

Of these six stages, the first five have been put in place; but, because of the deaths of the sub-contractors in Faluja, the sixth stage, the sub-contract work, will be postponed, until there is a distinct ceasefire. Some of what has been reconstructed has already been destroyed. These delays can be frustrating for those whose goal it is to see Iraq rebuilt and run in a safe and democratic way.

The situation in Iraq is a troubled one, and troubling to us who watch it from our homes in Australia. Australia is involved in this country, as is the USA, a huge international stakeholder. Without God's control and involvement, the situation could be a recipe for disaster. Darren reminded us that as we follow the events, there is a huge need for us to pray for those involved in Iraq. To pray that the officers involved in rebuilding may make wise choices. To pray, along with President Bush, that the invasion may have opened up opportunities for Christianity to spread in the Middle East. To pray that, if it is God's will, the blood may stop being shed on Iraqi streets.

SPYSC would like to heartily thank Darren South for sharing his time and understanding with us and making us aware of the complex issues involved in an invasion and reconstruction of a country.

~ **HESTER BAX**

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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*"contending earnestly for the faith ..."* Jude :3

## The Great War

A few weeks ago we commemorated ANZAC day. We remembered those who fought in the various wars that Australia has been involved in over the years, especially remembering those who died in combat. It brought to my mind two unchanging factors of wartime: the importance of good preparation and knowledge of the battle, and the guaranteed loss of life and casualties.

Before entering the battle zone the ANZAC soldiers would have undergone thorough training and preparation. They would have been given weapons, and been trained how to use these weapons. Good preparation, knowledge of the enemy and the terrain to be fought in was essential. After all, on the battlefields they fought for their lives. In many cases they lost what was most precious to them: their very lives.

We also are involved in a war - a Spiritual war. Daily we engage in combat with the devil and our own sinful nature. We are attacked from all sides. It is important to remember that we do not live in a time of neutrality, but rather that at all times we must remain alert, as the enemy is there every moment. We must prepare ourselves for the battle; learn how to use our weapons.

The Dawn Service of ANZAC day was established because dawn was considered to be a very significant time of the day for those out on the battle-

fields. The poor light made it difficult to see and the shadows would play tricks on their eyes. These factors made it a prime time to attack. In times where they were most vulnerable they had to be at the highest alert.

At the low times in our lives, when our direction in life seems to blur and we aren't sure what is friend or foe, we also are likely to be attacked by Satan all the more. He knows when we are easy targets. So we must remain on the alert. We must be aware of the imminent attack and ask God for strength during the attack. God calls us to put on the whole armour of God: the belt of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, our feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace, the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation, the sword of the Spirit. And God will help us with this if we 'pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests' (Eph 6 NIV).

Yes, there is a war on. It has been going on for centuries and we're still in the middle of it ... that is, we should be in the middle of it. As in any conflict, if we lay down our weapons or pretend the enemy isn't half as scary as he really is we're in trouble. Are we enthusiastically serving our great General Jesus Christ, or will we become a casual-ty?

~ **ROSE VERMEULEN**

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# Where are You?

I'm not much of a fisherman, and I don't know much about boats either, but if I was going to go on a fishing trip way out in the deep blue, there are two things I'd want to take - apart from all my fishing gear of course. One of those is a GPS, the other is a Marine radio.

Why these two bits of modern technology? Well, I wouldn't take them for show. Nobody would be very impressed. No-one would look at me and say "Wow, he's got a GPS and a radio!!" The reason is, it's standard equipment. Everyone has them. It's a given.

So why take these things? To answer this question you've got to know a little about these instruments - what they do.

A GPS is a wonderful toy which communicates with satellites. It sends a question out to space and gets a reply pretty quickly. To the question: "where am I?" the answer looks like this:

Lat. 33 17'45" Zone 56 E 345 000  
 Long. 151 20'20" N 6, 314, 700

Lots of information. Really useful - as long as you know what it means. And if you don't, you make sure you sit down and read the manual, study it hard until you do know how it works and what the numbers are telling you. You make sure you know how the machine works, back to front and blindfolded. You make sure you ask around if you have queries, perhaps even ring the manufacturer. But you don't rest until you are a capable GPS user, because your life may depend on this knowledge. One day, that GPS may save you.

