

An aerial photograph of a vast, rugged mountain range. The peaks are covered in snow and partially shrouded in mist. A deep valley with a winding river or road cuts through the center of the range. The lighting is dramatic, with strong shadows and highlights on the snow and rock.

the presbyterian banner

June 2013

*He moves mountains without their knowing it
and overturns them in his anger.
He shakes the earth from its place and makes its pillars tremble.*
Job 9:5-6

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Editorial

For Synod this year Betty-Ann and I were able to drive up and visit some congregations where I had been invited to preach. So, as well as being acquainted with the Wauchope folk at Synod itself, we also met the Hawkesbury-Nepean folk at Mt. Druitt, western Sydney, and the Hunter-Barrington congregation at Raymond Terrace and Cardiff, Newcastle (I even got to a Bible Study with folk from the Manning congregation at Taree!).

Visiting these congregations was actually as a result of an invitation by an elder to do a 'moderatorial visit'. Apparently some years ago the moderator of Synod for that year would visit all the churches in the denomination. While we didn't get that far, those congregations we did go to were a pleasure to visit. And what was also noticeable was the diversity amongst those congregations. Add this to the congregations we are familiar with down in Southern Presbytery and there is quite a mix we are part of. We do not come only from traditional PCEA backgrounds and connections but from all over the world and from a variety of ethnic and church backgrounds.

But we were most definitely united in the biblical faith. The fellowship was most enjoyable because it was a genuine fellowship, as we very much enjoy down here also.

(An interesting sideline in regards to the names of a number of our congregations in New South Wales was highlighted by one of the delegates from another denomination at Synod. He wondered why there were congregations named after rivers and not regions or towns. Very quickly he got a lesson in early PCEA history!)

*How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity!
It is like precious oil poured on the head, running down on the beard, running
down on Aaron's board, down upon the collar of his robes.
It is as if the dew of Hermon were falling on Mount Zion.
For there the LORD bestows his blessing, even life forevermore.
Psalm 133*

*Cover: Mt Ruapehu in the central North Island, New Zealand.
Taken by Eileen Loudon*



GEELONG BIBLE CONFERENCE
5 - 7, July 2013

Topic: **Is the Church Past Her Use-By Date?**
Keynote Speaker: **Dr. Derek Thomas**
(First Presbyterian Church, Colombia, South Carolina and Professor of
Systematic and Historical Theology at Reformed Theological Seminary, Atlanta)

Venue: **Reformed Theological College, Geelong**

Register Online:
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‘Is God Through With The Jews?’

Considering Romans 11

George Ball

Is God through with the Jews? Has he rejected his ancient people? Has he turned his back and washed his hands of them? Has he written them off? Is their rejection and apostasy final and absolute? It would seem like it. Paul concluded the previous chapter with the statement that Israel is a disobedient and obstinate people who refused to listen to the clear message of God and who spurned the sincere love of God.

This chapter however – despite its difficulties and differences of interpretation – gives us encouragement to believe that there is still hope for Israel in the gospel. There is a future for Israel in the plan of God. Before we begin, and to avoid confusion, let it be clear that when we refer to ‘Israel’ we are not referring to the modern, political, covenant-breaking, secular state of Israel. We are referring (like the apostle) rather to Jewish people wherever they are – whether in Jerusalem, Sydney, Melbourne, London, New York, Budapest or wherever.

Paul begins by giving us a little history lesson to illustrate the fact that God has not rejected his ancient people.

1. God has always had a Remnant People (1-10)

Paul asks, ‘**has God rejected his people? By no means! Just look at me! I myself am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, a member of the tribe of Benjamin**’ (1). Paul was a real thoroughbred; a pedigree; a true blue Jew. Yet God transformed this persecuting Jewish zealot into a humble Christian. Saul the persecutor became Paul the preacher. He was a monument of grace. That’s positive proof that God hasn’t abandoned the Jews. No doubt Paul understood his own conversion as a pledge that others too by God’s grace could and would follow him into the kingdom. Nothing is impossible with God.

Someone commented despairingly to John Newton about the salvation of some poor wretch. Newton replied, ‘I’ve never despaired of any man since God saved me.’

Has God rejected his people? By no means! **Look at 1 Samuel 12: 22** which Paul alludes to in the first verse. **‘For the Lord will not forsake His people for His great name’s sake.’**

The context is when Israel had rebelled against God by (among other things) asking for a king. Samuel

warns them of the consequences, but nevertheless assures them that they are not rejected; the Lord has made a commitment to His people (22). Further Samuel says, **‘God forbid that I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for you.’** (23). Like Samuel we should not cease to pray for the conversion of the Jewish people even though they are still in rebellion.

Has God rejected his people? By no means! Look at the example of Elijah (2-4). Cf. 1 Kings 19: 1-18. Elijah’s time frame was an even worse time of apostasy than Samuel’s time. It was a dark hour in Israel’s history. It was Elijah’s lowest point. He had single-handedly defeated the priests of Baal on Mount Carmel. As a result, he was now on Jezebel’s ‘most wanted list.’ He was afraid and lonely and discouraged. He felt he was the only man left standing for God. But God assured him that there were 7,000 others who ‘had not bowed the knee to Baal.’ God has his remnant people. God is saying to Elijah – to Paul – and to us today – that the Church is bigger than you and me. The Church is bigger than what we see. There are many believers in other churches and places. There are even believers in churches where we would not expect to find them. I dare say there will be many a surprise in heaven! Someone once said there will be three surprises in heaven. The first surprise will be that – I will be there. The second surprise will be – who is there. The third surprise will be – who is not there. God always has his remnant people.

Has God rejected his people? By no means! Look at what the Bible says (7-10). He quotes a conflation of texts from Deuteronomy, Isaiah and the Psalms to illustrate that in Moses day, as in David’s day as in Isaiah’s day there were always those who hardened their hearts and who thus failed to find the blessing of salvation. The same is still true today (Matt. 4: 10-12). There are still those who harden their hearts. We do not say this lightly or flippantly. I believe the apostle wrote these words with an aching heart and a breaking voice. The psalmist appeals, **‘Today if you hear his voice do not harden your hearts.’**

Israel failed to obtain what it was seeking – but the elect obtained it, while the rest were hardened (7). God has always had a remnant people in every

generation.

2. God has always had a Plan for Israel (11-16)

In these verses Paul shows us how God can work through Israel’s disobedience to further his purposes. It might appear that God’s mission to Israel was a failure. In many ways it was. ‘Jesus came to his own but his own received him not’. Israel was to be a light to the nations so that salvation might be brought to the ends of the earth. Instead, Israel became a stumbling block and a hindrance. But God’s plan will not be thwarted by their disobedience. God used converted Jewish hands, feet and mouths to take the gospel to the Gentiles. Israel’s stumbling and trespass opened the way for Gentiles to receive the gospel. It was all part of the Divine plan. The story is told in **Acts 13: 42-48.** Paul and Barnabas were preaching in the synagogue in Pisidian Antioch. **‘But when the Jews saw the crowds they were filled with jealousy and began to contradict what was spoken by Paul reviling him’** (45). Paul’s response was, **‘since you thrust the Word of God aside and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold we are turning to the Gentiles’** (46). Further evidence that the mission to the Jews appeared to be a failure.

However, Paul insists this is part of the Divine plan. The Jewish rebellion will bring riches to the Gentiles – and somehow the salvation of the Gentiles will provoke the Jews to envy and jealousy and thus save some of them. **‘For if their rejection means the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance mean but life from the dead’** (15). There are many explanations as to what this last phrase means. If we were to mention them all things would get too complicated. Whatever it means it should be clearly understood that the salvation of the Gentiles is not a cul-de-sac, but a route to the salvation of Israel. Israel’s future is wrapped around the salvation of the Gentiles. We Gentiles therefore have a responsibility to bring a loving Christian witness and testimony to the Jewish people that somehow they might be enticed, attracted, persuaded and convinced. This is the pattern that Paul has in

mind. His mission to the Gentiles (which often brought him much criticism and misunderstanding) had ultimately the salvation of the Jews in view.

