

Growing Out of Your Cubby-House

Do you remember when you were a kid and you had no cares at all? Where all that occupied your life was making cubby houses and playing ‘mums and dads’ or ‘princes and princesses’? And when you were at school singing your psalm you loved singing, and when you were asked if you loved the Lord your answer was a straight out YES- no buts about it!

Life was simple!

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Growing Out of Your Cubby-House

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Now we grow up, we turn into a teenager and life gets more complex. We start to see that the world is far from perfect, that our parents actually make mistakes. We see that we can't pretend life is a wonderful castle full of adventure with happy endings. We have to go to school, we have to spend time studying and we 'have to' go to catechism and club. On top of this there is peer pressure from our friends that pushes us do things we don't want to do.

In the end we often think – man, if we could just go back to being a little kid again, where everything is set out for us and life is just plain simple!

But...I urge you to pause that thinking and think on this question. Is your life really that bad? Would you really want to rewind your life and go back to being a 4 year old? I'm sure the answer is no. That's why Paul wrote: *"When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things."* (1 Cor 13:11) We are meant to grow up, to experience hardships especially to learn from them and move on from them to become the person that the Lord wants us to be.

Yes life doesn't stay simple, but you know what? FAITH DOES. We can still be kids in that aspect. If someone asks you: Do you love the Lord? Your answer should be YES- no buts about it. If someone asks you why you love the

Lord? Your answer should be: Because the Lord loves me!

The Lord Jesus also speaks of this when He says, *"Assuredly I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore whoever humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven."* (Matt 18:3-4) We should be quick to love the Lord and to speak of Him and to learn more about Him every chance we get.

With that, I welcome you to another edition of the contender. A magazine for the youth of the Free Reformed churches. If you are over 25 and reading this magazine that's great, but please remember to pass it onto your sons or daughters or friends younger than you. This magazine is meant to be filled with words of encouragement for the youth of our churches who need to realize that they are the future of the Lord's church. If you are between 13 and 25 and reading this magazine we hope that you gain encouragement and can relate to the words of the articles within it. And if you are 4 years old and reading this article I would say "WOW" and then I would say "Go make cubby houses while you're still small enough to fit into them!"

Happy reading!

KATIE WAGENAAR

Hello and Welcome to the October edition of Contender,

I think I can be fairly brief with this edition, for there are no editors departing, or getting married, etc that needs to be recognised.

Instead we have produced an edition this time which has some slightly longer articles in it, which give attention to reformation in the church, to the respect we show towards our pastoral leaders as well as to brothers and sisters in the Church, and to the beautiful doctrine of the origin of salvation.

Sometimes it is easy to become a little bit disappointed with the Church and this can happen for various reasons. Still, we need to recognise that church members have two things in common: all are sinners and all want to walk the path that leads to eternal life. And yet church people are not there because of their own desire to be there, rather they meet together because the Lord calls His own people together. The Lord Jesus demonstrated His love, and He calls us to mirror that love towards each other.

May the articles encourage us to do this, as we walk the road to the end of time.

Eric Terpstra

EIC

THE U IN TULIP

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Have you ever considered why you are a believer in Jesus Christ and others are not? What is it that brought you to the point of wanting to submit your whole life to Jesus Christ, and others remain indifferent to the gospel or worse they are even hostile to the gospel? Somewhere we confess that, “out of the multitude of sinners God selects a number of people in order to show them His grace and his love...” His grace and love have been extended to the believers, they are His elect

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and chosen ones. Unbelievers face God’s judgment, to them God has not shown any mercy, they are known as the reprobate.

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Whilst believers are thankful for the mercy that God has extended to them, there is always an uncomfortable notion about those to whom God has not shown His mercy. What is it about the believer that they receive God’s

mercy and others face God’s judgment? Considering the severity of judgment that will be meted out, a Christian might almost feel guilty about the special favour they have received, because as such they are not any more deserving of salvation than anyone else. Thoughts lead to questions. Is it fair of God that He chooses to save only a few? If God determined the elect already before the foundation of the world, is it just bad luck that unbelievers missed out? Are unbelievers doomed to die no matter what they did?

These are hard questions to answer, and somewhat bothersome too. We have deeply ingrained inside us morals such as acting fairly,

Is it fair of God that He chooses to save only a few?