A GPS has got at least two useful functions. One, it tells you exactly where you are on the earth's planet. Two, you can enter a place on it and it will tell you which direction to go in order to get there. That can be good too. It means you won't get lost when you're looking for a specific spot. The GPS will give directions to keep you headed the right way.

A Marine radio is easier. You talk into the mouthpiece, and someone, somewhere, hears what you say and talks back. Hopefully.

Now, back to the original question. Why take these two things along? I think by now the answer will be fairly self-evident. Mainly for safety. So that if something should go wrong with the tub in which I'm floating, I will be able to contact someone (hence the radio) and tell them where I am, using the GPS. Because the first question anyone will ask when they want to rescue me is: "Where are you?"

Jump off this for a minute. Think about the Bible. More specifically, think about Genesis 3. God walked in the cool of the day in Paradise and knew that Adam and Eve had eaten the forbidden fruit. They were hiding. Hiding behind a couple of fig leaves, amongst the trees. They had just become lost.

And the first question God asked them was: "Where are you?"

Have you ever thought about this question? Applied it to yourself? Think about it. Where are you? Not physically. No-one is bothered if you are in the lounge or bedroom. But where is your heart?

Is it a bit lost? Because the time frame we are dealing with here is one which looks like this - Forever. Pretty good motivation to learn how to use your safety gear isn't it?

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**'If you really want to find the light, you've got to use the right equipment.'**

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Safety gear? Well, God has given us, not a radio, but prayer. So we can call for help. So we can communicate with Him. And when we call, we don't have to think "He will hear us - hopefully." No, there is no "hopefully" about it. It is a given. He WILL hear us. And He WILL answer. So we MUST call. He wants us to.

He also gave us a Bible, to guide us. So that we don't have to stay lost. It's our spiritual GPS as it were. And we need it. We have GOT to read it - unless we want to stay lost. You can bumble about in the dark, but if you really want to find the light, you've got to use the right equipment.

But we need to know how to use the Bible if it is to be effective. The Bible needs to be known. You must study it. You must get to know it back to front and blindfolded. And if you have questions, you've got to ask around and get answers. And then, when you feel lost, you check your GPS and it will give you directions on where to go.

But even better, it will let you know where you are. Spiritually.

So here's the question: Where are you?

~ ERIC DEKKER

As mentioned earlier, one way that an invasion is considered legal is through the Doctrine of Precedent. The USA might later be able to use the invasion of Iraq as a precedent to justify the invasion of other enemy countries, particularly those run by religious dictators.

An understanding of the possible motives for the Allies' attack makes it easier to understand the issues and decisions being made regarding the rebuilding of Iraq.

A Time to Build Up?

There are many complicated issues involved in rebuilding an invaded country, particularly one, with such a divided and diverse population as Iraq.

When to rebuild?

Some wars are relatively easy to clean up after, because events follow a simple succession:

war → ceasefire!! → peace (building up)

In such cases the rebuilding can begin and continue relatively unhindered.

Though we might say the Allies were victorious, in Iraq there has been no distinct ceasefire. Extreme military groups (not necessarily government-run), have been attacking and holding hostage many foreigners who have come to assist those affected by the war. Iraq is in an intermediate period, somewhere between war and peace:

war (tearing down) → peace (building up)

The Allied officers in Iraq have already made the mistake of believing there has been a ceasefire and that the way is clear to rebuild. They learnt the hard way that this was not the case when the first contractors met a bloody death, to be paraded in pieces through the streets of Faluja. For now the building has been put on hold, and meanwhile the officers and troops stay on, waiting.

Who will pay?

As mentioned earlier, according to UN law,

invaders are rebuilders. That means the USA, the UK, Spain and Australia share the responsibility, in proportion to the troop commitments they have made. Australia's troop commitments were 3% of the troops involved, therefore we shoulder 3% of the costs and labour involved. If, as public sentiment suggests, we withdraw the troops that are in Iraq, we will have to make up for the withdrawn labour financially.

The USA hopes to get their money back, with interest, through swap contracts - that's Iraqi oil in exchange for \$US. The UN Security Council and the World Trade Organisation do not support this, as according to law the US should be paying for, not loaning, the rebuilding operations. However there are no international police to enforce these laws, and with few countries in a position to confront the US, it is likely that they will be able to go ahead with these contracts.

