

the presbyterian banner

March 2016

*Consider how the lilies grow,
They do not labour or spin.
Yet I tell you, not even Solomon in all his
splendour was dressed like one of these.
If that is how God clothes
the grass of the field,
which is here today,
and tomorrow is thrown into the fire,
how much more will he clothe you,
O you of little faith!
Luke 12:27-28*



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Editorial

It's a discussion that many in our Christian community are increasingly involved in. One in the family has come out as homosexual and is actively involved in an intimate relationship with a person of the same sex. How does one respond to that? Then, in the course of the discussion it might be raised what one's reaction would be if they were to be invited to the 'marriage' of those in the same-sex relationship.

You could have close family involved stating quite different positions. One, for example, could believe that if invited they could not possibly go, as it was against God's Word. Another says they would go because of the love for the family member, while still not supporting homosexuality as part of a biblical lifestyle. Yet another says it's all right as long as they love each other.

You can see how much this takes out of a family. Particularly for the parents of one who had 'come out' it is something deeply challenging to them, and a situation that those who aren't going through it can fully appreciate. He or she is their child and they want to keep a connection open with them.

We are certainly in a time and place where certain issues face us which we as a Christian community haven't had to deal with before. This is because society as a whole until recently mirrored the biblical pattern for marriage, family life and connected relationships. That has drastically changed within the last fifty years – through the free-love movement, no-fault divorce, de-facto relationships, the decriminalisation of homosexual activity, civil unions, and so on. Now the surging waters of change have become a tsunami overwhelming all with the most extremely depraved lifestyles. You only need to look at the so-called 'Safe Schools' program for schools drawn up and promoted by various homosexual movements, and endorsed by certain State Governments, to see the obvious harm to our children.

But what are we to do as those Christians with family who have 'come out'? Can we condemn the sin while loving the sinner? Well, if it were any other type of sin I think our answer would be clear. It is unloving to let a person stay in a state of sin. It is not hateful to let a person know he is sinning. Sin leads to death (James 1:15), and we love the sinner by speaking the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15). We hate the sin by refusing to legitimise it, ignoring it, or excusing it. We cannot enable a thief to go on stealing or a partner abuser to go on hurting, can we? In the same way, we cannot endorse anything which is against God's Word. So, no, we could not be a party to such a 'celebration'. If one is not able to marry one of the opposite sex God's Word tells us he should remain single and pure (1 Corinthians 7). While we should not go to the extreme of those in the Jewish community who cut off all contact with a family member who has left their faith, even conducting a funeral service for him, we yet need to make it clear we believe this is against God's Word.

That will be hard for those directly involved but it is where we need to keep looking to the Lord and his guidance to help us give the reason for the faith that we have (1 Peter 3:15-16). In an age and a place where the gospel is increasingly despised it asks a lot of us. But, then, how much haven't we been given? And isn't he who gave us what we have in Jesus Christ able, by his Word and Spirit, to keep us and use us through all this?

Cover Photo Credit: Native Orchid, by Tom Audet

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‘Our Help is in the Name of the Lord’

Psalm 124

I remember as a lad in Sunday School being fascinated by this psalm: I liked its cadence; its rhythm; its shape and appearance (on the page it was 'short and slim', thus easy to memorise). I liked its images – especially the picture of the fowler’s snare. It captured my imagination. But I understood it only in a childish way. I think I understand it a little better now.

It’s another of the psalms of ascents. It’s a song for pilgrims and a very suitable one, too; it reminds us that the pilgrim's journey can be a dangerous one. Jesus reminds us, **‘in the world you will have trouble. But take heart; I have overcome the world’** (John 16:33).

It’s a psalm of David: one of four in this section (Psalms 122, 124, 131 and 133).

It’s a song of thanksgiving to God, acknowledging what He has done. He has wrought great and miraculous deliverances not only for David, but also for the nation of Israel. As a result he exhorts us to, **‘Praise the LORD, who has not let us be torn by their teeth’** (6). We don’t know the background of this psalm. There are several possibilities in David’s life which might fit.

He might have composed this psalm after his encounter with Goliath: recorded in 1 Samuel 17.

He might have composed it after Saul was suddenly transformed into ‘a wild beast’ and sought to kill him: recorded in 1 Samuel 19: 9-10.

The background could be 1 Samuel 23: a report came to David that the Philistines were attacking Keilah in Judah, and had raided the threshing floors and made off with the grain. David enquired of the Lord what to do. The Lord told him to attack; so he rescued Keilah, inflicting heavy losses on the Philistines. When Saul heard that David was in Keilah he dispatched his

A Song of Ascents

army – thinking David was easy prey. The Lord told David to flee the city: he escaped to the wilderness of Ziph and Maon. Saul, in hot pursuit, was going along one side of the mountain, and David and his men were on the other side. The noose was tightening. David was heading into a trap. But just at the right moment a messenger came to Saul saying, **‘Come quickly! The Philistines are raid-**

Psalm 124

A Song of Ascents. Of David.

1 “If it had not been the Lord who was on our side,”

Let Israel now say—

2 “If it had not been the Lord who was on our side,

When men rose up against us,

3 Then they would have swallowed us alive,

When their wrath was kindled against us;

4 Then the waters would have overwhelmed us,

The stream would have gone over our soul;

5 Then the swollen waters

would have gone over our soul.”

6 Blessed be the Lord,

Who has not given us as prey to their teeth.

7 Our soul has escaped as a bird from the snare of the fowlers;

The snare is broken, and we have escaped.

8 Our help is in the name of the Lord, Who made heaven and earth.

ing the land.’ So Saul broke off his pursuit. David was saved. It was a remarkable providence! He escaped like a bird out of the fowlers snare.

