

A photograph of a forest of tall, thin trees, likely cedars, with their reflections in a body of water. The trees are dark against a lighter sky, and the water is calm, showing clear reflections. The overall mood is serene and natural.

# the presbyterian banner

September 2016

*The trees of the LORD are well watered,  
the cedars of Lebanon that he planted.*  
Psalm 104:16

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ISSN 0729-3542

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Subscriptions for 2016  
11 Issues per year  
*Within Australia:* \$40 [Bulk \$35]  
*Overseas:* AU \$50 Airmail.

Direct Credit :  
NAB (BSB) 083-802  
A/C No. 98 473 8955

## Editorial

As Christians we have a most blessed heritage in what has been given us through those who have gone before us. Reading the biographies of the saints of the past is a great encouragement and challenge for us. But I have to acknowledge, though, that in a sense they are a little unreal. This is not because they are not true but rather because those believers were gifted in quite exceptional ways. And that is what I and many others don't have. Luther, Calvin, Owens, Baxter, Whitefield, Spurgeon, Ryle, and those other leading lights make who I am and what I do quite dim in contrast. If there could only be more biographies of basic, ordinary Christians.

I once commented to an older Christian elder and friend that I was more of a journeyman than a craftsman. He wasn't too happy with me about the comment and was most definite that the Lord had gifted me for the ministry I was then serving. He reminded me that each one of us is called to serve the Lord to the utmost of the abilities he has given us. That certainly adds an extra dimension to 'The Parable of the Ten Talents.' While there was the one who received the ten talents and another five, there was also the man who was given the one talent. It was what he did with that which is a prominent feature of that story. And while he didn't use it, we can.

So, while there may not be many biographies written of those with the one talent, let's look around us to see how there are believers who do use the little they have. And then I have to acknowledge, like Abraham Kuyper did of his maidservant and many of the simple village folk in his first parish, that they were definitely shining examples of faith being lived out.

*"The King will reply,  
'I tell you the truth,  
whatever you did for one of the least  
of these brothers of mine,  
you did for me.'"*  
Matthew 25:40

*And whatever you do,  
whether in word or deed,  
do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus,  
giving thanks to God the Father through him.*  
Colossians 3:17

Cover Photo Credit: Northern Victorian Wetlands

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## ‘There Is Forgiveness!’

### Psalm 130

Luther was (reportedly) asked what his favourite psalm was. He replied, ‘The Pauline psalms’. 130 is one of those psalms; it emphasises the fact of sin, the forgiveness of sin, redemption from sin, and the salvation of God. (It’s also one of the seven penitential psalms i.e. 6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130 and 143).

This a psalm of ascents in more ways than one. It’s part of the section of psalms entitled ‘Psalms of Ascents’ that the ancient pilgrims sang on their way up to Jerusalem. But it also ascends spiritually; it begins in the depths of loneliness, distress and despair and rises to the heights of faith, assurance and exhortation. As we approach this psalm, I’d suggest it tells us two things we should know, and two things we should do.

#### Two Things We Should Know (1-4)

The aged John Newton said, ‘Although my memory is fading I remember two things very clearly. I am a great sinner and Christ is a great Saviour’. These are the two things that we too should know, that are emphasised very clearly in these opening verses.

It begins, ‘**Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord! O Lord, hear my voice**’ (1). The psalmist is in great distress, darkness, loneliness and despair. Why? Is it because of persecution? Is his life in danger? Is he grieving over the loss of a friend? Is he depressed? Is he homesick? Is it a family problem? Has he been diagnosed with a fatal disease? No, it’s none of these things. The clue is in verses 2b and 3. He cries, ‘**Let your ears be attentive to the voice of my pleas for mercy. If you, O Lord, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand?**’ (ESV). This is

### A Song of Ascents

a man in the depths of personal sin. This is the confession of a godly man who felt deeply the pain of his guilt, and the horrible shame of his iniquities. (‘Iniquity’ means crookedness, twistedness, it’s the moral corruption in our heart, it’s our perverseness, it’s like our attempt to draw a straight line without a ruler.) This is a sin entangled soul who felt the sinfulness of sin (Owen). He knew that if God were to deal with him not in grace but according to justice, there could be no hope for him (3).

#### Psalm 130

A Song of Ascents.

*1 Out of the depths I have cried to You, O Lord;*  
*2 Lord, hear my voice!*  
*Let Your ears be attentive*  
*To the voice of my supplications.*  
*3 If You, Lord, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand?*  
*4 But there is forgiveness with You, That You may be feared.*  
*5 I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, And in His word I do hope.*  
*6 My soul waits for the Lord*  
*More than those who watch for the morning—*  
*Yes, more than those who watch for the morning.*  
*7 O Israel, hope in the Lord;*  
*For with the Lord there is mercy, And with Him is abundant redemption.*  
*8 And He shall redeem Israel*  
*From all his iniquities.*

Perhaps he, like David, had done something very devious and wicked? Or, he could have been like Isaiah? Remember how Isaiah was overwhelmed by his sense of sin in the Temple and cried out, ‘**Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of**

### George D. Ball

**a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts**’ (Isa. 6: 5). His experience is similar to Paul’s, who always considered himself the chief of sinners. When he pondered his sin he complained, ‘**For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing. Wretched man that I am**’ (Romans 7: 18-19). C.S.

Lewis perceptively described this paradox, ‘When a man is getting better, he understands more and more clearly the evil that is still in him. When a man is getting worse, he understands his own badness less and less’.

John Newton was a godless, drunken sailor before he was converted by God’s amazing grace; but he (like Paul) always considered himself a sinner to the very end. His epitaph reads, ‘John Newton, clerk, once an infidel and a libertine, a servant of slaves in Africa, was by the rich mercy of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, preserved, restored, pardoned, and appointed to preach the faith he had long laboured to destroy’.