Is it just bad luck that unbelievers missed out?

judging without partiality, and acting consistently. Therefore when thoughts such as these arise in relation to God they can be very disconcerting. Lets look briefly at what unconditional election is about, and from God’s word try to answer some of these hard questions.

What is unconditional election?

Unconditional election is the second part of the TULIP doctrine, which was taught by the Reformer John Calvin. This teaching has as its basis that before the foundation of the world, God chose a certain number of individuals to

eternal life, and at the same time leaving many others in the misery into which they had plunged themselves.

The fact that God did this before time already is made most clear in God's revelation to Isaac and Rebecca when she was expecting their twins. At that point God said to Rebecca, *"Two nations are in your womb, two peoples shall be separated from your body, one people shall be stronger than the other, and the older shall serve the younger"* (Gen 25:23). In this way God made it clear already before the babies were born that God had rejected Esau and chosen Jacob. This is confirmed in Romans 9:13, *"As it is written, Jacob I have loved and Esau I have hated."*

Another man who was also rejected by the Lord was Pharaoh king of Egypt. Already before Moses was sent to speak to Pharaoh, the Lord had said that Pharaoh would not listen, because God would harden his heart. We can ask ourselves, what could Pharaoh do otherwise when God acted in this way? In Romans 9:17 the Apostle Paul comments on this, *"For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I may show my power in you, and that my Name may be declared in all the earth."*

So it becomes clear that God rejects certain individuals and to others He shows His mercy. When dealing with unconditional election we need to recognise clearly that God would have done injustice to no one had He decided to leave everyone in the misery which they had plunged themselves. God was under no compulsion whatsoever to work out a plan for redemption in

order to save some. The fact that He chose to demonstrates His mercy and grace and serves only to magnify and glorify His name even more.

Not a problem for everyone:

The questions that were raised in relation to God are questions that are unique to Calvinism, the Reformed doctrine, and all those who accept the "doctrine" of TULIP. Not all Christians struggle with this concept.

The doctrine of Arminianism teaches that God's election is based upon God's fore knowledge of who would come to believe and who would not. Arminian Christians understand that there is sufficient goodness left in people, that when combined with the work of the Holy Spirit, they will be saved. Thus salvation becomes dependant on people, whether they are willing to accept the sacrifice of Jesus Christ for sin. We recognise in this two main points: firstly that salvation is based on the effort of mankind, and secondly that there is no issue or question about the fairness of God because God's election was based on the decision of what man kind would do.¹

Our Reformed faith disagrees with this position. In the last edition I wrote about the Total depravity of mankind – the T in TULIP. It was recognised there that the Human condition is absolutely corrupt, that in no way can we do the will of God and it is not even our desire to understand God's will. As Ephesians 2 makes clear, we are totally dead in our sins and trespasses, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind. Therefore as an extension of that, we

The U in Tulip

continued

conclude that our salvation is based solely on God's choice, on His mercy and grace. In no way whatsoever do we contribute to it.

So...Is God Fair?

In answering this question the first point that we need to be crystal clear about is the sovereignty and majesty of God. We recognise God as the Father and Creator of this world. He remains sovereignly in control of it, even if at times it may not seem that way. His almighty power, His gloriousness, His splendour and awesomeness are all attributes which human mortals can but only worship and glorify. With that clearly in our mind, we can humbly ask some questions, and at times we simply need to accept what His word says, because it goes beyond what the human mind is capable of understanding. Consider these two Bible texts for a moment:

"Woe to him who strives with his Maker... Shall the clay say to him who forms it, 'what are you making' or shall your handiwork say, 'he has no hands?'"

Isaiah 45:9

"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the Lord." Isaiah 55:8

In answering the question, God would have been most fair and just if He had just totally destroyed the world and without exception punished everyone for their sins and transgression. That

would have been the most reasonable and logical action God could have done after the fall into sin, and then no one would have any reason to state or imply that God is unfair. But the fact is that He didn't. He chose to extend grace and mercy to some by way of a plan of redemption. Why? That is the part that goes beyond the Human mind. I don't know why... but it was something God chose to do.

*God would have been most fair
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destroyed the world*

This is the grace which we hear preached every Sunday. God worked out the plan of salvation, completely accomplished it, and now imparts grace to all who will believe it. What a great and awesome God, what a merciful God that He

chose to extend this grace to us! What a privilege it is to be chosen to salvation!