This is confirmed in verses 30-31. The implication and the direction of Paul's argument lead us to conclude that God is not through with the Jews.

Furthermore, the analogy of the first-fruits and the roots (16) leads us to the same conclusion. The first-fruits are a token and promise of more to come. The holy root also implies fruit. The Jewish first-fruits and Jewish roots surely imply a pledge of yet more Jewish response to the gospel.

2. God Reminds us Gentiles of our Jewish Roots and Responsibilities (17-24)

Is God through with the Jews? By no means! **They are the original olive tree planted by God (17)**. What the wattle is to Australia the olive is to Palestine. It's a native. Paul's point is that the Jews are God's 'native' people. There is nothing more natural than a Jewish Christian. 'Salvation is of the Jews'. We should not be surprised therefore if this old native tree may yet bear more native fruit. It is true that the old olive has produced some dead wood, but God has broken these branches off. In their place he has grafted in some unnatural wild olive branches (Gentiles). Any horticulturalist would have been amazed at such a graft. That amazement should not be lost on us. That we (Gentiles) are attached to the olive tree (i.e. part of the Church) is an entirely unnatural (and humbling) phenomenon. We do not naturally belong. Paul's argument is that if God has done the hard thing, the thing contrary to nature – by grafting wild branches into the cultivated olive – then one should not find it difficult to believe that God will restore the broken-off branches to their former position. The allegory of the olive tree leads us to the conclusion that God is not through with the Jews. One writer comments, *'The future restoration of the Jews is in itself a more probable event than had been the introduction of the Gentiles into the church of God.'* (Liddon). Another writes, *'There is no room for despair'* (Stott). Paul gives us (Gentiles) a strict warning in verses **18-22!** Remember who (or what) you are – you are a branch – and not the root! You are an unnatural graft. We have no natural indigenous rights; we are in the Church by virtue of God's grace and kindness. There is

no room therefore for arrogance or complacency. We are made of the same stuff and have the same capabilities to sin as the natural branches. As God did not spare the natural Jewish branches for unbelief, neither will he spare engrafted Gentiles if we too prove to be dead wood (21). We must therefore continue in his kindness otherwise we will be cut off (22).

4. Whatever God does will result in his Praise and Glory (25-36)

As Paul has surveyed God's great plan of salvation by grace which embraces Jews and Gentiles – he is led to praise, adoration and worship (33-36). **This is good theology**. It has often been said, 'Theology should lead to doxology'. Doctrine should lead to devotion.

What led the apostle to praise? **God the master builder has finally placed the last block in place and**



Flag of the nation of Israel

thus completed the building of his Church. He describes it thus: 'A partial hardening has come upon Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. And in this way all Israel will be saved' (25-26). Instead of leading his readers to similar praise – the result has been argument and debate! These verses have become a battleground for commentators. The meaning of the phrase *'and in this way all Israel will be saved'* (and every word in this phrase) has been disputed. Good men have come to mutually contradictory conclusions. The arguments are complicated and technical and at times confusing. There are three main views (with variations): –

View Number One: Paul is here referring to a future time when – after the fullness of the Gentiles has been gathered in) – God will gather in a large number (perhaps most?) of the Jews. Such will mark the grand climax and crescendo of God's mighty act of re-

demption.

This view is held by e.g. Charles Hodge; John Murray; C.E.B. Cranfield; Martyn Lloyd-Jones; J. Stott; Douglas Moo; Don Carson; etc.

View Number Two: Paul is here referring to the whole sweep of history. 'All Israel' describes the total number of elect Jews throughout history who will be saved.

This view is held by e.g. Anthony Hoekema, Herman Bavinck; L. Berkhof; W. Hendriksen; H. Ridderbos; O. Palmer Robertson; etc.

View Number Three: 'All Israel' indicates the entire people of God, the total number of the elect out of both Jews and Gentiles, that is the Church – 'the Israel of God' (Gal. 6: 16).

This view is held by e.g. John Calvin, S. Olyott; R.S. Ward (though he assures me this view does not preclude the possibility of future gospel blessing among the Jews); etc.

Which view is correct? It's impossible to be dogmatic – and we shouldn't be! Each view is supported by 'heavyweights' in the faith. It would be foolish and arrogant to be dogmatic. There are strong reasons for each position. But neither can they all be correct.

This is an example of, 'some things written by Paul that are hard to understand.' (2 Peter 3: 16).

Do I have a preference? I would (obviously) like View Number One to be correct. I happen to think it captures the argument of the apostle. God is not through with the Jews. He still has a gospel promise for them. Wouldn't it be wonderful to think that **through the preaching of the gospel to the nations** the time will come when the hardening of Israel will be finished and when **many Jewish people will turn to the Lord Jesus Christ**, with resulting blessing for the world-wide Church – and praise for the Lord!

But no matter which view we take it should not affect in any way our mission or attitude to the Jews. By way of conclusion let it be clear:-

First: - There is only one way of salvation for Jew and Gentile alike. There is only one body, one Lord, one faith, one olive tree, one family of God, one Saviour and one gospel.

We reject any 'two-covenant theology,' that suggests there is one covenant unique to Israel and another for Gentiles. If any are saved it will be because of faith alone in the Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 16: 30-31). *'We are brought near by the blood of Christ . . . who has made us both one'* (Eph. 2: 13-14).

Second: - We should take a keen interest in supporting gospel witness among Jewish people. God is not

done with the Jews! The Gospel is still as much for the Jew as the Gentile. (Rom 1: 16). There should never be a hint of racism or anti-Semitism in the church. We are to love our neighbour. We do that best by sharing the gospel with them.

Third: - Because God has a fool proof plan to complete the building of his multinational church – it should lead us in anticipation to give praise and glory to God. **'Oh the depth of the riches**

and the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgements and how inscrutable his ways! For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counsellor? Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid? For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen' (33-36).

The Past for Today

The PCEA Synod (2) Origins—Two Union Controversies 1853-65 Rowland Ward

Australian Presbyterianism remained a rather small affair for some years after 1846 as neither Scottish Church was in a position to assist with ministers. However, with the discovery of gold in 1851, society experienced a revolution in its life and a great influx of new settlers, including more ministers. Between 1851 and 1857 the population of Victoria rose from 77,000 to 409,000, and of New South Wales from 178,000 to 351,000.

Church Union in Victoria

In this situation the desirability of union across the Presbyterian divide was soon raised. The movement began in Victoria in January 1853 with an approach by the United Presbyterian Synod (10 ministers) to the Free Presbyterian Synod (6 ministers), thus bypassing the Presbytery of Melbourne of the Synod of Australia in connexion with the Established Church of Scotland (8 ministers). The idea was that as the UP and FP Synods were agreed in the practice of rejecting state-aid they might be able to achieve a union, even though they disagreed in their theory of the state's duty in relation to religion; and then they could negotiate with the Established Church body from a position of strength. It was a year before the FP Synod took up the subject and meantime the able, orthodox but impulsive Rev Dr Adam Cairns had arrived from the Free Church of Scotland with several other ministers. The FP Synod policy of rejecting state-aid was progressively abandoned, and Forbes' careful work increasingly ignored. Another issue was that on its formation in 1850 the United Presbyterian Synod had not adopted the Westminster Confession, but only a rather meagre summary of doctrine and polity. So nothing came of the UP approach.