Sadly, there doesn’t seem to be much sense of sin nowadays. Perhaps this is due to the teaching (or lack of it) in the churches. There is no longer an emphasis on the reality of hell and the wrath of a holy righteous God against sin. Sin is no longer thought of as an offence against God. It’s merely a breach of personal or community standards. ‘But we will never really know what sin is till we learn and to think of it in terms of our relation-

ship with God' (Packer). That's what we should know, that we are great sinners.

The second thing we should know is that Christ is a great Saviour. He says, **'But with you there is forgiveness, that you may be feared'** (4). There are two surprises in this verse.

The first surprise is that there is forgiveness at all in light of the fact that the Lord knows all about us. If he were to tally up all our sins and hold us accountable, who could stand? (3). Not one of us. We don't have a leg to stand on. We have all sinned in thought, word and deed.

But yet there is forgiveness with God! How can a holy God who hates sin with a perfect hatred possibly forgive sin? It's wonderful and mysterious. It takes us to the heart of the Gospel. John explains, **'This is love. Not that we loved God but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins'** (1 John 4: 10). The death of Christ has appeased the righteous wrath of God so that we can now enjoy His favour and fellowship. That broken and damaged relationship has now been mended and restored through Christ. Now, 'there is forgiveness with God' for every sin (4).

There is forgiveness for murder and adultery (ask David). There is forgiveness for lying and deceit (ask Abraham). There is forgiveness for drunkenness (ask Noah). There is forgiveness for coveting (ask Paul), and swearing (ask Peter). You may not get it from your husband or wife, your son or daughter, your brother or sister, your neighbour or friend. But there is forgiveness with God.

The second surprise is the link between forgiveness and fear. **'With you there is forgiveness that you may be feared'** (4). It's a paradox. Surely if there is forgiveness with God then there should be no need to fear Him?

If there's forgiveness there should be love and gratitude – but not fear! How do we explain? It's when we realise that God had every right to condemn us because of the enormity of our sin, and that He could have thrown us body and soul into hell, but He didn't! He pardoned us – as He alone can. How should that make us feel? It means we are no longer flippant about sin. We don't take forgiveness for granted; we don't receive it lightly. We fear God. That's what we should know, Jesus is a great Saviour.

### **Two Things We Should Do (5-8)**

In the first part of the psalm the psalmist was addressing God; in the second part he is addressing Israel. He applies the lessons he has learned to them. He says there are two things that the forgiven should do. They should wait on the Lord (5-6), and they should witness to the Lord (7-8). They should trust and tell. Three times he exhorts, 'wait'. **'I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, my soul waits for the Lord'** (5-6).

Why wait? Has he not already been forgiven? Yes. But perhaps the feeling of closeness and fellowship hadn't yet returned. The feeling of estrangement may still have remained. **'I wait for the Lord.'** After David received forgiveness he prayed, **'Let me hear joy and gladness, let the bones you have crushed rejoice – Restore to me the joy of salvation – Then will I teach transgressors your ways'** (Ps. 51: 8, 12, 13). Cowper desired 'a closer walk with God'. Waiting also indicates the attitude of trust. **'They who wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint'** (Isa. 40: 31). That's what the forgiven must continue to do. As believers we also, **'wait**

**for His Son from heaven'** (1 Thess. 1: 10). We wait with patience and longing, **'for the redemption of our bodies'** (Rom. 8: 23). Then there will be no more of sin's misery.

On what does he base his hope? **'In His word I put my hope'** (5). Matthew Henry says, 'We must hope for only that which He has promised in His word, and not for the creatures of our fancy and imagination.'

How does he wait? 'Like a watchman for the morning' (6). If you've ever worked a night shift, or sat up through the night with a crying baby – you know how eagerly you wait for the morning to come. God promises to 'meet' with those who wait longingly and expectantly for Him.

The second thing the forgiven should do is witness (7-8). Here the psalmist becomes an evangelist. He exhorts others to put their hope in the Lord. **'O Israel, hope in the Lord!'** Why? Because with the Lord there is 'unfailing love' and 'full redemption'. Unfailing love is one of the big words of the Bible (Hebrew – *chesedh*). It's His enduring, steadfast, covenant love. It's His unconditional love for His people. It's permanent, unbreakable and irrevocable. It's love that is unique to the Lord. He is **'merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness'** (Ex. 34: 6).

He also exhorts Israel to hope in the Lord because with Him there is **'full redemption', 'abundant redemption', 'plentiful redemption'**. Redemption was not purchased on the cheap. We are redeemed not with silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ. **'In Him we have redemption through His blood for the forgiveness of sins in accor-**

**dance with the riches of God's grace that He lavished on us'** (Eph. 1: 7).

A final reason for hoping in the Lord is because salvation is all of God (8). **'He will redeem Israel from all his iniquities.'** Salvation is not a DIY job. We need some

one to do the work for us. That's exactly what the Lord has underwritten in Christ.

*Prayer: Loving Heavenly Father, we thank you for the surprise and joy of forgiveness that you have richly provided for us in Christ.*

*Help us to continue trusting in the promises of your word that we might share our hope with others. In Jesus' name. Amen.*

## The Past for Today

### Christianity in Scotland (18): Free Church Liberal & Conservative

Rowland S. Ward

In 1863 the brilliant linguist A. B. Davidson (1831-1902) became Professor of Hebrew and Old Testament at the Free Church theological college in Edinburgh. A very effective teacher he introduced higher criticism of a kind inconsistent with a high view of Scripture. A bachelor, quiet and unassuming, he was never censured by the church, but was extremely influential. His even more brilliant but arrogant student, William Robertson Smith (1846-94), was appointed professor of Hebrew in the Free Church seminary in Aberdeen in 1870, but was soon mired in controversy. Published articles by him in *Encyclopaedia Britannica* in 1875 and 1876 and 1880 resulted in tortuous proceedings against him. No doctrinal error was established by judicial process, but he was removed from his post as an administrative procedure without touching his status as a minister. Strikingly, although his views undermined a high view of Scripture, Smith remained otherwise Calvinistic in his theology. He died while Professor of Arabic in Cambridge. Two other men, Marcus Dods and A. B. Bruce, were acquitted of error by the Free Church Assembly in 1890 by a large majority, although they were rebuked. Professor George Smeaton (1814-89), a fine scholar and the last of the orthodox Disruption-era teachers, had died the year before.

