

## Letter to the Editor

Dear Sir,

I would like to make a couple of comments on the editorial in *BRJ* 38 entitled "Why Churches Fail.

"Firstly, I thoroughly agree that education is decidedly missing from the church today. Ideally it should by rights be the duty of the state schools to give proper Christian education, but as this is just not happening it is too often assumed by the churches that their people shall somehow teach themselves. Today, both children and adults need teaching not only basic doctrines, but also related subjects such as church history, logic, hermeneutics, Greek and Hebrew, all of which should not be solely the domain of the theological student, as it seems to be today, but should be freely taught to all believers by the churches. In days gone by, some of the churches mentioned in the editorial used to employ Catechists, who would regularly visit each family in turn and teach all in the household the catechism. This office has now completely disappeared. To revive such an activity today would be eminently useful, especially as young families find it difficult for both partners to go out to a church meeting in midweek. I would also suggest that twice a week midweek lectures could be arranged on the above topics in the church building. This would not only make more use of church buildings (most of which stand empty for six days of the week), but again partners with young children could take it in turns to get out to at least one meeting each per week. Godless men have no problem in finding the time to watch four hours of television every night, and those who do venture out of their houses in the evenings would think nothing of at least two evenings a week being taken up with pub crawling or line dancing or some other inane activity. This I fear is the problem. The will is not there in the church members to do these things. Unless and until people want to change their habits, no amount of force can do it.

Secondly, it seems to me that the editorial, together with all the literature from the Protestant Reformed Churches I have ever read, definitely give the strong impression that single people are second class Christians. Of course this would be denied, but the fact remains that single people are regarded as not being, to use a word in the editorial, "normal." [Ed. I agree with the exception that Mr. Hayden takes to the word "normal." I suggest instead that "The *usual* and biblical position is that we will marry when we come to maturity" (see *BRJ* 38, p. 3).] I must object to this in the strongest terms. The attitude seems to be that if single people (especially men) are not aggressively hunting for marriage partners, then they are sinning against God. This is at least the impression given. I would say that exactly the opposite is true. It is animals and godless men who aggressively hunt for mates, and I am thoroughly convinced that such activity is truly and properly sin. Christians should have no part in that sort of thing. It is the Lord in His providence that either provides or does not provide a life partner, not we who

should go hunting of our own accord. There are plenty of people, both male and female, who have never met anyone of the opposite sex who would be in the slightest bit interested in even the thought of having them as a marriage partner. There are plenty more who have had someone interested in them for a time but have been let down or rejected. None of these are sinning against God for not hunting enough. Rather, they understand it as being God's providence that he has put them in the position of being single. We should all praise the Lord for whatever position he chooses to put his people in, whether married with a large family, married with no children, single, widowed, etc. etc. Whatever position the Lord puts us in we should learn therein to be content, knowing that it is for our good (Rom. 8:28). It is against the tenth commandment to be discontent with our own estate. Paul said that "I would that all men were even as I myself" (I Cor. 7:7). This is not to mean that singleness is a better state than marriage, otherwise we should all become monks and nuns! Rather this verse must be used as a counterbalance to the verses mentioned in the editorial regarding marriage as honourable. Neither estate is better than the other now we have a fallen world. Both have their own peculiar miseries. Articles stating singleness as not being "normal" and that "normality" is all about getting married and procreating as much as possible, are unhelpful to say the least.

Kind regards, *Paul Hayden*

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*Prof. David J. Engelsma on I Corinthians 7:* "It is safe to say that Reformed Christians have generally failed to do justice to what the apostle says about single life in this passage. They have, therefore, failed to do justice to the single life that some of their members actually live and that others might live, if properly instructed. There are two main reasons for this failure. One is the strong reaction on the part of the Reformed against the Roman Catholic use of this passage to support its teaching that the single life is inherently more spiritual and religious than marriage. This has resulted in Rome's glorifying of celibacy, especially for her clergy. The other reason is the Reformed emphasis upon marriage and family on account of the Reformed doctrine of the covenant. Since God establishes His covenant with believers and their children, gathering His church in the generations of believers and using the godly home to rear covenant children to maturity in Christ, the Reformed emphasis upon marriage is right. But such an emphasis on marriage which ignores or even disparages single life is wrong. Justice must be done to what I Corinthians 7 teaches about the single life. After all, this too is part of biblical doctrine. Besides, failure to reckon with the biblical teaching on single life discourages the unmarried. They begin to think of themselves as second-class citizens of the kingdom. Some may even plunge into a disastrous marriage in order to escape singleness. What is even worse, if we ignore what is said about single life for some, we hinder the life of special devotion to the Lord that some may very well choose to live as single" (*Better to Marry* [Grand Rapids, Michigan: RFPA, 1993], p. 34).