How will the rebuilding be run?

With regards to the rebuilding, the Allies have arranged their officers into different organizations which work in a hierarchical manner. Listed below are the organizations and their tasks, in the order of which they are implemented (watch out for those acronyms!):

1. PMF's (Privatised Military Firms) - Companies who formerly provided weapons for destruction (tanks, arsenal etc.), now provide medical supplies and transportable hospitals.
2. TF82's (Task Force Division 82) - Military commandoes whose job it is to protect infrastructure from sabotage, looting etc.
3. FCA's (Foreign Claims Administrators) - Army commanders who, according to their own discretion, can give grants of up to US\$50,000 to locals who lodge claims for compensation or rebuilding requirements.
4. CERP's (Commander Emergency Response Programs) - Officers of higher rank than FCA's who can supply grants of up to US\$500,000 per claim.
5. Head Contractors - Contractors from the four Allied countries who are responsible for the restoration of the major services, such as telecommunications, electricity, water and food.
6. Sub-contractors - Contractors from around the world are invited to tender for various elements within the head contracts. (The workers who were murdered in Faluja fell into this category.)

# Rebuilding Iraq

SPYSC meeting review

Last year, as war threatened to break in Iraq, SPYSC got together to debate the pros and cons of entering such a war. SPYSC members saw what a complicated issue this was, and opinions were varied. Australia did enter Iraq, along with the US, Spain and the UK, and apparently shared a victory! Saddam Hussein is captured! The war is over! But is it?

We're all wondering about what happened after that brief but fiery war in Iraq early last year. How are the USA and their Allies going about rebuilding the country? Are there opportunities for Christian mission amongst Iraqis? Are things getting better for the Iraqi people? And what about the latest attacks on Western aid workers? What exactly is going on?

To get an answer to these questions and to alert us to what's going on in Iraq right now, SPYSC called in Darren South, a lawyer currently specialising in International Law (focusing on the Middle East). Darren has also visited the Middle East on multiple occasions.

A Time To Tear Down?

Going back to our question of last year - should the Allied troops have entered Iraq? Entering a war is no longer a case of conquer and take over. These days a war must comply with International Law, as governed by the UN. Furthermore, invading countries are also bound to rebuild and repair the invaded country, in the case where the government of that country has been removed as a result of the war.

So what could have justified entering this war?

First Darren explained to us the three ways an invasion can be lawful under UN law:

1. Doctrine of precedence - if its happened before;
2. Doctrine of consent - if the leadership of that country request it; or
3. Doctrine of international treaty - if the majority of UN Security Counsel representatives support it.

A similar invasion had not happened before, the Iraqi leaders had not requested an invasion (though many civilians had) and most UN representatives did not support the invasion - therefore Darren argued that the attack was legally wrong and unlawful, even if many support it on moral grounds.

Why would the USA want to invade Iraq - considering the huge rebuilding task attached and the disapproval of the large majority of the UN? Darren presented four theories to us as to why the four allies, and specifically the USA might have wanted to fight Iraq.

## 1. Anticipated Self-Defence

Many claim that the USA wanted to invade Iraq because they saw Saddam Hussein's religious dictatorship and meddling with arms production as a direct threat to their country.

## 2. For the Money

The USA overcame their worst financial downfall (The Great Depression) by entering World War II. Given the economic recovery often associated with wars, it has been argued that the US initiated this war to overcome its massive foreign debt (an incredible one third of its current GDP is dedicated to paying the 'interest bill' on its foreign debt). The US is loaning US\$87B to Iraq, and though the UN will not support it, many believe the USA will demand this money to be repaid in the form of precious oil. Darren asked us to look out for this issue in media discussions of the rebuilding.

## 3. To open up the Middle East for Christian Mission

President Bush is reported to have discussed and prayed in his daily prayer meetings, that the Invasion may be used to let Christianity be brought into Iraq and surrounding countries. Some are suggesting that the war is George Bush's personal religious war, and that the spread of Christianity is the main agenda behind the attack.

## 4. To create a precedent, allowing the USA to invade other countries/threats, such as Korea.

# " a little wine is good for the soul "

The above quote is a well-used cliché among today's Christian youth. It is the first text brought up whenever alcohol consumption is discussed in our circles. Well, we're on the right track by turning to scripture for a guideline on the issue, but God has much more to say to us about drinking than this little quote. Let's take a closer look.