*Free Church Declaratory Act, 1892* A Declaratory Act was drafted and brought before the Free Church Assembly of 1891. Opposition was almost entirely from the north-west Highlands where the Gaelic language was still widely used. The Rev. Dr. Robert Rainy (see previous issue) endeavoured to conciliate but was now prepared to press on. The Act, in rather similar terms to that of the United Presbyterians, was duly passed into church law in 1892 following Barrier Act procedure on a vote of 346 to 195, with 18 ministers and 17 elders recording their dissent.



Professor A.B. Davidson

Those opposed seem to have differed somewhat among themselves. There was a small number for immediate secession. Two min-

isters, Donald Macfarlane of Raasay and Donald Macdonald of Sheildaig, took this step and formed the Free Presbyterian Church on 28 July 1893 (discussed below). Some others would ultimately go into the 1900 union with the United Presbyterians. These included the elderly Highlander Murdo MacAskill (1838-1903) of Dingwall, and Melbourne-born R. G. McIntyre (1863-1954) of Maxwelltown near Dumfries. McIntyre would become prominent in New South Wales from 1903. Others held on and made their stand at the time of union in 1900 as they were not obliged to view their own subscription in terms of the changes of 1892.

In far-off Australia, Rev. J. J. Stewart (1852-96), a former editor of *The Signal*, the paper published in the interest of the constitutional party 1882-89, and former assistant to Dr William Balfour of Holyrood Free Church, gave an excellent assessment in his address as moderator of the remnant Free Presbyterian Church of Victoria in May 1893. He criticised the liberals but also criticised conservatives for their lack of an adequate rebuttal of the higher critics. He thought they were characterised by an attitude of mere immobility, rather than endeavours to advance and improve, for example, the version of the psalter, and to find and purify what ever might be good

in the forms of rationalism and ritualism then pressing so hard on the church. To revere the memory of good men is right, he said, but to allow their practices or customs to be law for us is popery and idolatry, the extreme of reaction and revolt against prevailing corruptions. Professor Donald Macleod of the Free Church College [now Edinburgh Theological Seminary] put it similarly:

With the Union controversy (1863 onwards) the mood changed. As those who were pro-Union became looser and looser in their attachment to the Confession, those who were opposed became more and more rigid. Calvinist orthodoxy developed a siege mentality, isolating itself from ideas which threatened it and offering little welcome to those which might have enriched it. The creativity of the early days had gone, and men were lauded for conserving the past, not for building on it.<sup>1</sup>

#### *Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland*

The Free Presbyterians of 1893 emerged as a protest against change and change became anathema to it. In a short time the new church gathered a community including children of perhaps 15-30,000. There were 70 places of worship by 1896. A number of its ablest young ministers moved to the Free Church in 1905 after the continuing Free Church repealed the Declaratory Act legislation and the decisions allowing hymns and instrumental music. The FP Church has continued and made mandatory the use of the King James or Authorised Version of the Bible. It prohibits the use of public transport on the Lord's Day to attend worship, an action one of its ministerial students, the future Profes-

sor John Murray (1898-1975) of Westminster Seminary, considered infringed liberty of conscience in going beyond Scripture. Murray himself never used



*Professor George Smeaton  
(1814-89)*

public transport on the Lord's Day, but he withdrew on principle in 1930. In 1945 the FPs laid down the position that protest against a decision of the Synod excludes one from church privileges, certainly an unhistorical position but one which aims to prevent variations from the norm. By the mid 1950's the community was about 6,000. One of its elders was disciplined because he was present, but did not participate, at a funeral mass in 1986 for a judge of Roman Catholic persuasion. The elder, Lord Mackay of Clashfern, the son of a railway signalman, was the British Lord Chancellor 1987-97 and thus the highest legal officer in the United Kingdom. As a result, in 1989 about a third of the ministers and 700 people left and formed the *Associated Presbyterian Churches* to maintain liberty of conscience. Today there are some 350 regular attenders in APC churches, about 9 parishes plus some co-operative work with the Free

Church. The FP Church has under 2,000 attending her Scottish services, less than 10% of these being communicant members, plus a few churches in Australia (Grafton and Sydney), New Zealand and Canada, as well as extensive mission work in Zimbabwe.

#### *Free Church of Scotland*

On 30 October 1900 a union of the over 1,000 Free Church and the nearly 600 United Presbyterian Church congregations was effected under the name United Free Church of Scotland. Only 26 Free Church ministers (out of more than 1,000) protested and continued the Free Church on the original basis. Although they believed the Declaratory Act to involve a departure from a fundamental constitutional principle, and thus to be beyond the church's lawful power, they had judged the best course differently from the brethren of 1893 and stayed in against the day the issue would be resolved another way. They took legal action and, while, perhaps unsurprisingly, Scottish courts were against them, the House of Lord's judgment in 1904 vindicated their position, much to the consternation of Robert Rainy and the United Free Church. The House of Lords' judgment made clear that that the establishment principle was a fundamental principle of the Free Church of Scotland; that property held in a trust which lacks the power to change fundamental matters is at hazard against a minority dissenting against any such change; and that the Barrier Act did not enable wholesale change but was a procedural device to ensure careful consideration of those matters that are within the power of the church to change.

The initial following of the remnant Free Church was reported in 1901 at around 35,000 if children are allowed for, and there were 260 elders. In 1904 a total of 120 congregations of the remnant Free Church contributed to the Sustentation Fund, only four of these being self-sustaining. The church was awarded the pre-1900 Free Church property but was not in a position to use it all. In 1905 Parliament acted to give the Free Church what she could use effectively at a congregational level, and perhaps 50% overall

of the central funds. The United Free Church received the balance. The Free Church in 1903 had 31 ministers; in 1913, 78;

and in 1923, 86; so there was real progress, including a significant movement of able ministers from the FP Church in 1905 and 1918.



*Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland, Leverburgh, Scotland*

Footnote:

1- In David F. Wright and Gary F. Badcock (eds.), *Disruption to Diversity: Edinburgh Divinity 1846-1996* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1996) 226.

*Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia*  
**FAMILY CAMP**

*at*

*Elanora Conference Centre,  
Elanora Heights, NSW*

*5 pm Tuesday 3rd January 2017 to  
1 pm Friday 6th January 2017 (DV)*

*Main Speaker: To be advised*

*Enjoy Fellowship with other Christian families  
Be seriously challenged in your thinking and lifestyle  
Afternoons free to relax – games, bushwalks and pool  
Missions night Psalmody Good food Peaceful surrounds  
Childrens programme*

*Brochures with further details available soon  
Please pray for God's help and blessing  
(Youth & Fellowship Committee)*

# The World in the Banner

## 63-yr-old mum case raises ethical issues applicable in same-sex marriage debate

The Australian Christian Lobby has joined the Australian Medical Association and IVF pioneer Gab Kovacs, in questioning the decision by a senior Tasmanian couple to have a baby using a fertilised donor embryo obtained overseas.

ACL spokesperson Wendy Francis said the procedure was ethically troubling with the interests of the child not considered. "The ACL is concerned about IVF that involves the donation or sale of eggs or embryos involving a third party because it denies the child the right, wherever possible, to be loved and raised by their biological mum and dad," Ms Francis said.

"We agree with the comments reported from Dr Bernadette Richards, an expert in medical law and bioethics from the University of Adelaide, that the driving principle of our laws must always be the best interest of the child. The ACL shares the medical profession's concerns with using donated eggs or embryos because it clearly is not in the best interest of the child. Whether it be using donated embryos or a surrogate mother, the practice objectifies children and denies them their biological heritage."

Ms Francis said the rights of the child issues highlighted in this case also applied to the debate about changing the definition of marriage. "So-called marriage equality confers a right to found and form a family – a right which cannot be realised for couples of the same gender without Assisted Reproductive Technologies that are currently prohibited in Australia. Sadly, if marriage is redefined in Australia, same-sex marriage involving two men will, by its very nature and design, mean children will be severed from their biological mother through commercial surrogacy. Sperm donation for lesbians also denies children the love of their father."

"Children risk missing out on forming important relationships with those who are the source of their biological origins," Ms Francis said. "We must ask ourselves what kind of impact using donor embryos, eggs or surrogates might have on a child's identity, and if the desire to have a child, no matter the cost, is really more important than the needs of the child involved."

+ *ACL Media Release, 4 August 2016*

## Three For Free!

Three new e-books have been added to the collection of now twenty-five e-books from Reformation Trust by R.C. Sproul available for free download here:

<http://www.ligonier.org/blog/rc-sprouls-crucial-questions-ebooks-now-free/>

The new titles are:

- Are People Basically Good?
- How Can I Be Blessed?
- How Should I Think about Money?

+ *Ligonier Ministries, 400 Technology Park, Lake Mary, Florida 32746*

## Christians Gravely Imperilled In Aleppo, Syria

The battle for Aleppo is about to escalate. In late July Syrian government and loyalist forces severed the supply-line into rebel-held eastern Aleppo. They besieged the rebel stronghold while opening humanitarian corridors so that civilians and surrendering fighters might leave. With rebels calling the escape routes a trap, most chose to stay. On 31 July the rebels launched a counter-offensive in south-western Aleppo and by 6 August had broken through the siege. Western media are applauding what is actually a major victory for al-Qaeda in Syria. The rebels are fighting with the al-Qaeda-led Jaysh al-Fatah and are threatening to take their jihad into government-held western Aleppo and to capture the whole city. This is home to some 40,000 remnant Christians. Please pray for God's

intervention in Aleppo.

+ *Religious Liberty Prayer Bulletin | RLPB 370 | Wed 10 Aug 2016*

## New hope for 'Marriage Reality'

The Coalition's federal election victory – albeit narrow – has given new hope for a plebiscite on the meaning of marriage.

FamilyVoice research officer Ros Phillips said today that an overwhelming majority of Australians want to have their own say on this fundamental issue, and the Coalition now has a mandate to hold a plebiscite. "The plebiscite question must be unambiguous, and there should be equal funding to explain both yes and no cases to each household, as in a referendum," she said.

"A compulsory plebiscite, where people can reveal, in the privacy of the polling booth, their genuine views without media pressure, is the only way to settle this fundamental issue.

"It is not a matter of 'marriage equality'. Marriage is not discriminatory, as Federal Court Justice Jayne Jagot found in 2013. Men and women are already equal in value. All are equally entitled to marry someone of the opposite sex.

"The plebiscite is really about Marriage Reality: the man-woman meaning marriage has had since the beginning of recorded history because of its potential to create and raise the next generation."

+ *FamilyVoice Australia, Media Release, 12 July 2016*

## The Story Of Iran's Church In Two Sentences

Everyone loves a good story. As Christians, we especially love stories that tell us how, when all seems lost, God makes a way.

One such story is about the church in Iran — and it's one of the greatest stories in the world today.

It's a simple story that can be



summarized in just two sentences: Persecution threatened to wipe out Iran's tiny church. Instead, the church in Iran has become the fastest growing in the world, and it is influencing the region for Christ.

As simple as it is, such an amazing story is worth examining deeper.

### **Growth Amid Persecution**

The Iranian revolution of 1979 established a hard-line Islamic regime. Over the next two decades, Christians faced increasing opposition and persecution: All missionaries were kicked out, evangelism was outlawed, Bibles in Persian were banned and soon became scarce, and several pastors were killed. The church came under tremendous pressure. Many feared the small Iranian church would soon wither away and die.

