

*The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it,  
for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp.  
Revelation 21:23*

**the presbyterian  
banner**

June 2011

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ISSN 0729-3542

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Subscriptions for 2011  
11 Issues per year (Note new prices)  
*Within Australia:* \$35 [Bulk \$30]  
*Overseas:* AU \$50 Airmail.

Direct Credit :  
Bendigo (BSB) 633000  
A/C No. 140124082

## Editorial

When you go to the Annual General Meeting of a secular organisation, you will meet facts and figures. Facts and figures which will be dressed up, mind you! The overall financial situation of that company from the previous financial year will be portrayed in the most positive way possible. And how do they do that?

I think we all know, don't we? It's all about the bottom line. What those share-holders want to know is what kind of a return they can expect on their money. And woe betide the meeting where there is not a healthy dividend for them! The share-holders' cries for accountability will be long and loud. There may even be a demand for a new CEO, or at least a change in the membership of the Board, especially in regard to the Chairman.

When the economy is a bit tough, being one of the governing officers is not easy. While the millions of dollars some of them receive now in salary and bonuses might seem a bit exorbitant, we can appreciate they do deserve an appropriate remuneration. A six-figure package is a fair reward!

Some congregational AGMs are a bit like those secular annual meetings. That might surprise you, but it is very true. Unfortunately the spirit of the world has crept into the Church of Christ. And while we knew that already with the obviously secular practices of management many modern churches use and teach, it also appears in the AGMs of many conservative congregations. Some members go to those meetings demanding to know why there is so much being spent on photocopying and petrol in the minister's car. There was even one member who used to follow the minister around to make sure the car was only used for church use!

The sad thing is, however, that for many who go to those meetings prepared like that, it shows up more of what they're really like than it does about the leadership in the church. One experienced church treasurer, who had endured such questions over many years at congregational meetings, said to me that whenever a member stood up to ask the inevitable negative question like that, he knew how much said member was actually giving to the church in the offering. Now, he was a treasurer in a church where there were numbered envelopes and so he actually did know what the members gave. Yet it was so sad to hear him say that the members constantly raising that criticism actually gave next to nothing to the church. Yes, you heard it right! They gave nothing, or very little at all. And it's not as though they weren't blessed as much as anyone else in the church. In fact, often they had very successful businesses or were well-paid tradesmen. But they don't give.

I mean, it wasn't as though they themselves had received very little materially from the Lord. It wasn't as if they could plead poverty or extenuating circumstances. And they wouldn't say that anyway. What would be the purpose? After all, isn't this their church? Yes, you heard me right! Membership of the church is theirs by right.

Now, we've heard quite a bit of that sort of talk out there in the world, haven't we? It seems everyone has rights and no one has privileges! This means, of course, that such thinking and such action, is far removed from the gospel. As someone very perceptively said once, 'Our talents are the gift God gives to us... What we make of those talents is our gift back to God.' This is exactly the way Paul puts it in Ephesians 4. Leading up to verse 7 it's clear that all we have and are is from God — through and through. And so when verse 7 speaks of the grace each one of us has been given, we see that it comes as the most precious privilege. A privilege that is useless unless we use that grace to serve God.

Indeed, from the verses 8 till 16, it's clear where that grace has to go. It has to be focused on worshiping and serving the Lord through the Body of Christ — the Church. There is no sense of 'self' in any of these verses — nor anywhere else in Scripture. His Word is all about His Self! Perhaps here is a good point to let that church treasurer have the final word. He said that those who put the most into the church were the least in complaining. He never found them negative. Rather, they were always willing to go the extra mile to help. They say, 'If you want something done, ask a busy man,' and that's so true of those folk — because they are always praying and working for the Church of Christ. They love their Mother — and all because of that sense of ultimate privilege because the Father chose them through Jesus Christ.

Dear friend, is that where the Lord finds you? Can those around you see in you the grace Christ has given to you?

Cover Photo Credit: Eileen Loudon

**The Presbyterian Banner** is the official magazine of the Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia. The PCEA was established in 1846 and adheres to the Westminster Confession of Faith (1647) as its doctrinal standard.

Literary contributions are welcome. Submission by email is preferred.

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## 'Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God'.

### Considering Romans 1: 18—32

George Ball

The title is hardly original, but it seems to capture the theme of this paragraph. Paul has given us a summary of the gospel in verses 16-17. The gospel is good news. It's all about salvation, righteousness and life. All the things that we need, but don't have.

The apostle knows not everyone is convinced that they need the gospel. So in the next couple of chapters (until 3: 20) he will set out with painstaking thoroughness the natural condition of men and women. He acts like a surgeon who uses his scalpel to expose a devastating and fatal human condition; and as a lawyer who uses systematic argument and penetrating logic to prosecute his argument, which will lead to an inescapable verdict: 'Guilty!' Before we are convinced of our need of the good news, we need to hear the bad news. Before we are convinced of our need of a Saviour, we need to know why we need a Saviour.

The Church today is guilty of neglecting (even omitting) and rushing over the diagnosis in its race to offer the prescription. The result is that Jesus is often offered like an ecstasy pill. He'll give you a thrill. But once the thrill and excitement vanishes the new 'believer' is left disillusioned and confused. The late Frances Schaeffer once said that if he had one hour to explain the gospel he would spend the first 50 minutes on the bad news, and 10 mins on the good news. We need to know the bad news first. The bad news is not very appealing, and is not very popular with many. It deals with such themes as the wrath of God, sin and the judgement of God. But this is where we must begin.

#### The Wrath of God is Real

Another word for wrath is anger (Greek = *orgy*). Some people get disturbed at this. They think that this is somehow unworthy of God. God should not get angry! Is God like one of us? Does He lose his temper? Does He 'see red'? Does He fly off the handle? Does He lose the rag? Does He get mad? Is He irritable and moody? To think like this is to make

God in our image.

God's wrath is not capricious. His wrath is His controlled and permanent and holy opposition to all sin. 'It is his strong and settled opposition to all that is evil arising out of His very nature.' (Morris). It is not a whim; not blind fury; not a mere emotional moment. God never goes 'over the top', never loses His temper. But it's the reaction of His glorious and perfect nature to sin. It's the inevitable reaction of One who is utterly good to what is evil. God hates sin with a perfect hatred. Just as He loves with a perfect love, He also hates with a perfect hate. The two are perfectly compatible – just as we see (albeit imperfectly) in any good parent. A mother's love is unconditional – but such love is not a blank cheque to misbehave. If God did not have this perfect anger he would not be God. What kind of God would He be if He was indifferent or morally neutral to evil? I recall in November 1988, our manse in South Armagh was damaged — the result of a massive 500 pound bomb planted by the IRA. Most of the windows were blown in, and great damage was done. Some assessors from the Northern Ireland Office came to inspect the damage and determine the level of compensation. One of these men knew me or at least knew of me because he knew my parents. He inspected the wreckage. He never spoke to me. He never said anything to me. He completely ignored me. An outrageous evil had been perpetrated. Wicked men had sought to kill and destroy. Yet he said nothing! He appeared indifferent. Understandably, I have never forgotten!