Not against our own will:

Whilst our salvation is pre-determined by God's plan of election, what ought to also be clear is that no one arrives at their eternal destiny against their will. You can be assured that you will not hear grumblers in heaven saying that they don't want to be there, but they were dragged here because they happened to be one of God's elect. Similarly despite the fact that Hell is a horrible place you won't hear the residents there longing to be with God in Heaven. In life they totally rejected God, in hell they will not be with Him and nor will they desire to be with Him.²

Eternal Mysteries:

Perhaps the heading of the previous paragraph may have surprised you. After all that has been said, does man still have a will after the fall into sin? Do we have a choice in our eternal destiny if God has it all pre-determined from the beginning?

In Luke 14:15-24, Jesus tells the parable of the man who gave a great supper, and invited many guests. However the invited guests refused to come, and therefore the master commanded the poor, the maimed, the lame and the blind who were in the streets to come and partake of the supper. Texts such as these³ make it clear that there is definitely an invitation for everyone to accept the gospel. Everyone is invited to accept Jesus as their Saviour, and therefore obtain eternal life. Therefore in this life, when people are confronted with the gospel, they have a choice to make: to accept it or reject it.

On the other hand, as we have already seen no one can embrace the gospel unless God first works in us. We cannot in our own strength accept God's invitation unless He first begins to soften the heart and renew the mind. In John 15:16 Jesus says, *"You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit."*⁴

To the human mind these are two irreconcilable thoughts. We confess the sovereignty of God and also at the same time the responsibility of man. Both these thoughts are completely biblical, and yet to confess them both seems almost irrational. They are and continue to be one of the eternal

mysteries in Christianity. It is no wonder that men such as Jacobus Arminius fell over this doctrine and sought to explain it in other ways.

In conclusion, we thank God who worked out the plan of salvation, and who at the same time imparts this gift to the believers as well. How thankful we can be that our salvation is not dependant on our choice (which day and again is a choice of sin) but rather on God's election and the subsequent faith which He works by the power of the Holy Spirit. The most humbling and profound thought remains: that out of countless millions the Lord chose me – I am not sure why – but... Thank you Lord!!

ERIC TERPSTRA

¹ EH Palmer, The five points of Calvinism, page 27

² Palmer page 36, 37

³ Other texts which promote the idea of man accepting Jesus into their life include: John 6:35, Jesus says, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to me shall never hunger and he who believes in me shall never thirst." Also Paul's letter to Philippians, chapter 2:12: "work out your own salvation with fear and trembling..."

⁴ See also Romans 9:16: "So then it is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy"

NEHEMIAH'S REFORMATION

We don't often think of Old Testament people as reformers. When we think of reformers we think of those who contributed to the great reformation back in the sixteenth century. Names like John Calvin and Martin Luther immediately spring to mind, after all they were the great reformers. And what about reformation? Wasn't it just the movement against the Roman Catholic church? We so quickly forget that Reformation is so much more than just the events of the sixteenth century. Since the fall into sin God has worked reform in

his church through many of His servants. Nehemiah was one of these servants.

Nehemiah was the cup bearer of King Artaxerxes in Susa the Babylonian capital. Word reaches Nehemiah of the state of Jerusalem. Those who had survived the exile lived in disarray. The walls of Jerusalem are destroyed, and the gates have been burned with fire. The news troubles Nehemiah greatly, and with the king's blessing Nehemiah is allowed to return to Jerusalem. For twelve long years Nehemiah oversees the rebuilding of the city walls, and the reformation of temple worship. He battles the opposition of Sanballat and Tobiah, as well as the distrust and greed of the people against one another. Finally we read in the second last chapter that Nehemiah was able to finish his reformation. Nehemiah and the people

celebrated this joyous occasion with the feast of Hanukkah, a dedication of the city and temple of God. Nehemiah had set out to achieve precisely this. With God's blessing he has accomplished his mission. The walls are rebuilt, and the temple is again functioning properly. Nehemiah has been governor of Israel for twelve years. It is now time for him to return to Persia to report to the king who gave him leave to complete this task in the first place.

We so quickly forget that Reformation is so much more than just the events of the sixteenth century.

