

A Safe Bet

Sometime during the 1600s a French philosopher by the name of Blaise Pascal proposed a bet now known as “Pascal’s Wager.” In his book *Pensées* he proposed that according to logic, everybody should serve God. He came to this conclusion based on various mathematical and existential theories, but I have summarized his argument in the following easier-to-read format:

Option No.1: *Live out our 80 odd years of life in total debauchery, having non-stop “fun” and doing whatever our hearts’ desire.*

Option No.2: *Live out our 80 odd years of life in total religious subservience to God.*

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At the end of all time, he notes that there can only be two results: either God exists or He doesn't. Applying the worst-case scenario to each results in the following:

Option No.1 and God exists: *You have lived in sin, and now must spend eternity in hellfire. You have essentially wagered 80 odd years of "fun" for an eternity of hellfire.*

Option No.2 and God doesn't exist: *You are chemical matter and upon death you cease to exist. You have essentially wagered 80 odd years of "no fun" for an eternity of nothingness in which you won't know or feel anything because you won't exist.*

So the wager is 80 years of "fun" but risking an eternity in hellfire, or 80 odd years of "no fun" for nothing. According to Pascal, the obvious conclusion is that it doesn't matter how bad the odds are for God existing or not, either way the possibility of an eternity of hellfire is too dangerous a bet, and everybody ought to take Option 2 just to be safe.

Now of course, this synopsis is quite a modern extension of the now well-known "Pascal's Wager" and goes a little beyond what Pascal intended. Pascal himself admitted this was only a reason for faith, not *the* reason. Obviously, if God is truly omnipotent, He would see through our attempts to cover our bases with church attendance on the off-chance that the worst-case scenario does come true.

Still, this is precisely the idea that seems to, albeit unknowingly, dominate the mind-set of many modern church-goers. They go to church, pay their voluntary contributions and roll up at the odd congregational meeting, just in case God does exist and they are sinful and must be in the Free Reformed church in order to avert eternal perdition. For the rest though, they do their best to enjoy the fun and entertainment of this life, so that not all of their 80 years of life are wasted. The sad part is that by trying to take both options, they are actually taking Option No.1 and are still risking eternal damnation.

The thing is, Pascal's Wager is not really much of a bet. If anything, it's a safe bet. And a truly safe bet isn't really a bet anymore, but an investment. By living our life to the service of the Most High, we are not hedging our bets or covering our bases. We are making a life investment, one which will have eternal benefits. That's why Jesus exhorted his followers: *"Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."* (Matt 6:19-20) As Paul already wrote to the persecuted Roman Christians so long ago: *"For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us."* (Romans 8:18)

Not only that, but is Option No.1 actually all that much fun? James disagrees. He writes: *"Come now, you rich, weep and howl for your miseries that are coming upon you! Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are moth-eaten... you have heaped up treasure in the last days..."* (James 5:1-3) He suggests that their misery has already started on this earth, and will only multiply infinitely and eternally upon their death. Only a cursory glance at the lives of those still in bondage to sin shows us that the "fun" that they are supposed to be having is usually shallow and meaningless.

Option No.2 however, is a lot more "fun" than these people would care to admit. The Psalms and Proverbs are packed end to end with proclamations of how blessed the man is who serves the Lord. In fact, the very first Psalm begins with these words: *"Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly...but his delight is in the law of the Lord..."* (Psalm 1:1-2) Flip back a few pages and we read about the man called Job who "feared God and shunned evil" and as a result was "the greatest of all the people of the East." The fact is, already in this life we experience the beginnings of eternal happiness.

Finally, we know that ultimately we are not really choosing anyway. Instead, God chose us, *“having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will...”* (Ephesians 1:5) So it’s not like we are presented with the choice of either options, we just have to, with thankfulness, accept the covenant blessings that God has granted us.

Still, we must choose a life-style. There is a certain mode of living that we must abide to, as prescribed in God’s Word. So let’s change Pascal’s Wager to something more realistic:

Option No.1: *Live out our 80 odd years of life in debauchery, having some very brief moments of fun in an otherwise rather meaningless and therefore miserable existence... but still attending church and*

paying our voluntary contributions in a weak attempt to cover our backsides.