What would you think of a God like that? One who didn't care? One who was indifferent to the evil and malicious acts of men and women? That kind of God would no longer be God. He would forfeit the right! I'm glad that our God has a righteous anger against sin and wickedness. His wrath is real.

#### The Wrath of God Has a Reason

(v.18)

*'God's wrath is being revealed*

*against all godlessness (asebeia) and wickedness (adikia) of men' (v.18).*

God is angry with men. It's sometimes said, 'God loves the sinner but hates the sin.' Can you, however, separate the sinner from his sin? Sin does not exist in a vacuum. Sin is not something abstract. It is with sinners that God is angry, and it is precisely this that constitutes the sinners predicament. God's wrath has a reason.

He is against all godlessness and wickedness: one follows the other as night follows day. Godlessness is the root, wickedness is the fruit.

Godlessness constitutes our relationship with God; wickedness is the result, seen in our actions toward one another.

Godlessness is described in verses 21-23. 'They neither glorified God nor gave thanks to him.' What is godlessness? It is 'God-less-ness'. It is man's attempt to rob God of His 'God-ness' in order to steal it for himself. Godlessness is rebellion against God's majesty and authority; it's a determination to rule God out of one's thinking and conduct. It takes us back to Genesis 3. Man sought to topple God from His righteous rule. Man sought to make himself the centre of the universe and be 'number one'. He usurped the place of God.

*'Nor did they give Him thanks (v.21).*

The Scriptures exhort us to: 'Give thanks to the Lord for He is good.' 'Sing to the Lord with thanksgiving.' 'Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise.' 'Give thanks in all circumstances, etc.' Thanks is the great unpaid bill. God is to be thanked. Yet, countless millions go through the average day with no conscious appreciation of God's goodness or kindness to them, and without ever giving thanks to Him for his gracious provision of their needs. Even when the phrase, 'Thank God' is used, it is usually meaningless. But consider this: failure to thank God is not mere weakness or forgetfulness, but wickedness. Remember Jesus question,

'Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine? Was no one found to return and give praise God except this foreigner?' (Luke 17: 17-18). Failing to give thanks to God is a great evil. It devalues us. It puts us on the same level as the animal. Have you ever seen a pig give thanks to God before eating its food? Of course not! Yet many people behave no better than pigs! Wickedness, the fruit of godlessness, is described in verses 24-32. The fruit is rotten and repulsive. Some people think that these verses should not be read in public! The disgusting fruit includes shameful lusts, lesbianism, homosexuality, evil, greed, depravity, envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice, gossip, slander, God haters, insolent, arrogance, boasting, disobedience, endorsement of evil, etc. It's a slippery slope – it just gets worse.

The Bible calls a spade a spade. It says plainly that homosexual practice is sinful in God's eyes. This however does not give us reason to be homophobic. The homosexual is often seen as a modern day leper; as a disgusting pervert; as an irretrievable sinner. We need however to restore some balance. What they do is sinful; but we need to remember that such people are still human beings though sinful. Jesus is the friend of sinners. These people need Jesus! Paul reminds the Corinthians believers; 'this is what some of you were; but you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.' (1 Cor. 6: 11). John Newton once said, 'I have never despaired of any man since God saved me.'

### **The Wrath of God is Righteous** (vs. 19-20)

Might God be unfair? Might His wrath be too severe and unjust, especially toward those who have never heard the gospel or never seen a Bible? The answer is 'No!' God has made Himself plain to everyone. God is not hiding away in some remote unreachable part of the universe; nor does He play hard to get. Instead He has provided us with a massive and spectacular visual aid to assure us of His existence and presence – the entire created order. It's like one gi-

ant billboard. This concept is what we call 'general revelation.' It's 'general' because it's for everyone to see. Psalm 19 speaks about it: 'The heavens declare the glory of God, the skies proclaim the work of His hands, etc.' Creation proclaims the handiwork of God. As a result, men and women are without excuse. Everyone is aware that there is a God who is supreme. 'Nobody can plead that he is ignorant of the existence of God. It can clearly be seen there is an unseen' (Olyott).

'There is enough evidence of God in a flower, in a tree, a pebble, a grain of sand, a fingerprint, in a bowl of rice, to make us glorify God and thank him'.

Our problem is not lack of evidence or information! Instead, 'men suppress the truth by their wickedness' (v.18). They refuse to recognise the fact and face up to its evidence. The motorist who ignores the traffic lights or the road signs can argue all day with the police officer – but it doesn't alter the fact that he drove through a red light! Signs are there to be seen and obeyed. The swimmer who ignores the flags on the beach is courting trouble. The evidence for God all around is incontrovertible. Tiger Woods suppressed the truth about his private life and hid it from his wife. But the truth cannot be suppressed successfully. He knew the truth. Others soon came to know. His wife came to know. Soon the whole world came to know. Strictly speaking there is no such thing as an atheist – one who says there is no God. There are anti-theists: those who refuse to acknowledge God, those who do not like the thought of God. But an atheist has to suppress the truth to remain consistent.

Someone has said that, 'for an atheist to find God is as difficult as a thief to find a policeman... and for the same reason!' An atheist is a man on the run! The problem is not lack of evidence or ignorance. It's a moral problem. It's not that man does not know God – but that man does not like this God! His problem is rebellion, which he needs to repent of. That's why God is angry. That's what makes the gospel necessary and urgent. We are sinners in the hands of an angry God. We need to be

saved from His wrath.

### **The Wrath of God is Revealed** (vs. 18, 24, 26, and 28)

'The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven.' (v.18a). Just as God's righteousness is being revealed in the gospel (v.17); so God's wrath is likewise being revealed in judgement (v.18). Both these aspects of God's character are constantly being revealed.

Don't think for a moment that God has abandoned the world or that He is unable to act in judgement. No! God is actively and constantly expressing his righteous judgement in human history.

The Bible records some spectacular examples of this: e.g. the flood, the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, the plagues on Egypt, the destruction of Sennacherib and his army, the punishment upon Uzziah, the judgement on Nadab and Abihu, etc. In the New Testament we read of God coming in judgement upon Ananias and Sapphira, Herod Agrippa 1, and others. The Bible also makes it very plain that God has appointed a **Day of wrath** - the day of judgement – the last day in which He will judge the world in righteousness.

What Paul is here emphasising is that judgement is being revealed now — right in front of our eyes! We read three times that, 'God gave them over' to their sinful ways (vs. 24, 26, and 28). He has abandoned them – what a terrible punishment! As though God said to them, 'Enough is enough. Have it your way. Depart from Me. Do your own thing and pay the consequences.' C.S. Lewis comments perceptively that, 'they enjoy forever the horrible freedom they have demanded.' The freedom they craved is a poisoned cup. The freedom proves to be a horrible bondage. It's the story of the Garden of Eden repeated. The freedom promised and anticipated brought only bondage to sin. Instead of reaching the heights, they sank to the depths. This is the wrath of God being revealed in action. True freedom is not found running away from God, but in coming to God and doing His will.