Firstly, scripture makes it quite clear that there is nothing wrong with drinking wine - or beer or other alcohol for that matter. Wasn't it our Lord Jesus himself who turned water into wine at the wedding feast in Cana (John 2)? Also, the above text is actually a misquote taken from 1 Timothy, where Paul instructs Timothy to "no longer drink only water, but use a little wine for your stomach's sake and your frequent infirmities" (ch 5:23). If Jesus condoned alcohol consumption, then we also can enjoy a glass or two.

However, moderation is the keyword, which sadly is sometimes overlooked. Alcohol is a depressant that slows down the central nervous system and impairs judgement, making people more likely to become abusive, violent and irrational after drinking too much. In such situations, Christian morals are easily forgotten, and too often coarse language or arguments fill the air. Isaiah gives us a vivid picture of a drunk losing his moral judgement in chapter 28:7-8:

"But they also have erred through wine, and through intoxicating drink are out of the way; the priest and prophet have erred through intoxicating drink, they are swallowed up by wine, they are out of the way through intoxicating drink; they err in vision, they stumble in judgement. For all tables are full of vomit and filth; no place is clean."

A disgusting image to think about isn't it? A priest and a prophet - drunk! Accusations form in our minds as we think of the responsibility such men held. But ... are we any better today? Don't we all know of situations where Christian youth - including professing members - were behaving in similar ways?

God forbids drunkenness. In Proverbs 20:1 we read: "Wine is a mocker, strong drink is a brawler,

and whoever is led astray by it is not wise". Or even more seriously, "Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither fornicators ... nor drunkards ... will inherit the kingdom of God" (1 Cor.6: 9-10). It is put clearly to us in Ephesians 5:18: "Do not be drunk with wine in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit". Such a straightforward command makes it impossible to justify getting drunk. Anyone who sees nothing wrong with excessive alcohol consumption has not heeded the words of Scripture. Christianity and drunkenness simply do not mix!

To bring the point home, it may be good to ask ourselves this question: think of the last party/camp/get-together that you were at - how would you have felt if Christ were standing next to you? Could you have looked Him in the eye that night and joyfully greeted your Saviour? Or would you have wished you hadn't had those extra drinks and acted like you did? Is there anything you would have done differently? We need to be ready to meet Christ at any minute - His return will be as unexpected as a thief in the night - He really could come back today!

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**'Anyone who sees nothing wrong with excessive alcohol consumption has not heeded the words of Scripture.'**

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However, even if Christ doesn't return during your next party, keep in mind that God is not only watching our every move, but He is also dwelling in us in the form of His Spirit. The words of the apostle Paul speak for themselves where he says: "Do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's." (1 Cor.6: 19-20)

By abusing our bodies with alcohol we are actually abusing the dwelling place of the Most High! That's certainly something to think about!

So what do we do when peer pressure threatens to undo us, and our sworn enemies - the devil, the world and our own sinful flesh - seem nearly impossible to resist? Once again, we do well to turn to Scripture: "And such [drunkards, etc.] were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God." (1 Cor.6: 11). We need to turn to Christ, who Himself was tempted as we are, and who paid for the sins that we now commit - yes, even for the sin of drinking too much. We need to bring our struggle to Him, asking for forgiveness as well as for the ability to fight the sin. We need to realise that it's not what our friends think of us, but what God thinks of our actions that really matters! Only then will we, with God's help, be able to resist the pressures around us, holding firm to the truth of His Word, expressing this in our words and in our actions.

Rather than being filled with beer and spirits, let us strive to be filled with the Spirit (Eph.5: 18). The commentary "Alive in Christ" gives us a clear picture of this: a person gets drunk on wine by drinking and drinking and drinking, until the drink takes control. Likewise, we must constantly 'drink' spiritual things until we are under the Spirit's influence. By actively engaging ourselves in Church activities and in personal prayer and Bible study, we can show that God's spirit indeed lives in us!