The background could be 2 Samuel 5: David had captured Jerusalem from the Jebusites and made it his capital; but the Philistines were alarmed and attacked. Their goal was to terminate

George D. Ball

David’s kingship. But they were defeated at Perazim. They regrouped and tried again at the Valley of Rephaim, where they were routed again. Both times the strategy was the Lord’s. David could have said, **‘if the Lord had not been on our side when men attacked us, we would have been swallowed alive.’**

There are many other similar incidents in David’s life. But because we don’t know the precise background; we can apply it to any remarkable deliverance – personal or national. There are many times we marvel at what might have been, **‘if the Lord had not been on our side.’** Perhaps you have a story to tell about God’s startling intervention and protection?

I can think of a couple of experiences while growing up on the farm – if the Lord had not been on our side – I would have been killed – and the machinery I was working on smashed. I’ve been in a couple of collisions in the car and in God’s goodness I’ve walked away unscathed. During my years in the ministry I can testify that **‘our help is in the name of the LORD, the Maker of heaven and earth.’**

The late Tom Woollard of Dingo Creek in his book, *‘Changes of a Lifetime,’* tells us that at least 3 times he should have been killed – once when a tree fell upon him; once being trampled under the hoof of a horse; and once by taking a prescribed drug for blood pressure for too long. He too could have said, **‘if the Lord had not been on our side – we would have been swept away.’**

Let’s look at the three metaphors that David uses to describe the different dangers he faced.

1. The Fierce Animal (2-3 and 6)

The image is of a monster large enough that could gulp its prey in one go. (NB. 'Quick' in the KJV and NKJV means 'alive'). The enemy is not a literal monster, but came in the form of dangerous and bloodthirsty men motivated by malice and hatred (2-3). It well describes Israel's enemies. They were strong, numerous and ruthless. They were like a ferocious animal. They outnumbered and outgunned Israel. Israel 'should' have been defeated. But David says, '**Praise be to the LORD, who has not let us be torn by their teeth**' (6). Against all odds the LORD granted miraculous protection and deliverance for His people. David says, '**The eyes of the LORD are on those who fear Him, on those whose hope is in His unfailing love...We wait in hope for the LORD; He is our help and our shield**' (Psalm 33:18 and 20).

It's significant that David compares his enemies to wild beasts and fierce animals. In the Bible the nations and empires of the world are often depicted as wild animals. E.g. in Daniel 7 and Revelation 13, Daniel saw four great beasts emerge out of the turbulent sea (Dan. 7: 3-7). They were like something out of a Steven Spielberg movie.

The first beast is described as a lion with eagles' wings (4). The second beast was like a bear with 3 ribs in its mouth (5). The third beast was like a leopard with four wings of a bird (6). The fourth beast is an indescribable monster, terrifying and extremely strong (7). These animals (as we know from verse 17) represent 4 kingdoms that will arise from the earth. (This idea is not farfetched. Still today animals and birds are used as nation symbols e.g. the Russian tiger, the Chinese dragon, the American eagle, the Australian kangaroo, the New Zealand kiwi, etc.). All these king-

doms in Daniel's vision have something in common: they are all hostile to God and His people. The beasts represent the hostility of the world toward the church.

Fast forward to the present: the enemy of the church today in so many places is the secular godless state. There is persecution against the church in many countries. Read 'Barnabas News' or 'Voice of the Martyrs'. This psalm therefore is no less relevant today than it was in David's day. Derek Kidner writes, 'It makes the psalm all the more accessible to the Christian as a vehicle of his own praise...the praise is (primarily) corporate, blessing God for the survival of His people (in whom we may now see not only Israel but the church) under the most formidable attacks and most pitiless bondage'.

2. The Flash Flood (4-5)

The picture here is of the flash flood. Like the flood we saw in the Hunter Valley last year. Remember the scene of the car being washed away and two houses in Dungog sailing downstream?) It was a tragedy that happened unexpectedly – it was unforeseen – out of the blue.

In the Middle East the streams (or wadis) were normally innocuous and harmless. But after a storm over the hills, the little stream was suddenly transformed into a raging torrent, which swept away everything in its path. The result was sudden, catastrophic and unforeseen destruction on a massive scale.

It's a picture of how our lives can be suddenly overwhelmed by an unexpected and unforeseen event. Perhaps it's a visit to the doctor; or a phone call in the middle of the night; or an accident in the car. Or it may be a sudden temptation that arises from within our hearts that has the potential of sweeping us away. The only defence against being swept off our feet is to ensure we are standing

on the Rock – the Almighty Sovereign and Omnipotent God. David says, '**If the Lord had not been on our side...the raging waters would have swept us away.**' He says something similar in Psalm 18: '**He reached down from on high and took hold of me, He drew me out of deep waters. He rescued me from my powerful enemy, from my foes, who were too strong for me. They confronted me in the day of my disaster, but the Lord was my support**' (Ps.18:16-18).

3. The Fowler's Snare (7)

The picture here is of a fowler using all his cunning and skill to lure an innocent helpless dove into his net or trap. Can you think of anything more helpless than a dove? It has no teeth or claws or strength to fight off its captor. When caught, it is doomed unless someone sets it free. But miraculously and unexpectedly, it is set free. God foils the fowler. And so David says, '**The snare has been broken and we have escaped**'.

There is surely the suggestion that this kind of danger is Satanic. Satan is a cunning deceiver and a liar. He aims to lure us into his deadly trap. Paul declares, '**We are not ignorant of his designs**' (2 Cor. 2: 11). He also tells us that, '**when you are tempted, He will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it**' (1 Cor. 10: 13).

He provided a way of escape for **George Wishart** (*John Knox's mentor*). It was 1545. Wishart received a letter alleging to come from an intimate friend who had suddenly become ill and earnestly desired his friend's presence at his deathbed. Wishart set out with a few friends but had scarcely gone a quarter of a mile before he stopped and abruptly announced, 'I am forbidden to go

on this journey; will some of you be pleased to ride to yonder place (he pointed to a little hill) and see what you find, for I apprehend there is a plot laid against my life.' His scouts checked the hill and discovered some 60 horsemen concealed behind it, ready to seize Wishart. The 'friend's' letter had been a forgery of his eminence, the most bloody, treacherous Cardinal Beaton. The Lord preserves and protects His people from the snares of Satan.

