

# the presbyterian banner

April 2012

*Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good;  
his love endures forever.  
Let the redeemed of the LORD say this —  
those he redeemed from the hand of the foe,  
those he gathered from the lands,  
from east and west, from north and south.*

Psalm 107:1-3

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## Editorial

With Australia being the relatively young nation that it is, it's no surprise that the vast majority of those living here come from somewhere else or are the descendants of those who came here one, two, three, or four generations ago. I find it interesting talking to people about where they come from and what sort of background they had in the place they or their predecessors came from. With a name like mine I often get asked regarding this as well!

Everyone has roots, and their roots to a large degree define where they are today. The young Anglo-Indian man serving me in the bank will have invariably come from a long line of office roles which his family has been apart of. And it's a tradition that will continue to be in him for a while yet. That much was clear – and also his tremendous motivation to move on up within there!

This is where we should use the opportunity to ask those we meet not only where they come from but also where they hope to go. What are their plans and ambitions? Where do they picture themselves in say ten years or so?

Then stretch them a bit further. Do what a wise older man did in conversing with a young man several centuries ago. This Christian questioned a young man about his hopes for the future. The young man replied that he hoped to study in order to become a lawyer. The older man then asked him what he would do after that. The young man replied that when he was a lawyer he looked towards marrying well and building up a large estate. This questioning went on for some minutes. All the while the believer would ask, "And then what...?" Well, that young man soon came to an end of his earthly ambitions, for what lay ahead of him when he was to die? Then it struck him how very limited he had been in his thinking. Then he was open to hearing about the gospel and so for what mattered for all time.

You see, more than being defined by where we come from we of all people should be identified by where we are going to. As Christians we should stand out as those who have a real hope and guidance in our everyday lives. We should be patient, friendly, and attentive to other people, as our Lord Jesus Himself showed us. But all this is so that we show we are but pilgrims here below. As the apostle Paul wrote, *If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men. But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive* (1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 15:19-22).

*Has this world been so kind to you that you should leave it with regret?  
There are better things ahead than any we leave behind.*

C. S. Lewis.

*Cover Photo Credit: Ghost Gum, Ormiston Gorge by Alex Steel*

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## Two Ways to Live

### Considering Romans 6:15 — 23

George Ball

Sinclair Ferguson describes this chapter as, 'one of the most important in the New Testament. Its teaching is as fundamental to the Christian life as it is stretching to the Christian's mind.' It is fundamental because it takes us to the heart of what it means to be a genuine Christian.

In chapter 5, we were reminded that a Christian is one who was once in Adam (and under sentence of death) but who is now in Christ (see chap. 5: 12, 18-19). To use Goodwin's illustration, 'In God's sight there are two men – Adam and Jesus Christ – and these two men have all other men hanging at their girdle strings.' Once we were hanging from Adam's belt; now we are hanging from the belt of Christ. How do we explain the transfer? God's saving sovereign grace! The Lord shows great grace to great sinners.

**How should we then live now that we are saved by grace?** That's the subject of this chapter. **'Shall we keep on sinning so that grace may increase?'** Shall we keep on sinning to our heart's content? Is grace a ticket to go on sinning? 'Perish the thought!' The very idea indicates an unregenerate mind. It's impossible to be a Christian and continue in sin.

Why? Because, **'No one who is born of God will continue to sin... he cannot go on sinning because he has been born of God. This is how we know who the children of God are and who the children of the Devil are.'** (1 John 3: 9-10). The break from sin is permanent because of what God has done for us in Christ.

**Paul in verse 15 repeats the question raised in verse 1** (It's broadly similar except that here it refers to occasional sin). 'Can I sin now and again?' Does it really matter if I sin just occasionally? Is sin such a big deal? Paul's answer is the same vehement protest. 'By no means! Absolutely not!' (v.15). He approaches the question now from a human point of view. He uses a human illustration – one that is a bit lost on us today. He takes us to the slave market (v.16). Not a pleasant place to go, but a very common and familiar sight in

Rome when 50% of the citizens were slaves. We need to understand that not all slaves were coerced. Some requested to be slaves. These were the days when there were no welfare or state benefits and people in dire poverty would offer themselves as slaves simply in order to be fed and housed. Once they were slaves to a

*15 What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? Certainly not! 16 Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one's slaves whom you obey, whether of sin leading to death, or of obedience leading to righteousness? 17 But God be thanked that though you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered. 18 And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness. 19 I speak in human terms because of the weakness of your flesh. For just as you presented your members as slaves of uncleanness, and of lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves of righteousness for holiness. 20 For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. 21 What fruit did you have then in the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death. 22 But now having been set free from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting life. 23 For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

master they were in his service to do his bidding. There were two kinds of masters – good and bad. This is the point of the illustration. Just as in the Roman slave market there were two kinds of masters – so spiritually there are two kinds of masters.

### 1. There are Two Masters – and Only Two (16-18)

The first master is described as SIN (see vs.16-18, 22-23). Sin is personified as a sinister, ruthless, heartless, mean and deceitful slave owner.

The other master is described as RIGHTEOUSNESS (vs.16, 18, and 20) and as GOD (vs.22-23). He is caring, holy, good and extremely generous.

How can we tell who one's master is? Let's go to the slave market and ask the nearest slave who his master is. He gives his answer – but we don't know if he is telling the truth. We must watch him and see whom he obeys. Along comes a man and asks the slave to do something. Immediately the slave obeys. We conclude therefore that that man must therefore be his master. That's the point of verse 16. The proof of ownership is not what we say, but who we obey. Jesus said, 'Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord', shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father in heaven.' (Matt. 7: 21).

What happened at conversion? (See vs.17-18). It involved an exchange of masters. We used to be slaves of sin – but then we obeyed from the heart Christ's pattern of teaching that was delivered to us. As a result we have been set free from sin – and have become slaves of righteousness. This is what a Christian is. One who is committed to obey the teaching of Christ; one who is a slave of Christ; one who is committed to do the will of Christ. 'Shall we then sin – even occasionally?' By no means! Who is your master? Who do you obey? As Bob Dylan sang, 'You gotta serve

somebody. May be the Devil or may be the Lord, but you gotta serve somebody'. If we obey the Lord, we are 'enslaved to righteousness.' This entails living a life according to the pattern of teaching handed down to us. Just as there are rules in every area of life – whether it be driving a car, writing an article for the Presbyterian Banner, or operating a computer – we are not free to do as we choose. There are rules and instructions to follow.

## 2. These Two Masters Demand Different Kinds of Work (vs.19-23)

These two masters demand two kinds of service – we will either be slaves to uncleanness or slaves to righteousness (v.19). If sin is your master he will tell you to offer your body to impurity, deceit, and lawlessness – and when you have done that, he will demand more. Having SIN as your Master is like being on a conveyor belt which carries you further and deeper into disobedience. **If GOD is your Master** He will require a life of righteousness and holiness from you (vs.19b, 22)... The two kinds of service could not be more different.

An illustration might help. I've arrived in Sydney and I'm looking for a job. There are a couple of positions possible. The first is a job with the Ibrahim's. (They've been in the news lately. There are three brothers – Fadi, Michael and John, the Kings Cross nightclub boss. They all seem to be mixed up with bikie gangs, drug dealing and the criminal underworld). If I was employed by them I can guarantee it would not be long before I would be told to do something illegal, immoral or illegitimate. A job with them would be the beginning of a downward spiral. The other job option is working for the Archbishop of Sydney – Peter Jensen. I would expect him to be a good employer. I would be confident that he would never ask me to do anything illegal or immoral. I would expect that he would require of me a consistently high standard of ethics and behaviour.