Option No.2: *Live out our 80 odd years of life in total obedience to God’s Law, rejoicing in the certainty of an eternity of happiness and glory in His presence.*

I don’t know about you, but I pick No.2.

BRENDAN PITLO

Welcome to a new decade of Contender!

With it come a number of changes, including the loss of our long-time Editor-in-Chief Eric Terpstra who is moving on to greater things. We would like to thank Eric wholeheartedly for the many hours he put into *Contender* over the years and we will sorely miss his gray-headed wisdom in the upcoming months.

That having been said, change can also be good, and with that we’d like to welcome our latest star recruit Joshua Schiebaan, who hails from the lofty peak of Mt Nasura. We’re quite certain he will be a handy bolster to our grammar nazi ranks, and we look forward to working on future editions with him.

This edition boasts a number of interesting articles. Apart from my editorial we have a submission from our moderator Rev. Vandelden; not written by him, but something he discovered in the vast archives of the World Wide Web. We have a submission by Rev. Smith about integrity amongst Christian youth. Unfortunately we had to split it in half due to its length, so stay tuned for Part 2! We also have a SPYSC report submitted by Bryony Heerema about a speech delivered by Mr. Dick Pot last year that is well worth reading.

All-in-all we have a great edition to kick-start the year and we hope our readers enjoy it. As a committee, the Lord willing, we have some surprises in store for you this... so keep reading, keep submitting and above all, keep praising God for allowing us the freedom to write, speak, discuss and apply the Living Word in our lives.

Happy Contending!

Brendan Pitlo
EIC

Explaining the Origin of Evil

A submission from Cynthia Bultje [cbultje@xplornet.com], member of, Bethel Canadian Reformed Church, Richmond Hill, Ontario, Canada. Posted on "Refnet" (an internet discussion of Reformed people) on 28/01/2010.

'Let me explain the problem science has with religion.' The atheist professor of philosophy pauses before his class and then asks one of his new students to stand. 'You're a Christian, aren't you, son?'

'Yes sir,' the student says.

'So you believe in God?'

'Absolutely.'

'Is God good?'

'Sure! God's good.'

'Is God all-powerful? Can God do anything?'

'Yes.'

'Are you good or evil?'

'The Bible says I'm evil.'

The professor grins knowingly. 'Aha! The Bible!'

He considers for a moment, 'Here's one for you. Let's say there's a sick person over here and you can cure him. You can do it. Would you help him? Would you try?'

'Yes sir, I would.'

'So you're good!'

'I wouldn't say that.'

'But why not say that? You'd help a sick and maimed person if you could. Most of us would if we could. But God doesn't.'

The student does not answer, so the professor continues. 'He doesn't, does he? My brother was a

Christian who died of cancer, even though he prayed to Jesus to heal him. How is this Jesus good? Hmmm? Can you answer that one?'

The student remains silent.

'No, you can't, can you?' the professor says. He takes a sip of water from a glass on his desk to give the student time to relax. 'Let's start again, young fella. Is God good?'

'Er...yes,' the student says.

'Is Satan good?'

The student doesn't hesitate on this one, 'No.'

'Then where does Satan come from?'

The student falters, 'From God.'

'That's right. God made Satan, didn't he? Tell me, son. Is there evil in this world?'

'Yes, sir...'

'Evil's everywhere, isn't it? And God did make everything, correct?'

'Yes.'

'So who created evil?' The professor continued, 'If God created everything, then God created evil, since evil exists, and according to the principle that our works define who we are, then God is evil.'

Again, the student has no answer.

'Is there sickness? Immorality? Hatred? Ugliness? All these terrible things, do they exist in this world?'

The student squirms on his feet. 'Yes.'

'So who created them?'

The student does not answer again, so the professor repeats his question, 'Who created them?'

There is still no answer... Suddenly the lecturer breaks away to pace in front of the classroom. The class is mesmerized.