**None of us can afford to be com-**

**placent or to point the finger at the wicked world.** The sins listed in verses 29-31 come a bit closer to the bone for many of us. None of us is immune from these things. We may, by the grace of God, have been prevented from the 'grosser sins.' But none of us can claim innocence! None of us is free from strife or deceit or malice or gossip or slander or arro-

gance or boasting. What makes it worse however, is when people who should know better, just continue to sin without any regret, even applauding the sins of others (v.32). Paul, the lawyer has presented his devastating case against us. The surgeon has exposed our fatal condition. We are all guilty before God. We have no excuse. We have nowhere to hide.

We have no defence. We need to be saved from the wrath of God. Only God can deliver us from His wrath. That's why we need the gospel. 'For in the gospel righteousness from God is revealed.' 'How shall we escape if we ignore such a great salvation?' (Heb. 2: 3).

## Life under the Banner

### *The Quieted Soul (II)*

In the midst of a noisy, cluttered world in turmoil, we are in desperate need of peace. We long for the quieted soul. Is it possible to have one? Psalm 131 shows us how.

The first half of Psalm 131:1 tells us, 'Lord, my heart is not haughty, nor my eyes lofty.' The psalmist is basically saying here: I am not proud.

Part 1 of this article in last month's Banner focused on this matter. Having a pride-filled heart is the opposite of having a quieted heart. Pride simply precludes any real possibility of peace, either peace within yourself or peace with God.

Moving on now, the second half of verse 1 also shows us the opposite of the quieted soul: 'I do not concern myself with great matters, or things too wonderful for me.'

What is described here in the second half of verse 1 is very closely related to the first half. The thing is, while the first half of this verse refers to what is commonly thought of in our society as self-esteem, this second half relates to what is commonly spoken of as self-fulfillment.

Our society tells us to be all we can be. Reach for the stars. There are no limits to what you can do. This kind of thinking does not lead to peace.

Now please understand, we should in fact be all we can be. But we need to understand this in the proper manner. Consider the parable of the talents, found in Matthew 25. We read there about three servants who were each given by their master a different number of talents (a talent was a monetary unit worth more than \$1000). One servant was given five talents, and with that money earned five more

talents. Another servant was given two talents, and he went on to make two more talents. A third servant was given just one talent, but the only thing he did with it was hide it away by burying it. Needless to say, his master was not too happy with him. Each servant given talents was expected to do the best they could do. And the same goes for us. We are called to be diligent with what we have been given.



But the thing is, there are limits. The servant given two talents was not expected to do what the one given five talents did. Rather, he did what he could with what he had. And he was commended for it.

One of the keys to finding peace is to recognise our role and do the best that we can within that role. And the simple truth is that God does place certain limits on the roles we are called to fill.

### *Jim Klazinga*

For instance, to use an extreme example: can a blind person have the role of being a pilot for a passenger airline? That wouldn't really make sense, would it?

Is that unfair? Not really. It's simply realistic.

Now, if such a person were to say, 'I want to be an airline pilot no matter what, and it's not fair that God has made it so difficult for me to be an airline pilot,' he is not going to be at peace, is he? For him to have a quieted soul, he has to realise that he has a different role to fill.

#### **Different roles**

To further illustrate this truth, consider a more controversial example: the Bible clearly distinguishes between the different roles assigned to men and women in the marriage relationship and in the Church. Is this because they are unequal, having different worth in the eyes of God? Absolutely not. It's simply a matter of having different responsibilities.

Is this unfair? Is God unfair? God is God, and He is the one who sets the roles that we are to fill. If we are to have true peace, both men and women need to understand their different roles and abide by them. Mind you, this kind of thinking is completely foreign to everything our feministic anti-authoritarian culture tries to pump into us. We are told there are no set roles. Do whatever you want to do. Don't let anyone tell you there is something you can't do. This type of thinking has even led some to go so far as to say that we can become gods. But only God is

God. Only He can do truly wondrous and marvelous things. Only He has no limits.

It is pride that says there are no limits for us. Sinful pride makes us think that we can do anything we want to do. Sinful pride makes us envious. It makes us think it's not fair that we can't do things that others might be able to do.

And this type of sinful pride does not lead to peace. When we try to make ourselves into gods, we will be cast down. When we try to reach beyond ourselves, we will be gravely disappointed.

We can only have a quieted soul when we are able to say with the Psalmist, 'My heart is not proud, O LORD, my eyes are not haughty; I do not concern myself with great matters or things too wonderful for me.'

Well, having looked at verse 1 of Psalm 131, seeing how the world's ideas on self-esteem and self-fulfillment do not lead to the quieted soul, let's proceed to consider verse 2 of this Psalm. 'But I have stilled and quieted my soul; like a weaned child with its mother, like a weaned child is my soul within me.'

Being like a weaned child can lead to peace? But some children don't appreciate being weaned. Breast-feeding is a form of comfort for them, and they don't enjoy having that comfort taken away. So why does the Psalmist use this kind of language? To help understand this, consider these words written by one of the great Puritan pastors, Thomas Manton. This quote is written in old English, but hopefully the meaning should come across: 'Though the weaned child has not what it would have, or what it naturally most desireth, the milk of the breast - yet it is contented with what the mother giveth — it rests upon her love and provision. So are we to be content with what providence alloweth us: Hebrews 8:5, 'Let your conversation be without covetousness, and be content with such things as ye have'; and Philippians 4:11, 'I have learned, in whatever state I am, therewith to be content.' Whatever pleaseth our heavenly Father should please us... The child, when it hath lost the food which nature provideth for it, is not solicitous, but wholly refereth itself to the mother, hangeth upon the mother. So for everything whatso-

ever should we depend upon God, refer ourselves to God, and expect all things from him: Psalm 62:5, 'My soul, wait thou only upon God; for my expectation is from him.'

As the weaned child is still dependent upon his mother for everything, so we must be dependent upon God. No matter how mature in the faith we become, we will always be completely dependent on the providing care of our great heavenly Father.

### One of the keys

Here is one of the keys to the quieted soul: recognising your total dependence on God and putting your trust completely in Him.

Oh, our sinful pride gets in the way. It tells us we must rely on ourselves. It tells us that if we want to get something done, we have to do it ourselves.

But this will not work. This will only lead to strife: strife with others, and strife within ourselves. We have to give everything into the hands of the Lord.

My friend, do you have some sin that is dominating your life? Recognise your complete dependence on God in dealing with it. Is there some struggle that you are going through that is eating you up inside? Trust in the Lord to give you the peace you need. Are doubts and questions plaguing your soul? Rest in the Lord's promises for His people. Is someone or something making your life miserable? Give it up into the hands of the Lord. Trust in His love. Rely on His Word. That is the most we can do. That is the best we can do.