If God is my Master He requires of me a life of ongoing obedience. I should not think that I can sin - even occasionally – any more than I can steal or cheat on my wife just occa-

sionally. William Tyndale (1526) wrote in his Prologue on Romans: - 'Remember that Christ made not this atonement, that thou shouldest anger God again; neither died He for thy sins, that thou shouldest live still in them; neither cleansed he thee, that thou shouldest return (as a swine) unto thine old puddle again; but that thou shouldest be a new creature and live a new life after the will of God and not of the flesh.' We have a name to live up to. We are to remember who we are – we have died to sin (v.11) and we are slaves to God (v.22).

The late Duke of Windsor (Edward VIII, who abdicated to marry Mrs Simpson) was interviewed about his life. Recalling his boyhood he said, 'My father (King George V) was a strict disciplinarian. Sometimes when I had done something wrong, he would admonish me saying, "My dear boy, you must always remember who you are."' We too must remember who we are. Our identity is in Christ. We have a name to live up to. Alexander the Great had reason to reprimand a soldier - whose name was also Alexander – for cowardice. The Emperor told him, 'either change your name or change your behaviour'!

It's true that we usually respond better to encouragement than rebuke. What we need is not so much the whip of rebuke as the pat of encouragement. We need the encouragement of reminding ourselves constantly who we are and what God has done for us. We need to acquaint ourselves with our privileges in Christ. John Owen reminds us that, 'a due sense of deliverance from the dominion of sin is the most effectual motive unto...holiness.' To know that we are a new creation is the best starting point for living as new people.

The story is told of Augustine who, after his conversion, met a woman with whom he had an immoral relationship. Coming up to him she taunted him saying, 'It is I Augustine.' 'Yes', he said, 'but it is not I, Augustine.' The best encouragement to live holy lives is to remember who we are in Christ.

## 3. These Two Masters Hand Out Two Kinds of Returns (v.23)

These two masters hand out very different rewards. Master SIN gives a wage which is deserved. Master GOD gives a gift which is undeserved.

If SIN is your Master all his demands seem to be pleasant. He promises freedom and pleasure. But SIN is a rotten employer. He's a deceiver, a liar and a murderer. He promises to give, but takes. He promises to help, but only hurts. He promises to make rich, but leaves his victims in poverty. He drains the life out of you. He is like a vampire who sucks the life blood from his victims. He promises freedom, pleasure and life but delivers shame, bitterness, regret, embarrassment and DEATH (vs.21c and 23). Death is not just death of the body. It means being cut off from God and suffering His furious anger forever.

God is a good, generous, and kind employer, who gives good gifts. He gives holiness and the gift of eternal life. Not only life that shall never end (everyone has that) but eternal life, which is life with God where it will take an eternity to discover and enjoy the riches of heaven. Eternal life is life which is inexhaustible and eternally satisfying. 'Eternal life will be the never ending giving of God to make us ever increasingly happy in all that He is for us in Jesus'.

This gift comes to us 'in Christ Jesus our Lord'. When we receive and rely on Jesus Christ, we receive all of God's gifts with him. In our day when so many are investment savvy and money smart, they can recognise a good offer when they see one. One doesn't have to be very smart or savvy to see which master or which employer gives the best return.

**There are two ways to live. Two masters to serve. Two rewards to receive.** Which way are you going? Who do you serve? Who is your boss? What is your reward? Jesus said, 'No man can serve two masters. Either he will hate one or love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other.' (Matt. 6: 24).

# The Past for Today

## Henrietta Smith of Dunesk (2)

Rowland S. Ward

*Arising from the previous article some have asked the value of £100 in 1838. Different answers can be given depending on factors like CP1, purchasing power, average earnings and the like. It was certainly not less than £7,000 today but let's say A\$20,000 as an indication.*

### South Australian aborigines

On 2 August 1839 Henrietta also purchased, by land orders 1065-1070, six 80 acre parcels of land in South Australia's Barossa Valley, with a view to leasing them as farms so that the rents might be devoted to the education and evangelisation of the aborigines of South Australia. The cost appears to have been £480 (say \$A100,000 today). It was in this year that Rev Ralph Drummond of the United Secession Church of Scotland came to South Australia as the Colony's first Presbyterian minister. However, he was not commissioned by the home church and it does not seem Mrs Smith would have been directly influenced by his coming to take an interest in South Australia. It is more likely that the proclamation of the Colony at the end of 1836, and knowledge of the experience of the Tasmanian aborigines, whose plight was particularly dire in the late 1820s and early 1830s so that they had almost died out, were the factors. Her nephew, Peter Graham, would have been a direct source of information about Tasmania. Perhaps there were family friends who had come to South Australia as well, although the story that Mrs Smith herself lived at Ardornish near Adelaide for some years prior to 1852 where allegedly a son died is without foundation. At any rate, we can well imagine that she saw an opportunity to do good at an early stage in the Colony's development.

The actual grants for the land Henrietta purchased were not available until various dates between October 1851 and May 1852. Meantime the Free Church of Scotland had been formed and two ministers of that church had arrived in South Australia. In September 1853 the Colonial Committee of the Free Church of Scotland was informed that Mrs Smith proposed to transfer the lands to the trustees of the Church, "the annual proceeds of said property to be placed at the disposal of the Colonial Committee for the conversion of the Aborigines in that Colony [of South Australia]

should the Committee ever find themselves in a position to extend their labours in that direction, but if not, for the General objects of the Committee in South Australia."

Following discussion with church officials on 22 November 1853 the lands were gifted to the trustees of the General Assembly of the Body of Christians calling themselves the Free Church of Scotland "towards promoting the cause of the Gospel in South Australia either through the Colonial Committee of the General Assembly (Free Church of Scotland) or in such other way as the said General Assembly shall think proper" with power to sell part or all. On 28 November 1853 Mrs Smith wrote to the Convener of the Colonial Committee stating her original intention in purchasing the sections of land in 1839 was "that the annual proceeds of them might be entirely devoted to the education and Evangelisation of the aborigines of south Australia." She added: "The lapse of 14 years producing a change of circumstances thereby putting an end to the plans I had formerly laid down for benefitting of parties first intimated, I have thought it best in order that the property might not be lost to the cause of Christ to convey it over to the Free Church of Scotland, trusting and believing that they will not lose sight of the welfare of the natives for whom it was first intended along with other pious objects in South Australia." She wished her letter recorded in the minutes and this was done on 20 December 1853. The change of circumstances referred to presumably was the rapid decline in the number of aborigines and the likelihood that they would virtually die out as they had in Tasmania, a view certainly current at the time.

It should be noted that the terms of the Deed of Gift are general and clearly allow for non-aboriginal use. The wishes of Mrs Smith expressed outside the Deed do not over-ride it. Nevertheless, one would have thought that in the particular circumstances much greater regard to her desire might have been given over the years than was in fact the case. One suspects that the evangelical zeal of Mrs Smith, and her confidence in the transforming power of the Gospel for aborigines, were not universally shared by those administering the bequest. She continued to protest about

the way the money was used until the year of her death, and Jemima Russell continued to represent her views after that. Some of Henrietta's latter statements perhaps reflect a person of advanced age who has not appreciated the terms of the Deed of Gift which certainly did not require exclusive use for the benefit of aborigines. On the other hand, one is not convinced that the church officials were always absolutely straight in their dealings given the assurances she had received from them that her wishes would be respected.

### Point McLeay mission

In 1859 the *Aborigines Friends Association* appointed George Taplin (1831-79) as missionary/teacher in the lower Murray lakes district based at Point McLeay on the shores of Lake Alexandrina. Taplin was a Congregationalist but given the encouraging progress of the work he was ordained in 1868 as an Evangelist by ministers of several evangelical denominations. A very interesting account of the service appears in *The South Australian Advertiser* on 5 November 1868.