But the exact opposite has happened. Despite continued hostility from the late 1970s until now, Iranians have become the Muslim people most open to the gospel in the Middle East.

Despite continued hostility from the late 1970s until now, Iranians have become the Muslim people most open to the gospel in the Middle East.

How did this happen? Two factors have contributed to this openness. First, violence in the name of Islam has caused widespread disillusionment with the regime and led many Iranians to question their beliefs. Second, many Iranian Christians have continued to boldly and faithfully tell others about Christ, in the face of persecution.

As a result, more Iranians have become Christians in the last 20 years than in the previous 13 centuries put together since Islam came to Iran. In 1979, there were an estimated 500 Christians from a Muslim background in Iran. Today, there are hundreds of thousands — some say more than 1 million. Whatever the exact number, many Iranians are turning to Jesus as Lord and Saviour.

More Iranians have become Christians in the last 20 years than in the previous 13 centuries put

together.

In fact, last year the mission research organization Operation World named Iran as having the fastest-growing evangelical church in the world. According to the same organization, the second-fastest growing church is in Afghanistan — and Afghans are being reached in part by Iranians, since their languages are similar.

### **Three Changed Lives**

The testimonies of Iranian men and women who've come to Christ are powerful.

Kamran was a violent man who used to sell drugs and weapons. One day, a friend gave him a New Testament. After reading for five consecutive days, Kamran gave his life to Jesus. When his family and friends saw his transformed life over the ensuing months, many of them also came to faith. A church now meets in Kamran's house.

Reza was a *mullah* (a Muslim scholar) who hoped to become an *ayatollah* (a Shiite leader). One day, while studying at an Islamic seminary in Iran, he found a New Testament that had been boldly left in the library. Out of curiosity, he picked it up and was deeply shaken. Over time, he fell in love with Jesus. Today Reza is a trained church planter serving in the Iran region.

Fatemah's earliest memories were of being raped by her brothers. At age 11, she was sold in marriage to a young drug addict who abused her and then divorced her when she was 17. Upon returning home she was raped again, until she decided to leave. On the streets she heard the gospel preached, and she trusted Jesus. In time, she married a Christian man. As they were receiving training in evangelism and church planting, Fatemah felt called to go back home and witness to her family. Her entire family repented and gave their lives to the Lord. The first church Fatemah and her husband planted was in her childhood home.

Fatemah felt called to go back

home and witness to her family. Her entire family repented and gave their lives to the Lord.

I've had the privilege of hearing Kamran, Reza, and Fatemah share their stories. I've heard countless other testimonies that are equally remarkable. Each one is a painful and yet marvelous celebration of the gospel's beauty. Each one is a powerful reminder that despite trials and persecution — perhaps *because* of the suffering — the gospel of Jesus shines and the church of Jesus grows.

### **The Story God Is Writing**

We're living in a time when many Christians are suffering for their faith, particularly in Islamic contexts. People often react by preaching fear and hatred of the Muslim world. Yet the apostle Paul reminds us that we are to "rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer" (Rom. 12:12). This is our call.

And the story God is writing for Iran reminds us that we have every reason to rejoice and remain confident in our sovereign Lord and the power of his gospel. Jesus will build his church. It's a promise (Matt. 16:18).

I ask that you would keep the people and nation of Iran in your prayers. Please pray for:

- Many more Iranians to give their lives to Christ.

- Endurance and joy for Iranian Christians suffering in prison for their ministry—many have testified to sensing the prayers of the global church while imprisoned.

- More trained leaders to serve as evangelists, church planters, and pastors to disciple the many new Iranian believers.

Persecution threatened to wipe out Iran's tiny church. Instead, by God's mighty hand, his church is growing rapidly. Praise him!

+ Mark Howard,  
[www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/the-story-of-the-irans-church-in-two-sentences](http://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/the-story-of-the-irans-church-in-two-sentences)

# Life under the Banner

## “Just Are Your Ways”

What do you think it's going to be like, praising God forever in the new heavens and the new earth? Do you give much thought as to how joyous, how beautiful, how glorious that will be?

As we praise Him in eternity, we will know Him so much more intimately than we do now. Of course, our knowledge of Him will always be limited, because we will never be God. But still, unimpeded by sin, we will have a much better understanding of His characteristics, His attributes, and we will be declaring the wonder of his perfect being.

Now, before proceeding, we must make one thing clear: we always need to emphasise the oneness and simplicity of God. We can't separate his attributes from who he is, and we can't play off one attribute against another.

But that being said, if it were possible to pick out your favourite characteristic of God, if you could choose one aspect of his being that you look forward to praising him for, for all eternity, what attribute would that be?

Consider what the saints in glory right now are praising him for. Revelation 15:3 says, “Great and amazing are your deeds, O Lord God the Almighty! Just and true are your ways, O King of the nations!”

The church in heaven proclaims: Lord, you are great, and all that you do is great. You are marvellous, and all that you do is marvellous. You are just and true, and all your ways are just and true.

The church triumphant praises God for the fact that He is, among other things, just. When we get to heaven, we'll be praising him forever for his justness. Is that what you look forward to praising Him for?

### A Just God

Philippians 4:8 instructs us to meditate on whatever things are just. To do that, we need to consider

first of all the God who is the source of justice, the ultimate in just. We need to meditate on the fact that God is a just God.

Mind you, this is not a particularly popular concept. To speak of God being a just God is to draw attention to how He makes judgments.

To speak of God being a just God is to say that He has specific standards by which He judges whether something is just or not, and He makes firm decisions according to those standards.

To speak of God as a just God is to speak of how God will reward the righteous and punish the guilty.

We might very well be wondering: how is it possible that the saints in heaven would make this part of their song of praise, “You are a just God”?

Yet, they are praising the God who has revealed Himself. And He has revealed himself as a just God, a God who makes judgments. He has revealed himself as a righteous God who judges sin. And whatever he reveals about himself gives us another reason to praise Him.