Nehemiah returns in the thirty second year of Artaxerxes king of Babylon. It is almost certain that Nehemiah returned

with a great sense of satisfaction. God had allowed him to do what had been considered impossible. Most importantly, the spiritual reformation of Israel is now complete.

So the book appears to have a happy ending. Mission accomplished. And then Nehemiah returns to Jerusalem...

We do not know how long Nehemiah was in Susa to report to king Artaxerxes, however we can assume that it was between five and ten years. It seems like a relatively short period of time, yet what he finds when he returns seems beyond belief.

Life in Israel has returned to how it was before Nehemiah returned. The temple is profaned and neglected, the Levites and singers have gone to their own homes, the sabbath is no longer kept, and marriages with non-Israelite women are as common as they were before.

Eliashib the priest was put in charge of the store rooms within the temple of the Lord. Eliashib had given a room to Tobiah to live in within the temple. Tobiah was the Persian official who had mocked the Israelites for rebuilding Jerusalem, and was also a relative of Eliashib. Together with Tobiah he had caused a rebellion against the Israelites. They had mocked that if a fox jumped up against the walls they would fall down, and now here he was living not only within the walls of the city, but desecrating the very temple itself. It was, as it were, a peaceful infiltration. He was living in the room used to store the grain offerings and incense and temple articles, as well as the tithes of grain, new wine and oil prescribed for the Levites. Tobiah had taken the holy house of God that he should not even have been allowed to enter, and turned it into his governor's residence. This probably meant that he taxed, or rather stole, the tithes and offerings brought for the priests and singers. God's house had once more become a den of thieves.

Perhaps this is also the cause, or at least a part of the cause of the second problem. The tithes were not being paid by the people, and so the priests and singers had no choice but to return to their own fields and wine presses. Tobiah, the heathen who should not have been allowed in the temple,

now lived in the temple, while the priests, Levites and singers who should have lived in the temple now did not. There was no reason for any person to go and worship in the temple anymore. Those who ventured there were greeted by a heathen, interested only in power and money, rather than those who wanted to worship the Lord.

This lack of worship in the temple quickly led to other things. Work continued on the Sabbath as it did on any other day. Food and drink were brought into the city, processed and sold at the market. Merchants came from far and near to sell their wares. There were no more worship services on the Sabbath, so it became business as usual.

What had taken twelve years to reform had quickly deformed to the way it was in less time than it had taken to reform. Nehemiah is angered and appalled at this. He throws Tobiah out of the temple. His household goods are thrown into the street. The temple rooms are commanded to be purified, and changed back to the way they were. Nehemiah calls the priests back to their posts. He commands all of Judah to recommence their tithe paying. He places four men in charge of the storerooms. These are men who Nehemiah considers to be trustworthy. They are given the task of distributing the supplies to their brothers so that these supplies will not be stolen again.

The final sin that Nehemiah takes action against is the men of Judah who have taken for themselves heathen women as wives. These were not from the outlying tribes of Israel, but from Judah, the very center of Israel. They have taken women from Ashdod, Ammon and Moab. These nations

Nehemiah's Reformation

continued

have been the enemies of God's people ever since they had arrived in the land of Canaan. We read that half of their children did not speak the same language, rather spoke the native tongue of their mothers. These children did not understand the language of God's covenant people. In such mixed marriages, the children often live a completely heathen lifestyle. If this had been allowed to continue, God's chosen people would soon cease to exist.

In those few short years of Nehemiah's absence, the returned people of Israel have let the temple become a Samaritan habitation, caused the Levites to return to their homes. Also the Sabbath was no longer upheld, and many of their children were already pagan. God's chosen people had returned to the way they lived before exile. The church is conforming to the world. They are once again becoming children of darkness.

Tobiah was unable to discourage the Israelites from building the wall by scorning and mocking them earlier in the story. However Tobiah did succeed in destroying the faith of the Israelite nation by much more quiet, subtle means. Balaam made a recommendation along similar lines, suggesting that the way to defeat Israel was not to remove Israel's God from His people, but to remove Israel from their God by causing them to sin.

This chapter is a very strong warning to us today. It shows us how seemingly small changes to God's laws can have massive implications. Although the idea of having the high priest's relatives living in a store room in the temple doesn't seem so bad, the implications are disastrous.