In January 1861 James Reid arrived from the Free Church of Scotland and was received by the Presbytery of the Free Presbyterian Church of South Australia Presbytery. He was personally acquainted with Henrietta. He visited the aboriginal camps using a small boat and his work met with encouragements. He was ordained on 3 December 1861. Unhappily Reid, who was based at Wellington and worked well with Taplin, drowned in Lake Alexandrina on 18 July 1863. Part of his salary had been paid from the Smith of Dunesk monies – at first £50 a year, later £70.

Reid's most famous convert (in 1861) was James Unaipon (1835-1907), a Ngarrindjeri man, who took Reid's name until 1864 when he moved to Point McLeay for training as a preacher. James became known as Ngunaitpon, later anglicized as Unaipon. Henrietta supported Taplin at Port McLeay. She also paid for a small stone cottage for Unaipon and a writing desk, and gave other funds to him as well as £50 in 1869 for a chapel at Raukkan which still stands

(with transepts added in 1891) and money for other cottages. Several of James' children have significant names for our story: Henry Erskine Smith Unaipon born 22 October 1867, Jemima Russell Unaipon born 4 August 1869, Henrietta Smith Unaipon born 22 August 1871. James' fourth son was David Unaipon (1872-1967) whose picture is on the Australian \$50 note. In his day he was Australia's best known aborigine.



James Unaipon

### A needy family

On her death in 1871 Henrietta also left £200 to benefit the surviving children of Peter McCrackett, a teacher at Greenock, and his late wife Catherine McLaren. After communicating with Taplin land was to be purchased in South Australia. Taplin could apply the revenue for the McCrackett's benefit if they went to South Australia, otherwise it would accumulate until the youngest reached majority and it would then be divided. The children were Jessie Russell (b.1852), Duncan McLaren (b.1856) and James Sanderson (b.1860). In 1891 Jessie, then a governess in Victoria, married Rev Henry Braddock, an Anglican minister, later influenced by the Pentecostal movement, who ministered in Australia and New Zealand where he died in 1932, but she survived until 1954. In 1882 Duncan commenced to study for the ministry of the Churches of Christ in Adelaide where he married in 1884. He subsequently ministered in Australia and New Zealand and died in Melbourne in 1916. I have not been able to trace James, nor am I aware of the precise relationship with Henrietta: perhaps they were relatives of Jemima Russell.

### Scottish Highlands

In her will Henrietta also left £100 to the committee of the Free Church of Scotland for preaching the Gospel in the destitute parts of the Highlands and Islands, so she seems to have had a real heart for the marginalized and for those without the Gospel.

### Henrietta's death

Mrs Smith was buried in Lair 15 at Lasswade Old Church graveyard beside the site of the now demolished original church, about 50 metres from the border of Dunesk land. The inscription, with text derived from Hebrews 12:2, is not clear enough for a photograph. It reads:

Erected to the memory of Mrs Smith of Dunesk who died the 8<sup>th</sup> July 1871 Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith who for the joy that was set before Him endured the Cross despising the shame and is set down at the right hand of God to intercede for me.

Relict of Dr P Smith of Dunesk, daughter of the Hon Henry Erskine.

*To be continued*

## The Church under the Banner

### How churches lose the plot

Not all historical phenomena that manifest themselves as doctrinal are necessarily immediately doctrinal in cause or origin.' That statement, made to me by a mentor in my field of historical theology, articulates a crucial principle, a principle that came to mind quite recently.

I have spent the last few weeks reflecting on the general question as to why churches lose the plot and end up going liberal. Of course, the simple answer is, 'Because of human sinfulness,' but that is not particularly helpful as an explanation of why particular churches lose the plot at particular points in time. Thus, over the next few days I want to offer a series of posts, in no specific order of priority, about more particular, immediate causes for the phenomenon of theological decline within churches. I should add that my reflections are avowedly Presbyterian, and I make no apologies for that; but I do believe that the causes I outline have their parallels within other

Christian ecclesiological traditions such as evangelicalism etc.

### The Celebrity Pastor

The first danger I want to highlight is that of the celebrity pastor who is ultimately so big as to be practically beyond criticism. Some pastors are just so successful as communicators that, frankly, they are placed on a pedestal and become, in both their precept and example, authoritative sources of wisdom to their followers. In part this is because many rightly think that thankfulness, not criticism, should be the appropriate response to seeing the Lord bless a ministry. Who really wants to criticise a man who brings so many the good news? Yet in an age where sheer numerical success and the ability to pull in the punters and keep them enthralled is often assumed to be a clear sign of faithfulness, there are dangers of which we must be aware.

The successful pastor, like every other

### Carl Trueman

one called to ministry, must honour his ordination vows concerning what he teaches, and abide by the laws and processes of the church of which he is a minister. Ironically, in our secular celebrity culture, the more famous and wealthy someone is, the more boorish the behaviour we tolerate from them, and the quicker we are to forgive. We must not allow this worldliness to pervade our ecclesiology so that, the more successful a pastor is, the lower the bar we set for doctrine, life, and behaviour. Paul's words on the eldership do not somehow cease to apply once a pastor is invited on the Larry King Show, or passes the 2 000 mark in terms of church membership. The pastor should also make his local church, his Sunday ministry, and his denominational duties his ministry priority, however mundane and lacking in glamour they may be; and his fellow elders and congregants must still constantly test his teaching by scripture to

see if it is faithful. Furthermore, if he is a figure of stature in the wider church community, he must take very seriously his responsibility to that larger constituency which looks to him for wise guidance. If he tells people that justification is no big deal, or that it is fine to have a loose doctrine of scripture, or even if he simply shows by his actions that this is what he thinks, then guess what? People will tend to believe him and act accordingly, and orthodoxy will fade away like the coda at the end of a Bee Gees' track.

Even more seriously, if such a revered pastor sets in place successors who are heterodox or too concessive on crucial doctrines, then, however orthodox and faithful he may personally be, he will be responsible not only for the damage done by such poor appointments while he is alive, but also that done by the same to generations as yet unborn. Praise God for preachers whose ministries are extraordinarily blessed; but let us hold them to the same exacting standards as Paul held the super-apostles in Corinth. Celebrity ministers who act as influential lone rangers in constituencies where there is no accountability can prove remarkably dangerous. And if they do not come up to snuff on standards of life and doctrine, let us not pretend otherwise, or trade off fidelity for eloquence or stage presence. Make no mistake: tomorrow's church will be the epitaph of today's leaders.

### The Radical Pastor

Above I noted how the big personality can shift the church in the wrong direction. A closely related phenomenon is that of the minister who thumbs his nose at the church's public standards of doctrine and practice, who decides that he does not like that to which his vows bind him, and that he will consequently ignore them, or at least those bits with which he happens to disagree. Confessional Presbyterianism, the church system with which I am most familiar and for which I am most concerned, requires its office bearers to take vows to uphold the system of doctrine as taught in the Westminster Standards, to respect the church courts, and to maintain the peace and unity of the church. Most confessional Presbyterian denominations also bind their office bearers to uphold certain worship practices, typically outlined in a Directory for Public Worship. Thus, the minister is committed by solemn vow to maintain both certain doctrines and certain prac-

tices.

Of course, these very Standards and Directories themselves make it clear that they are not the ultimate authorities. To use the technical terminology, they are the normed norm not the norming norm. The latter is the Bible. Thus, it is always possible that any individual office bearer or even an entire church may come to believe that the Standards are unbiblical on one or more points.

In this context, there is always an orderly process available for addressing the concerns: typically, the minister goes to the church, in the shape of his presbytery or even the General Assembly, tells his brothers about his change of mind, and allows them to judge whether the change is compatible with continued service in a denomination which holds the Standards as its public standard of doctrine. The same applies with any directory of worship to which the church requires subscription. This process is sensitive to the minister's conscience, honours the Standards to which his vows commit him, and, by due process, maintains the peace and unity of the church.