### 'Rather than being filled with beer and spirits, let us strive to be filled with the Spirit'

This is not to say that we cannot attend and enjoy socials where alcohol is served. On the contrary, God wants us to enjoy our youth, while living in a manner which pleases Him: "Rejoice, O young man, in your youth, and let your heart cheer you in the days of your youth ... But know that for all these God will bring you into judgement. Therefore ... put away evil from your flesh" (Ecc.11: 9). There are plenty of ways to have fun as Christian youth without going overboard on alcohol. Let us then take this message of scripture to heart, and strive in all our activities to build each other up in faith and keep our bodies as clean temples for the One who dwells in us!

How can a youth preserve his way, O LORD,  
And keep it free of evil and transgression?  
By guarding it according to Thy word:  
O let my heart be wholly Thy possession,  
That by Thy servant sin may be abhorred.  
Let me not stray, denying my confession.  
(Ps 119: 4)

~ VIVIAN BAX

## On the other hand how are we different?

Dear Editor,  
I was at work the other day enjoying a break when another tradesman came and sat nearby to have a chat. We ended up talking about the weekend activities and in the discussion I mentioned that on Sundays I went to church. This led him on to poke fun at different religions, mainly the Jehovah's Witnesses and Mormons. I defended our church and mentioned that we were quite different, but he persisted in claiming we were just a sect like all the others.

So here's the query - how are we actually different? I realise we aren't a sect, but what sets a church apart from a sect? Also, is it worth getting into these discussions, or is it better to restrict the discussion to cars...?

What do you think? SHORT responses (max 150 words) to be emailed to [eric.dekker@frsa.asn.au](mailto:eric.dekker@frsa.asn.au)

they've been getting drinking water from teams of aid workers who supply tarps, mosquito nets and other things. I'm not sure if everyone's been reached but you can say that many of the needy have got the basics now to survive. Now our big problem is that many are getting sick with all sorts of problems. Cases of Malaria could start skyrocketing since so many have been eaten alive while sleeping outside. Many are dehydrating under the hot sun underneath the tarps and others are sick from being cold at night. The worst hit are the young and old.

The men on our base had immediately started a water project outside our front gate. They set up

a huge tank by the gate and have five faucets just outside available for anyone who needs drinking water. At first we had to refill the tank every hour. We were surprised at how many people were constantly out there, filling up on water.

Anyways... the earthquakes have caused everyone to not sleep very well. After the first week we were all exhausted. Your nerves are always ready to run for cover or outside with any quake that comes on strong.

~ CORINNE KOENS

## Letter to the Editor response to on the other hand

Dear Editor,  
At first glance, the story of the atheistic hairdresser appears to be a good one, since it appears to negate the 'evil disproves God' theory. However, on second inspection it becomes obvious that it can be attacked at several levels - both by atheists and theologians.

To begin with, philosophers are not merely arguing that the existence of evil right now disproves God, as in, "He's not doing anything to prevent bad things like September 11", but also that evil had to come from somewhere, and God should never have let sin enter the world. They find a problem with the serpent in the Garden of Eden.

The basic premise for the philosopher's argument is this:

1. If God existed, He would be omniscient, omnipotent, and morally good.
2. If He is omniscient and omnipotent, then He would have known that Eve was going to fall for the temptation, and if He is omnipotent, He would have been able to stop her. This would have been 'morally right'.
3. He did not stop her, so either He is not omniscient, or not omnipotent, or not morally good.
4. Therefore, no omniscient, omnipotent being exists.
5. Therefore, God does not exist.

The 'hairdresser story' does not explain away the serpent in the Garden.

On a theological level, it is wrong to say that by 'coming to God', evil (in the physical sense, as in sickness) disappears the way hair does when one shaves. This

is 'health and wealth' religion. From the customer's explanation, the hairdresser would get the idea that people who embrace Christ in faith have no worries and no evil comes to them. Obviously, this is wrong. Therefore the hairdresser story, while thought-provoking, is overly simplistic.

Belinda Schoof

Dear Editor,  
Re: Does the customer come with a good argument about the existence of God?

I remember hearing a paper delivered by Dr C Van Dam on Faith and Reason. In it he pointed out that we do not need to argue about the existence of God with anyone, it's a basic presupposition, it's just a fact. I quote: "God's existence is the basis for all human activity, also human reason and logic. This basis does not need to be debated. It is known as true to all men, in spite of protestations to the contrary. Therefore, and this is a critical point, one does not argue and reason with all kinds of evidence pointing towards the existence of God (as if God and His Word is on trial before human reason), but one starts with God and explains all reality from Him in the light of His revelation".