'Tell me,' he continues onto another student. 'Do you believe in Jesus Christ, son?'

The student's voice betrays him and cracks. 'Yes, professor, I do.'

The old man stops pacing, 'Science says you have five senses you use to identify and observe the world around you. Have you ever seen Jesus?'

'No sir. I've never seen Him.'

'Have you ever felt your Jesus, tasted your Jesus or smelt your Jesus? Have you ever had any sensory perception of Jesus Christ, or God for that matter?'

'No, sir, I'm afraid I haven't.'

'Yet you still believe in him?'

'Yes.'

'According to the rules of empirical, testable, demonstrable protocol, science says your God doesn't exist. What do you say to that, son?'

'Nothing,' the student replies. 'I only have my faith.'

'Yes, faith,' the professor repeats. 'And that is the problem science has with God. There is no evidence, only faith.'

The student stands quietly for a moment, before asking a question of His own. 'Professor, is there such thing as heat?'

'Yes,' the professor replies. 'There's heat.'

'And is there such a thing as cold?'

'Yes, son, there's cold too.'

'No sir, there isn't.'

The professor turns to face the student, obviously interested. The room suddenly becomes very quiet.

The student begins to explain... 'You can have lots of heat, even more heat, super-heat, mega-heat, unlimited heat, white heat, a little heat or no heat, but we don't have anything called 'cold'. We can hit up to 273 degrees below zero, which is no heat, but we can't go any further after that. There is no such thing as cold; otherwise we would be able to go colder than the lowest -273 degrees.' 'Everybody or object is susceptible to study when it has or transmits energy, and heat is what makes a body or matter have or transmit energy. Absolute zero (-273) is the total absence of heat. You see, sir, cold is only a word we use to describe the absence of heat. We cannot measure cold. Heat we can measure in thermal units because heat is energy. Cold is not the opposite of heat, sir, just the absence of it.'

Silence across the room. A pen drops somewhere in the classroom, sounding like a hammer.

'What about darkness, professor. Is there such a thing as darkness?'

'Yes,' the professor replies without hesitation. 'What is night if it isn't darkness?'

'You're wrong again, sir. Darkness is not something; it is the absence of something. You can have low light, normal light, bright light, flashing light, but if you have no light constantly you have nothing and its called darkness, isn't it? That's the meaning we use to define the word. In reality, darkness isn't. If it were, you would be able to make darkness darker, wouldn't you?'

The professor begins to smile at the student in front of him. This will be a good semester. 'So what point are you making, young man?'

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'Yes, professor. My point is, your philosophical premise is flawed to start with, and so your conclusion must also be flawed.'

The professor's face cannot hide his surprise this time, 'Flawed? Can you explain how?'

'You are working on the premise of duality,' the student explains...'You argue that there is life and then there's death; a good God and a bad God. You are viewing the concept of God as something finite, something we can measure. Sir, science can't even explain a thought.' 'It uses electricity and magnetism, but has never seen, much less fully understood either one. To view death as the opposite of life is to be ignorant of the fact that death cannot exist as a substantive thing. Death is not the opposite of life, just the absence of it.' 'Now tell me, professor. Do you teach your students that they evolved from a monkey?'



'If you are referring to the natural evolutionary process, young man, yes, of course I do.'

'Have you ever observed evolution with your own eyes, sir?'

The professor begins to shake his head, still smiling, as he realises where the argument is going. A very good semester, indeed.

'Since no one has ever observed the process of evolution at work and cannot even prove that this process is an on-going endeavour, are you not teaching your opinion, sir? Are you now not a scientist, but a preacher?'

The class is in uproar. The student remains silent until the commotion has subsided. 'To continue the point you were making earlier to the other student, let me give you an example of what I

mean.' The student looks around the room, 'Is there anyone in the class who has ever seen the professor's brain?' The class breaks out into laughter. 'Is there anyone here who has ever heard the professor's brain, felt the professor's brain, touched or smelt the professor's brain? No one appears to have done so. So, according to the established rules of empirical, stable, demonstrable protocol, science says that you have no brain, with all due respect, sir.' 'So if science says you have no brain, how can we trust your lectures, sir?'