Of course, depending on the Lord is not something we can use as an excuse to do nothing ourselves. We have no right to say, 'Well, only God can help me, so why even bother trying?' Rather, when we commit everything to the Lord, when we recognise our total dependence on Him, confess our complete reliance on Him, when we look to Him as our only source of comfort and peace, then He gives us what we need to carry on. In and of ourselves, we can do nothing. But with Him lifting us, we have strength to move forward.

What this all means is neatly summarised for us in the third verse of this Psalm: 'O Israel, put your hope in the Lord both now and forevermore.' O

Israel, hope in the Lord. O people of God, put your trust in the Lord. There you have it. This is the foundation for having a quieted soul. To hope in the Lord. To depend on the Lord. To look to Him alone for comfort and strength. To rely not on oneself, but only on Him who is the source of all good things. And to know that He is ultimately faithful. There is no purer joy than this, no mightier strength, there is no more lasting comfort than this: to hope in the Lord, to trust in the only Saviour Jesus Christ.

This might sound somewhat idealistic to you. Sure, sure, hope in the Lord. But what about our suffering? What about all the pain we experience? Well, having the quieted soul does not mean we will not have to undergo struggles.

Having a quieted soul is not an escape from reality. The peace of God is not like the peace of the drug-induced coma. Rather, the peace we have from God enables us to get a grip on reality. It gives us the strength to face reality.

Without this strength, you will be lost. It's that simple.

There is no other way. We in our pride might think there is another way, but we in our pride will be cast down, we will be humbled.

Jesus said we must become as children, relying on Him, casting all our burdens on Him. Then we can know peace. Then we can know what it means to have the quieted soul.

My friend, are you suffering from having a noisy soul? Does the noise of this sinful world weigh you down? Is your own sinfulness stirring up pain and misery in your heart, so that you do not know peace, so that you do not know the quiet that comes from God?

Come to the quiet, the peace, the shalom, that can only be found in the crucified Saviour Jesus Christ, who shed His blood on the cross to pay the punishment for your sins. He humbled Himself for you. He sacrificed Himself for you. And so, repent of your pride. Humble yourself. Look to Him. Find your hope in his promises. Put your trust completely on the One who cares for you, your heavenly Father.



# The Past for Today

## PCEA Origins in Victoria

Last time, we looked at Presbyterian origins in Melbourne and the coming of Rev James Forbes (1813-51) as the first permanent Christian minister in January 1838. Forbes served Scots' Church. The present site on the corner of Russell and Collins Streets was secured from the government. Forbes had a brick schoolhouse erected in Collins Street in 1839. The school operated most effectively. The first permanent church was erected on the corner facing Collins Street and was used without internal finishing from 3 October 1841. A modest manse soon appeared between the two buildings and was extended shortly prior to Forbes' marriage to Helen Clow in 1845.

Forbes was the founding honorary secretary of the *British and Foreign Bible Society* auxiliary founded in 1840, chairman of the *Port Phillip Theological Education Society*, assisted in the founding of what is now the *Royal Melbourne Hospital* and the *Melbourne Debating Society*, all in 1841. In 1845, he inaugurated the *Presbyterian Female Visiting Society*. As society was not narrowly denominational in 1847, it was renamed the *Melbourne Ladies Benevolent Society*. He supported aboriginal missions established by Wesleyans and Baptists, and was a true friend of all. Forbes then sought more ministers. He obtained Andrew Love for Geelong in 1840 and Thomas Mowbray (Campbellfield), Alex Laurie (Portland) and Peter Gunn (Gaelic, Melbourne) in 1842. The Synod approved the forming of the Presbytery of Melbourne, which held its first meeting 7 June 1842. With the exception of Mowbray, the other recruits were strongly attached to the Established Church of Scotland [ECS]. When that church was divided in 1843, the Australian Synod said it agreed with Free Church principles concerning the independence of the Church under Christ her Head, but ultimately refused to act consistently on this profession by breaking her legal and

moral connection with the ECS which had accepted the interference of the State in her spiritual affairs.

### The Free Presbyterian Church

At the Synod of Australia in connection with the ECS meeting in October 1846, several members led by Rev William McIntyre of Maitland protested. They withdrew and formed the PCEA. Forbes was not present at that meeting, but agreed with McIntyre. Like McIntyre and his *Voice in the Wilderness*, Forbes had also begun a magazine in January 1846 to explain his views and to further Christian interests. Called the *Port Phillip Christian Herald*, it was the first Christian newspaper in Victoria. Because of the isolation and potential that he saw in Port Phillip District, Forbes formed a distinct body, the Free Presbyterian Church [FPC], that refused to accept state aid whether in the form of land or building grants. Forbes wished to bring in moderate United Presbyterian ministers who shared this view. The policy held until 1853, when the Gold Rush brought a revolution in conditions in society.

Forbes considered that he had been 'surrounded by icebergs' in the Presbytery and was glad enough to give up his handsome stipend of £350pa and start again. The larger part of the congregation followed him, although only one of the active elders, Henrie



Collins Street from Scotch Kirk – etching by Henry Gilbert Jones ca. 1842

Bell, merchant, did so. Forbes had significant support but ministers were difficult to come by, given the needs of the newly formed Free Church of Scotland. Forbes built John Knox

## Rowland S. Ward



Rev James Forbes

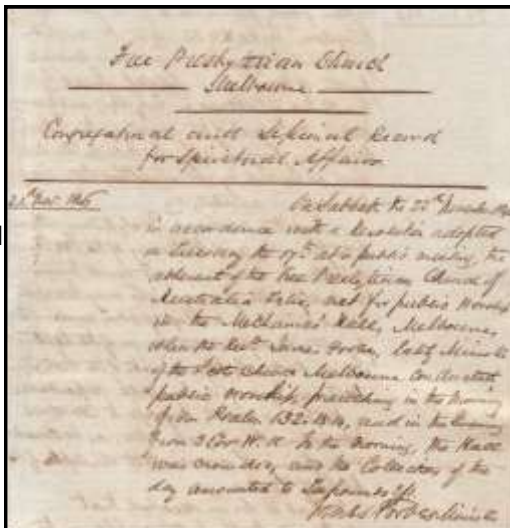
FPC on the corner of Swanston and Little Lonsdale Streets, facing Little Lon and so looking down towards the Yarra. It was opened 7 May 1848.

Like many buildings of that era it had construction defects and was rebuilt in 1863, facing Swanston Street, and opened on 26 July of that year by Rev William McIntyre with seating for about 400. No clear photograph exists of the first building but it appears to have been rather similar to the second building which, since 1879, has housed the Church of Christ congregation. Forbes also erected John Knox School, and a manse was built in 1850.