The story of Nehemiah is but one example that teaches us that Reformation is not a once off event, but rather an ongoing process. Church life is never plain sailing. It is either time of

reformation, or a time of deformation.

If we see reformation as an event rather than a process, then we are in grave danger. It is then that we relax, and stop paying attention to what is going on in church life. We loose our critical ear. We let things slide. Like the Israelites we don't mind if Tobiah moves in to the temple. Then we don't mind if the priests don't live in the temple. In fact we quite enjoy it. Then we can do as WE please on the Sabbath. We let Satan do as he pleases amongst us, and in a few short years we return to the way we were before we started reforming.

Church life is never plain sailing

DARREN HEEREMA

BALD HEADS AND BAD SPEAKERS

These days ministers and pastors aren't regarded as the highly respected, first-class citizens they once were. Times have changed. The emerging stories of paedophilia amongst Roman Catholic priests and a good deal of media-bashing has resulted in the average Australian regarding a pastor as little more than a brain-washing, kiddy-fiddling bigot who likes the sound of his own voice.

Now the question is, has society's attitude started to filter into

our own churches and amongst us as youth? Do we

still regard our ministers with the respect that comes with holding their God-given role? Or do we view our minister with suspicion, twisting his words to suit our own purposes, or just as bad, interpreting everything he says as a personal attack?

Most of us are guilty of criticizing our minister to varying degrees, and sometimes healthy criticism of his sermons can be beneficial to encouraging fruitful discussions around the dinner table or in our club-rooms. But what about unhealthy criticism, the sort of criticism that spawns animosity and hurt, that breaks up friendships and divides families? This may seem far-fetched, but it has happened in our churches and will continue to happen as long as both ministers and congregations are prone to sin. So to answer these questions, it would behoove us to revisit what the

Bible has to say about ministers and leaders of congregations.

One of the first leaders of Israel was Moses. Moses went before Pharaoh to plead Israel's cause, Moses led them out of the land of Egypt, Moses led them through a lifetime of wandering in the wilderness. Was this because Moses was an exceptional man? Was he a patient leader, a brilliant rhetorician with great diplomatic and mediation skills?

In Exodus 2:11-15 we read the story of how Moses came upon the

Egyptian beating a Hebrew, and instead of attempting to mediate the situation as his role as a prince of Egypt would have allowed, he killed the Egyptian. The next day when two Hebrews were fighting, his efforts to resolve the dispute failed with one of the Hebrews asking him if he was going to kill him as well. Moses was so scared he fled from Egypt. Fear, rashness, violence... not exactly leadership qualities.

Later in Exodus 3 we read of how God appears to Moses in the Burning Bush. God says that He has chosen Moses to lead the people of Israel out of slavery from Egypt. Instead of humbly accepting this duty, Moses thinks up every excuse in the book to try get out of it. In verse 11 Moses says: *"Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and that I should bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?"* In verse 1 of chapter 4 Moses openly worries that the Israelites would not believe that he was

Bald Heads and Bad Speakers

continued

chosen by God. Then in verse 10 we read Moses saying that he is *“not eloquent...but slow of speech and slow of tongue.”* Finally in verse 13 Moses outright rejects his duty by saying: *“Oh my Lord, please send by the hand of whomever else You may send.”* At which point we read that *“the anger of the Lord was kindled against Moses”* and He appoints Aaron as Moses’ spokesman. And we know from Numbers 20 when Moses strikes the rock in anger and frustration that he was not the most patient of leaders.¹

There are many other such examples of very fallible leaders in the Bible. The apostle Peter was a fisherman, by no means an eloquent man, so weak in faith at times that he once denied Christ three times. He was also prone to xenophobic Christianity, that is, he believed for a time that the gospel was only for the Hebrews until he received the dream about the sheet containing unclean animals in Acts 10. King David, *“a man after [God’s] own heart”* (1 Sam 13:14; Acts 13:22) was a murderer and adulterer, while King Solomon allowed his numerous wives to draw him away from the Lord.