Now the room is silent. The professor just stares at the student, his face unreadable. Finally, after what seems an eternity, the old man answers, 'I guess you'll have to take them on faith.'

'Now, you accept that there is faith, and, in fact, faith exists with life,' the student continues, 'Now, sir, is there such a thing as evil?'

Now uncertain, the professor responds, 'Of course, there is. We see it every day. It is in the daily example of man's inhumanity to man. It is in the multitude of crime and violence everywhere in the world. These manifestations are nothing else but evil.'

To this the student replied, 'Evil does not exist sir, or at least it does not exist unto itself. Evil is simply the absence of God. It is just like darkness and cold, a word that man has created to describe the absence of God. God did not create evil. Evil is the result of what happens when man does not have God's love present in his heart. It's like the cold that comes when there is no heat or the darkness that comes when there is no light.'

The professor sat down.

Developing Christian Integrity

Paper delivered to the older youth of Albany and West Albany at Camp Kennedy on 21 November 2009. The session began with singing Ps 119:43 and reading James 1:1-8, 22-25 and 4:1-10, which are relevant for the topic.

I'd like to speak to you this morning about developing Christian integrity. Let me first explain what that means. Integrity means something like honesty or wholeness; a person of integrity is someone who remains true to his responsibilities, trustworthy in every respect, he will not be corrupted or compromised. So developing Christian integrity means becoming a Christian in all areas of your life, so that your life is consistent with your faith: what you believe is how you live. Think of the disciple Nathanael. When the Lord Jesus saw him, He said, "Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit!" (John 1:47). Or think of Daniel: even after the Persian nobles had tricked King Darius into making a decree that whoever would pray to anyone besides him for the next 30 days would be thrown into the den of lions, Daniel continued to pray to the LORD three times per day with his window open towards Jerusalem (Daniel 6:10). He'd always done that; it was the right thing to do, and he wasn't going to change now – he was a man of integrity.

Developing Christian integrity – why this topic? I have a couple of reasons. The first is this: lately there have been some articles in the *Una Sancta* in which the author expresses concern about Free Reformed youth. Now that in itself is nothing new: it's quite common for older people to be concerned about the youth. And yet the articles make an interesting point. Here's a quotation from the first article:

... our Reformed youth can easily become citizens of two vastly different worlds: that of the home, church, catechism and Bible study, and at the same time, that of internet and youth culture. These two worlds are at odds

in a number of ways. Our directives about behaviour, clothing, lifestyle, entertainment, outings, and the roles of males and females don't match the assertiveness, freedom of choice and individualism proclaimed in society. Some Reformed youth will resolve this tension by adopting two identities; one as parents and others in church see them, and the other when they're out of focus, consisting of a life of freedom, finding entertainment and mixing with whom they will, exchanging their real thoughts via suitable programs on their computer.¹

Someone then responded to this article with a letter, also published in *Una Sancta*. I quote:

I have seen photos on facebook and heard of so many youth of our Free Reformed churches that are partying hard every weekend, going nightclubbing, they are using drugs, having sex (including the singles), they drink way too much alcohol, they go to the casino on a regular basis and play the tables etc. and then they turn up at church on Sunday mornings with a hangover or whatever and come to the Lord's Supper table ...²

It's very blunt, isn't it? Are these observations fair? You're probably in a better position to judge that than I. Now, the person who wrote this letter did not want to paint everyone with the same brush. Quite the opposite: there are many who sincerely want to serve the Lord, but the concern is for "the youth with the ungodly lifestyle, but coming to church on Sundays; they have a twofold faith."³

It's not my intention this morning to talk about the dangers of alcoholism or drug-use or gambling or clubbing or sex before marriage or anything like that. Instead I would like to explore

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the idea that a person can have a 'two-fold faith', or two separate identities, one associated with church and club and catechism (that's his faith), and the other associated with leisure, entertainment, separate from his faith. It's the opposite of Christian integrity; there's a dualism in his life: the faith part and the fun part. He needs to develop Christian integrity. That doesn't mean that the fun has to disappear so that only faith is left. No, it means that his faith and his fun have to become integrated, so that when he has fun he doesn't compromise his faith but expresses his faith in his fun. How do you become that kind of Christian?