Therefore from the point of view of Dr Van Dam, the argument is invalid, let alone the reasoning. Enter a discussion like this, and you've already lost, because you start from the wrong place.

Stephen Houweling.

peared. We stayed outside for a while and sat together with the others on base just trying to get a grip of all that just took place and got damaged, and then we prayed.

While we were praying a strong aftershock took place. From then on we experienced so many aftershocks and earthquakes that I can't remember one from the next. The real odd thing was that we were consecutively experiencing them at around the same time each day. Noon, 9ish pm, around 1 am, 4am and 7 am. It was really odd.

It was hard to distinguish sometimes what was another earthquake and what was just a tremor or aftershock. We have been told a bunch of different information. Some say we had 2 earthquakes over 7 r.s. (Richter Scale - Ed.) and 4 between 5-7 r.s. and the rest were after shocks. The epicenter was for awhile travelling towards PNG so we were expecting the worst to be over, but then we got another hard hit close to home after that. So we were beginning to be prepared for anything, even though I don't think you're ever prepared for it really.

This one I just mentioned we experienced in two tremors, 10 min. after each other. I remember that one really well since Hadassah was in our bedroom and Joshua with me in the living room. When the earthquake hit hard, I picked up Joshua and raced to our bedroom. I stuffed Joshua under the ironwood desk and hit his head in the meantime, and ran to pick Hadassah up. I remember stumbling around but not able to stand up properly yet. 10 min. later I'm in the laundry and Joshua and I felt the cement under my foot go up and down before I realized another quake was going to take place. And sure enough, it hit as hard. I yelled to the maid to take Joshua and I raced inside to get Hadassah. This time it lasted long enough for me to pick her up and get outside. I banged myself against a closing door on the way in, and thankfully on the way out the earth began to calm enough to walk safely outside. Looking back I'm not sure how smart it was to run in and pick up the kids. There was that chance of falling over, or the kids being hit by a door or something. But when we saw one of our workers' homes and saw the bricks that lay at the head of two of the beds, we thanked God that their kids were not in those beds at that time.

Our one water tank broke, collapsed. Our base water pump broke. Electricity was out a long time and then when it came back on later in the week, it was shut off for half a day or more every time an earthquake hit. The Caravan shifted off its ramp about a meter or two.

The damage that cost MAF the most was the parts room. All the shelves and spare parts and glue, liquids of various sorts were all over the floor. Much had to be thrown out. The concrete fence that faces the ocean side came down all the way. In a few of our own homes, the kitchens were a mess. The floor was a mess with water and glass and water filter parts. A few of our water filters broke here on base.

We found out our homes are built with a wooden structure and just plastered on top. So no wonder our homes survived the quake. Most cement homes came down all the way or suffered lots of damage. Most wooden homes survived, though a few finished up on odd angles, with interesting leans.

The last two weeks has seen a lot of rain, especially at night. Most everyone in Nabire had moved outside and just this past week those who could have moved back into their homes. As we drive out of our compound, you see tarps everywhere. Down the mainstreets, most of the tents are on the islands in between the road. Churches are damaged badly or destroyed. A huge fire burned down a housing complex across the airport from us. Bridges have moved or fallen, roads have caved in or cracked, split. Many store owners on this one street in town live above their stores and although the store part seems to be okay, the above apartment structure is bent right over and falling over the parking lot. Each quake has made it get worse and worse.

Many of the homes that are still standing are not safe to live in, and many people will have to break them down and rebuild another home. It will take a lot of work to rebuild this city. I wonder if most people will just leave their homes the way they are and take what they can and rebuild elsewhere. That's what's happening at the market.

SP 1, a transmigrant camp, got hit the worst. 70% of the homes there have collapsed and they have no running water or electricity. Everyday

# Vine and Vinedresser

Creation is before our eyes as a most beautiful book. This is what the Church confesses in Article 2 of the Belgic Confession. Creatures great and small are many letters leading us to perceive clearly the invisible things of God. I confess this truth, yet at the same time questions arise. When in the last week have I read this book of creation? Exactly how is this done? This is an important matter for Christians to be clear on. For if we do not know how to read the book of creation, we will miss out on the revelation of which Article 2 speaks. In John 15:1-8, Jesus reads to His disciples from the book of creation. Jesus communicates a wealth of meaning to his disciples by referring to a natural phenomenon that the disciples knew well, the relationship between the vine and vinedresser.