There really can be no doubt that this is who God is. Deuteronomy 32:3-4 – “For I will proclaim the name of the Lord; ascribe greatness to our God! The Rock, his work is perfect, for all his ways are justice. A God of faithfulness and without iniquity, just and upright is he.”

And remember this, brothers and sisters: if we try to downplay the justice of God, if we try to downplay any aspect of God whatsoever, then we end up worshipping a false God. A God who can't be bothered to be just is a figment of our imagination, and as such he is a false God, an idol.

### The Perfect Judge

So it's important to see God as a just God. Let's elaborate further on what this means.

For one thing, God shows him-

## Jim Klazinga

self to be a just God when he reveals Himself to be judge. God is the ultimate judge, far greater than any human judge. And the time is coming when everyone will be forced to acknowledge this about God.

James 5:8-9 – “You also, be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand. Do not grumble against one another, brothers, so that you may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing at the door.”

Now, for God to be a judge, several things are necessary. For one thing, he has to have a standard to go by. He has to have a set of rules, guidelines, laws. A judge without standards to judge by is nothing but a tyrant.

God certainly has a standard to judge by. It's a standard that flows from His very being. Quite simply, it is His law.

A judge also has to have the ability to be able to discern whether or not those being judged are living up to that standard. He has to have the wisdom to be able to discern the facts of the cases before him. What good would a judge be who could not discern truth?

With God, this is not a problem. Seeing as how His knowledge and wisdom is perfect, it follows that that His ability to come up with just judgements is also perfect.

His knowledge is so perfect, that He can do that which no human judge can possibly do: He can search right into our hearts. Jeremiah 17:10 – “I the Lord search the heart and test the mind, to give every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his deeds.”

A just judge must also be good and fair and upright in his judgments. A judge who lets malice control his decisions is nothing more than a bully.

Thanks be to God, He is per-

fectly good, perfectly fair.

Also, as judge He must have the power to enforce His judgments. What good would a judge be if he were helpless to do anything about the judgments he makes?

Again, when it comes to God, this is not a problem. He is Almighty and sovereign.

### **Justice for the Wicked**

So, God shows that He is just, simply by virtue of the fact that He is a judge. And He is unlike any other judge: He is the perfect judge. And so He is perfectly just.

Part of what this means is that he will condemn the wicked. Ezekiel 7:8-9 – "Now I will soon pour out my wrath upon you, and spend my anger against you, and judge you according to your ways, and I will punish you for all your abominations. And my eye will not spare, nor will I have pity. I will punish you according to your ways, while your abominations are in your midst. Then you will know that I am the Lord, who strikes."

In Revelation 15, where we read of the saints praising God for being just, we also read about the judgment of God about to be demonstrated against a wicked world.

Verse 1: "Then I saw another sign in heaven, great and amazing, seven angels with seven plagues, which are the last, for with them the wrath of God is finished."

The wrath of God being poured out: hardly something we're inclined to praise him for in this life. Yet when we are in heaven, that's exactly what we will be praising him for. We will be praising him for his judgment, eternal judgment, on his enemies.

This is not something we like to meditate on: everlasting punishment. Oh, it's ok to talk about the Hitlers and Stalins going to hell. Perhaps there are some so evil that they are beyond redemption.

But that this could happen to normal people, no different than you or I, well, that's another matter. Especially when it comes to someone we know. How can I ever entertain the possibility that a good God would

send someone I love to hell? And to think that I'll be praising Him for that? Unimaginable!

This is a hard truth, but also a simple one: the good God is the just God, and everlasting condemnation demonstrates his justness.

But is that really just? Let the punishment fit the crime. How can eternal suffering possibly be a just punishment for a few sins?

Well, as we need to repeatedly emphasise, sin is not a minor matter. And when we realise just how serious sin is, as something completely contrary to who God is as the Majestic, holy God, then we will have to confess that the punishment does fit the crime. It's a hard concept, but a necessary one to come to grips with.

### **Justice for the Righteous**

So, a just judge shows justice in punishing the wicked. He also shows justice in rewarding the righteous. Not only must there be negative retribution, but also positive rewards.

Proverbs 13:21 – "Disaster pursues sinners, but the righteous are rewarded with good."

But wait a minute, there's a problem here. As we read in Romans 3:10-12, "There is none righteous, no, not one."

There is no one deserving of being rewarded with good. The problem is, no one can live up to the standard of God's law. We all fall short. Therefore, why bother even talking about rewards for the righteous?

Well, the simple fact of the matter is, the Bible does talk about rewards. Scripture is clear: the righteous can expect a reward. 2 John 8 – "Watch yourselves, so that you may not lose what we have worked for, but may win a full reward."

Here's where we need to remember: God makes us righteous, not we ourselves. In other words, the reward the righteous receive is not because they are so great. Rather, it is a gift, given merely out of grace.

God in His mercy has determined that he would grant His people righteousness, and that's why they are

rewarded with everlasting life. We did nothing to deserve a reward. God in his mercy freely bestows that reward, simply because, in addition to being a just God, he is also a gracious God.

But wait a minute, we get a reward we don't deserve? Where is the justice in that? If God were truly a just God, wouldn't we get exactly what we deserve? The punishment would fit the crime, and since we've all done the crime of sin, then we all deserve to go to hell.

And yet, the words of 1 Thessalonians 5:9 speak loud and clear – "For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ." We have been chosen to receive salvation. There can be no doubt.

### **Justice Satisfied**

Still, doesn't justice need to be satisfied?

Yes, it does. And it has been. Justice was satisfied completely on the cross. The cross is the ultimate demonstration of the justice of God, because there the punishment for sins was endured by Christ. On the cross, Jesus experienced the infinite suffering that should have fallen on us. The punishment of the unrighteous was inflicted upon the ultimate in righteous, that by his blood we might be declared to be righteous.

You know, if you don't understand how God is a just God, if this is not something you want to meditate on, then how can you possibly understand the cross? Without meditating on that which is just, you can never meditate on the cross. Why would Christ have had to undergo such suffering, if in fact he was not meeting the requirements of God's perfect justice?