It's really about growing, maturing as a Christian, and that's my main reason for doing this topic. As older youth you've finished your formal Christian education; some of you have entered the work force, apprenticeships, TAFE, while others have gone on to ASHS, NASHS, and university programs. In the past everything happened in a Christian environment: Free Reformed home, Free Reformed school, Free Reformed friends, Free Reformed church. But that's all changing: you work and study with unbelievers; some of you have finished catechism instruction, others don't have long to go; with your own driver's license, your own vehicle, you become independent of your parents. No doubt you have some lively debates with your parents about where you're allowed to go and what you're allowed to do, and when and why. The day is coming when you move away from home, and you can make your own decisions. And then what's left of the Free Reformed environment? Club, church ... that's about it! So what happens to the rest of your life?

“How do you make sure that your life doesn't get carved up into Christian and non-Christian bits...?”

How do you make sure the rest of it all stays Christian, so that your life doesn't get carved up into Christian and non-Christian bits, but you mature into one integrated, whole person, a Christian through and through?

The letter of James is helpful: it's a book about becoming spiritually mature. Have a look at chapter 1:2ff. It says there, “My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have *its* perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.” If you lack something, ask the Lord, but make sure that you ask in faith, without doubting, for he who doubts will not receive anything from the Lord; “he is a double-minded man, unstable in all

his ways.” A double-minded man – what is that exactly? It's someone who is indecisive and noncommittal in his faith. He knows what

the Christian faith is all about; he's received instruction, he goes to church with everyone else, but he has doubts, and he doesn't really want to commit himself wholeheartedly to serve the Lord no matter what; he wavers, he's never really too sure. Such a person doesn't pray with conviction, so God doesn't answer his prayers, so he never makes progress. You see that double-mindedness prevents a person from developing Christian integrity, and that's why the Bible warns against it. Ps 119:113: “I hate double-minded men, but I love your law.” James 4:7-8: “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!”

Double-mindedness is mentioned only three times in the Bible (Ps 119:113, James 1:8 and James 4:8), but I recently read some of the writings of the early church fathers who wrote soon after the New Testament was finished, and it was amazing to see how often they mention double-mindedness. I'll give you a few examples. First of all, there is a little booklet written very soon after the time of the apostles. It's called the *Didache*. *Didache* is a Greek word that means teaching. It's like a little catechism textbook, used for teaching new converts the basics of the Christian faith before they were baptized. This little book was actually lost for many centuries, but in the late 1800s someone found a copy of it and published it. It's a fascinating little book; in fact, part of it is found in our Book of Praise: Hymn 46 ('We thank Thee, Father, who hast planted Thy holy name within our hearts') is a rhymed version of part of the *Didache*. Anyway, here's a quotation:

... the second commandment of the teaching is this; "Thou shalt do no murder; thou shalt not commit adultery"; thou shalt not commit sodomy; thou shalt not commit fornication; thou shalt not steal; thou shalt not use magic; thou shalt not use philtres [i.e. drugs or magic potions]; thou shalt not procure abortion, nor commit infanticide; "thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's goods"; thou shalt not commit perjury, "thou shalt not bear false witness"; thou shalt not speak evil; thou shalt not bear malice. Thou shalt not be double-minded Thou shalt not be of two minds whether it shall be or not (*Didache* 2:1-4; 4:4).⁴

My translation is a bit old-fashioned, but the list of sins is surprisingly modern: sexual misconduct, using drugs, getting an abortion – they talked about those things in the early church, and double-mindedness is listed right up there with those kinds of sins.