First Basis 1854

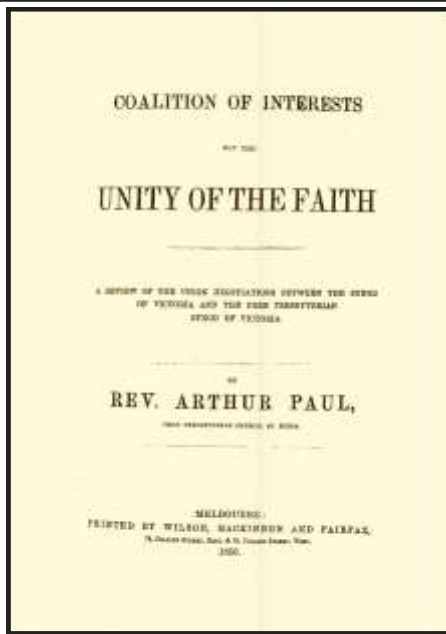
However, in 1854 Rev Irving Hetherington, whose sympathies were Free Church but who had stayed with the Synod of Australia in 1846 and succeeded Forbes as minister of Scots' Church, Melbourne, made approach to the FP Synod on behalf of his Established Church presbytery. A Basis of Union was speedily agreed by September 1854 between the FP Synod and the Established Church Synod of Victoria (as it became in 1854), but it was not found possible to bring in the UP Synod. The UP Synod required modifications which would in practice abandon the doctrine of the obligation of the civil power to countenance and cherish the truth of God, and the large majority of the FP Synod refused to concede this. The notion that Church and State should not have anything to do with each other horrified many, who saw that such a view led to the secular state with its humanistic religion. Things began to unravel. It became clear that the words in the 1854 Basis of Union that were initially understood to disapprove of the position of the Established Church of Scotland were not understood in that sense by the majority of the two Synods that had approved it. Consequently, a minority of the FP Synod became opposed to union because of the use to be made of the Basis in receiving ministers from Established and Free on an equal footing without questioning the attitude to state interference accepted in the Established Church of Scotland. A minority (5 ministers of 23) was expelled on 8 April 1857 simply because they adhered to the Fundamental Act of the FP Synod in faithfulness to their vows. This rash and unconstitutional expulsion, as all were to later regard it, occurred despite the proposal by the

minority in the FP Synod of a peaceable withdrawal.

Many congregations had people from the various Presbyterian streams but, in Melbourne (Scots') and Geelong congregations of the Established Church Synod, membership was almost entirely monochrome. Early in 1858, these two congregations openly expressed difficulties with the 1854 Basis because, without naming the Established Church of Scotland, the Basis condemned what that church had done, stated that it was a fundamental rule that election of office-bearers belongs to church members, and implied that the Established Church was unfaithful. The FP Majority Synod tried to explain away this interpretation, which was what their Minority had also been saying all along was the meaning. In May 1858 the Free Church of Scotland Assembly recognised the Majority and approved the 1854 Basis. It indeed appeared satisfactory on the surface: the rather different meaning to be given by its proposed use was the real issue. So the expelled FP Synod ministers were out on a limb.

Second Basis 1858

In December 1858 a completely new and simplified Basis was proposed by the Synod of Victoria which in effect allowed subscribers to have their own view about the proper church-state relation, gave no binding church voice on the matter, and allowed for the reception of ministers from other Presbyterian churches on an equal footing. On 7 April 1859 the Presbyterian Church of Victoria (PCV) was formed on this Basis, with 27 of its 53 initial ministers of Free Church background. In 1856/57 the UPs had become the



Pamphlet of Rev Arthur Paul of St Kilda FPCV (November 1856)

split Ps by dividing into three sections, but most joined the union of 1859. A few remained out over state-aid until 1870. The Minority FP Synod continued. The Reformed Presbyterian congregation at Geelong, which had been organised in 1858, was not part of the union either, and continues to the present.

The union was not effected in a very principled way, and reflected a pragmatic attitude that would have impact on larger issues soon enough. Reflecting the worse side of church politics, appeals by the Minority to be recognised by the Free Church of Scotland were rejected in 1860 and again in 1861. That made life difficult, particularly as regards a source of ministers. Yet all the Minority had done was stand fast to their vows and refuse to go against the Fundamental Act of the FP Synod drawn up by Forbes. The Victorian union in 1859 of 53 or 54 ministers was highly significant, as the first such in the British colonies. The Free Church of Scotland would not herself unite with the United Presbyterians in Scotland until 1900, and it took until 1929 for the United Frees to join the Established Church. The breach of property trusts involved in the 1900 union led to a tiny 2% of the Free Church being acknowledged in the famous 'Free Church Case' in the House of Lords as the legal owners of all Free Church property, and being apportioned in the final settlement all that they could profitably use. These 'Wee Frees' re-established relations with the Australian remnant.

Presbyterian unions elsewhere

The churches in Queensland, New South Wales and South Australia all went through a process that resulted in majorities joining with Presbyterians from the Established Church as well as the United Presbyterians to form the Presbyterian Church of Queensland (1863), the Presbyterian Church of New South Wales (1865) and the Presbyterian Church of South Australia (1865). In Tasmania there were special issues affecting the Established Church Presbytery, which had significant internal problems. In 1853 the Free Church Presbytery of Tasmania had been formed by three ministers, but it appears that this energetic and able body did not think of itself as independent of the Free Church of Scotland. It was dissolved on union with the Presbyterian Church of Tasmania on 18 March 1896.

New South Wales

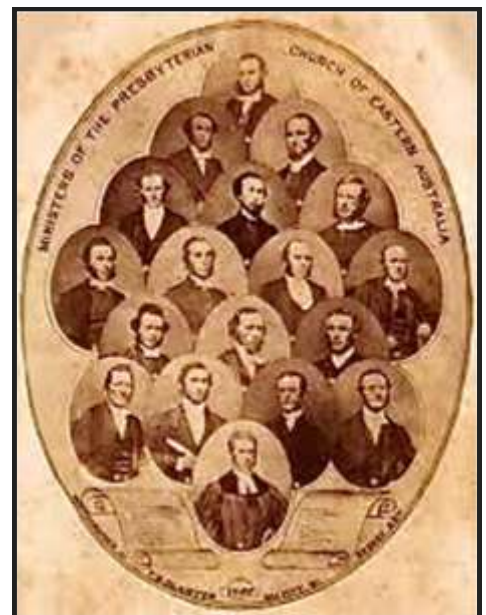
Union in New South Wales occurred in two stages. Fifteen PCEA ministers, four ministers from Dr John Dunmore Lang's Synod of New South Wales and one United Presbyterian minister united on 15 November 1864 to form a General Synod. On 8 September 1865 the General Synod joined with 'the Synod of Australia in connexion with the Established Church of Scotland' and one United Presbyterian minister to form the Presbyterian Church of New South Wales with 47 serving ministers. This procedure was considered necessary since the Synod of Australia could not stomach direct union with Lang, and Lang avowed 'he would never appear as a suppliant before the Synod of Australia, which had deposed him in 1842. Such was the influence of this turbulent Scot that a satisfactory union without him was thought unachievable. To secure a further vote, unionists in the PCEA Synod unconstitutionally allowed a pro-unionist minister to be a member of Synod, despite him having no employment with the church.

The 1864/65 Basis was more carefully drafted than the Basis in Victoria, but the key sticking point remained. Resolutions accompanying the Basis were designed to offset any reflection on the Established Church of Scotland, and to enable her ministers to be received without question on the disputed issue. On its formation the New South Wales church had a large Established Church component in its ministry (48%), a factor that has coloured it ever since. About 25% of the PCEA ministers did not join the union and were supported

by a largely Highland and conservative Irish constituency on the coastal rivers north of Sydney.

South Australia

In South Australia a union occurred on 10 May 1865 on a basis similar to that in New South Wales, although the churches in the south-east of the colony remained linked to the PCV. This exacerbated the relative weakness of South Australian Presbyterianism. Eight ministers in all were embraced by the union. However, there was a continuing Free Presbyterian work led by the remarkable Rev James Benny of Morphett Vale. In 1856 a discipline case in the Morphett Vale congregation had been referred to the Presbytery for advice. Contrary to its own recently adopted rules, the Presbytery sought to take over the whole case. The Session resisted and the upshot was that Benny was deposed for contumacy and rebellion on 5 January 1858, in what a South Australian historian has called 'one of the most tyrannical incidents in the history of Presbyterianism in this State'. Benny's ministry continued without interruption, extended to further centres and flourished for many years.