The problem comes when a minister has such concerns and simply acts on them without observing due process. This has often been how liberals have gained influence in denominations: for example Pastor X decides he does not believe in the Virgin Birth and immediately starts teaching his new view. In doing so, he gambles on the fact that this 'Come on, if you think you're hard enough' approach will deter challengers on the grounds that most ministers and elders want peace, if not at any price, then certainly at almost any price. Almost certainly, he couples all this with a powerful line in positive rhetoric: he is acting outwith the laws of the church to be more relevant, to connect with new constituencies, to draw new people in etc. He may also have realized that, if he is charged, he will automatically gain the status of victim and martyr, of a brave hero of conscience, of progress, of evangelism, while his opponents can plausibly be cast as reactionaries, unbalanced, obscurantists, and just downright vindictive bully boys.

In short, those who try to oppose the nose-thumber are at a double disadvantage: the rhetorical aesthetics are entirely against them from the very start; and the fact that, unlike their opponent, they take their vows seriously and thus follow the rules, means that they will

always be at least one step behind. Combine this with the fact that most ministers rightly do not like to fight, and, ninety-nine times out of a hundred, the nose-thumber is on to a winner. He may be considered contumacious in the courts of the church; but in the courts of public opinion he invariably cuts a sympathetic figure. Thus, if history is anything to go by, the chances are that this minister will not be challenged, and the church's standards will change, in practice if not in actual statute; and this change will come about, not because of reasoned argument and due process, but because fighting him would be just too nasty and difficult.

### The Long Term Culture

The final element of this particular factor in liberalizing is, of course, the long term culture it creates where solemn vows are not taken seriously, where rhetoric that sets church confessional standards in antithesis to scripture becomes the norm, and where the ideas of submission and accountability to the wider church, even when these are inconvenient for the individual, are ridiculed. But what goes around just as surely comes around; and that is why it is critical for the orthodox to follow the rules and procedures of their particular church. Yes, the reformed church should always be reforming, seeking to be more faithful in doctrine and practice to scripture; but that has to be done in a manner that is decent and in order. Vows are vows; and breaking vows is a disastrous, indecent, and disorderly precedent, whether one is a liberal who does it by denying the Virgin Birth or an evangelical who does it in the name of evangelism and outreach. In a world where, as the old Dutch proverb has it, 'Every heretic has his text,' a church culture where vows are breached with impunity is a culture where there is nothing in principle to stop the proliferation of any views, no matter how heterodox, which any office-bearer happens to want to propagate.

When I was younger, I thought rules and procedures were an irritant, an imposition, an inconvenience. Now, after years of seeing them ignored and abused, mocked and circumvented, and of observing the uniformly disastrous results of such, I see their correct application and enforcement as a key part of ensuring justice, fair-

play and, above all, the maintenance of orthodoxy within the church. Yes, obviously I know that rules and procedures do not in themselves guarantee the preservation of orthodoxy; but it is just as obvious to me that it is impossible to preserve orthodoxy without them. Thank God for books of church order; and, to quote the late, great Frankie Howerd, 'Nay! Nay! Thrice nay!' to ministers who think thumbing their noses at the rules is a way to preserve either orthodoxy or orthopraxy.

### The Muddle In The Middle

Above I have tried to suggest that the reasons for a church's decline into liberalism are not always immediately doctrinal, but can actually arise out of a culture; and, by implication, the underlying story I am trying to tell is that sometimes (oftentimes?) churches go liberal without any initial intention of so doing. Indeed, I believe a functionalist, rather than an intentionalist, account will often provide a more adequate explanation of why a denomination loses the plot: the cumulative force of a set of often disparate circumstances and actions leads to a sudden collapse in orthodoxy, with the conscious intention of going liberal perhaps only emerging comparatively late in the process. In this post, I want to address another of these practical, cultural phenomena. It is what I call the law of the included middle. In essence, it can be stated as follows: churches do not go liberal because the majority of the ministers and elders are liberal; they go liberal because the majority of ministers and elders, while being personally men of great integrity and doctrinal orthodoxy, will tend to side with the left in the initial rounds of the struggle. This is often for the laudable reasons of desiring the peace and unity of the church, and of reading the left as charitably as possible. While I might criticise their wisdom, I find such motives to be admirable. Further, (let's face it) the men on the right can be pretty obnoxious in their demeanour which can make it very hard to support them in public. Sometimes, however, it is for less laudable reasons: they are simply intimidated by the nose-thumbing boot boys (see yesterday's post) or take the attitude that 'this is not a hill worth dying on' or its close, venal cousin, 'OK, as long as it is not happening in my back yard.' The problem with that, of course, is that it may be an option for those with no ecclesiology; but thoughtful Anglicans and Presbyterians know that the church - the whole pesky

denomination - is their back yard. The best examples of this problem come from churches that have moved to ordain women. Typically, the process starts by a compromise being offered, a conscience clause that allows individual congregations to opt out. This is because the group committed to change knows that, by itself, it will find it hard to keep the church up and running without keeping on board as many of those with doubts about change as possible. And, of course, it seems very reasonable to put a conscience clause on the table. The moderate conservatives consider their interests to be safeguarded as no-one is going to be imposing women elders on their congregations; and they are free to continue to preach as they wish.

Now, before continuing this line of reasoning, I offer a personal anecdote which is illustrative of my next point. In the late 90s, I was sitting outside a café in Utrecht, chatting to a friend who was an ordained minister in a North American Reformed denomination. In the course of the conversation, he commented on how, after the recent decision of that denomination to ordain women, the conservatives who were strongly opposed to this had all left. He named one such and, with a twinkle in his eye and a chuckle, asked me 'Do you know what I find most hard to forgive about that man?' I responded that I did not. 'He has made me the right wing of my own denomination, and I just can't stand that,' he declared. 'What did you expect?' was the thought that passed through my mind; but I had too much respect and affection for my friend to rub salt into his wound.

This conversation pointed me towards something that is often missed in discussion of how churches change: when a change is introduced, those who are really strongly opposed to it tend to leave; and that alters the balance of power within the church and, more nebulously, changes the ethos of the denomination. Suddenly, the old centre is now the new right, the overall numbers are smaller, and the need for the left to play nice and to build coalitions is proportionately diminished. In addition, the denomination may well now attract a few new people who are more radical and who have real agendas to push. For such activists, too much is never enough, and you have a recipe for increasing movement in a leftward direction.

### Compromise Has No Conscience

That is why brokering a compromise deal with a conscience clause rarely does anything more than weaken the orthodox. Some of the conservatives pick up their marbles and head off to other playgrounds; those who remain soon find out who their real friends were -- the guys who, while perhaps aesthetically rougher at the edges and a bit too strident in tone, were essentially pointing in the same direction. The churches that have moved to ordain women, and where the centre decided that this was not a hill on which they wished to die, are cases in point. Look at Anglicanism or the Church of Scotland or certain Reformed denominations in North America: within a few years, the conscience clauses are in practical terms not worth the paper they are written on; to refuse to ordain women is seen at best as a piece of barely tolerable obscurantism, more typically as bigoted, chauvinistic, oppressive and something against which it is probably necessary to legislate. And those conservatives who remain suddenly find that not only are they now a lonely minority, but that women's ordination is the least of their worries. This is not to say that any on the left initially envisaged where this would all go, or that such developments represent the last moments in a chess game that was planned in detail right from the moment the first white pawn was moved. It is to say that interim deals where the left divides the moderate conservatives of the centre from the conviction conservatives of the right are never the end, whatever the sincerity of the intention of their framers. Such deals change the theological demographics of a denomination and open up new questions and new possibilities, perhaps unforeseen and unimagined, and, combined with other elements, such as those I noted in the first two posts, this fact transforms the future trajectory of denominational decisions. Indeed, while much has been rightly made of how the hermeneutics that lead to women's ordination seem also to undermine any grounds for opposition to gay ordination, denominations are not changed simply because of hermeneutical moves. Changes in theological demographics are just as important; and those in the centre who cut deals with the left really need to bear that in mind and reflect on who their real friends are.