"I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit" (John 15:1-2).

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**'Our heavenly Father builds walls around us to keep us from hearing and seeing temptations too great for us.'**

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When Jesus said, "I am the true vine" what would the disciples have thought? What did a vine mean to them? From what we know about the land of Palestine there were many vines. The rocky landscape and balmy weather were better for grapes than cereal crops. Vineyards were something they saw everyday; much like the bush to Australians. It is reasonable to assume that the disciples had a fair idea of what was involved in the cultivation of vines. The word "true" adds more meaning to the statement. The word true is often associated with Jesus, for He is faithful and true. Yet in this context it means still more. In vineyards also grow wild vines. They have the appearance of true vines yet their branches bear no good fruit. The devil and false religions are

such vines. But the branches that are attached to Christ bear fruit.

While Jesus is the vine, the "Father is the vinedresser" and verse 5 tells us "you [His disciples] are the branches." To a Palestinian with an understanding of viticulture this comparison had a far greater depth of meaning than we would normally appreciate today. A vinedresser has a lot of work to do. The vinedresser is essential for the health of the vine. If left to themselves the branches on the vine would not be productive.

A vinedresser had to build a wall for protection of the vines from animals. This we may compare to God's work in our lives. Our heavenly Father builds walls around us to keep us from hearing and seeing temptations too great for us. He knows our weaknesses and knows the strength of the Devil. You can gain comfort from the words of 1 Corinthians 10: 13 where it says that our Father "will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able".

When the plant is still maturing a vinedresser must train the branches to grow up along walls or trestles. Branches must regularly be twisted up around the supports. If this is not done the branches will stay lying on the ground and little sunlight will reach the fruit. Young people are like vines in this respect also. Through God's Word and Spirit we must be directed to live our lives along His paths. We must seek our friends, entertainment, and employment in obedience to the direction of Scripture.

Branches grow excess leaves that cut off sunlight from the majority of the fruit. The vinedresser must prune the branches, plucking off leaves in order to stop the unripened fruit from decomposing from lack of sunlight. As God's disciples we must pray to Him to remove all hindrances and distractions, when we are sitting in church or reading our Bible. When our lives are full of worries and cares we might not make time to meditate on God's word. Then we are shaded from the light of the Gospel, we decompose with our life falling apart.

It is clear that the work of the Father like a vine-dresser is critical in the lives of His disciples. But there is another type of branch mentioned in chapter 15. The branch that does not bear fruit. This branch "He takes away". Who are these branches Jesus is talking about? Unbelievers? Jesus says that both the fruitful and unfruitful branches are in the vine. This means that both of these unfruitful branches were in God's covenant. They have received the promises of the LORD at their Baptism and heard God's promises of salvation. These branches are not just any unbelievers, they are unbelievers who have been in Christ's Church and have then left.

Jesus spoke these words to the disciples in the upper room before going to the garden of Gethsemane. In this same night the disciples would learn that Judas Iscariot was Christ's betrayer. Judas, one of the twelve, was with them throughout Christ's ministry. He heard Christ's teachings and admonitions, witnessing the righteous walk of life of our Lord. He was in the vine yet Judas became one of the branches of which the Lord here speaks. A branch that had been in the vine and yet is "cast out as a branch and is withered." A branch which is gathered up and thrown into the fire (verse 6).

**'We must seek our friends, entertainment, and employment in obedience to the direction of Scripture.'**

This is very alarming for the disciples. What security do Christ's disciples have? If Judas, who had the benefit of years of Christ's teaching, fell away, what hope has anyone in persevering in a life of obedience? We must keep reading.

"He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing." These are encouraging words. Sometimes in our lives we may feel hopeless, at our wits end, we can do nothing right. Then Jesus says this is true, indeed of ourselves we can do nothing. When we feel hopeless we must look to Him and His promises. We should have been doing this all along. Jesus says we must "abide" in Him. This means we are

to have faith in Him. Believe that He will save us from our sins. Trust in His promise to renew our hearts by His Holy Spirit to make us live lives of thankful obedience.