Ministers of the PCEA 1862

Some lessons

The union controversy points up some important lessons. Union was very desirable but it needed to be union in truth, not a mere coalition of factions. The issue involved was not a small one. The Headship of Christ in his Church does not mean that

there can never be any appeal to the civil courts over church decisions involving alleged wrongs touching on temporal interests although this has sometimes been said (as in the Scottish Cardross case in 1860 or the Australian Frackleton case in 1908), but it means that the spiritual affairs of the Church have been committed by Christ to office-bearers he has appointed in the Church, and the intrusion by the civil power into spiritual

issues such as the appointment of ministers is unacceptable. It's an issue that has parallels in earlier as well as more recent times: for example, churches in Australia formed by migrants from Greece, Serbia or Russia. The associated issue is the importance of vows: one must be clear, and not ambiguous or dishonest in this area. It is this, and not our practice of a capella psalmody, that is the most basic distinctive of the PCEA. Vows

are not made to be broken, but to be kept. Fine words are all very well, but they must be backed by consistent conduct. We are to mean what we say. Hence, if there is a gross inconsistency in the immediate past connection of an applicant for PCEA ministry, it is not enough to merely express agreement with our Standards; an adequate recognition of past error is required.

'The Only Way!'

Retiring Moderator's Sermon on Acts 4:12

Sjirk Bajema

What we see happening in Acts 4 is a vivid picture. And that's not only because of the very well known verse 12. There is also all that is going on around it and behind it. There's so much happening here!

That's why it is through five aspects we will consider this special verse – the twelfth verse of the fourth chapter of the book of Acts. Mind you, not that there is any less an important verse than this in Scripture. But, dear friend, isn't it this verse amongst those that hold a particular place for us? How often haven't you found yourself thinking and saying these words?

The Scene of Total Opposites

So let us note, first of all, 'The Scene of Total Opposites' – because it is in the presence of the Sanhedrin that this text is set. The Sanhedrin is the Supreme Court of the Land. Those making up this body were the rich, powerful, and most intellectual Jewish citizens. Amongst them there is the most senior high priest, the real power broker, Annas. It shows the influence this man has that Luke calls him the high priest, when we know from elsewhere that Caiaphas was the actual high priest for this particular year. In the politics of things the majority party were the Sadducees. They were the priestly aristocracy and the secular nobility. Under their control was the temple.

The minority party were the Pharisees, who were the bourgeoisie, the middle classes. To this group belonged most of the scribes and the professional legal experts.

Then there were a number of so-called "elders". They were men of worldly rank and importance – nobles, heads of families.

There were seventy-one of them altogether. Quite some court – and so quite some audience to speak against! But there are two men who do. They were two men from a group in society

who would never be represented in this court. Two men who in any other situation and time would have almost certainly been put in their place!

The two men were Peter and John. Two fishermen – and Galilean fishermen at that!

Humanly speaking, Peter was in the most awkward of circumstances. Here he stands before the highest religious court. And he's being put in his place by those leaders. **"By what power or name did you do this?"** they demand of them in verse 7.

Yet if they thought such ecclesiastical bullying was going to crush these two untrained, illiterate, and itinerant fishermen, they were quite mistaken. The clothes of the disciples might have suggested a humble background but their bold and fluent speech declared something quite different. And what else could account for that but that they had been with Jesus?

This was 'The Scene of Total Opposites All Right.' All right! But the side the Sanhedrin were on wasn't the best looking side! This was the problem that they were meant to have eliminated. Having done away with their leader, Jesus of Nazareth, they had expected the movement to die out with him. Yet there had been that unsettling incident on the day of Pentecost. And rather than the movement drying up, it was being flooded with new adherents!

So stunned are these religious rulers of Israel that their solution is the most weak-kneed response of all. As we read in verse 17, all they come up with is to warn them to no longer speak to anyone in Jesus' name.

What was happening? How had a scene which should have favoured the Sanhedrin quite comprehensively become completely the opposite?

Well, it was quite simple. The Holy Spirit inspired the apostles. What Jesus had promised his disciples, as we read in Luke chapter 21, had come true. For there the Lord had told them

what they were to do in this very kind of situation. There he had told them of times when they would be persecuted and brought before rulers and councils. There he had said to them in verses 14 and 15, "But make up your mind not to worry beforehand how you will defend yourselves. For I will give you words and wisdom that none of your adversaries will be able to resist or contradict."

And, boy, didn't Christ's Spirit inspire Peter's mouth then! He had them stumped! And how much doesn't God's Spirit today have the authorities of this world stumped? Despite the most hostile persecution of Islamic government authorities, the Church is growing in those lands. However strong the hate-filled rhetoric and violence of non-Christian governments, the gospel is being proclaimed!

Dear believer, isn't that what you're showing in your life? Though you are so insignificant in the eyes of this world, how much doesn't what you do stand out in this world! Or does it? How often haven't we failed to live in the power of Christ's Spirit? While we have his promise that he will give us the words to say we were struck dumb – or struck with stupidity! Let's be stirred up again by 'The Scene of Total Opposites.' Let's realise his strength in our weakness.

The Situation of Thorough Change

But now let's consider another contrast found in Acts 4. It is a contrast Peter refers to his speech to the Sanhedrin. In the words of a second aspect, we realise 'The Situation of Thorough Change.'

You see, in verse 9 Peter starts his speech by reference to what had happened to a particular man. It was actually what had happened to this man which was the precipitating factor to their being brought before the Sanhedrin now. That's why Peter

speaks of their being there because of what has happened to that man. And what had happened to that man couldn't be missed by any one there, because the man himself was there! The man everyone had known as the crippled beggar at the temple gate. Well, the former crippled beggar, anyhow! Because now he couldn't be more the opposite! This is another contrast which sets everything on its head!

I'm sure you know the story told in Acts 3. When that crippled man asked Peter and John for money he received instead the command, "Look at us!" He looked at them – couldn't do much else, could he? He was certain he was going to get something from them. And he did!

In fact, such a gift it was he received that millions have heard about it. For Peter said, "Silver and gold I do not have, but what I have I give to you. In the name of Jesus of Nazareth, walk." And as soon as the apostle took him by the right hand, he was up, as the song goes, "walking and leaping and praising God!"

In his reply to the Sanhedrin, Peter refers to what they can see there right before them. How could you possibly miss that miracle now?

In verse 9 Peter uses a Greek word for that man's healing which literally means he was saved. It's the same root word for "salvation" in our text of verse 12. But it's also the only time in Acts that this word is used for physical rather than spiritual healing, because Peter is making a very strong connection. It's a point he confirms at the end of verse 10 when he refers to that man before them being completely healed. The contrast here is between what that man was and what he is now. This was a contrast as clearly obvious to those listening as the contrast between the well-bred, wealthy and intellectual Sanhedrin and these rough, working class fisherman. Yet the contrast is exactly the point!

For how do you think that man was healed? And why do you think these common men could argue this way? Definitely not by what any mere man could do! Only God does it!

There couldn't be any clearer case anywhere for the way of salvation through Christ alone, than with what Peter says here! Peter strongly states the case by quoting, in verse 11, from the Scriptures – the Old Testament – with the prophetic word about Jesus.

It is a quote from Psalm 118 verse 22. And let's notice that it was a prophetic word which spoke of precisely the opposition to the Messiah the Sanhedrin

had shown to Jesus with his trial and crucifixion.

Ouch! That would have hurt. Yet most of all they were stunned. The Galilean fisherman's words caught them out. Verse 13 says this. There we read, "When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realised that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and took note that these men had been with Jesus."

Is that what this world says of us? Do they see that we too are followers of Jesus? Would you say that they can't help but notice that we've been with him? How full of ourselves we are! So, how true isn't it that when the Lord brings revival he starts from the bottom up! His Spirit stirs up those least likely ones and gives them a power and ability quite beyond them! That's what his Word does!