What kind of horrible God would make His Son, His only beloved Son, suffer the torments of hell on the cross, if it were not to satisfy the demands of His justice? The cross makes absolutely no sense apart from the justice of

God. Those who deny the justice of God take all meaning out of the cross.

But the cross does have meaning. God had a definite purpose in mind by having Christ die on the cross. He knew exactly what it would take to satisfy His infinite justice, and He did it, perfectly.

God's righteousness and His justice define who He is. His righteousness and justice explain eve-


rything with regard to what He has done for His people in Jesus Christ. We cannot understand God as Lord, as Shepherd, as Father, unless we understand Him as just.

And we will never be able to truly praise him unless we can declare with brothers and sisters throughout the world and throughout history, including those who are now in heaven with God, we declare with them: great and marvel-

ous are your works, Lord God Almighty! Just and true are your ways!

We do not worship Him because He is who we want Him to be. We worship Him because He is who He is. We praise Him for His righteousness. We praise him for his truth. Thanks be to God that He is who He is. Thanks be to God that He is just.

# Children under the Banner — Luke 18:9-14

<h2>The Pharisee and the Tax Collector</h2>	<p>Jesus told a story to people who looked down on others.</p> 	 <p>Two men went up to the temple to pray.</p>
<p>One was a Pharisee...</p> 	<p>The Pharisee stood at the front thanking God for how good he was. He wasn't like that awful tax collector.</p> 	
 <p>The other a tax collector, who everyone hated.</p>	 <p>The tax collector would not even look up. He prayed, "God have mercy on me, a sinner."</p>	
<p>Who was God pleased with?</p> 	<p>The proud Pharisee?</p> 	<p>Or the humble tax collector?</p> 

# Prescribed Search Work

## SEPTEMBER 2016

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

### SENIOR AND INTERMEDIATE (Intermediate omit questions 5 and 8)

#### 1 PETER chapter 4

1. How should we live, seeing the end of all things is at hand? (2 verses)
2. Why were the believers to rejoice in their fiery trial? (2 verses)

#### chapter 5

3. Why should we humble ourselves under the hand of God? (2 verses)
4. What does Peter pray the God of all grace to do for his readers?

#### 2 PETER chapter 1

x5. List the 8 graces that we are to add to each another.

6. What words had Peter heard when he and the other apostles were eye witnesses of the Lord's majesty?

#### chapter 2

7. What did God do to the angels that sinned, and to the old [ancient] world? (2 verses only)

#### chapter 3

x8. What will happen to the heavens and the earth that now exist? What do we look for according to God's promise? (2 separate verses)

## JUNIOR

#### 1 KINGS chapter 19

1. Who came to Elijah as he slept under the juniper [broom] tree?
2. What did Elijah do when he heard the still small voice?
3. How many people did the Lord have left in Israel who did not worship Baal?
4. On whom did Elijah cast his mantle?

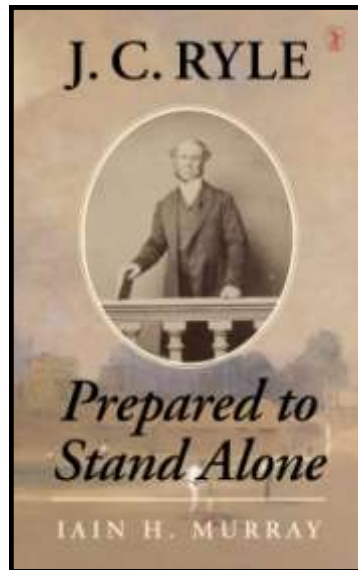
**Please send the answers to:**  
**Mrs I Steel**  
**PO Box 942**  
**Epping NSW 1710**  
**The questions for the whole year**  
**are available from the above postal**  
**address or by email at:**  
[iesteel@gmail.com](mailto:iesteel@gmail.com)

# Books in the Banner

## J.C. RYLE: *Prepared to Stand Alone* by Iain H. Murray (Banner of Truth, 2016)

Iain Murray continues his valuable work in providing well-researched and challenging biographies of leaders within in the Reformed Presbyterian tradition. Whether it is Jonathan Edwards, D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, Army Carmichael, Graham Miller, or various others, Iain Murray and *Banner of Truth* have been a valuable resource and encouragement to us through these publications.

I must admit to knowing little of J.C. Ryle and so became quite educated concerning him and his times through reading this book. The Lord certainly used the circumstances of his life to challenge and convict Ryle and subsequently use his immense talents in the promotion of the biblical faith. That there were so few to stand with him in that distinct Calvinism within the 19<sup>th</sup> Century Church of England does not take away from the stand he clearly made. One needs only to consider how much Ryle published and how relevant he still is today to realise his mani-



fest and perceptive giftedness.

That he was willing to be brave showed in his taking on the new bishopric at an age when many would be thinking about retiring and fulfilling that calling for nearly another twenty years.

Above all else, Ryle was a man of the Book. So it was no surprise that in an age of a growing depreciation of God's Word through

Higher Criticism he was much maligned and disregarded. Sadly, his own son Herbert succumbed to the devastating error of placing man's wisdom above the Holy Scriptures. For a while after his death Ryle became almost forgotten. Yet through a recent revival in Calvinist preaching and publishing, he is being read more now than ever before. This biography brings out clearly why he needs to be appreciated.

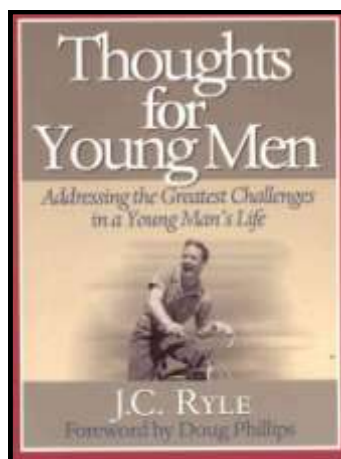
One reviewer has said this book was somewhat drab and dry. That was certainly not the book I read. In fact, I found it held my interest consistently throughout. I also appreciated the selection of a number of quotes from Ryle's various tracts and books towards the end of this biography. Like A.W. Tozer, Ryle is often quotable and adds to a church newsletter is a most helpful and challenging way.