This psalm has ultimately only

one message. Where would we be if the Lord had not saved and delivered us from all the dangers we have encountered? We would be swallowed by death; we would be washed away; we would be held captive by sin. 'Our help is in the name of the LORD, the Maker of heaven and earth'.

Prayer (adapted from the 1595 Psalter). *Almighty God, and merciful Father, you see the multitude, the force, and the exceeding rage of our enemies to be so great that*

they would devour and tear us in pieces if your bountiful mercy did not relieve and help us. But, seeing their craft and fury increase and grow from day to day, declare yourself to be our defender and protector; that we, escaping their traps and snares, may give ourselves wholly to praising and magnifying your most holy and blessed Name, and that through Jesus Christ, your dear Son, our only Lord and Saviour. Amen.

The Past for Today

Christianity in Scotland (13): Missions and Migration

Rowland S. Ward

The revival tradition

In the Calvinistic understanding, revival is God doing what he ordinarily does in the conversion of an individual but doing it more extensively among numbers at one time. It does not occur apart from the gospel message, but that message is given in varying religious, social, economic and/or religious contexts. If these contexts include an expectation of God's blessing, changes in them may be used by God to bring people to consider the claims of Christ in a way they had not done before.

Revival does not occur in a vacuum nor apart from human factors. Always prayer for God's blessing involves commitment to the use of those means best calculated to bring about such blessing. Although recognizing God's sovereignty we can never account for the low spiritual state of the church by blaming God for not sending a special outpouring of his Spirit. There is fault in ourselves and there is no deserving of God's blessing either. We are shut up to the sheer mercy and grace of God, and to aim at a reformation that he might be pleased to revive us again. The human factors will mean mistakes and errors but God is oft times pleased to bless faithful

work even when these human imperfections are very obvious. Revival does not come because we deserve it but because God is good.

The Protestant Reformation of the 16th century was itself a revival movement. It was a religious age but the burdens arising from the corruptions that had entered the church were cast aside as the true Gospel was once again proclaimed. Notable later revivals include the Six Mile Water Revival in Ulster in 1625 among Scots who had settled there as part of King James 'Plantation of Ulster', that at Stewarton in east Ayrshire in 1625, and that at the Kirk o' Shotts in Lanarkshire in 1630 when John Livingstone preached for two and a half hours on Ezekiel 36:25-26, and several hundred were converted. These were years of distress for the godly due to the suppression of Presbyterianism by the King, and led on to the Covenanting struggle. They sought the Lord and he heard them.

The Westminster Standards (1646/48), while being careful on

details of eschatology, reflect belief in gospel blessing including the overthrow of anti-christian power and the conversion of the Jews (e.g. Larger Catechism, 191). Perhaps 100,000 Ulster Scots migrated to America in the 17th century carrying this optimistic 'puritan hope' with them. The First Great Awakening 1731-1755, in which Jonathan Edwards and George Whitefield were prominent, was on Calvinistic lines, and news of this came back from America to Scotland, particularly to the minister at Cambuslang near Glasgow who taught and prayed for revival with his people. In 1742, the year following a bad harvest in the district, there was a revival at Cam-



buslang, a place of 200 families, in which some hundreds were converted, and other areas impacted. The minister of Cambuslang carefully chronicled the 'wark' that occurred. Large open-air communions were held, an existing tradition that continued elsewhere in future years. The Methodist Revival in Arminian form was strong in England, and in Calvinistic form in Wales. Scotland has been specially favoured over the years.

These revivals need to be carefully distinguished from the consciously worked up excitements and revivalistic techniques that came to the fore in 19th century America and elsewhere.

The Scottish Seceders condemned Whitefield since he would not agree to labour exclusively with them. One can note the 1742 Secession publication: The declaration, protestation and testimony of the suffering anti-Popish, anti-Lutheran, anti-Prelatick, anti-Whitefieldian, anti-Erastian, anti-Sectarian, true Presbyterian Church of Christ in Scotland, with its obvious similarity to the self-description of the Cameronians in 1687/1692.

Home & Overseas Missions

After Presbyterianism was restored in 1690 the episcopal following in the Highlands continued in measure, principally on the west coast south of Fort William at places such as Appin and Glencoe. It would be a century before the south-west was effectively secured to the Presbyterian cause. Instrumental in this was the activity of the Society in Scotland for Propagating Christian Knowledge [SSPCK], founded in 1709. It established schools in the Highlands, initially using English but later Gaelic as well. At its peak about 1795 there were 229 such schools. The New Testament in Scottish Gaelic was published in 1767. The Highlands generally lagged behind the Low-

lands areas which saw significant economic progress in the 18th century.

A quickening of overseas mission interest occurs only late in the 18th century, as was also the case in England, and comes to fruition in the 19th century. Here too, Moderate and Evangelical are not always entirely at loggerheads. Evangelicals generally insisted on the primacy of Gospel preaching, while Moderates stressed waiting for openings in God's providence for civilizing efforts to proceed first. John Inglis (1762-1834), a leading Moderate, but a Calvinist, was instrumental in persuading the 1824 Assembly to appoint a Committee on Foreign Missions. In general the two positions worked out satisfactorily.