He then sought to obtain additional ministers for the Free Church. He apparently offended the Irish Church by some critical remarks on individual Irish ministers who had not stood with him in 1846, so assistance came chiefly from the Free Church of Scotland. Thomas Hastie came from Tasmania in January 1847 and was settled at Buninyong

and The Leigh, while Rev J.Z. Huie became minister at Geelong in the same year. Schools were established in both parishes. There was little other help until the population

explosion following the discovery of gold in 1851, the year Forbes died. In 1851, shortly after his death, the Melbourne Academy (soon renamed Scotch College) opened under the supervision of the FPC. It was the culmination of Forbes' extensive work in this area. He has rightly been called *Victoria's First Public Educationist*. The three ministers and Henrie Bell, elder at John Knox, formed the Synod of the Free Presbyterian Church on 9 June 1847. Forbes showed himself an efficient administrator. He not only wrote the Fundamental Act of the Synod (which was adopted also by the Free Presbyterian Church of South Australia upon its formation 9 May 1854) but he drew up rules for the guidance of the church. His own death plus the revolution caused by the Gold Rush meant his careful positions were modified to facilitate union



First minute of the Free Presbyterian Church, 22 November 1846

into the Presbyterian Church of Victoria in 1859. His strong stance against

receiving state aid on an indiscriminate basis was modified in 1853. In 1859, the majority of the FPC united with others to form the Presbyterian Church of Victoria [PCV]. A number of congregations stood out and were expelled for opposing union. The FCS also refused to recognise them and the continuers divided in 1864, with some joining the PCV in 1867. Ironically, the three parishes that ultimately continued the Free Presbyterian Church of Victoria and united with the Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia in 1953 — East St Kilda (Chapel Street), Geelong (Myers Street) and Hamilton/Bransholme — had all benefited from state aid.

## Address to Synod 2011

### 'The Great Commission' - Matthew 28:18-20

George Ball

I wish to focus your attention on the most famous commission in the Bible — the 'Great Commission.' (It has also been cynically called the 'Great Omission') Though found at the end of the gospel, these words are no mere Post Script — no mere afterthought. They form an essential part of the gospel story. These words are the climax and grand conclusion to the great gospel event. Just 50 words (in Greek) — yet these words have had a pre-eminent place in the history of the Christian church and mission. Thousands of sermons have been preached on these verses. We are very familiar with them. There's nothing new here. You've heard the Great Commission preached on before. That, of course, has its dangers. You may be waiting to hear what you already know. In any event, we need to be reminded of the familiar. Let us then pray, 'Lord, open my eyes that I may see wondrous things out of your law.'

The risen Jesus met with His disciples on a mountain in Galilee and revealed His authority. Mountain tops are very important in the Bible as places of special revelation. Whether we think of Moriah, or Sinai, or Carmel, or the

Sermon on the Mount, or the Mount of Transfiguration, or Golgotha, or this mountain in Galilee. Interesting that Jesus begins and ends His ministry in 'Galilee of the Gentiles' (Matt. 4: 12-25).

\*Why do we call it the Great Commission? Let me suggest three reasons. Because it contains:-

1. **The Greatest of all Claims** (v.18) **Jesus said, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me'**. That's a brain buster! A staggering, mind-boggling claim! Jesus claims universal authority and supremacy over everything; everyone; everywhere! One of the significant features of the Great Commission is the four-fold repetition of the word, 'all'. Jesus claims to have 'all authority'. His disciples will come from 'all nations'. They will be taught to obey 'all things' and finally Jesus promises to be with us 'all the days' or always. You ask, 'Did Jesus not have all authority prior to this?' Of course He did. That has been stressed in the Gospels. E.g. Jesus taught with authority. He had authority to forgive sins; He had authority over people; He had authority over nature; He had

authority over demons; He had authority over death. He had authority as the Servant King whose glory upon earth was veiled. Now, however, after completing His work, after the Cross and His glorious resurrection, He is publicly honoured and rewarded with this position as the exalted Mediator King.

He now claims ALL authority in heaven. To have this authority Jesus must be God Himself. He has authority over the angels and the saints. Paul agrees; he states that God 'raised Him from the dead and seated Him at the right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age, but also in the one to come.' (Eph. 1: 20-21). And, 'God exalted Him to the highest place and gave Him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth.' (Phil. 2: 9-10). He claims ALL authority on earth. 'For He must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet' (1 Cor. 15: 25). He is 'King of kings and Lord of lords' (Rev. 20: 16). He



is the 'Governor among the nations' (Ps. 22: 28). 'Jesus is Lord'. Abraham Kuyper has famously said, 'There is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is Sovereign over all, does not cry, 'Mine!' What does this mean in practice? It means He has authority over the political world: over Kings, Queens, Governors, PMs, MPs, etc.; who all have a responsibility to recognise, obey and serve Him. ('Kiss the Son ...' Psalm 2: 12)

It means He has authority over the natural world: the land, the sea, the clouds, the wind, the rain, the floods, the sun, the climate (yes; He even controls the climate change!)

It means He has authority over the economic world: over the bull market and the bear market, the shares, the Footsie, the Dow Jones. He has authority over the church accounts and authority over your personal bank account!

It means He has authority over the academic world: over Vice Chancellors, Academic Deans, lecturers, students, Headmasters, Teachers, pupils, and parents.

It means He has authority over the scientific world: whether it is Richard Dawkins or Stephen Hawkings or Tim Flannery.

It means He has authority over the entertainment world: the T.V., the movie makers, the music industry.

It means He has authority over our own personal world.

It means He has authority over families: over husbands, wives, children, etc.

He has authority over every individual: over men and women, young and old, rich and poor, black and white, married and single, gays and straights, simple and wise, healthy and sick, powerful and powerless, Labour and Liberal, Greens and Independents, Christians and non Christians, angels and demons, living and dead, Buddha and Mohammed, etc.!

All must bow the knee. All ought to recognise Him and honour Him.

\*And of course He has authority over the Church! 'God placed all things under His feet and appointed Him to be head over everything for the Church, which is His body' (Eph. 1: 22). 'He is the head of the Body, the Church' (Col. 1: 18).

The implications of this are many! I mention only two: -

1- Christ is the only King and Head of the church. He (and He alone) must rule over the Church's life and doctrine and worship. We are not free to organise these things as we might like. Everything must be subject to the will of Christ as revealed in His Word. No one must usurp the position of Christ in the Church. Remember Andrew Melville's courageous and famous admonition to James VI?

'There are two kings and two kingdoms in Scotland: there is King James the head of this commonwealth, and there is Christ Jesus, the King of the Church, whose subject James VI is, and of whose kingdom he is not a king, nor a lord, nor a head, but a member'.

2- Such a great claim presents us with a unique Christ who provides us with a unique salvation. Nowadays, when tolerance seems the supreme virtue, it is common to find religions described as different paths to the top of the same mountain or as different tributaries flowing into the same river. Oprah Winfrey (one of the most powerful and influential women today) has said, 'One of the biggest mistakes human beings make is to believe there is only one way. Actually, there are many diverse paths leading to what you call God.' That's the gospel according to 'O'. It seems a very tolerant and charitable statement. But it's foolish and ridiculous. You might as well say that every road in Melbourne leads to Mountain Highway! It's just plain wrong!