This, of course, leads to one final ob-



servation on this issue. Those on the right also need to wrestle long and hard with the issue of when their responsibility to stay and fight ends and the need to leave begins. The most egregious examples of mass ecclesiastical exoduses are of those who bail out of churches for non-theological reasons, leaving the centre exposed simply because the right has a personal beef with a particular person or cultural issue. That is nothing more than modern day Donatism, itself an egregious error. Yet, even when the matter is theological, it can be very tempting to jump ship at the first defeat; but such need to understand that they too must shoulder responsibility for future ecclesiastical trajectories, not only of the church to which they are thinking of going, but also of that which they are leaving. Sure, once the courts of the church are lost to the nose-thumpers, it is time to move on; but exactly when that happens can be very hard to discern in the early stages of a struggle. Some times churches go liberal because the men of principle and backbone bail out too early.

#### **Brief, practical guidelines**

In conclusion, I want to offer some brief, practical guidelines on how to help keep a church on the rails. Each could be a post in itself, but I have no wish to try your patience further. So, for what they are worth, here they are:

#### **1. Guard your personal integrity and be honest about where you stand in relation to your vows.**

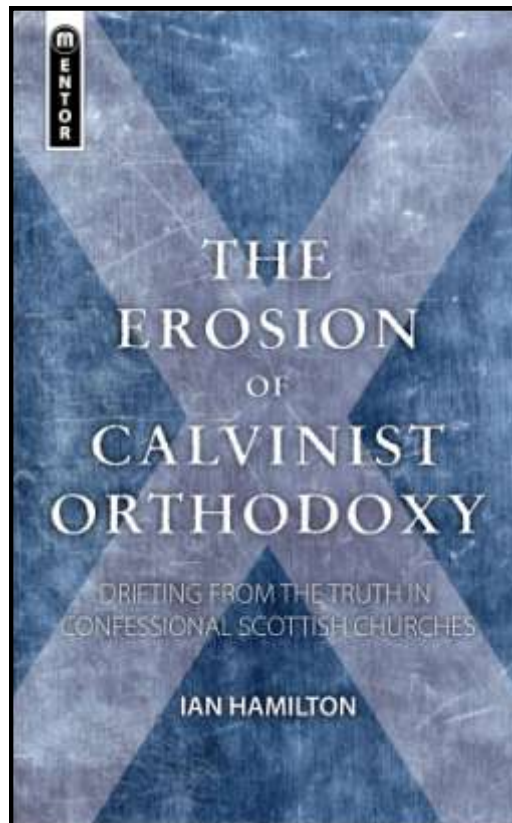
Personal integrity in Presbyterianism is really very simple: if you change your mind relative to any point in the Westminster Standards or any other aspect of your subscription, just go to your elders and your presbytery and be honest about it. Your brothers can offer counsel and, if necessary, make the call on whether your change of mind is compatible with the laws and practice of the church.

Further, subscribe with passion and commitment. Do not simply sign on the dotted line in order to gain membership of the club, and then start asking, 'OK, I have to sign up to this seventeenth-century malarkey to be a minister, but now what can I get away with doing? How can I bend or bypass the rules?' That is a recipe for disaster. You should also avoid at all costs a quasi-DeGaullian 'L'église: c'est moi!' attitude, which identifies you, your ministry, your opinion, and your way of doing things with the future of the entire

church. Presbyterianism is about the whole body. Despite what every instinct in your fallen nature tells you, it isn't, never has been, and never will be, all about you.

#### **2. Understand that sound preaching and earnest prayer are not enough to stop a denomination losing the plot or to turn it around once the rot has set in.**

Life would be so much easier if preaching and prayer were, in themselves, enough to keep churches on the straight and narrow or to bring them back to



orthodoxy, but they are not. One cannot, of course, maintain orthodoxy without them; but they do need to be supplemented with thoughtful action. Pray and preach - but keep your powder dry. Churches go bad for a myriad of reasons but not generally because heterodoxy just drops from the sky one morning and takes over the entire denomination before noon. To keep a church safe and sound, you need to understand the mechanisms of change and respond to them: thank God for successful pastors, but don't idolize them; stand up to the bullies and the nose-thumpers, don't reward them by changing the rules simply to avoid conflict; think long term when someone makes an apparently attractive proposal for change; and, above all, be good churchmen. Presbytery meetings and

committees are not high on most of our lists of fun things to do with our spare time, but these are where the key decisions are usually made: therefore, you should be involved in them because, if you are not, then you must shoulder considerable responsibility if they fall into the wrong hands or make bad decisions. You should also know the rule book. I cannot stress that enough: whatever else you do, *know the rule book*. A Westminster colleague often says, one must realize that, in church debates, points of procedure always take precedence over points of theology. Sad, of course, but true. Take it into account when you enter the committee room or the presbytery chamber. You can safely assume that others will certainly do so.

#### **3. Watch changes to the terms of confessional subscription very carefully.**

Ian Hamilton's excellent book, *The Erosion of Calvinist Orthodoxy* (Christian Focus) is a most instructive historical study of how changes to the terms of subscription in various Presbyterian denominations were constitutive of the decline in orthodoxy within the same. Sometimes the changes were, in and of themselves, intended for good; but a generation or so down the line, the precedents these changes set or established had lethal consequences for the maintenance of the faith. This is why it is also important to observe carefully not just what decisions churches make, but how they make them. For example, the Orthodox Presbyterian Church has stayed orthodox thus far by God's grace, not because of the superior godliness of its officers, still less because of its worship aesthetics, but because it has generally played by the rules and, more importantly, punished rather than rewarded those who break or subvert them.

Even to make a decision which is, strictly and narrowly speaking, biblically sound, but to do so by circumventing the rules, or because one does not wish to stand up to a nose-thumper, can be as disastrous in the long run as positively legislating heterodoxy: it undermines due process and, as I argued in the second post, sets unfortunate precedents that will come back to haunt the church at a later date.

#### 4. Do not be intimidated by the 'we are just doing it for evangelism' argument.

This is an old chestnut used by almost all - if not all - of those who have advocated for various changes throughout church history. It is a powerful rhetorical move, as it immediately places opponents in a hard place: to oppose the advocates of change is to be regarded as opposing evangelism. As a rule of thumb, the key question to ask is: are the changes being proposed really matters indifferent, mere cosmetic changes, or do they require an alteration of theological principle? If they are merely cosmetic, then pragmatic arguments such as the above are clearly legitimate. If, however, the proposed changes actually involve theological principles (e.g., 'we need to stop believing this or preaching that, because, if we don't, we will be looked upon as idiots/bigots/cultists/just a wee bit weird') then purely pragmatic arguments are likely in the long run to prove to be Trojan Horses for more serious change. It is vital to be able to discern the difference between cosmetic and principal changes or the church will well and truly lose the plot.

#### 5. If you are called to be a leader, then be a leader, not a statesman.

The church is full of men who want positions of prestige, profile and responsibility, but who do not want to take the tough stands that such positions demand. It is easy to defend the faith in front of an audience of six hundred adoring fans at a conference; it is not so easy to stand for principle in a room full of two dozen indifferent or hostile colleagues. Sorry - if you want the position of responsibility, then silence on the hard issues in the hostile context is not

an option.