The Source of True Deliverance

So let's listen to what the apostle Peter said. In the words of a third aspect, let's see 'The Source of True Deliverance.' To the religious elite the apostle proclaims the only source of salvation itself – words that are the most earth-shattering. "Salvation is found in no one else..." he begins verse 12.

The apostle affirms what Jesus himself had said, and what Luke has recorded in his Gospel, that Jesus **is** the Son of God and the true King of the Jews, the Messiah prophesied from of old. It was **Jesus** who healed this crippled beggar – the Jesus who is God.

Peter couldn't have told the Sanhedrin in a plainer way that their whole religion was worthless. They couldn't be saved apart from Jesus Christ, he declares. F.F. Bruce sums it up: "If the rulers persisted in their repudiation of Jesus, no such deliverance could be hoped for from any other quarter or by the power of any other name: the name of Jesus, which the cripple had been enabled to spring to his feet and walk, was the name with which Israel's salvation was inextricably bound up."

The Jewish leaders then, and later, had the Gospel preached to them. There was then, and there is now, no excuse! So why is it that a Reformed theologian said, "I can't believe that God would not have heard the cries of the Old Covenant people when they cried out in Auschwitz." (Klaas Runia, 1996.) Now, no-one can take away from the terrible injustice of the concentration camps, and certainly no-one can deny the Nazi persecution and slaughter of the Jews, but none of that changes the only source of salvation. If men and women reject the gospel today, no matter how good or generous or long-suffering they

seemed to have been, they won't be saved. Then there is no whole healing in their souls. The Lord Jesus said in John 14 verse 6, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except by me." How many times does it need to be said? But still the devil attacks the head and the heart of the Church. For if he can at all possibly separate the Word and the Spirit he will!

Then it is most unhelpful, even dangerous, for ministers of the gospel to speak about not wanting to be dogmatic about the salvation of those outside the reach of the gospel.

"Salvation is found in **no one else**, for there is **no other name** under heaven given by which we must be saved."

Perhaps you're wondering whatever this could have to do with you? You consider yourself definitely orthodox. But how about now not thinking about your orthodoxy but your orthopraxy? It's not only what you believe but also how you live!

The Signature of The Saviour

You see, **then** we may say 'The Source of True Deliverance' is clearly pronounced. **Then** you testify to the only way. But also the signature of the Saviour certainly confirms it. And this is our forth aspect ... 'The Signature of The Saviour.'

Let me explain. When discussing such as passage as verse 12, those who think others will be saved apart from the gospel say that this applies to Christians only. So the Word of God is only the Word of God if it speaks to you.

Then there are those who say that they don't go this far, but do hold room for salvation apart from the gospel. "Well," they say, "what about all those who never had the chance to hear the good news?"

This is a question often asked by Christians. We honestly do wonder. And if people are saved without hearing the gospel, it surely doesn't affect what we believe about the deity of Christ, or his physical resurrection, does it?

That's how some argue. 'Something like this wouldn't affect the essentials of faith,' they say. So what did Peter mean when he declared that salvation is found in no one else?

Here we are helped by what he says after saying that salvation is found in no one else, because there he goes on, "...for there is no other name under heaven given by which we must be saved." In a way this second part of verse 12 parallels the first part, in

the style many of the psalms do. But in another way, it adds more, as we often find in the book of Proverbs, for instance.

As an example of this take the word "name" here. To us a name is more of a label than anything else. In Scripture, however, a name says something about **who** the person is. The name 'Jesus' itself means 'Saviour'. In Matthew 1 verse 21 the angel of the Lord says to Joseph, about the baby inside Mary conceived by the Holy Spirit, "She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, **because he will save his people from their sins.**" 'Ah,' but some say, 'true there are those who don't actually hear the gospel, they may not know Jesus, but we shouldn't always say Spirit and Word belong together so that the Spirit cannot do anything without the Word. We have always said that the children of believers are saved, not by the Word but by the Spirit.' So they say that the text can be true for those who haven't heard the gospel, because it was the Spirit of Christ active in their lives. Because of the Spirit's work the secret of Christ became shown to and in them too.

That's quite some jump in interpreting Peter's word, though! The last thought on his mind would have been pagans yet to hear the gospel; firstly, because that stage in church history hadn't yet come; and, secondly, because he was rebutting those who had heard the gospel but had rejected it.

Later when the Gentiles were recognised as coming to faith, Peter said in Acts 10:43, "All the prophets testify about him – Jesus Christ – that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sin **through his name.**" Notice those words, "**through his name.**" There is a distinct identification with the person and work of Christ in salvation.

The apostle especially commissioned to go to the Gentiles, Paul, confirms this. In Romans 10 verse 9 and 10 he writes, "...if you confess **with your mouth**, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it's with your mouth that you confess and are saved."

Apart from an explicit profession of faith in Jesus Christ one cannot be saved. As Roger Greenway notes, "...the gospel stands or falls on this issue. This is not a peripheral issue, and if we hedge on this we're forfeiting our right to be called Christians." To say, then, that a cry of deep distress to Allah by a Muslim would be a prayer heard by the God

we believe, cuts at the very uniqueness of Christ.

John Calvin comments on the word "name" that by it Peter means the **cause**, as if he had said, "Since salvation is in God's power only, he won't have us share in it by any other way than that we seek it from **Christ alone.**" And Calvin goes further as he says that the phrase "under heaven" means that we cannot ascend to heaven to attain to God. Since we are therefore so far from the Kingdom of God," he says, "it's necessary that God should not only invite us to himself but should reach out his hand and **offer salvation to us** so that we may enjoy it."



There are so many around us who readily identify to being Christian in some vague way. Somehow they see themselves as Christian rather than as Muslims, or Hindu, or some other religion. But ask them to tell you where the name 'Christian' comes from and, while they have a rough guess at Jesus, they won't know him personally. And they certainly won't realise that what they believe is not what Jesus taught. Because they think they've done all right by themselves. They don't know they're totally lost without him! That's why you're there, my friend. Together with the apostles Peter and John and true believers through all ages, you're declaring this to them.

The Seal of Triune Working

In this way we come to a fifth aspect to considering this passage. For here we move on to note 'The Seal of Triune Working.'

You see, the Lord doesn't send his regenerating Spirit to work in the hearts of people without their hearing the gospel. To quote Paul further from Romans 10 verse 14, "How ... can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they haven't heard? And

how can they hear without someone **preaching to them?**"

This makes it clear that the Word and Spirit can never be separate. As soon as we turn from that something of the necessity and uniqueness of the gospel is gone. To cut out the very heart of mission to the pagan world is to destroy altogether the witness the Church is to be to her Bridegroom.

Then a Church will quickly travel the path of no return. The road so many denominations becoming liberal have travelled. Then you'll find they cease missions to the Jews – 'I mean, don't we both essentially share the same faith?' There'll be the interfaith dialogues, and all the rest of it!

But already before denominations make decisions like these, the rot has set in. As soon as believers begin to turn their focus away from the amazing grace of God in their salvation, and begin speculating instead upon the millions who are lost in their sin, the slide has begun.

To return to the scene in Acts 4: Where is that same contrast in the world today? In which places is the Lord's Spirit making all the difference between the world and the church? Ah, it's where the Word is proclaimed in all its fullness and power! It's when nothing less and nothing more than when the Saviour's Name is heard! Only Jesus saves!

Then, how thankful aren't we for so great a salvation? Aren't we moved to declare the only source of our salvation with all that we say and do? For don't you and I know that nowhere in Scripture does it tell us that people are saved who have never heard of Jesus Christ. That's why we have to do it!

The call to we who believe – and especially to we called to preach – is to be Christ's witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria – **and to the ends of the earth!** While there is yet one soul who hasn't heard the gospel sound, the Church's work isn't done. The number of God's elect isn't complete until God's own Son comes back. Indeed, until the Living Word does come back he tells us we need to keep speaking the saving Word. And that's exactly through this Word!