I prefer the Gospel according to Jesus Christ who said, 'I am the way, the truth and the life' and, 'All authority has been given unto Me.'

This great claim, as John Stott reminds us, 'is the fundamental basis of all Christian missionary enterprise... If the authority of Jesus were circumscribed on earth, if He were but one of many religious teachers, one of many Jewish prophets, one of many divine incarnations, we would have no mandate to present Him to the nations as the Lord and Saviour of the world... Only because all authority on earth belongs to Christ dare we go to all nations. And only because all authority in heaven is His as well have we any hope of success.' It's a claim that should put backbone into the life

of the Christian!

## 2. The Greatest of All Commands (v.19)

\*It was given originally to the disciples/apostles; who, let's remember, were not spiritual giants, but were a group of ordinary men prone to failure! Even though they had just proven themselves to be enormous flops, yet Jesus amazingly commissions 'flesh and blood' to carry out His commission – and He still does. The commission should not be limited to the apostles. It has never been rescinded; it is still binding on the people of God. It is still the marching orders of the church. The command is based on the universal lordship of Christ – until the end of time.

What is the command? What is the great commission all about? Is it about evangelism and mission? Yes – but it is more than that. There is only one command here: one main imperative verb in verse 19: '**make disciples.**' (matheteusate). This is the church's prime directive: 'to make disciples' – not decisions or converts – but disciples.

This is the commission which stands at the centre of the Church's mandate.

What is a disciple? The word means 'pupil' or 'student' or 'learner' or 'apprentice'. It was the name used to describe the followers of Jesus – being applied first to the Twelve and then to those who came to believe in Jesus and live under His authority.

When Jesus called for recruits, He asked for the whole person. He wanted disciples who shared His mission and purpose and motivation. He wanted followers who were focused and committed and dedicated to do the will of God. Disciples are men and women who are willing to leave everything behind to follow Jesus. That's what Peter and Andrew did when Jesus called them by the Sea of Galilee.

Jesus spells out the requirements of a disciple, 'If anyone comes after me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters – yes – even his own life – he cannot be my disciple. And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be

my disciple' (Luke 14: 26-27).

Disciples are to come from 'all nations' — i.e. no longer limited to Jews (though not excluding them!) All peoples are included in the commission. How is the command to be fulfilled? There are three present participles (verbal adjectives — 'ing' ending words) which tell us how we are to do it i.e. by going; baptising and teaching.

(a) 'Going' doesn't necessarily mean we need to apply for a passport, or get on a boat or plane — though for some it will involve that. We are to 'go'. The word 'go' at least implies that the message of the gospel will not spread by itself. It's up to God's people to get the message out. If the world will not come to the Church, the Church must go to the world. Jesus took the gospel to the people — on the hillside, by the seashore, at the dinner party. Paul preached in the market place, where people were to be found. Our temptation is to be satisfied when we open the door of the sheepfold twice on Sundays at 10 and 4 — hoping that some lost sheep may happen to wander in. The

Good Shepherd knows however that many lost sheep cannot find the safety of the fold. They are trapped in the mire of sin, entangled in the thicket of evil habits, too foolish to find the way and too weak to travel the distance. So what does He do? He goes into the mountains and valleys; to the cliffs and crevices where the sheep are liable to be. He seeks that lost sheep because He is moved with compassion — and so should we. We must go and find men and women where they are and seek to bring them into the safety of the fold.

(b) 'Baptising into the name of the triune God.' Baptism is the sacrament of initiation into the covenant family of God; it marks entry into membership of the Church. Whatever else baptism implies, here it surely means that Church membership is part and parcel

of discipleship. A disciple will be a member of the Church. Discipleship was never intended to take place outside the Church. The disciple is not a 'Lone Ranger'. He is not a loose body part. He is to function as part of the body of Christ — the Church. The disciple is one who lives under the authority of Christ in His Church as part of the people of God.

(c) 'Teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you'. We are to teach the whole counsel of God. It's not a 10 week blitz and then we're finished! We are to teach and keep on teaching — the whole of the Bible.

The aim of our teaching is practical — 'that they may obey!' Practical obedience is the aim. It's no use possessing the truth if it's not practised. Our task then is bigger and broader and deeper and longer than we often realise.

'The early Church was interested in edification as well as evangelism, in sanctification as well as conversion, in Church government as well as preaching.' (G.W. McKnight).

done my part. I'm going to leave you now with these instructions. Now, get on with it. It's up to you now!' I think He must have taken them by surprise when He said, 'I am with you the whole of every day.'

'In other words, the disciple is not going to be left to serve God as well as he can in the light of what he has learned from the things Jesus commanded. The disciple will find that he has a great companion as he goes on his way through life.' (Morris).

The best way to be sure of His companionship is to be working for Him! It was this promise that sustained David Livingstone — the famous missionary and explorer in Africa. He spent over 16 years struggling with discomfort and physical danger (including being mauled by a lion) and repeated bouts of tropical fever as he sought to make disciples for Christ. He wrote in his diary. 'Would you like me to tell you what supported me through all those years of exile among a people whose language I couldn't understand and

whose attitude toward me was always uncertain and often hostile? It was this, 'Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.' On these words I staked everything and they never failed.' These words were practically the last words of John Wesley when he said: 'the best of all is, God is with us.'

Jesus gives us the promise of His presence so that we will have the confidence to fulfil our Great Com-

Due to popular demand it is proposed to have a:

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Brochures with further details available soon.

Please pray for God's help and blessing as organisation for the camp commences.

(Youth & Fellowship Committee)

### 3. The Greatest of all Companions (Matt.28:20)

**'Surely I am with you always to the very end of the age.'**

This breathtaking promise was not (I'm sure) what the disciples were expecting. We might imagine Jesus saying, 'I've finished my work. I've

mission — which is just as urgent today as it was when Jesus stood on that mountain in Galilee.

# The World in the Banner

## The Old Liberalism Is 'New' Again!

The edition of TIME magazine timed for Easter Week featured a cover story on the controversy over Rob Bell and his new book, *Love Wins*. Interestingly, the essay is written by none other than Jon Meacham, the Pulitzer Prize-winning author and former editor of Newsweek – TIME's historic competitor. Meacham, who studied theology as an undergraduate at the University of the South, helpfully places Rob Bell in the larger context of modern theology, even as he offers a basically sympathetic analysis. Meacham explains: The standard Christian view of salvation through the death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth is summed up in the Gospel of John, which promises 'eternal life' to 'whosoever believeth in Him'. Traditionally, the key is the acknowledgment that Jesus is the Son of God, who, in the words of the ancient creed, 'for us and for our salvation came down from heaven... and was made man.' In the Evangelical ethos, one either accepts this and goes to heaven or refuses and goes to hell. Bell, Meacham writes, 'begs to differ' with this 'standard Christian view'. He then relates that Rob Bell 'suggests that the redemptive work of Jesus may be universal – meaning that, as his book's subtitle puts it, 'every person who ever lived' could have a place in heaven, whatever that turns out to be. Such a simple premise, but with Easter at hand, this slim, lively book has ignited a new holy war in Christian circles and beyond.' Well, 'holy war' is an exaggeration loved by the media, but Bell has obviously ignited a raging controversy within evangelical circles. Meacham then traced something of the reaction to Bell's argument: When word of *Love Wins* reached the Internet, one conservative Evangelical pastor, John Piper, tweeted, 'Farewell Rob Bell', unilaterally attempting to evict Bell from the Evangelical community. R. Albert Mohler Jr., president of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, says Bell's book is 'theologically disastrous. Any of us should be concerned when a matter of theological importance is played