Further, if there is one thing worse than the minister who talks a good game to his fan base but is as much use as a chocolate spanner in a conflict, it is the professional statesman. This is the patrician figure who makes a career out of triangulating in debates, often doing so by setting the alleged poor theology of one side against the alleged bad attitude of the other in a kind of moral equivalence. This then allows him to justify not taking sides and to rise above the fray. No doubt as he goes to bed each night, he thanks God that he is not like other men, for he has clean hands and finely manicured nails, unlike the troublers of Israel around him; but, as I have said before on Ref21, he can only sleep peacefully at night because many of those same troublers of Israel have broken their nails and bloodied their fists in making the streets outside his house safe for women and children. In fact, true statesmen earn the right to be statesmen by first of all leading their people through battles and conflicts. Think of Athanasius, of Luther, of Chalmers, of Machen - all risked everything they had, and were targets of the harshest disdain even from within the church, but they stood firm on principle and led their people through the wilderness. Too many today want to take a shortcut to the position, to be admired for nothing more than landing the high profile job in the first place. Forget statesmanship: if you are a minister, act like a minister, and do not use pretensions to statesmanship as a cover for your own weakness.

So, to conclude this series, keeping a church on the rails is actually quite easy: honour your vows and do not cross your fingers; be honest with your

people and your presbytery if and when your views change; know - and follow - the rules; pray and preach in a sound, godly fashion; and lead as you are called. Above all, understand that complacency - personal and corporate - kills. It leaves the field open to the activists; and activists are, by and large, highly organized and effective, and only follow the rules as and when it suits their cause. You need to work twice as hard as they do to keep the ship afloat; but that is a high calling indeed.

*Carl R Trueman is Departmental Chair of Church History at Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia. He has an MA in Classics from the University of Cambridge and a PhD in Church History from the University of Aberdeen. He has authored a number of books, including The Claims of Truth: John Owen's Trinitarian Theology and The Wages of Spin: Critical Writings on Historic and Contemporary Evangelicalism. He lives in Oreland, a suburb of Philadelphia, with his wife, Catriona, and his two sons, John and Peter.*

*This first appeared as a series of posts in Reformation 21, the online magazine of the Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals.*

**Please note:** Dr Trueman will be visiting Melbourne from July 17—30. This will include public lectures, a ministers' conference, and preaching. Further details can be obtained from the Rev Rowland Ward: rowland.ward@gmail.com or Ph. (03) 9720 4871

## The World in the Banner

### The Other Side in Syria

Syrian sources have told Barnabas Fund that Sunni jihadists are invading and pillaging house after house and that around 70 homes belonging to Christians in Homs have been thus affected. Forced to live in the crossfire, without electricity and with supplies of water, food and medicines declining, Christians are saying they would flee if only there were the opportunity. Two martyrdom brigades of Islamists have formed in Homs this past month: the Al Baraa Ibn Malik Martyr-

dom Brigade and the Al Nusrah Front to Protect the Levant. The Catholic Archbishop of Damascus, Maronite Samir Nassar, says the situation in the country is spiralling out of control, with Syria becoming an arena of international conflict over competing political, military and economic interests.

+ *Religious Liberty Prayer Bulletin | RLPB 148 | Wed 29 Feb 2012*

### Rev. Franklin Graham Rebuked for Caving in to the NAACP

BOND Action Founder and President

the Rev. Jesse Lee Peterson on 29 February 2012 criticized evangelist the Rev. Franklin Graham after Graham apologized for questioning U.S. President Barack Hussein Obama's Christian faith. In a statement released 29 February 2012, Graham said, "I regret any comments I have ever made which may have cast any doubt on the personal faith of our president, Mr. Obama." Graham also stated that he objects to Obama's policy stances on abortion and same-sex marriage, which Graham con-

siders to be in “direct conflict” with Scripture. Graham’s apology reportedly came on the heels of pressure from black churches and more than a dozen National Organization for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) religious subgroups. The NAACP accused Graham of “bearing false witness” and fomenting racism. Mr. Peterson issued the following statement regarding Graham’s forced apology: “I am saddened to hear that Rev. Franklin Graham was bullied into issuing an apology for the truthful words he spoke, due to accusations of ‘racism’ by the NAACP and left-wing black clergy. Franklin Graham’s weakness is a pitiful representation of Christ and is disheartening to Christians in America and those persecuted around the world.

“This is a politically-motivated attack on a Christian leader by Democrats and the NAACP. Democrats could not allow the facts of what Graham said about Obama’s faith to stand and cast doubt in the minds of Christian voters. So they attacked the messenger, labeling him a racist and a liar. This is reminiscent of the intimidation used by Hitler in Nazi Germany.

“Barack Obama has shown without a doubt that he does not believe in a Judeo-Christian God. It’s unfortunate that white Christian men and women are being attacked for stating the obvious about this president and they’re too weak to stand for righteousness.”

+ *Christian News Wire*, [newsdesk@christiannewswire.com](mailto:newsdesk@christiannewswire.com)  
+ *BOND Action*, [info@bondaction.org](mailto:info@bondaction.org)

### Christians in Laos Threatened – Recant or Leave

Whilst religious liberty is enshrined in the Laos constitution, it is restricted by prohibitions in Article 9 and Decree 92 that forbid anything that could cause social division. Virtually all religious activity must be approved by village, district and regional civic (often animist) and political (Communist) officials. Christians refusing to recant their faith are routinely punished by denial of services and eventually expulsion from their village. Khalma, a new believer, has been told to recant or leave Dongvieng village, while 10 Christian families (65 believers) have been ordered to recant or leave Huey-gong village by Sunday 18 March. Other Christian families in other vil-

lages are similarly at risk. Some who have already been expelled after refusing to recant are struggling to survive.

Please pray for the Church in Laos.  
+ *Religious Liberty Prayer Bulletin | RLPB 150 | Wed 14 Mar 2012*

### Australian Ethicists Argue the Right to Kill Babies After They’re Born

The Liberty Counsel reported 2 March 2012 that an article entitled “After-birth abortion: Why should the baby live?” was recently published in the London-based *Journal of Medical Ethics*, advocating that if abortion is allowed, then society also has the right to kill a newborn child. This outrageous deduction by Alberto Giubilini and Francesca Minerva takes abortion to its logical conclusion.

The abstract states: “By showing that (1) both fetuses and newborns do not have the same moral status as actual persons, (2) the fact that both are potential persons is morally irrelevant and (3) adoption is not always in the best interest of actual people, the authors argue that what we call ‘after-birth abortion’ (killing a newborn) should be permissible in all the cases where abortion is, including cases where the newborn is not disabled.”

The authors are willing to admit that handicapped children are able to live happy lives but then advocate that, because of their burden on the rest of the family, the children should be able to be killed.

Mathew Staver, Founder and Chairman of Liberty Counsel, commented: “Abortion opens the door to infanticide. If you can kill a child in the womb, even up to the moment before birth, then there is no logical reason to protect life after birth. A human being begins at the moment of conception and should be afforded legal protection at all stages of life. This is the only logically defensible position. It is shocking to see people advocating killing children after they are born. It is just as shocking to see people advocating killing them before they are born.”

+ *Liberty Counsel*, [Liberty@LC.org](mailto:Liberty@LC.org)

### Watching Sudan

The Sudan Revolutionary Front (SRF; also known as the Kauda Alliance) is an alliance of rebel groups from Darfur, South Kordofan and Blue Nile. On

26 February the SRF defeated Sudan Armed Forces (SAF) troops at the strategic garrison town of Jau near the South Sudan border.

The victory has theoretically opened the Kauda Valley for the Nuba refugees fleeing from genocide. The SRF is appealing for a no-fly zone to be established so that much-needed humanitarian aid can be delivered. On Saturday 3 March Sudan’s President Omar al-Bashir declared that the SAF would ‘purge South Kordofan’ of ‘traitors’. To that end he ordered the reopening of all Popular Defense Forces (PDF) camps across the nation.