Migration

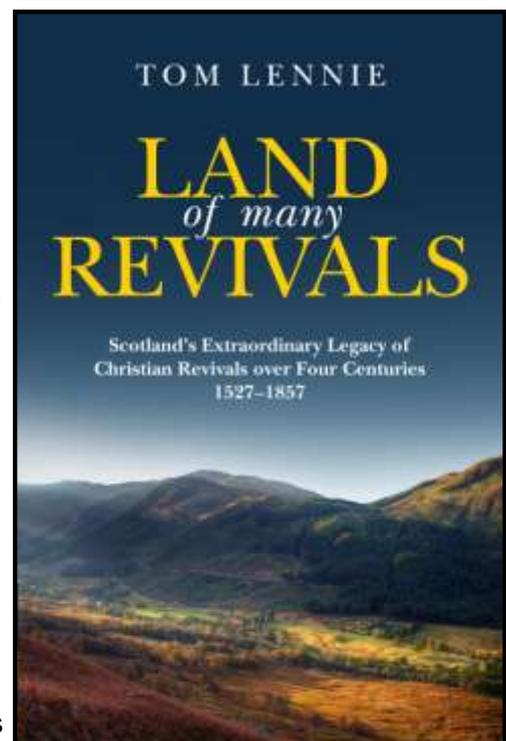
Significant for future developments was the outflow of population from Scotland. In the 17th century around 100,000 Scots went to Ireland (forming the Ulster-Scots community), around 35,000 moved to Poland and thousands more to other European countries. In the 18th century prior to the American War of Independence of 1776, some 200,000 of the Ulster Scots migrated to America. The large majority of these were Presbyterians discriminated against in Anglican Ireland. A further 150,000 came from Scotland itself. Major concentrations in Pennsylvania and the Carolinas resulted, and the faith was reproduced, including its divisions. The first American Presbyterian organisation beyond the congregations was the Presbytery of Philadelphia in 1706. In the British colonies in Canada the first Presbyterian service was in 1758, and the first presbytery, formed by Seceders, was organised in 1786. Scots

-Irish played a significant role in support of independence from Britain.

In the major changes following 1745, the old clan chiefs increasingly sought more economic value from their land to support a life-style like that of the Lowland and English aristocracy to which they aspired. The previous small arable and mixed farming units were typically consolidated into sheep runs, and from about 1780 tenants were removed, often by force. The Clearances, chiefly in the Highlands, continued for over 70 years, with a spike in the 1830s and 1840s that was even worse due to famine and overpopulation. After the American War of Independence, Canada and later Australia, were major destinations for Scots.

Conclusion

The 18th century saw massive changes in society and in the church. The ideal of one church in a Christian state had been lost, although, apart from the Secession and the Relief Church, denominations other than the Church of Scotland



were small. The population had risen from about 1 million to 1.6 million over the century and incorporated a growing middle class. Glasgow in 1800 had 77,000 inhabitants, and would soon overtake Edinburgh to become the second largest city in Britain. The

Church of Scotland had at least the nominal allegiance of 85% of the population with almost all the rest in the smaller Presbyterian bodies. Roman Catholics were no more than 1%. The Industrial Revolution was already underway. James Watt's perfection of the

steam engine and Thomas Telford's engineering genius were already making major contributions by Scots of Presbyterian upbringing and facilitated the urbanization and industrialization of society and the extension of trade.

Statement on Funerals

Every culture and every religion has its own particular way of burying their dead. Death comes to all human beings, so all families and societies have to dispose of the body of a member who dies. We cannot bury ourselves, as much as we might like to in our fierce independence. How should Christians dispose of the dead body of a loved one and/or member of the church?

The first question is: burial or burning/cremation? In the Bible we read that Abraham purchased a plot of land with a cave in order to bury his wife, or put her dead body in a cave. Abraham was later buried by his sons in the same cave. The most detailed account of a Jewish burial is that of our Lord Jesus Christ. His dead body was wrapped in linen, anointed with spices and perfumes, and placed in a cave. There is no reference to burning dead bodies, apart from the wicked Achan, and the special case of King Saul and his sons, to prevent further abuse of their dead bodies by the Philistines (Joshua 7:25 , 2 Samuel 31:13). Even so, no specific instruction is given to the church regarding the disposal of the bodies of the deceased. What is important is that, no matter how or where the body is disposed of, the person will be raised on Judgment Day (Revelation 20:13).

While the manner of disposal of the body of the deceased has no impact upon the dead and their resurrection, it does have importance for the living. A funeral can arouse all manner of superstitions. 'You shall not make any cuts on your flesh for the dead' (Leviticus 19:28). Sometimes mourners shave their heads. White doves can be hired for a funeral service. A Christian funeral will be different to that of the unbeliever. Christians are not to mourn as those who have no hope (1Thessalonians 4:13).

The secular humanist has no hope beyond the grave, so emotion at a funeral can be great, or it can be turned into a strange celebration which almost forgets the person has died. When there is no belief in an after-life, all the focus is on the eulogy and giving the deceased a 'good send-off'. But a funeral is a time for solemn reflection, not only on the dead person's life, but on the reality of death and the great Christian hope. The presence of a dead body or casket reminds us of the reality of death. Should we have a private burial, or should we have a huge affair going on for days? Some think huge funerals inappropriate for Christians, while others see them as a way of paying respect for the deceased person.

The Roman Catholic Church enters into great ceremony when a member dies. A special mass (Requiem) is held because of sins taken to purgatory. Prayers are said and candles are lit for the dead person, while the coffin is sprinkled with holy water, and decorated with rosary beads and 'sacred heart' pictures of Jesus. The Reformers reacted to all this ritual and superstition by having simple funeral services. Even so, they recognised the significance of death, no matter how old or infirm the person, and the importance of dignified, godly burials.

The Directory of Public Worship, appended to the Westminster Confession of Faith, refers to the dead body as being, 'decently attended from the house to the place appointed for public burial', and of Christian friends accompanying the body to this place of public burial. This Directory also refers to the minister, 'putting them in remembrance of their duty'. Being present at the graveside, or at least having a casket present, is a solemn reminder to all that this life comes to an end. We all return to the dust from which we were taken (Genesis 3:19). There is a place for remembering the life of the deceased person, but not to the exclusion of remembering their death, and of mourning their departure from this world. Mourning is not inappropriate for the believer. Abraham wept and mourned for his wife Sarah (Genesis 23:2). Believers mourn, but not without hope (1 Thessalonians 4:13). We believe in the resurrection of the dead – all the dead (John 5:28-29). Those who die in Christ will be raised to meet Christ when he returns. The death of a family member or friend, is a time to reflect on this truth, usually with the aid of a minister of the gospel.

'Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints' (Psalm 116:15). The Lord takes notice when a believer dies. Friends in the church also notice. They are ready to comfort those who mourn. A death should be time for the fellowship to come together, sharing in the truth of the cross and the resurrection. Great words of comfort are found in the Scriptures. These should be shared at this solemn occasion.

This is one in a series entitled 'Short Statements on Issues of Significance' produced by the Church & Nation Committee, on behalf of our denomination. You may find others by going to www.pcea.org.au and going to 'Downloads' and then to 'Other Items'.

The World in the Banner

A New Cultural Revolution In China?

This year is the 50th anniversary of Chairman Mao's Cultural Revolution and it seems there is now a new cultural revolution. Not only is President Xi purging the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) of all opposition, he is reviving Maoist ideology and strengthening CCP control over everything, including the Church. President Xi's campaign to force the Church into the service of the CCP is focused at present on the southern coastal province of Zhejiang. For the first time since Mao's Cultural Revolution of 1966-1977 the CCP is targeting official, CCP-approved churches. In recent weeks two of Zhejiang's most senior registered pastors have been imprisoned, essentially for criticising CCP policy and resisting CCP orders. The situation in China is extremely serious. Please pray for China and its Church.

+ *Religious Liberty Prayer Bulletin* | RLPB 343 | Wed 10 Feb 2016

Only One Man Has Gone Through Hell

It seems to be all the rage nowadays to use specifically biblical concepts to picture everyday events. You hear it often in the language of the community we live in. There are constant references to heaven and angels and glory and God's names. And how much doesn't the media lead the way in all this? The continuing news on a particular AFL club that has been on the front pages for the last few years provided such a headline two weeks ago in the Saturday edition of the Sun-Herald. THE DAY ALL HELL BROKE LOOSE was the attention-grabbing front-page title for an interview with the former coach of the team.

Now while I have no doubt it

was a particularly traumatic event for that man, and maybe it was the worst thing he has ever experienced, he was yet never completely outside the loving care of the Heavenly Father. As Matthew 5:45 says of God's concern to all those living in this world, "He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and he sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous." If indeed hell had broken loose – and I don't think the state called hell quite operates that way – this man would have been in no position to be interviewed by a newspaper over his particularly traumatic time. He wouldn't be able to tell anyone about anything at all actually, because he would be completely cut off from everything and everyone.

There has only been one man who has experienced hell while on this earth. He, of course, was the Lord Jesus suffering the consequences of our sin upon the cursed cross at Calvary. When he cried out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Matthew 27:45) he expressed his being cut off from his Heavenly Father on our behalf.

Naturally this causes much unhappiness for believers, as an ungodly world increasingly misuses the names for God and things of God. We would love that others have respect for the Lord. I mean, none of them would ever dare use Mohammed's name for a swear word! Aside from the charge of hate-speech that would inevitably be made, there is also the danger to that person's own life from a violent attack. Yet, there is a way we can use such an occasion for witnessing to the gospel. It might not always be understood by those hearing because they have no idea what they're actually saying, but it still might make some think. This re-

sponse would be to ask when a name like 'heaven' or 'hell' is used, 'Oh, have you been there?' When one of the Lord's names is used – 'God', 'Jesus', 'Christ', and so on – you could ask, 'Are you a Christian too?'

The traditional response from Christians has been to say that using God's name is personally upsetting because of the relation he has with the Lord. But that has often invited a harsh response and, as we are reminded in the news almost every day, those responses can be quite violent. The huge problem of addiction and lack of anger management means you have no idea how stable someone is when you are talking to him.

In some instances it will be best to not say anything at all, apart from a quick silent prayer for him. No one should think ill of a fellow believer who wasn't able to respond. These moments can quickly flash past us and we don't always have the words to say. But as we have the opportunity, let us be prepared as much as we can to give a reason for the hope we have, and do that with gentleness and respect (1 Peter 3:15-16).

+ *Rev. Sjirk Bajema, Narre Warren Newsletter*

Children Withdrawn From School

Concerned parents are pulling their kids from school after some 250 schools across Victoria signed up to the \$8 million Government-sponsored program 'Safe Schools' that endorses students cross-dressing and other radical sexual concepts.

The 'Safe Schools' Coalition and Minus 18, have released

this year a new program “All of Us” that contains an abundance of slick classroom material and videos which teach kids aged 11 to 14 that they can be lesbian, gay, bisexual, straight, queer and pansexual (attracted to everyone).

Victorian Schools that use Safe Schools material include Brunswick East Primary, Carey Baptist Grammar, Canterbury Girl’s Secondary and Cambridge Primary School.

Of the 482 Australian schools that have signed up to the ‘Safe Schools’ campaign which includes the ‘All of Us’ material, around 50 per cent are located in Victoria.

According to Australian Christian Lobby spokesperson Wendy Francis, the most worrying aspect is that it pressures kids into accepting LGBTI concepts and confuses them about their own identity.

“All of Us’ asks students a series of questions which aim to single out students that do not support LGBTI issues or have not yet formed an opinion.

Students then have to explain why they hold a different view in front of the class and teacher, and are coached to alter their views,” Ms Francis said.

“One activity requires the class to imagine themselves as 16 year olds in a same-sex relationship.

“Making a public example of children on controversial sexual matters is a form of cultural bullying. It is ironic that the program, which claims to tackle bullying, pressures children from families who may not support LGBTI ideology.

“Schools should be a safe environment where students are taught and not where they are

made a public example of if they do not support or know where they stand on a particular ideology.