with in a subversive way.' In North Carolina, a young pastor was fired by his church for endorsing the book. All that is a matter of public record now, but what makes Meacham's analysis really interesting is what comes next: The traditionalist reaction is understandable, for Bell's arguments about heaven and hell raise doubts about the core of the Evangelical worldview, changing the common understanding of salvation so much that Christianity becomes more of an ethical habit of mind than a faith based on divine revelation. 'When you adopt universalism and erase the distinction between the church and the world,' says Mohler, 'then you don't need the Church, and you don't need Christ, and you don't need the cross. This is the tragedy of nonjudgmental mainline liberalism, and it's Rob Bell's tragedy in this book too.'

This may mark the first time any major media outlet has underlined the substantial theological issues at stake. Meacham understands what Bell's proposal amounts to – 'changing the common understanding of salvation so much that Christianity becomes more of an ethical habit of mind than a faith based on divine revelation.'

To his credit, Meacham also understands that Bell's argument fits comfortably within the context of Protestant Liberalism. 'Early in the 20th century, Harry Emerson Fosdick came to represent theological liberalism, arguing against the literal truth of the Bible and the existence of hell. It was time, progressives argued, for the faith to surrender its supernatural claims,' he explains. Rob Bell, he suggests, 'is more at home with this expansive liberal tradition than he is with the old-time believers of Inherit the Wind.' Meacham is right about this, of course. Readers may differ with his analysis of other aspects of this controversy, and,

in the end, Jon Meacham seems to admire Rob Bell, whom he describes as 'an odd combination of Billy Graham and Conan O'Brien'. But he understands that the liberal tradition in theology is where Rob Bell now finds his home.

Finally, this may be the most telling portion of the article: Is Bell's Christianity — less judgmental, more fluid, open to questioning the most ancient of assumptions — on an inexorable rise? 'I have long wondered if there is a massive shift coming in what it means to be a Christian,' Bell says. 'Something new is in the air.'

Like Brian McLaren, who argues for 'a new kind of Christianity', Rob Bell now openly wonders 'if there is a massive shift coming in what it



## A Bible ministry for all ages



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means to be a Christian'. 'Something new is in the air,' he says. Actually, arguments for universalism and the denial of hell are anything but new. The real question is now whether the Church has sufficient biblical conviction to resist this doctrinal seduction. Otherwise, it may well be that Rob Bell's 'massive shift' is the shape of things to come.

*From the blog of Albert Mohler, President of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary*

### **Algerian Christians Arrested for Sharing Faith with Neighbors**

International Christian Concern reported 25 April 2011 that two men from Oran, Algeria, were arrested 14 April 2011 on charges of proselytizing and blasphemy after sharing their Christian faith with their neighbors. Both men face an upcoming court hearing, and may face a sentence of five years in jail.

A pastor from Tizi Ouzou, Algeria, was quoted as saying: 'The Protestant Church of Algeria engaged a lawyer to defend [the two men]. We are hopeful that they will be acquitted. Although our constitution says to respect other faiths other than Islam, the government is Islamic, and article two says 'Islam is the religion of state'. There is no respect for human rights or religious freedom and the Protestant church is suffering.'

+ *International Christian Concern, superadmin@persecution.org*

### **New Hungarian Constitution Affirms Personhood of the Unborn**

On 25 April 2011, Hungary adopted a new constitution that includes provisions that affirm the personhood of the unborn.

Article II states: 'Human dignity is inviolable. Everyone has the right to life and human dignity; the life of a [fetus] will be protected from conception.'

Article III prohibits torture, degrading treatment or punishment, slavery, medical or scientific experiments on humans without free and informed consent, eugenics, making the human body and its parts a source of profit, and the reproductive cloning of human beings.

+ *Personhood USA, Post Office Box 486, Arvada, Colorado 80001, 202-595-3500*

### **Electrician under Investigation for Display of Eight-Inch Palm Cross in Work Van**

Colin Atkinson, a fifteen-year employee of the private, non-profit Wakefield District Housing (WDH) in Yorkshire, England, had for eight years discretely displayed an eight-inch palm cross on the dashboard of his work van, until a complaint was lodged by a tenant that the cross might cause offense to those of other faiths. WDH management then told Mr Atkinson to remove the cross because allowing display of the cross favors Christianity and may be offensive to others.

Mr Atkinson refused to remove the cross, citing the fact that the WDH allows members of other faiths to wear the headdresses, beards, and turbans, which are distinctives of their faith. He is now under investigation for alleged failure to comply, and will soon find out whether or not he will face disciplinary action. Andrea Minichiello Williams, CEO of the Christian Legal Centre, said: 'Colin Atkinson is a decent and hard-working man, yet after many years of service he has been told that he cannot continue to have a small palm cross in his van. This smacks of something deeply illiberal and remarkably intolerant. Freedom of expression now needs to be robustly defended. When a man can't display a palm cross in his van in a historically Christian country, it should give people serious pause for thought. Is this the kind of society that the British public want to live in?'

'The cross is a profound symbol of God's love for all of us. We should not be embarrassed about it, and the historic Christian character of this nation should be retained for the benefit of all.'

+ *Assist USA, danjuma1@aol.com*  
+ *Christian Legal Centre Limited, info@christianlegalcentre.com*

### **Christian Driver Exonerated and Allowed to Continue Displaying Palm Cross in Work Van**

Christian Concern announced 23 April 2011 that Wakefield District Housing (WDH) employee Colin Atkinson, who had refused to remove an eight inch palm cross from the dashboard of his work van after being ordered to

do so after a tenant lodged a complaint that the cross might offend those of other faiths, will be allowed to keep the palm cross displayed in his work van and will not be disciplined by his employer for failure to comply.

Atkinson has worked for WDH for fifteen years and has displayed the palm cross in his van for the past eight years.