*Reviewed by Sjirk Bajema*

## 'Thoughts For Young Men'

by J.C. Ryle

Having read Iain Murray's enlightening biography of J.C. Ryle, I happened to come across an early edition of one of his books in a local Op Shop. The book was '*Thoughts For Young Men (From Many Points Of View)*'. While not so well known as other works such as '*Holiness*' it too is enjoying a resurgence of interest in recent times. The Banner of Truth has just republished it again, after several earlier reprints and it is being warmly endorsed amongst



many reformed-presbyterian churches. It now also comes with a study guide and has served as the basis for conferences for young adult males. This book is broken up into five parts – reasons for exhorting young men, dangers of young men, general counsels to young men, special rules for young men, and a conclusion.

Throughout the book Ryle makes it clear the vital importance of young men committing themselves to a godly lifestyle while

they are young. He very perceptively shows what it is that hinders young men from this. Then he clearly outlines what the way pleasing the Lord is and what a blessing it brings to them.

While Ryle's language is of the age he lived in, he yet writes in a clear and simple way. The chapters are not long but they are very challenging, with excellent illustrations from scripture and history. This book is vital reading for the young men in our congregations, but also for the older men and the women to help them understand and encourage our young men.

*Reviewed by Sjirk Bajema*

# Preaching in the Banner

John Charles Ryle and John Piper on Galatians 2:11-16

Andrew Wibe Bajema

John Charles Ryle, a well-known Anglican preacher from the Victorian era, and John Piper, a popular Baptist pastor, have two completely different approaches to the same text of Galatians 2:11-16, even though both manage to emphasize the clear message of justification of faith. John Piper in his sermon *Racial Diversity, Racial Harmony, and the Gospel Walk* uses a theme with an existing application in mind, and then gets the text to fit in with that message. Piper begins with retelling the story of Martin Luther King and his struggle, which takes up around the first third of his sermon. After this point Piper goes through explaining it in context of that theme, often jumping from verse to verse in no particular order. There is little in the way of clearly noted points, even though his points are there. On the other hand, J.C. Ryle with *The Fallibility of Ministers* places the text first and obtains various themes from it that can be applied to the Christian life as well as its relation to core doctrine. This includes: that great leaders do and will often make grave mistakes, that truth should be sought above peace, and that faith is the most important thing in a Christian life. Ryle makes it clear by repeating his points both at the start by way of the introduction and at the end, making sure his Church folk go home with a clear understanding of what his points were. Structurally Ryle is much more organized and clear to his points. Piper seems to be much more free-flowing in his use of the text.

Both Ryle and Piper bring out the overarching theme of justification by faith through their examples to prove their point. Ryle is more in-depth and his focus is on



John Charles Ryle, by Carlo Pellegrini, 1881

the text, approaching it using Biblical and historical examples, as he is talking to an audience familiar with the Bible and with Church history. He even uses other references like those of known philosophers, evidently seeing his audience of Victorians as well-educated. Likewise, Piper speaks to his contemporary audience, with his main concern being connecting, and finding refutations, to recent social history into the text. Piper's focus on his overarching theme, while in some ways applicable to the text, also feels like an opportunity for him to use the text the way he wants; while Ryle's points, coming more from the text, are more universally applied and timeless.

In actuality the conclusions the two ministers obtain are somewhat contradictory views, due to

their focus on differing aspects: Piper emphasizes unity, while Ryle questions it. Piper's end point was that Peter was at fault for ruining racial diversity and Christian unity and if one truly falls in love with the Gospel, they would not lapse as Peter did. Ryle makes the point that division sometimes need to happen for the sake of the truth and that all leaders, like Peter, can lapse even with great faith. Both are not necessarily completely contradictory, but reveal insight into the position each of these preachers comes from and what they aim to do.

## Bibliography

John Charles Ryle, "The Fallibility of Ministers," *Warnings to the Churches* (Pennsylvania: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1992), 93-121.

John Piper, "Racial Diversity, Racial Harmony, and the Gospel Walk," *Desiring God* (January 15, 2006).

The main source for John Piper's sermon was the video recording, and may contain slightly varying content to the textual version also available.



John Piper

# Churches in the Banner



Alexander Hilberts, Rev Tso, Adelaide King

hbpcea.org.au. Whilst a number of folk were not in attendance due to illness, a good number present enjoyed the Worship & warm fellowship. We are thankful to our gracious Saviour for the recent conversion of two of our young folk: Adelaide King & Alexander Hilberts. They partook of the Lord's Supper as communicant members for the first time.

and Millie to decorate their gingerbread houses and gingerbread men, with amazing results, while the other ladies made greeting cards using the multitude of decorative gear that Denise brings along for us. A special Thank You to these two ladies. We are finding that ladies are using some of the talents they have learnt at craft in different ways for family and friends to enjoy, and the cot quilt is almost ready for assembling.  
Loretta Hingston

### Ulverstone Ladies Craft

The photo of the craft shows appliques that we are all prepar-

### Hunter Barrington

On Sunday 31st July our congregation had a combined gathering at Raymond Terrace for morning Worship, the Lord's Supper & fellowship lunch followed by a Thanksgiving Service. Rev Tso preached on Matthew 4:1-11 'Christ's Temptations: our great need & triple comfort' at the morning service. At the Thanksgiving Service Rev Tso preached from Psalm 73:28. These two and other very helpful sermons may be accessed via our website <http://>



The combined gathering of the congregation at Raymond Terrace following morning worship and the Lord's Supper.



ing in an endeavour to make a cot quilt for the arrival of members' first grandchild. We are being instructed by Angela who is a wonderful maker of quilts and she will put them altogether when we have them finished. In the other photo we have the time when Briony helped Belinda