“What right do schools have to force this ideology upon 11 to 14 year old children? Why are parents not being consulted?”

Ms Francis warned that the impact of Safe Schools and its resources such as ‘All of Us’ on children, may not be fully explained to parents.

“I would hope that the schools that have signed up to the program have fully informed parents about what their children would now be exposed to and taught.”

Victorian mother of four, Cella White, has withdrawn her son and daughter from Frankston High School, South of Melbourne, because it has signed up



Mike Overd doing street preaching

to Safe Schools.

“I feel that Safe Schools Coalition exposes my children to questionable information that is neither convincing, nor conclusive,” White said. “The school is not hearing me and my input seems irrelevant,” Ms White said.

ACL Victorian director Dan Flynn said: “We encourage parents across the nation to inquire from their children’s school whether it has signed up to the ‘Safe School’ agenda. If it has, parents should be speaking out loudly in defence of their children by pressing the school to with-

draw from the dangerous program.”

+ *Australian Christian Lobby, 8 February 2016*

Street Preacher Vindicated

Open air meetings with street preaching were once common, though Rev Tut Yoa says they are still popular in Africa – stand on a stool in the middle of a town and a crowd will quickly gather and listen. One man who has done much street preaching is Mike Overd of Taunton, in SW England. He was convicted in March 2015 of a public order offence following a conversation with a man who identified as a homosexual and who objected to the preaching.

Mr Overd appealed and that appeal was upheld. During the appeal when the main prosecution witness said he wasn’t a sinner, the judge asked, “Aren’t we all sinners?” The same witness complained against Mr Overd that others do not say people are good or bad. But the judge interjected, “I do that”. Another main witness for the prosecution said

he was offended. The judge said, “We can be offended by anything, even someone’s tie. If it was an offence to be offended, I would be a witness a lot of the time.” Mr Overd welcomed the court’s decision. He said, ‘My motivation in all my preaching is to share God’s message of love and forgiveness through Jesus Christ. To do that I have to talk about the reality of life, including our sinfulness.’ Praise God that common sense prevailed!

+ *From Evangelicals Now, February 2016 & Knox Newsletter*

Life under the Banner

God Guides the Humble

Being a Christian is not a part-time occupation. Our faith is not an add-on to our schedule, a hobby we do in our spare time. It's not something we can leave in a drug cabinet, only to take it out every time we need a bit of spiritual medicine.

Being a Christian is something that makes claims on all of our time, all of our resources, all of our being.

What career you're going to have, where you're going to live, who your life partner is going to be, even whether or not you get married in the first place. How you work on your job, what you do with your recreation time, what you do on the weekend, how you spend your money. Your faith must influence the decisions you make in all these areas, and more.

Will this be easy? No.

Praying for Guidance

We need a guide. We need help. We need someone to show us the way.

There is only one who can really show us the way: God himself.

God is the one who calls us to lead the Christian life, and he gives us new life by his mercy and grace. But we're going to continue to need his help if we are going to live as Christians.

Knowing that we are completely lost without Him, the Christian prays to God what the Psalmist prays in Psalm 25:4-5, "Show me your ways, O LORD, teach me your paths. Lead me in Your truth and teach me, for You are the God of my salvation; On You I wait all the day."

"Lead me, O Lord, for I hope in you. Lead me in your truth. Guide me. Teach me. Help me to know the way. Help me to

know how to live. Help me to know how to serve you. When life's difficulties face me, when my sinful heart tempts me to go astray, help me to live the way you would have me to live. For, dear Lord, without your help, I cannot go on. Without you guiding me, I am lost."

This must be the prayer of every Christian. No matter how mature in the faith, no matter how smart, no matter how influential in the church, every Christian must constantly call upon God, "guide me in your truth and teach me."

Finding Guidance

So, we need God to guide us, to teach us. But how does He do this?

Well, it's pretty straightforward: if we want to be led in the truth, then we turn to God's truth, and God's Word is his truth. We look to the Bible for guidance, seeking in holy Scripture the answers we need if we are to live the Christian life.

This doesn't mean that in every situation we can look up a Bible verse that will give us a direct answer to any questions we may have. The Bible does not say, "John Smith must become a mechanic." Nor does it show him how to service a vehicle. But it does help him to understand what it means to use our gifts, and it lays out the principles of honesty and hard work and service, principles that can help him to be the best mechanic he can be.

Biblical teachings must guide our thinking in all areas, including matters that we might not think it addresses directly.

To illustrate this further, consider abortion. You will not find the word abortion in the Bible. You will not find a specific verse saying: abortion is wrong. Still,

Jim Klazinga

the Bible speaks out against abortion loud and clear.

When you take the biblical principles of how we are not to murder, and how God is the giver of life, and how human beings are created in his image, and how he forms us even as we are in the womb, and how justice requires us to protect the helpless, you take all these and other teachings together, and it becomes very, very clear that abortion is something we need to fight against.

That doesn't mean it's an easy thing to deal with this issue. Being involved with a crisis pregnancy organisation, this author and his wife have some sense of how difficult a matter this can be. But that doesn't change the fundamental biblical truth that makes it clear that abortion is one of the most devastating manifestations of wickedness in our society.

Whenever we face this issue, or any issue, we need to turn to the Bible, rather than worldly thinking, or our own biases and preconceptions. Having the Bible shape our thinking, the Holy Spirit guides us with its teachings, and he helps us to see the way that God wants us to go. God will use his Word to lead his people.

Humbly Seeking Guidance

Something else we need to remember: when we pray, "Show me your ways, O Lord; teach me your paths", we need to do this with the proper attitude.

It is possible to approach God for guidance with a measure of pride in our hearts. We feel very sure of ourselves. We know what's going on. So when we ask God for help, we're simply asking him to confirm what

we already know. When we turn to God's Word, we do not do so in order to submit to it, but rather, we want Scripture to submit to our thinking.