The World in the Banner

"The Word of God Precedes and Exceeds the Bible:" Pope Francis on Scripture and the Church

After a couple of eventful months surrounding the Vatican, the time has come to shift into a more routine mood. Pope Francis has attracted a lot of attention from the media and has sent various messages of change and renewal. After the initial surprise, the various Vatican departments are coming to terms with a less pompous papacy, and the Pope himself is beginning to shape his own views on a number of open issues that are on the Vatican agenda.

The first weeks of the new papacy were marked by what seemed new and extraordinary, but now the Popes has begun to do what a Pope in Rome normally does – residing over different liturgical events, receiving international delegations, meeting with bishops from around the world, speaking at various occasions, etc. The normal pace of the papacy is beginning to emerge. Using more "pastoral" language in his first homilies that almost everybody seemed to like, the more theological bent of Francis's thought is coming through as he has more opportunities to deliver speeches of various forms. One of his first opportunities was a speech he gave on April 12th to the members of the Pontifical Biblical Commission convened in the Vatican to discuss the theme "The inspiration and the truth of the Bible". Below is a summary of Francis' address and a few remarks on this very important subject for all Christians in general, and for Evangelicals in particular.

The Non-Identity Thesis

After commending the Commission for the choice of the topic, the Pope highlighted the nature of Scripture and its relationship to the Word of God. The Bible, according to Francis, is "the testimony in written form to the Word of God". Scripture is not associated with the Word of God on a one-to-one basis, but is rather perceived as a witness to something co-inherent, yet different. Following this comment, the Pope adds that "the Word of God precedes and exceeds the Bible". In other words, the Pope does not endorse an identity view between Scripture and the Word but supports a dynamic view of the relationship between the Word of God and the Bible whereby Scripture wit-

nesses to a Word that is before and beyond the Bible. The Word is present in the Bible but not confined to it. The Word is spoken and told by the Bible but the two do not coincide, being that the Bible is only a (partial) witness to the (fuller) Word. According to this view, what the Bible says is what the Word says, but what the Word says is not necessarily what the Bible says.

Francis rightly recognizes that the center of the Christian faith is a "person" and not a book, i.e. the person of Jesus Christ, the incarnate Word of God. Yet the inference is that "the horizon of the divine Word (i.e. Jesus Christ) embraces Scripture and extends over it". In a rather technical language, Francis goes on to say that the Bible is the "canonical memorial that attests the event of Revelation". The sentence needs some theological unpacking but it is clear that the "memorial" language coupled with the notion of "attestation" support the view that there is a gap between the Bible and the Word of God. There is nothing original in this account; it has been the theological standard of the Word advocated by the Catholic Church since Vatican II.

Scripture is Subject to the Church

Once the identity between the Word and the Bible is refused and substituted with the dynamism of a "living" Revelation that exceeds the Bible, there stems the need for an arbiter that is able to recognize the living Word in and beyond the Bible. While Protestant Liberalism submits the Bible to the final judgment of conscience or reason, Roman Catholicism believes that the Magisterium of the Church has ultimate authority over Scripture. This is what Pope Francis believes as well. In quoting Vatican II (which is actually a quotation of Vatican I), he says that "all of what has been said about the way of interpreting Scripture is subject finally to the judgment of the Church, which carries out the divine commission and ministry of guarding and interpreting the word of God" (Dei Verbum, 12). Of course, here Francis is recalling the Roman Catholic view that there is a profound unity between Scripture, Tradition and the Magisterium of the Church, to the extent that one cannot be pitted against the other two and vice versa. The critical point here is

that the Magisterium represents the only "living" voice of the Word, and its interpretation of Scripture is what really matters and what finally counts. So, instead of letting Scripture speak to the Church and over the Church by the Spirit, the Church is the only authorized voice of the Word which is witnessed in Scripture, and which also extends beyond it. Again, the Pope quotes Vatican II (which in turn quotes the Council of Trent) when he says that "it is not from Sacred Scripture alone that the Church draws her certainty about everything which has been revealed. Therefore both sacred tradition and Sacred Scripture are to be accepted and venerated with the same sense of loyalty and reverence" (Dei Verbum, 9). There will be other times when Pope Francis will address theological issues to express his views. However, this speech to the Pontifical Biblical Commission is an indication of the fact that the Pope will presumably not bring change to basic doctrinal issues and that he is rather conservative in his Roman Catholic theological outlook. Actually, the emphasis and tone of the speech seem to be willing to draw a line between what the Roman Catholic Church believes and the "Scripture Alone" principle of the Protestant faith.

+ *Leonardo De Chirico, Vatican Files no.20, www.reformation21.org*

What Every Christian Needs to Know about the Qur'an

What used to be an exotic religion of people halfway around the world is now the belief system of people living across the street. Relying on the media and politicians for information about what Muslims believe isn't going to cut it. Christians need to be better informed, whether the goal is to understand global politics or to talk to a Muslim neighbor. A respected scholar, apologist, and ministry leader, Dr James White has publicly debated the world's most prominent Muslim apologists. Through fair and accurate use of the Qur'an and other documents, White examines what Muslim sacred texts teach about Christ, salvation, the Trinity, the afterlife, and other crucial topics in his book, "What Every Christian Needs to

Know about the Qur'an."

This book provides believers with an understanding of Islam that will enable them to engage in open, honest discussions about the religion with Muslims and others.

"It is absolutely essential that Christians understand that Islam and Christianity represent two contradictory sets of truth claims. James White understands this, and in this important new book he sets out the issues of truth with distinction and clarity.

Christians will welcome this book as they seek to understand the challenge of Islam." -- R. Albert Mohler Jr., president, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

"This book is magnificent! I believe this is the most thorough and comprehensive book written by an evangelical scholar on the Qur'an." -- Abdul Saleeb, coauthor of "Answering Islam" and "The Dark Side of Islam"

About the Author:

James R. White is the author of several acclaimed books, including "The God Who Justifies," and "The Forgotten Trinity." The director of Alpha and Omega Ministries, he is an accomplished debater of Muslim apologists and an elder of the Phoenix Reformed Baptist Church. James has been interviewed on numerous outlets including "In the Market with Janet Parshall," "The Janet Mefferd Show" and ChristianPost.com. He and his family live in Phoenix, Arizona.

Visit aomin.org for more information. "What Every Christian Needs to Know About the Qur'an" by James R. White Trade Paper ISBN: 978-0-7642-0976-5; \$14.99; 320 pp.

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Australian MP Tries to Muzzle Upcoming Sydney World Congress of Families Meeting

World Congress of Families (WCF) Managing Director Lawrence Jacobs reported 29 April 2013 that he was astonished by a call to censor, for standing up for marriage and the natural family, the upcoming WCF VII

meeting in Sydney, Australia scheduled 15-18 May 2013 at the Australian Technology Park.

Jacobs noted:

"Leaders of a self-styled 'sexual minority' have expressed anger over some of our speakers... Australian MP Alex Greenwich was so agitated by the expression of views which conflict with his own that he wrote the New South Wales Tourism Minister, demanding that the Congress be monitored for heretical thoughts and, if any are found, sanctions be applied under the state's 'anti-discrimination law.'"

WCF VII sessions will include: The Causes And Cost of Family Breakdown – What Families Are Best for the Economy? -- Will the Human Family Survive: Can We Prosper with Small Families? – Philosophical Roots of the Cultural Revolution – Secular Humanism and Family Values -- Demographic Winter – Masculinity and Femininity –The Impact on Children of Legalizing "Same-Sex Marriage" – Economic and Social Costs of Abortion – Healing Post-Abortion Trauma – Work of the Home: A True Profession – AIDS Prevention through Strengthening Families – Marriage as An Instrument of Human Development – Promoting Families In the Mainstream and Online Media – Consumerism and The Soul – Defending Faith In An Age of Christophobia – The Pornography Industry – and Reaching the Next Generation with a Pro-Family Message.