Jesus commands us to abide in Him. However this act of abiding is not something that we can accomplish ourselves. We know and confess that our salvation is 100% God's work alone. The Heidelberg Catechism tells us that this faith (or abiding in Christ) the Holy Spirit works in our hearts by the Gospel. God demands that we abide in Him yet He also provides what He demands.

"So you will be my disciples" (verse 8). The matter is certain. We will be God's disciples. Jesus is a true vine and so his branches will have fruit. Our heavenly Father is the vinedresser and will take care of his children. We may take warning that those who do not bear fruit will be cast off. Yet this is not a cause for uncertainty for if we abide in Jesus by faith, our salvation is sure.

~ AREND WITTEN

# Contender General Notice

Earlier on in the year, the Contender Committee hosted an interclub meeting (a meeting with all the youth club committees). At the meeting a proposal for the organisation of future congresses was put forward, which has now been relayed to all youth clubs for discussion. Please see your youth club committee for more information.

Thankyou for your participation,

The Contender Committee.

# Earthquakes you think you've got problems?

I have got a sore toe. How so? Well, I needed to go somewhere of no importance at all, and I was in a real hurry to get there. But my car didn't start. So I kicked the tyre in frustration. It didn't help. And now I'm not only stroppy, but I've got a sore toe too. I forgot to check the big picture in which this mishap occurred. I reacted - inappropriately.

Isn't that the way it goes? Life is a rush, we get short tempered, we huff and puff at the most unimportant things. We play soccer and get a decision against us, perhaps unfairly, and suddenly we can't stand that umpire. We've got great names that we call him. Behind his back of course. And we forget about checking the big picture in which this mishap occurs. We react - inappropriately.

We're asked to volunteer our time to do this or that. We're expected to attend a certain meeting, are asked to be part of a particular committee. But it just doesn't fit our schedule. Because we want to do something else - for us. So we find a convenient excuse. And we forget about checking the result of our selfishness. We don't check the importance of the events on our timetable. We react - inappropriately.

After I got my sore toe, I went inside. I switched on my computer and checked my emails. The one I'm going to share is a personal one which happened to arrive that day, and which I have subsequently had permission to print. It came from Justin and Corinne Koens who work for the MAF in Irian Jaya. It's a labour of love amongst those who don't have much. It's about an earthquake they experienced, and the results of it.

I thought I had problems. But after reading this email, I've tried to put them in context, to see the big picture. Perhaps you will too. Because this email may make you rethink your actions and reactions. It also may make you stop and think twice before getting narky about petty things. It may make you realise how good you have it, encourage you to be content. After all, it's one thing to "Praise God from Whom all blessings flow". It's another thing entirely to recognise

those blessings.

Eric Dekker

Dear friends and family,

This is just another personal letter from me, Corinne, just to update you all on what's been going on the last weeks (in Irian Jaya - Ed.).

I don't know when I last wrote you. But I can't remember much beyond two weeks ago, from the first earthquake and on. It's just been so busy that I can't even remember the details of everyday. It's a big blur, so I'll rewrite the events that took place for those of you who haven't heard.

Friday morning, Feb. 6 we were jolted out of bed by the whole world around us swaying from left to right, with 2-3 feet movement taking place. Just rethinking about it brings the moment alive again in my mind. I remember yelling to Justin "Earthquake!!" and "Get Joshua!" (two year old son - Ed.), and then seeing Justin being thrown from one side of the room to the other, banging into the door that was closing, then stumbling out of the door and into Joshua's bedroom. I then picked up Hadassah (infant daughter - Ed.) and just sat on the bed stunned for a moment at what was going on. Then, as I was crawling across the ground to get underneath the ironwood desk Justin yells, "Get under the door frame!" There was a moment of gentle rocking of the earth that allowed me to make it to the door safely, and then as we sat under the door...the world around us began rocking again.

We think it lasted 45-60 seconds but it's hard to judge exactly how long it was, since, when you are sitting through something like that, it seems like it's lasting forever.

We ran outside the minute we could to see everyone else outside, all shaken up too. Justin got badly bruised, to the point that we thought he broke his collar bone. He couldn't pick up Joshua or hold him with the sore arm that day. But after a week the long line of bruise disap-