Psalm 25 makes it very clear that we can't have this attitude when asking God for guidance.

As verse 9 says, "The humble He guides in justice, and the humble He teaches His way." Humility is what we need if we are to be guided by God.

When we go to God for guidance, we must realise that he is very great, he is very powerful, and we are very weak. We must realise that he is very big, and we are very small. We must remember that he is infinite, he is all-knowing, he is everywhere, he is unlimited, whereas we are very limited. We must remember that he is holy, and we are sinful.

We need to approach God with a sense of awe, a sense of his majesty and power, a sense of his greatness. As verse 12 of Psalm 25 says, "Who *is* the man that fears the Lord? Him shall He teach in the way He chooses." The man who fears the Lord, he is the one who will be led by the Lord. The one who stands in awe of the Lord, the one who knows something of the greatness of the Lord, he is the one whom the Lord will guide.

We need to realise that Jesus is not a friend with whom we can bounce around a few ideas, and then go off and do what we like. Jesus is the Lord of creation who will be coming back to judge the living and the dead. And God is not an advisor who can be ignored if we don't like what he has to say to us. God is the fearsome, holy God who hates sin and who will not be ignored or shoved aside.

Having a sense of God's holiness also means we have to have

a sense of our unholiness. As verse 7 of Psalm 25 says, "Do not remember the sins of my youth, nor my transgressions." And verse 11, "For Your name's sake, O Lord, Pardon my iniquity, for it *is* great."

"O Lord, look upon us, and free us from our misery. Redeem us. Save us from our sins." This has to be our prayer if we are to look to God for guidance in living the Christian life.

This should be obvious. After all, how can you learn from God unless you know that you are sinful, and therefore need to learn from God? An ignorant person is not going to seek to be taught unless he is somewhat aware of his ignorance. This really is simply common sense.



And yet, the fact of our sinfulness needs to be stressed over and over again. One of the favourite strategies of the devil is to make us think, even if it's just subconsciously, that we really are not that sinful. Therefore, when it comes right down to it, we really do not need God's help.

But the simple fact of the matter is, if you do not approach God as one who is a sinner, if you do not approach God as someone who needs to be forgiven by the pre-

vious blood of Jesus Christ, if you do not throw yourself upon God's mercy, if you do not approach God as someone who is completely and totally dependent on God for redemption and salvation, then you will not truly know what it means to ask, "Make me to know your ways, O Lord, teach me your paths."

You may have a knowledge of the Bible. You may be able to fool a lot of people into thinking that you are a Christian. But you will not be looking to God for help. You will only be looking to yourself, you will be looking to your own human reason and intellect. You will be relying on your own strength, unless you know how futile your own strength is, unless you know how futile your thinking is, unless you truly know how great your sinfulness really is.

Assurance of Guidance

The wonderful thing is, those who truly go to God in all humility, those truly seeking to be taught the ways of the Lord, God has already in a very real way lifted them up. He has not left them in the depths of their sins. And he does not leave them so that all they think about is how bad they are. The wonderful news of the gospel is that because of Jesus Christ, God has forgiven his people. He has shown them his

mercy.

Verses 5 and 6 of Psalm 25, "Lead me in Your truth and teach me, For You *are* the God of my salvation; On You I wait all the day. Remember, O Lord, Your tender mercies and Your loving-kindnesses, For they *are* from of old." And verse 20, "Keep my soul, and deliver me; Let me not be ashamed, for I put my trust in You."

"I put my trust in you. You are the God of my salvation.

You are the steadfast loving God. You are the merciful God. You are the God who takes his people and holds them and keeps them. You are the God who lifts up his people. You are the God who has sent his Son Jesus Christ to save your people from their sins. And because of this, your people are raised to new life. Your people are enabled to do the things you require of them. Your people can live according to your word. Your people have the Holy Spirit living

in them, giving them the guidance and the strength that they need to walk in your ways.”

This can give us confidence. Not in ourselves. Not in our own wisdom. But it can give us confidence to know that God is a faithful covenant God who will guide his people and who will lead them on the right path.

Does that mean it will be a smooth road? No. God does not promise that we will have an easy go of it. There will be trials and

tribulations. There will be many temptations to live as children of darkness rather than as children of light. But God does promise to keep His chosen children on the right road that leads to eternal life. God will preserve his people.

We are sure in God. We have our confidence in God. On him do we rely. He guides us. He keeps us. He teaches us. He teaches the humble.

Was this space for your church news and photographs?

Ask your minister or elder how your congregation can be part of this positive promotion of the denomination, as well as keeping the rest of us up with what's happening!

Camps, special events, youth news, seniors, engagements, marriages, births, anniversaries, obituaries... the list goes on and on!

Perhaps you could volunteer to send in some news and photos?

Children under the Banner



FIND THE UNDERLINED WORDS IN THE GRID.

A man had leprosy. He begged Jesus to heal him.

'If you are willing, you can make me clean,' he said.

Jesus said, 'I am willing.

Be clean.' And the man was completely better!

Prescribed Search Work

MARCH 2016

Senior Section 12 years and over; Intermediate 10—11 years; Junior 9 years and under

SENIOR AND INTERMEDIATE (Intermediate omit questions 6 and 7)

ACTS chapter 27:27—44

1. What did Paul say to the centurion when the sailors were about to escape from the ship?
2. How were the sailors prevented from killing the prisoners, and how many escaped safe to land? (2 verses)

chapter 28

3. Why did the people of Melita [Malta] change their minds and think Paul was a god?
4. What was the response of the people when Paul had healed the father of Publius? (2 verses)
5. When they reached Rome, what caused Paul to thank God and take courage?
- x6. What was the answer of the leaders of the Jews after Paul had called them and spoken to them? (2 verses)
- x7. What verses from the prophecy of Isaiah did Paul quote describing the Jews? (2 verses)
8. What did Paul do for two whole years in Rome? (2 verses)

JUNIOR

DANIEL chapter 2

1. What did Nebuchadnezzar say he would do to the Chaldeans if they did not make known his dream?
2. Why did Daniel ask Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah to desire mercies of the God of heaven? (2 verses)
3. In the dream, what became a great mountain and filled the whole earth?
4. How did the king promote Daniel after Daniel revealed the secret of his dream?