For more information, please access worldcongress.org.
+ *World Congress of Families*,
info@worldcongress.org

Weeks after gay 'marriage' passes, New Zealand family group stripped of charitable status

Three weeks after the passage of homosexual 'marriage' in New Zealand, a pro-family group has been stripped of charitable status. Family First New Zealand, a charity which speaks up for families, and holds a traditional view of marriage and family, have received notice from the independent Charities Registration Board that they will be removed from the Charities Register on May 27th. During the same-sex 'marriage' debate prior to the April 17 passage of the Marriage (Definition of Marriage) Amendment Bill, Family First was a major force in educating and mobilising the public to stand up for marriage

being between one man and one woman. According to Bob McCoskrie, the National Director of Family First, the Charities Registration Board cited that view as one of the reasons for the deregistration. Brendon Ward, the General Manager of Charities Services, said "Family First's main purpose is to promote particular points of view about family life. Under the Act promotion of a controversial point of view is a political purpose." Under the Charities Act, it is possible for charities to support or oppose legislation as long as it is not the main purpose of the charity. "The Commission argues that Family First's efforts to represent the voice of 80%-plus of families on the anti-smacking law or half of New Zealanders on attempts to redefine marriage, for example, have no 'public benefit', and that it is in the 'public interest' for Family First to be deregistered."

The removal of Family First from the Charities Register will not stop the charity from operating. However, it does mean that their donors will not receive a donation rebate, and Family First will be required to pay income tax, despite being a non-profit.

Surprisingly Green MP Denise Roche spoke in defense of Family First saying, "Advocacy in charities is where we also keep our democracy. Not-for-profits and charitable organisations have a real role in advocating for a better society, and if they are unable to do that then we lose a voice."

Roche was a member of Greenpeace NZ, which was struck off the Charities Register in 2010. The case is still on going and will be heard by the Supreme Court in July. "You know a country is in trouble when a family group speaking up, publishing research, and holding conferences on traditional family values is deemed to be of no public benefit, and is in the public interest to be punished. It seems almost illegal to hold a viewpoint," McCoskrie concluded.

+ *AUCKLAND, New Zealand, May 7, 2013 (LifeSiteNews.com)*

‘I Will Fill It’

Moderator’s Address on Psalm 81:1-10

Andres Miranda

For those of us who have been Christians for a while, it becomes easy to think that we have pretty much exhausted the possibilities of our relationship with God. True, we participate in church activities week after week, but often with little or no expectation of anything new. The familiar becomes the predictable and what comes next is simply more of the same. We don’t really see ourselves enjoying anything else other than a changeless routine. But this is not the vision of God for the church. And it’s definitely not the vision of God for preachers of the gospel. In fact, God calls us into ever new dimensions of his fullness—his immensity—his all-sufficiency.

The Context of Psalm 81:10

The purpose of Psalm 81 is to remind us that there’s more for us in God than we have yet understood. This Psalm is divided in two parts: the invitation to shout for joy in verses 1 to 5 and the admonition to remember the obligations of the covenant – which takes up the rest of the chapter. The text I would like us to study together belongs to the second part of the Psalm. And the way I propose to reflect on verse 10 is to take out from it a few thoughts that will help us to see that God is prepared to bless us with more. Now, look at verse 10:

I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt. Open wide your mouth and I will fill it.

This verse is amazing. Here the psalmist is saying to us that God is ready to exceed our expectations. He is teaching us that whatever we think we have from God—is nothing compared to what he can do for us. And for that reason he encourages us to intensify our longing and ask big things from him. If our expectations of God are too small and our desires too weak, verse 10 tells us to do the complete opposite. Here God is encouraging his people to increase the intensity of their longings for him. This text describes a God who intends to release superabundance.

Open Wide Your Mouth

Now the basis for the exhortation to ‘open wide your mouth’ is the reputation of God. Notice what Asaph says at the beginning of verse 10: “I am the

Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt.”

In the midst of the intoxication with idols, God reveals himself with this majestic ‘I’. Yahweh is showing his authority and power to save. Through the mouth of the prophetic speaker, God tells his people: I am the One who has come out of impenetrable glory to make myself known –to crush your enemies and bring you back to my ways –to the sphere of my covenant dominion. So the self-introduction of God in the first part of verse 10 underlines his awesome capacity.



From verses 6 to 7 that capacity is recalled in the great events of the history of salvation. The purpose of this summary is to remind the covenant community that God is self-giving and generous. Here the Psalmist says that God comes to his people with gifts. What are these gifts? One of them is freedom. Verse 6 tells us that God liberated the people from the compulsory service of slavery. Verse 7 recalls the cry of distressed people and shows us what God did for them during the time of the wilderness. The other gift that God is willing to give is the promise of full satisfaction. With verses 6 and 7 in the background, God says: “I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt. Open wide your mouth and I will fill it.”

The affirmation of God’s saving deeds now includes the promise that God will give them fullness: ‘open wide your mouth and I will fill it’. I am rich for all your needs. I can satisfy all your longings and aspirations. This

means a total renewal and ever-increasing enjoyment of our covenantal relationship with God. The point here is clear and simple. The God who set free the hands from the basket and sustained Israel in the wilderness and introduced them to a land flowing with milk and honey, is the same God who calls us today to open wide our mouth and receive fullness from him. The true Christian is meant to hunger for God.

How to Open the Mouth for God

So how do we do this? How can we learn to open wide the mouth for God? Well, I suppose the first step is to get a deep sense of our need of God. That’s self-evident. If we don’t acknowledge the fact that we need God, we will never open our mouth wide to desire God. This is crucial. There is nothing more contrary to the vitality of our relationship with God than lukewarmness.

Things like pride, self-sufficiency and even defective listening of the preaching of the word, are serious obstacles to a deeper and fuller relationship with the Lord.

The other point our text illustrates is the simple fact that some Christians never experience more than what they can have, because they never open their mouth to ask for more. If we want all that God wants to give us, we need to cultivate a ferocious appetite. We need to understand that the only limitation of the promise in verse 10 is our own lack of faith and hesitation to open wide our mouth before God. In other words, the fulfilment of this promise depends on you.

Dear friends, the question here is not whether God wants to fill our lives with the wealth of his goodness. Verse 10 tells us emphatically that he will and can do it. The question is whether you want to experience more of God. If that’s your desire, then God says to you: you would be fed with the finest of wheat; with honey from the rock I would satisfy you.

Prescribed Search / Youth Work

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

JUNE 2013

SENIOR and INTERMEDIATE (Intermediate omit questions 1 and 5)

I CORINTHIANS chapter 13

1. Name 8 things that charity [love] does not do. (3 verses)
2. Will we always see through a glass darkly [a mirror dimly]?

chapter 14

3. Why is he who prophesies more edifying than he who speaks in tongues?
4. Write out the two verses in Isaiah 28 that Paul refers to in 1 Cor. 14: 21.
5. Write out two separate verses that speak of the way all things should be done in the church.
6. God is not the author of confusion, but of what?

chapter 15:1—11

7. What gospel facts did Paul receive and then deliver to the Corinthians? (2 verses only)
8. Who was the last person to see Christ after his resurrection?

JUNIOR

LUKE chapter 19

1. What did Jesus say to Zacchaeus when he saw him in the tree?
2. What did the nobleman say to the servant whose pound [mina] had gained ten pounds [minas]?
3. What words did the multitude call out when Jesus came near the mount of Olives?
4. What did Jesus say when he drove out those who bought and sold in the temple?