In short, leaders in the Bible were not always exceptional men. They were not necessarily men of high intellect, of extraordinary rhetorical skills. But they all had one thing in common: they were chosen by God. God used these sinful men to bring about His plan of salvation. When Moses questioned his own abilities to lead the people, the Lord says: *“I will certainly be with you.”* (Ex 3:12) When Moses voices a lack of self-confidence in his own speaking abilities, God says: *“Who has made man’s mouth? Or who makes the mute, the*

deaf, the seeing, or the blind? Have not I, the Lord? Now therefore, go, and I will be with your mouth and teach you what you shall say.” (Ex 4:11-12)

But what happened when the people to whom they were ministering became critical of them? What happened when they openly disparaged these men among themselves?

2 Kings 2:23-24 is the classic text parents like to quote to their children when giving them the “respect your elders” speech. It is the account of a large group of young men (more than forty two) taunting Elisha telling him to “go up, you baldhead.” Obviously this isn’t just a bunch of boys laughing at an old man’s baldness. The Hebrew word used here indicates “young men” not necessarily “young boys.” Moreover Elisha was not necessarily bald, it was more an epithet of scorn. Being bald was considered shameful in those times. Linked with the phrase “go up”, likely a reference to Elijah, Elisha’s mentor, being taken up to heaven earlier on in 2 Kings 2, we can conclude that the young men were gathered together in a sarcastic demonstration against Elisha. In response, the Lord sends two female bears to maul forty two of them. It was terrible judgment upon these youth divinely designed to warn all of us not to scorn or treat our prophets, and today ministers, with scorn or sarcasm.

Moses himself spent much of his time in leadership under attack from a variety of sources. In Numbers 12 we read about Aaron and Miriam muttering to each other about how Moses married an Ethiopian woman. They obviously did not agree with this and decided that they could take matters into their own hands, after all, they said in

verse 2, *“Has the Lord indeed spoken only through Moses? Has He not spoken through us also?”* And we read: *“and the Lord heard it”* and in verse 9: *“the anger of the Lord was aroused against them.”* Then the Lord struck Miriam with leprosy.

Not long after this in Numbers 13 and 14 we read about how Moses commissions twelve spies to scout the Promised Land and ten of them came back with a very negative report, causing everyone great distress. In 14:2 we read: *“And all the children of Israel complained against Moses and Aaron, and the whole congregation said to them, ‘If only we had died in the land of Egypt!’”* And in verse 4: *“So they said to one another, ‘Let us select a leader and return to Egypt.’”*

When Joshua and Caleb attempted to placate the people and urged them to trust in the Lord, the congregation threatened to *“stone them with stones”* (verse 10).

What is the Lord’s response? Is the Lord angered because of their rejection of Moses and Aaron? No. Instead in verse 11 we read: *“How long will these people reject ME?”* Not Moses, not Joshua and Caleb, but “Me”. The Lord saw the Israelites’ rejection as by proxy a rejection of Himself, for after all, He appointed Moses in the first place. And His response is this: *“I will strike them with the pestilence and disinherit them, and I will make of you a nation greater and mightier than they.”* If Moses had not interceded on their behalf, God would have wiped them off the face of the earth.

Today our ministers are well-educated. They have all been through the Theological College and received extensive training in the various aspects of their work. Very few professions in this world require as much training. Still, they are not always

the most intellectual men in our congregations. They are not necessarily brilliant leaders or profound counselors. Each have their own strengths and weaknesses. Ultimately, they are all sinful men. But they do have one thing in common: they have been chosen by God.

So do we walk into church, skim the liturgy sheet, and then decide to switch off because we’ve “heard it all before”? Do we listen carefully but then afterwards go around to our friends and swap notes and engage in some verbal bashing of our minister?

If so, we ought to get on our knees and beg for forgiveness, because ultimately, by disparaging

God’s minister we are disparaging God Himself. And while we’re at it, we should pray earnestly for our

minister, that he may diligently preach the gospel according to the Lord’s will and to the furtherance of His kingdom.

*But they do have one thing in common:
they have been chosen by God.*

BRENDAN PITLO

¹ I hasten to add that Moses was despite all this an exceptional leader. For instance, we know from Num 12:3 that he was a very humble man “more than all men who were on the face of the earth”, and that may have induced his lack of willingness to take up his leadership role in the first place.

DEALING WITH CONFRONTATIONS

If you would have to make a list of the most important things in your (church) life what would be on the list? The music in church, the kinds of clothes people wear to church? What is really important? And how do we treat people who do not agree with us?