[The PDF are Arab-Islamic paramilitaries or ‘mujahideen’.] He arrogantly predicted that SAF troops would soon perform thanksgiving prayers in the town of Kauda. On 6 March the pro-Khartoum Sudan Vision reported that up to 80,000 paramilitary troops are ready to die in ‘defence of the country and its Islamic belief’. Persevere in prayer for our imperilled brothers and sisters fleeing from genocide in Sudan.

Psalm 10:16-18.

+ *Religious Liberty Prayer Bulletin | RLPB 149 | Wed 07 Mar 2012*

### Marriage Is Best For Raising Children, Government Says

*Editorial Comment: Sorry everyone - it’s the UK government, not the Australian government!*

Iain Duncan Smith will make the Coalition’s most explicit official statement in favour of parents marrying and staying together. He will say that children from such homes are most likely to end up with a good education and a job... Marriage is particularly good for children, the paper says. The Government is “concerned” by the long-term trend away from marriage, it says. Mr Duncan Smith will say the strategy marks a change in the approach to marriage. Successive governments have done too little to promote stable families, he will say.... Mr Duncan Smith said he was not “lecturing” parents on how to live, merely setting out the facts on the advantages of marriage and commitment.

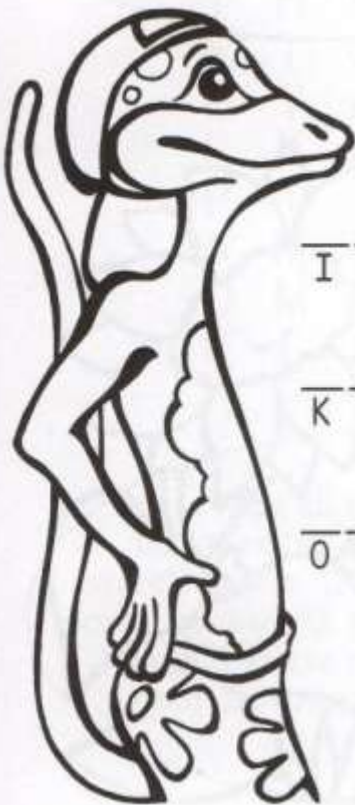
+ *Telegraph (UK) 13 March 2012*  
+ *Family First NZ*

# Children under the Banner

## An Important Question

The Philippian jailer asked Paul and Silas, "What must I do to be saved?" They gave him a good answer. Can you decode it? If you need help, see Acts 16:31.

O	I	V	G	B	J	E	X	K	M	F	Q	A
A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M
R	S	Z	W	L	D	P	Y	H	T	C	N	U
N	O	P	Q	R	S	T	U	V	W	X	Y	Z



I B Q K B H B

K R P X B Q S L G M B D Y D

O R G N S Y T K Q Q I B D O H B G

From: 'Search and Solve:  
Bible Activity Sheet',  
by Betty De Vries,  
[Illustrated by Donna Greenlee]  
Baker Books, 1998

# Prescribed Search / Youth Work

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

APRIL 2012

## SENIOR & INTERMEDIATE

(Intermediate omit questions 6 and 8)

### PHILIPPIANS chapter 1

1. According to Paul's prayer, how was the Philippians' love to abound? (3 verses)
2. What caused many to be more bold to speak the word without fear?
3. Why did Paul desire to depart from this life?
4. What other privilege were the Philippians granted besides believing on Christ?

### chapter 2

5. What has God done for Christ because he was obedient to death? (3 verses)
6. What character should the sons of God evince in a crooked and perverse [nation] generation? (2 verses)
7. How does Paul describe Timothy's service to him in the gospel?
8. What caused Epaphroditus to be close to death?

## JUNIOR

### LUKE chapter 5

1. What did Simon, James and John do when they had brought their boats to land?
2. How did Jesus cure the man full of leprosy?
3. What did the palsied [paralysed] man do when Jesus told him to stand and take up his bed?
4. What was Jesus' answer when the scribes and Pharisees asked him why he ate with publicans [tax collectors] and sinners? (2 verses)

Please send the answers to:  
Mrs I Steel  
PO Box 942  
Epping NSW 1710  
Or email to: [iesteel@gmail.com](mailto:iesteel@gmail.com)

# Life under the Banner

## *Have No Other Gods — The First Commandment*

*Jim Klazinga*

### **Thankful Living**

Christ has saved you by living the life of perfect obedience on your behalf and taking the just anger of God on himself. How can you not be thankful, right? And as a grateful believer, you want to live as he would have you live. It would be pathetically ungrateful to say, "Thanks for saving me, Lord, now I'm off to do what is right in my own eyes."

Then the question becomes: how do we go about living in a manner pleasing to God? The basic answer is simple: by having God's law as the pattern for your life. By seeing the law as your joy and making every effort to follow it. Oh, you know you will never keep it perfectly. And you know that the law will constantly remind you of your need for a Saviour. But you still see God's law as your delight and you long to live by it.

Now, the law can serve as a pattern for grateful living in both a negative and a positive manner. Negatively, it can teach us about the sinful behaviours we ought to flee from. And positively, it can show us the proper behaviours that we ought to pursue. In other words, the law shows us some of the practical ways in which we demonstrate both the dying away of the old self and the coming to life of the new.

We can see this demonstrated already in the first of the Ten Commandments, the commandments that outline the basic principles of God's law. In the first commandment, God tells us: "You shall have no other gods before me." We find in this command important truths about what we should and shouldn't do.

### **Magic Violates the First Commandment**

First let's consider this commandment from the perspective of the dying away of the old self. "You shall have no other gods before me." What kind of sins do we commit against this commandment, sins we should be sorry for and flee from?

Let's start off with an area we might not initially think of in regard to idolatry: magic. In Revelation 21:8, sorcerers are listed among those who will be condemned to hell. Practicing magic arts is a violation of the first commandment.

Are we saying we should avoid card tricks, rabbit in the hat tricks, and the like? Not really. Those can be more accurately described as tricks of illusion. The entertainment lies in not being able to figure out how it was done. The folks who entertain people in such a manner should be called illusionists rather than magicians.

*You shall have  
no  
other gods  
before me.*

Mind you, when the illusionist or magician or whatever he wants to call himself, when he presents his illusions as the result of super-natural occult forces, he is guilty of sinning. Why? Because even though people might not actually believe super-natural powers were involved, we don't want to make light of such powers. We know that the only true and good super-natural power comes from God. Any super-natural power that does not focus on giving credit to Him comes from demons and is completely opposed to God. We must avoid and flee from any sort of dependence on or contact with or making light of ungodly super-natural powers.

### **Avoid Superstitions**

Superstitious rituals also violate the First commandment. We shouldn't bother to read our horoscope in the newspaper. It's not some harmless little game; it's idolatry. Other examples: knocking on wood, carrying a rabbit's foot, avoiding the number thirteen, even something as simple as crossing our fingers. You might think these sorts of practices are harmless, but anytime you give credence to some such superstitious ritual, you are in effect putting your trust in something that does not deserve your trust, and that is idolatry. You might say you don't take your little superstitions too seriously. If that's the case, why bother with them? Why do little things out of superstition if you know in your heart that they don't make any difference?

Remember, there is no such thing as luck. Nothing happens simply by chance. Rather, everything, both good and bad, comes to us from the hand of God as He providentially cares for us. Putting trust in superstitious rites is, in effect, an effort to control God's exercising of His providential care. That simply is not appropriate for the Christian.

### **Making Up Your Own God**

How about a more obvious form of idolatry? We read in the Bible about how some would make an idol out of wood or stone or precious metal and use it in their worship. Well, that's not a problem for us today, right?