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

Churches in the Banner

The 166th Synod of Eastern Australia

Sjirk Bajema

Again we were privileged to be hosted by the Hastings River congregation at Wauchope in very amenable climatic conditions. We were looked after physically very well, with much appreciated accommodation and meals. The fellowship with the folk there was also much enjoyed — for most of us we could renew acquaintances and for a few there were many new friends made. And they must not mind having us — we have been invited back next year! An invitation Synod most readily accepted. The make up of Synod was similar to previous years. There were two retirements in the previous year — the Revs. Sam Tamata and Rowland Ward — but Rowland was again with us, this time in his capacity as a commission elder from the All Nation's congregation. Altogether there were some twenty-one ministers and elders delegated to Synod, with two further ministers being associated with the court and two delegates from other denominations. And what made up Synod also was much prayer and much singing of the psalms. Tom Reeve was our precenator, and together we sang God's praises.

Opening Sessions

Synod began as it should begin with the reading and teaching of God's Word. Our retiring Moderator, the Rev Sjirk Bajema, spoke on 'The Only Way' through considering Acts 4:12. Once the baton was passed on to the incoming Moderator, the Rev. Andres Miranda, Andres spoke on Psalm 81:1—10 ("I Will Fill It"), particularly focussing on verse 10. Both were thanked for their addresses and they are subsequently printed elsewhere in this *Banner*. Following this the Presbytery Reports were received.

Legal Aspects

As the time allowed for Synod has reduced by a day over the last few years, it meant there was a lot to pack into Synod's Schedule, especially with all the work that had been done on the proposed amendment of *The Synod of Eastern Australia Property Act* (NSW

1918). This took up quite a few pages within the Standing Committee Reports but was necessary because of the denominational structure we have. At Synod it was passed quite quickly, as the Law & Advisory Committee had done much preparatory work. Thanks were especially expressed to the Conventor, Rowland Ward, and the Treas-



urer, Alex Steel, for their contributions to this. This will now go to Northern & Central Presbyteries for any possible minor adjustments before September 30, 2013, and then on to the New South Wales State Parliament. In the meantime the amendments to the *Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia Property Act* (Victoria, 1953) have gone through the Victorian State Parliament. Synod was thankful too that the costs normally applied for a private bill were remitted on this occasion. We were thankful that these amendments have now been dealt with and make things much more workable for the future.

Training of Ministry

This Committee has been busy this past year with the applications of two men — Robin Tso and Denver Boehret — to enter the ministry of the PCEA. Both have now fulfilled the requirements of the Committee in terms of their studies and their knowledge of the PCEA position so that it now lies in the hands of the respective Presbyteries to examine them.

Church & Nation

The brothers on this Committee have the mandate to speak in the name of the PCEA on public issues of faith and conduct. To do this they identified a

number of issues relating to Christians living in our secular society and a brief outline of Biblical teaching was formulated. Thus it was we had statements of 'Yoga' and 'Christians and the right to protest.'

The Committee also formulated brief statements on the issues of homosexual marriage and abortion, which Synod endorsed, and has sent these in a letter to the Prime Minister and Opposition Leader in Federal Parliament. Lord willing, these statements will be published in *The Presbyterian Banner*.

Media

From this Committee reports were received on the ministry of *The Presbyterian Banner* and the PCEA website. *The Presbyterian Banner* continues to be self-supporting and of a high quality in its format. The Editor desires it to be largely made up of local PCEA material. He strongly promoted its hard copy version being increasingly used and distributed. This is ideally done by congregations ordering enough copies for each family in the church with spare copies available for visitors in the foyer.

The Website has been reformatted and continues to be a good gateway



Our Treasurer, Clerk & Moderator

through which many learn about our denomination and its distinctives. The Rev M. Gavin Smith was thanked by acclamation for his work over a number of years as the Webmaster and the Rev David Kerridge now takes this over.

Inter-Church Relations

In September this year the International Conference of Reformed Churches is meeting in Cardiff, Wales,



Dennis Muldoon introduces Vijay Tagore

United Kingdom. The Convenor of the Committee, the Rev. George Ball, and the Rev Rowland Ward, are our two delegates. Rowland is attending particularly as there are some key constitutional matters being dealt with. Present with us at Synod were two Clerks of other denominations – Elder Pieter van der Wel from the Reformed Churches of New Zealand (consisting of 17 churches and 3 preaching posts), and Elder John Coles from the Southern Presbyterian Church in Tasmania (consisting of two churches in Hobart and Launceston). They both spoke to Synod. Pieter spoke of the increasing odds we find ourselves at with society. He also spoke of the changed relations the RCNZ have with the Christian Reformed Churches of Australia. Their relationship to each other has been changed but how that will exactly work out remains to be seen. John spoke of the warm fellowship locally between the SPC and the PCEA, and the desire to continue and develop this.

Missions Speakers

Wednesday night was 'Missions Night' and we heard from three different areas of mission. The first of these was from Vijay Tagore, who lectures at the Reformed Theological Seminary in Dehra Dun, North India. He is a minister in the Reformed Presbyterian Church of India, a fellow member of the ICRC. He spoke of their continued growth but also of increased persecution.

Then the Rev Bruce Christian spoke on behalf of Christian Witness to Israel. He outlined the present situation in Australia with the Mission, prefacing this with how it was he became introduced to this Mission when a minister of the Rose Bay PCNSW. He warmly thanked the PCEA for their ongoing involvement and support of this work. Then our own inimitable Trevor Leggott spoke of his ongoing work with the Australian Indigenous Ministries.



Bruce Christian from CWI

There have been some encouragements of late amongst some of the aboriginal groups with a strong thirst for God's Word and Will. There are also more leaders coming out of the ranks of aboriginal believers. We were glad to hear this and commended this and the other missions to our Lord in prayer.

Money Matters

The Rev Rowland Ward presented the Superannuation report, which was warmly appreciated. He spoke briefly of the developments in Synod's provision for the retirement of its ministers over the years, with now government regulation taking over much of this. After 36 years on this Committee Rowland he is retiring from it and for this he received a vote of acclamation. Then Alex Steel presented the Finance Report and the Trust Corporation reports. This included an overall budget for Synod's major working funds. It was encouraging that the growing support from congregations for Trevor Leggott's work in AIM meant less needed to be drawn out of Synod funds — which have rapidly depleted.

Break up of a Committee

It sounds a bit sad, doesn't it? Breaking up is very rarely seen as positive. But in this case Synod simply returned one committee into the three it originally was – so there are now separate Administration, Inter-Church Relations, and Law & Advisory Committees. For a number of years these three had

been put together but it was found there are different skill-sets needed for each one and so they have been divided up again this way.

And in conclusion...

Synod concluded with the reports of the examiners on the various Presbytery records. The Rev Jim Klazinga of our Brisbane congregation was appointed Moderator-Elect for 2014-15, and, as indicated at the



Trevor Leggott from AIM

beginning, Wauchope was decided upon as the place we meet next year. The time we meet then was not exactly decided but one imagines it will be similar to this time. The moderator thanked the Rev M. Gavin Smith for his years of service in our denomination and wished him and Janet the Lord's blessing as they return to Scotland. The moderator in turn was thanked for his leading of the Synod and his devotional addresses. Then the moderator thanked the members of Synod for their participation, the Clerk, the Treasurer and the Precentor during Synod for their work, and expressed the thanks of the court to the Hastings congregation for hosting the Synod and for their hospitality.



Churches in the Banner

Synod 2013



Clockwise from top left: Our friendly and most helpful Wauchope folk; Initial meeting together; Eating together; And then business together.



Synod of Eastern Australia, May 7—9, 2013

*From left to right on bottom floor: Elder I. Hamilton; Rev. D. Muldoon; Elders D. Hamilton; Rev. S. Bajema; Elder D. Boehret; Elder A. Steel; Revs. R. Ward; A. Miranda; Elder D. Manley; Rev's P. Smith; G. Ball
 First Row behind on steps: Revs. J. (Jim) Cromarty; A. Scheepers; Elder T. Reeve
 Second Row (roughly): Rev's D. Kerridge; J. McCallum; Elder R. Lawson; Rev. G. Smith
 Back Row (roughly): Elder. J. Coles (SPC); Rev. J.. Klazinga; T. Leggott; Elders P. van der Wel (RCNZ), J. Kerridge; R. Campbell*