Then there's two letters to the Corinthians from someone called Clement. He writes:

Let us then serve God with a pure heart, and we shall be righteous, but if we do not serve him because we do not believe the promise of God, we shall be miserable. For the prophetic Word also says: "Miserable are the double-minded that doubt in their heart, who say 'We have heard these things even in the days of our fathers, and behold we have grown old, and none of these things has happened to us.' ..." Therefore, my brethren, let us not be double-minded, but let us be patient in hope, that we may also receive the reward (2 Clement 11:1-5; cf. 1 Clement 23:1-3).⁵

"... they live as though they do not really expect Christ to come back."

There the double-minded are people who live as though they do not really expect Christ to come back. There is a lack of Christian integrity: on the one hand they've been taught that Christ will come back, but on the other hand they don't really live out of that teaching; they don't live as though he could come back at any moment; their faith is not translated into their lifestyle.

The last book I'd like to mention is called the *Shepherd of Hermas*. The *Shepherd of Hermas* was one of the most popular books in the early Christian church. In fact, one early copy of the Bible actually includes it as part of the New Testament.⁶ We don't know exactly when it was written, but probably early in the second century. It's about a prophet named Hermas who received visions and commandments and parables from an angel who appeared to him in the form of a shepherd. This book mentions double-mindedness over and over. Here is a whole paragraph about it:

[Hermas is told,] "Get rid of your double-mindedness, and do not be at all of two minds about whether to ask for something from God, saying to yourself, 'How can I ask anything from the Lord and receive it after committing so many sins against him?' Do

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not debate these matters back and forth, but turn to the Lord with all your heart, and ask him without doubting, and you will know his great compassion; for he will never forsake you but will fulfill the request of your soul. For God is not like those who hold grudges: he holds no grudge and shows compassion to his creation. You, therefore, cleanse your heart from all the vanities of this age and from all the matters I mentioned before. Ask from the Lord, and you will receive everything. You will lack nothing you have requested if you ask the Lord without doubting. But if you doubt in your heart you will never receive anything you have requested. Those who doubt God are of two minds, and they obtain none of their requests. But those who are mature in faith ask all things, confident in the Lord; and they receive them because they have asked without doubting, never being of two minds. For any man who is of two minds and does not repent will be saved only with difficulty. And so cleanse your heart from double-mindedness and clothe yourself with faith because it is strong, and trust God that you will receive all the requests you have made. And if you ever ask for something from the Lord, but receive it only after a long delay, do not begin to doubt, simply because you did not receive your innermost request quickly. For you probably received your request slowly because of some temptation [or: test] or transgression that you did not know about. And so, do not stop making your innermost request, for you will receive it. But if you become disheartened and double-minded while making your request, blame yourself and not the one who gives to you. Be on the alert against this double-mindedness, for it is evil and senseless, and it uproots many from the faith, even those who are very faithful and strong. For this double-mindedness is the daughter of the devil, and it works great evil against the slaves of God. And so, despise double-mindedness and rule over it in your every deed, clothing yourself with the strong and powerful faith. For faith promises

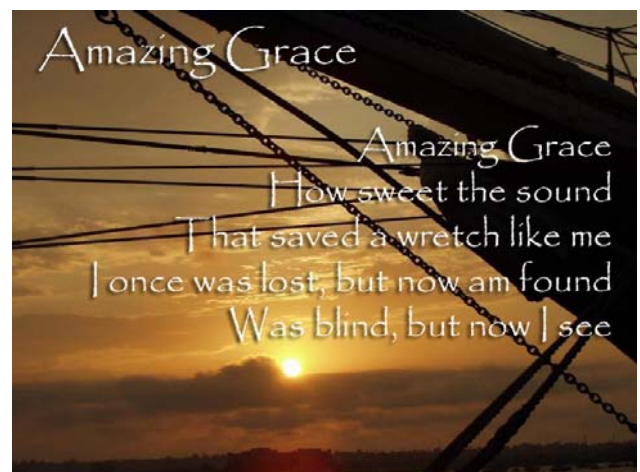
all things and perfects all things, but the double-mindedness that lacks confidence in itself fails in everything that it does. And so you see ... that faith comes from above, from the Lord, and is very powerful. But double-mindedness is an earthly spirit from the devil and is powerless. You, therefore, should serve the faith that has power and abstain from the double-mindedness that has none, and you will live to God. And everyone who thinks these things will live to God (Shepherd of Hermas [Ninth Commandment] 39).