Indeed, we might not make use of wood or stone in this way, but it's still easy for us to construct false gods. For instance, many people say they believe in God, when really what they believe in is just a figment of their imagination. The thing is, if the God we worship is not the God of the Bible, then we are worshipping an invented false God and we are in essence committing idolatry. Mormons are committing idolatry because they worship a God who is

more like an extra-terrestrial being than like the infinite creator of the universe. The Jehovah's Witnesses are committing idolatry because they deny the Trinity, they deny the divinity of Jesus Christ, and so they deny the true God. Classic liberals commit idolatry because they cannot envision a God of wrath who sacrificed His own Son to actually pay for sins. They are not worshipping the God of the Bible. How about a more controversial example: what if you worship a God who wants to save you, but is dependent on you to make a decision for Him? Is this the completely sovereign God of Scripture? How far along this path do you need to go before the God you worship turns out to be a false God and you are committing idolatry?

The sin of making God in our own image, the sin of making God into someone who we want Him to be, this is an easy sin to fall into. But it is one which we must avoid and flee from.

#### Other Examples of Idolatry

There are so many other ways we might commit idolatry as well. Money can be an idol. Material possessions can be idols. The government can be an idol. Self-esteem can be an idol. Even good health can become an idol.

Of course, these sorts of things can have great value when used properly. But, when we put our fundamental trust in them, when we give those things the kind of devotion only God deserves, each of them can easily become an idol.

This can be true about so many other things as well. Our job can become an idol when it becomes the focus of our whole life. Our children could become idols. Of course it's good to have a job, and it's great to have kids. But we don't exist for the purpose of giving ultimate devotion to our job or our kids, but to God.

Sports heroes can be idols when we overly adore them. Popular musicians can be idols as well. Have you ever heard someone say, "Oh, he's my idol." Such language is not appropriate out of the mouths of Christians. We should flee from such talk.

#### Keeping the First Commandment Positively

Having gone into detail regarding the kind of sin from which the first commandment tells us to flee, it's important for us to move on and consider some of the positive ways to keep this commandment.

For one thing, having no other gods means we acknowledge and confess the one true God. Of course, in order to do this, we have to have some idea as to who He is. Acknowledging the only true God, trusting him, loving him, fearing him, and honouring him, this would all suggest that we must know him.

How do we know Him? Through his Word. In other words, keeping the first commandment means we study



the Bible. Idolatry will always reject what God has revealed about himself to his people. But if we truly want to have no other gods, then we will love what God has revealed about Himself in His Word.

Of course, not only must we know God, we must also fear him. Positively keeping the first commandment means that we will have a holy awe of God. It means that we will never take Him lightly.

In addition, we should also seek to live more for Him. How can you love Him, fear Him and honour Him without serving Him? The believer who truly delights to have no other god is the believer who finds pleasure in obeying God. He will love the Lord with all his heart, soul, mind and strength, and this will be demonstrated in how he lives his life. Everything he does will be done for the ultimate purpose of giving glory of God.

#### Trusting the True God

So, finding joy in the first commandment means we will strive to know God better, it means we will fear him, it means we will serve Him. It also means we will trust Him. In fact, we will trust him for everything. We will put our confidence in him alone. As we read in Psalm 62:5-8 - "Find rest, O my soul, in God alone; my hope comes from him. He alone is my rock and my salvation; he is my fortress, I shall not be shaken. My salvation and my honour depend on God; he is my mighty rock, my refuge. Trust in him at all times, O people; pour out your hearts to him, for God is our refuge."

You know, ultimately, wherever you put your trust, there is your God.

You put your trust in your own deeds, even in the strength of your own faith, then you are in effect your own god. But if God is your God, you will trust him alone. You will trust him completely.

Only then will you know true hope and not be shaken. Everything and everyone else will let you down. But God is our ever-present help in times of trouble. He is ultimately faithful. This cannot be said of anything else in all creation. He alone deserves our undying trust.

You know, really, when you think about it, idolatry in terms of putting your trust elsewhere, is foolishness. God alone deserves our ultimate trust, because He is the one who made us. He is the one who redeemed us. He alone is ultimately powerful. Why would we even want to place our trust and confidence in something else?

Do you love, fear, honour and serve any god in place of or alongside of the one true God of the Bible? The first commandment requires us to repent of our idolatries. And it requires us to find our whole-hearted joy in having just one God, the covenant God of Scripture. May God send his Holy Spirit into our hearts to help us to have no other gods beside Him.

# Missions in the Banner

## Report from the Australian Indigenous Ministries (AIM)

*Trevor Leggott*

### Lengthen Your Cords, Strengthen Your Stakes. (Isaiah 54:2)

In Isaiah 53 we have that wonderful and well known passage of the Suffering Servant, a clear reference to the one who was to come in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ, the one who gave his life as a ransom for many, who suffered and died for the sins of his people. This same Jesus, we're told, "Will see his offspring and prolong his days and the will of the Lord will prosper in his hand." The Father says, "By his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many."

King Jesus lives and reigns and is in the process of building his church into the family of God.

In Isaiah 54 the prophet goes on to talk about the future glory of Zion, when God will call his people back, "The Holy One of Israel is your redeemer; he is called God of all the earth. The Lord will call you back." (v5,6). God is going to grow his people, and he encourages them to get ready: "Enlarge the place of your tent, stretch your tent curtains wide, do not hold back; lengthen your cords, strengthen your stakes." (v2)

AIM has a particular ministry seeking to build that church of Jesus Christ amongst the Indigenous people of Australia, a ministry that has continued now for some 107 years. Those who serve today stand on the shoulders of many of the faithful who have gone before, both mission personnel and those Aboriginal brothers and sisters whom the Lord has greatly used in his service. One could easily write a list that would stand well alongside those of the faithful recorded in the Scriptures.

But the ministry of the gospel moves on. For some years there was a decline in personnel offering for service, and there were a number of retire-

ments after many long years of service. Were we to live in a time of "small things" whilst there still seemed to be a great need with much to be done? We pressed on with confidence in the words of the Lord Almighty to the prophet Zechariah, any growth and development would be, "Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit."



Today we see well established and growing churches with good leadership at places in the Northern Territory like Tennant Creek, Katherine and Borroloola. We have the churches of the AIM Church Council in Queensland: Palm Island, Rockhampton, Woorabinda, Cherbourg and Inala, all

support for the various churches and fellowships that make up its number, and the Theological Education by Extension program is developing well from a small beginning.

The Lord has brought well gifted, trained and qualified missionary personnel to work with AIM. Today we are seeking to build stronger foundations for the future: "longer cords and stronger stakes". The mission focus is to provide a Bible teaching support ministry to equip Indigenous people throughout the country to develop their own church, true to the Word of God and reflecting appropriate cultural perspectives, where Aboriginal people will find a happy spiritual home, and one that will be a blessing to their communities.

Whilst the Lord has blessed the mission with new personnel, that has also provided something of a problem: Yes, we want to extend our ministry to meet the needs, but how do we provide accommodation for our personnel with limited resources, in the face of huge increases in the value of property and rental costs, especially in the Northern Territory? The AIM Council is

constantly reappraising the use of property and resources, believing that if God calls us to a work, then he doesn't leave us lacking in the resources to do the job. As we respond to the challenge of "enlarging the place of our tent" and as we see the need to "stretch our tent curtains wide and not holdback", as the God of all the earth calls people back to himself, pray with us as we seek the Lord in

showing us how we might meet this present need. "Our God is able."

*Trevor Leggott – General Director*



*Tennant Creek Mob*

functioning well with indigenous elders giving leadership and direction. In NSW the AIM Fraternal has grown into a network of encouragement and