Please send the answers to:
Mrs I Steel
PO Box 942
Epping NSW 1710
The questions for the whole year
are available from the above postal
address or by email at:
iesteel@gmail.com

Missions in the Banner

India

Dr Dennis Muldoon

Taleem Centre

Mariam, who has run this centre for village children since her father died in 2013 (her mother died in 2009), wrote the following report (which has been edited and names withheld).

“Greetings to you in the name of Lord Jesus Christ Our Saviour. It’s been a great pleasure being in partnership in working for his kingdom.

After the Lord called my dad to be with him, it’s been a roller coaster with ups and downs. But He has been so faithful to us orphans. I would like to thank the Mission Committee to have given me this opportunity to serve in His kingdom. It’s been 2.5 years working with PECA along with the help and guidance of ETANI (an organisation that assists with funding small NGO’s). I would like to share the work in detail.

We are presently working among children in a village of north India. It’s about 1.5 hr drive away from where we live. The Lord has used a group of people to help these children grow in their life and teach them about His word. As it is a Muslim and Hindu populated area we can’t share the word very openly and they have madrasa – a place of Muslim education – very close to our TALEEM CENTRE (BAL SHIKHSA ETANI). We have 7

people working for us in the village on the Taleem centre project. We have about 30 regular children and many come when we give some snacks – it’s difficult to say NO.

1. Mrs J. is the cook; she is not a teacher. She cooks and cleans for the children. She has been known to us for 6 years now. She came to worship at church when dad was taking worship services. She does know about Jesus but not as her personal saviour. But is open to sit and listen to His word.

2. Mr J. is a kind and open minded man. I have seen very few Muslim men who would allow their wife to work. He is also working with us; he drives, so he takes me to the village, drives his wife when we have studies in the word, or need to meet to discuss about the work.

3. H. helps us with cleaning and assisting J. in the kitchen to cook daily for the kids; this is not one man’s job.

4. S. is H.’s daughter, very different from her mother. She teaches the children Urdu. She goes to school in the mornings and comes back at 3. Later at 4 she comes and teaches the kids. She is good with kids. I have not had a lot of time to personally interact with S. other than things related to the kids. I see the dif-

ference between her and her mother. Different personality. Hardworking girl, I have never got an opportunity with her alone to share the word.

5. Sh. is the main teacher, teaching English and math and science to the kids. He is talented and the kids like him and listen to him. He has a way with kids. He is doing his bachelors and is in his 3rd year of college. He also has some problem with his head; we keep him in our prayers. The doctors are trying to find what it is. He is honest with the work; he informs before taking leave. He also has a shop of mobile phone repair.

6. G. is J.’s daughter. She helps in the Taleem centre when we need a hand; always ready to do anything we ask her to. She might be getting married soon. I am talking to her parents to wait till she is 18 or 20. I talked them out of it last year and prayed with them. She is a wonderful girl.

7. Mr M. (beany and grey beard in photo) is back with us now after 6 months with his family. He is a man with different talents. He is someone we can trust more than other workers. He has proved his dedication and honesty with the work time and again. Going to the village and spending a few days there

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with the staff is something good that he can do. He is a believer and baptised. The staff is willing to hear his word.

I go to the village on Saturdays or Sundays. With gift money we could buy bags for the children; it is absolutely amazing to see how God works and gives what we need. Tomorrow I will go and dis-

songs, playing games, etc.; the kids absolutely love it. Taleem centre is a place where they can relax, play, laugh, enjoy, eat and drink. No doubt there have been a lot of challenges but nothing



Pictures on this pages are of the ministry of the Taleem Centre



Dr Dickson

Dr Dickson, an Interserve missionary, started the Animal Wellness Centre in 2009 at Goyla

tribute the bags to the children. The work has been going on very well by God's grace. The children are given nutritious food, snacks, fruits, games, stationery, etc. I go every week to spend time with the children. We do colouring, singing

out of control. There was objection regarding teaching His word so we had to stop that; some parents stopped sending their children.



I would like to thank PCEA for their support to this ministry, for having the faith in this work".

Dairy, Delhi. Through this centre he aims to bring strategic changes in this poor community. Besides providing animal health care, he runs computer classes and a knitting training centre for the urban poor in order to bring sustainable changes. Dickson writes, "Continue to pray for the work at Goyla Dairy. Animal Wellness Centre is doing well in the new year. Now we run tuition classes for village kids,

computer coaching for girls, jute making and knitting work for slum women, besides treating animals. In December we had Christmas programme in the office. Please pray for the young ones to have encounter with our Lord. Dickson also conducts livestock husbandry courses across North India in partnership with EFICOR and World Vision. He writes, "My livestock training is yet to be started in 2016". Being based in Delhi he also coordinates mission conferences and student minis-



tries. will be winding up work with HIMserve early this year. He will be taking on a role in the leadership team of Interserve India, and also working as a facilitator in teaching Christian leaders in South Asia. A group called Development Associates International (DAI) has asked him to join this team. Astrid, his wife, has a short term teaching assignment at Heb-

The upper three photos are showing aspects of the work Dr Dickson does



Dr Tigi

Dr Tigi Verghis, an Interserve partner, has been serving with HIMserve in the Darjeeling Hills for 11 years. He has assisted

many churches (including the one pictured), in development work like building roads, agriculture, primary health and youth work. His children are now in Hebron Christian School in south India. Tigi

ron School. Tigi is thankful that his serious health problems have been resolved with limited medication.



The lower two photos are of Dr Tigi's with his family and one of the churches they are closely connected with.