This passage especially explains the danger of double-mindedness for the Christian life. It's not just a weak faith, but it's an enemy that hinders your prayers and prevents you from becoming spiritually complete. You can grow only if you are committed to the faith.

In the next edition, Rev. Smith concludes his article with four practical guidelines for developing Christian integrity.

REV J SMITH

- 1 Una Sancta 56.22 (5 September 2009) 462.
- 2 Una Sancta 57.3 (31 October 2009) 44.
- 3 Una Sancta 57.3 (31 October 2009) 44.
- 4 Kirsopp Lake (trans.), *The Apostolic Fathers*, volume 1 (Loeb Classical Library 24; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1998 [1912]) 311, 313, 315.
- 5 Lake (trans.), *The Apostolic Fathers*, volume 1, 145 (cf. 49, 51).
- 6 I.e. Codex Sinaiticus of the 4th century A.D.



Time Stewardship and Time Management in God's Kingdom

On Tuesday the 3rd of November, Mr. D Pot presented a speech for SPYSC on why effective time management is important, as well as some practical tips on how to improve time management.

Our time on earth is short, a mere speck in the timeline of eternity. Yet the Bible tells us that what we do and how we spend our time on earth will have direct consequences for eternity.

In the beginning, God gave man the command to work. Adam was placed in the garden to work. This command became more difficult with the fall into sin, but God did not take away the command, as can be seen in the 4th commandment "...six days you shall labour..." We are on this earth for God's glory and He wants to be honoured in our work. Work does not only involve paid work, but includes everything that we have to do, from mowing the lawn to our job at the office.

While work is everything that we have to do, leisure is time that is ours to use for our own pleasure. All leisure is a gift from God, and like our work, our leisure time should also be used to honour God. We have to make the most of the time God has given us, and choose leisure activities which bring us closer to God and other people. Leisure should be valued, and when used wisely it gives rest and renewed energy. Secular society focuses on leisure and many people 'live for the weekend'. For them, work is a necessary evil. However, true leisure can only be understood if work has taken place.

Achieving the right balance between work and leisure has always been a struggle, but even more so today. Standard work hours have decreased over the decades, and we have more time for ourselves, but less time for kingdom work. In an average week, the average person has 60 hours of leisure time. What happens in these 60 hours? When asked to give a written account of these 60 hours, many found it difficult, if not impossible. So where does the time go?

Many are familiar with making a budget for their money, but not many make a budget for their time. This does not mean that every minute of the week needs to be mapped out and planned for, but it is helpful in reflecting on how your time is spent and where your priorities lie. God must be placed central in our lives. As young people, we often have busy social lives, but it is important to remember that it is not our time, but God's time. We are stewards of the time God has given us and we need to use it in a manner pleasing to Him.

One of the current focuses of secular society is physical exercise, and many spend a lot of time becoming physically fit. 1 Timothy 4:8 says "...bodily exercise profits a little, but godliness is profitable for all things..." Physical exercise has some value, but its value is limited. What is the value of an Olympic medal in 50 years time? At death it means nothing, and neither does it count for eternity. Godliness, on the other hand, has eternal value. It is far more important. God doesn't expect us to win an Olympic medal, but He does expect us to be godly.

Why is it important to be trained in godliness? The answer is simple. Christ came and paid for all of our ungodliness.

To be trained in godliness may require changes in our lives. It may require a constant struggle, but with prayer, anything is possible. The key to being trained in godliness is constant prayer and Bible study, and there is always room for improvement and growth.

So, take up the challenge. Become spiritually fit and be trained in godliness. Because on the last day, you will have to give account.

BRYONY HEEREMA



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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