If an unbeliever asks you: what really counts for you? Would you explain to that person that you can only wear certain clothes to church, or would you tell him about how Jesus died on the cross for our sins? The answer to this question might seem obvious, but if it is that obvious than why do we spend so much time focusing on the less important things?

How do we for example spend the time in our bible study club meetings? Is it our goal to make sure everyone agrees with our opinion? A lot of our time is spent on talking about whether something are right or wrong. Of course it is important and interesting to talk about this, but how do we treat people who don't agree with us? Going to club creates great opportunities to build each other up and share experiences, but this will only happen if there is a non-judgemental and open atmosphere.

Paul says in Roman 14 verse 10 – 13, *But why do you judge your brother? For we shall all stand before the judgement seat of Christ. For it is written: "As I live, says the Lord, Every knee shall bow to Me, and every tongue shall confess to God."* So then each of us

shall give account of himself to God. Therefore let us not judge one another anymore but rather resolve this, not to put a stumbling block or a cause to fall in our brother's way.

Each person is accountable to Christ, not to others. While the church and its members must be uncompromising in its stand against activities that are expressly forbidden by Scripture (adultery, murder, theft), it should not create additional rules and regulations and give them equal standing with God's law. Many times Christians base their moral judgments on opinion, personal dislikes, or cultural biases rather than on the Word of God. When they do this, they show that their own faith is weak – they do not think that God is powerful enough to guide his children. When we stand before God's court of justice, we won't be worried about what our Christian neighbour or fellow church member have done.¹

In areas of conscience, no believer is answerable to another. Should he or she break God's moral law, the church has a responsibility to implement the restorative discipline of admonition, suspension and excommunication that the New Testament prescribes. But the authority to act in that area must not be carried over into the area which we are now discussing.

The most we can do here is remind each other that we are each personally responsible to our Master, and that we shall be called to account at

last. We need such reminders to keep our consciences clear and to help us to prepare to meet Him. But in no circumstances is my conscience to be imposed upon me. Christ alone is the Lord of conscience and to our Master each one of us stands or falls. This means that Christian liberty is to be both valued and preserved. Ignorance or neglect of the apostle's teaching has meant that far too many believers have had their liberty trodden on by others.²

This does not mean that we should always keep our mouths shut and agree with everything. But when we disagree with people we have to keep in mind that we are no better than any other and that the other person (especially fellow church members) could have very valid reasons for having a different opinion, providing of course they are consistent with Scripture.

When Paul wrote 2 Corinthians, he struggled with people who were misleading God's people. Surrounded by idolatry and immorality, the Corinthians struggled with their Christian faith and life-style. Through personal visits and letters, Paul tried to instruct them in the faith, resolve their conflicts, and solve some of their problems. Paul had to speak up against activities that were expressly forbidden by Scripture. Although we are in a completely different situation today we can still learn a lot from the way Paul deals with the people in Corinth. By reading Paul's letter we can learn how we should deal with confronting people. We should be **firm** and **bold** (7:9 and 10:2). We should not only focus on the negative,

but **affirm all you see that is good** (7:4). We should **know the facts** (11:22-27) and be **accurate** and **honest** (7:14 and 8:21). We also have to make sure that we **do not shut communication down** after the confrontation, but **follow up** on it (7:13 and 12:14). Maybe the most important and the hardest point is that we should not reflect our own ideas, but **speak words that reflect Christ's message** (10:3, 10:12, 13 and 12:19).

It can be hard to live in unity with our fellow church members. We are all so different. We come from different countries and cultures. We have different life experiences and we have different views. But with the help of the Holy Spirit we can and have to love and respect each other. It doesn't matter if that person shares your point of view or not.

Luther got it exactly right. Of Christian liberty, he said, 'A Christian man is a most free lord of all, subject to none.' Of Christian charity, he said, 'A Christian man is a most dutiful servant of all, subject to all.' The balance of these two principles is the will of God for us in those areas where Christian consciences differ.³

ANNETTE TEN BRINKE

¹ NKJV Life Application Study Bible – Tyndale House Publishers – Roman 14: 10-13 Notes

² The gospel as it really is – Stuart Olyott – Chap 22

³ The gospel as it really is – Stuart Olyott – Page 180

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.

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