+ *Christian Concern, 70 Wimpole Street, London W1G 8AX, England, 020 7935 1488*

### **Free Study Guide Available**

Covenant Reformed Church (United Reformed Churches in North America (URCNA)) of Carbon-dale, Pennsylvania, pastor the Rev. William Boekestein, has written a study guide to *Getting the Message: A Plan for Interpreting and Applying the Bible* by Daniel M. Doriani, which is available in PDF format for free download at:

<http://www.covenantrc.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/02/Getting-the-Message-Study-Guide.pdf>  
Pastor Boekestein uses *Getting the Message* as a text for teaching biblical interpretation at a lay level, out of a desire to give church members the practical tools necessary for better understanding God's Word.  
+ *Covenant Reformed Church, info@covenantrc.org*  
+ *United Reformed Churches in North America, stated-clerk@urcna.org*

### **Muslim Salafis Attack Coptic Christians in Embaba, Egypt**

The Assyrian International News Agency reported 8 May 2011 that a mob of 3000 Muslim Salafis staged a fourteen-hour attack on Coptic Christians in Embaba, Egypt, on 7 May 2011, killing twelve and injuring 232. The Muslims fired guns and rifles, and hurled Molotov cocktails at Coptic churches, houses and businesses. Rooftop snipers picked off members of the church of Saint Mina as they exited a church congregation meeting.

+ *Assyrian International News Agency*

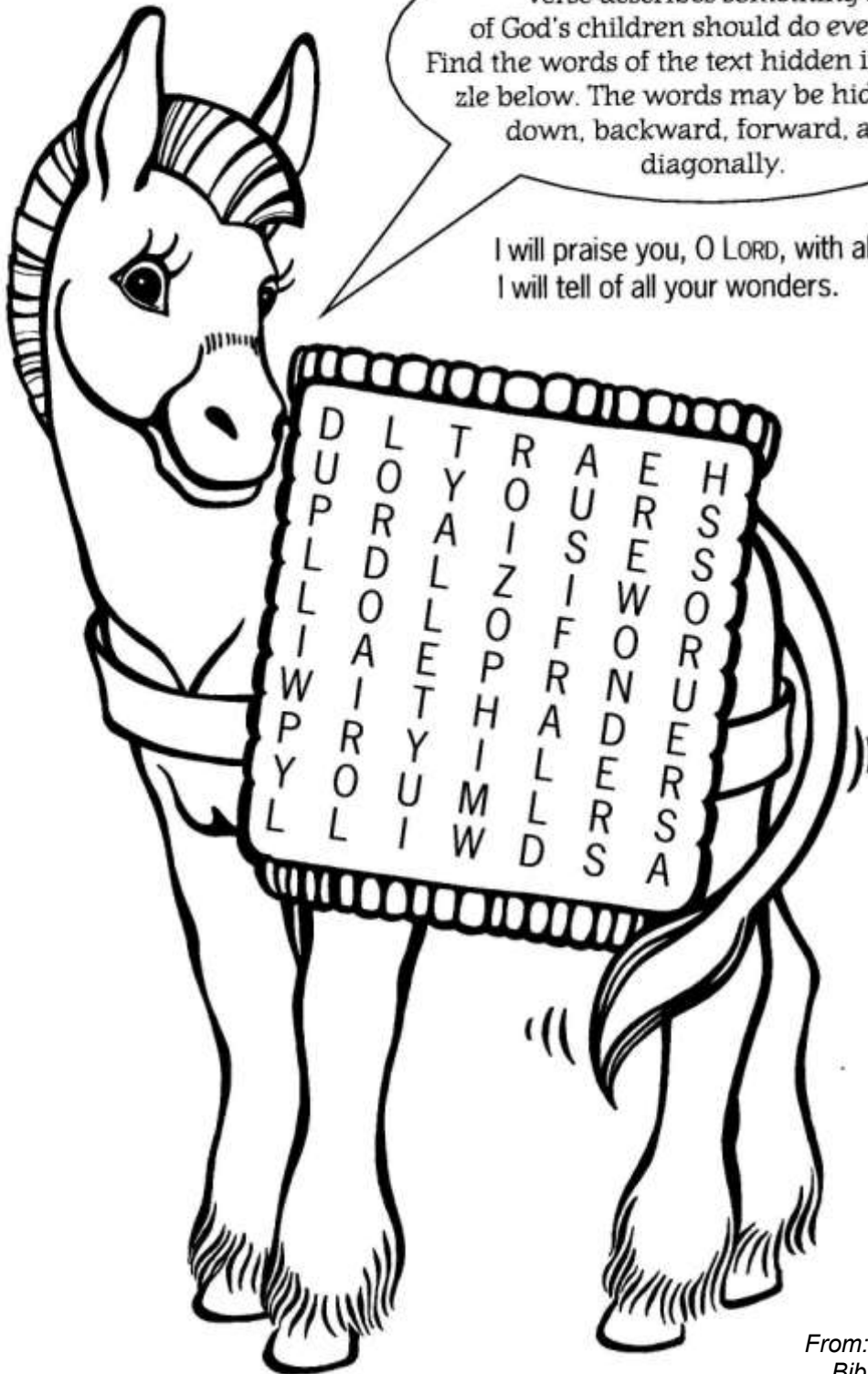
# Children under the Banner

## Praise God!

This verse describes something all of God's children should do every day. Find the words of the text hidden in the puzzle below. The words may be hidden up, down, backward, forward, and diagonally.

I will praise you, O LORD, with all my heart;  
I will tell of all your wonders.

Psalm 9:1



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



# Prescribed Search / Youth Work

## JUNE 2011

SENIOR and INTERMEDIATE (Intermediate omit questions 4 and 5)

JUDGES chapter 6

1. To whom did the angel of the Lord appear in Ophrah? What were the first words of the angel to him? (2 verses)
2. What happened when the angel touched the flesh and cakes with his staff?
3. What was Gideon commanded to do that night? (2 verses)
4. What was Joash's answer when asked to bring out his son that he might die? What was the meaning of Gideon's new name? (2 verses)
5. On two successive nights, what happened to the fleece Gideon put out? (2 separate verses)

chapter 7:1--14

6. Why were the men with Gideon too many?
7. By how many eventually did the Lord say he would deliver the Midianites into Israel's hand?
8. What conversation did Gideon overhear between two Midianite soldiers? (2 verses)

## JUNIOR

JUDGES chapter 6:1--32

1. Into whose hands did the Lord deliver Israel for seven years?
2. What was Gideon doing when the angel of the Lord appeared to him?
3. What did the angel do to the flesh and the unleavened cakes?
4. Why did Gideon's father call him Jerub-baal?

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

# Synod in the Banner

## And some other snippets

### Synod Report by *David Kerridge*

The word 'synod' comes from a Greek word meaning 'an assembly, a meeting or an astronomical conjunction' (OED). While there were few stars colliding at this Synod it was a stellar occasion. The Synod was generally acclaimed as being a wonderful example of brotherly co-operation in the service of the Lord's kingdom, as well as a spiritually challenging and refreshing time.

The Synod opened with the usual addresses. The first was from the outgoing Moderator, Rev. George Ball, who spoke on the 'Great Commission' from Matthew 28:18-20. He referred us to the *greatest claim* of Christ in verse 18, that of Christ who has all authority in heaven and on earth; secondly, the *greatest command* to go in mission and discipling; and thirdly, the *greatest comfort* that in the great commission we are all called as Christ's disciples. He is 'with us always, even to the end of the age'.

The Moderator for this year's Synod is the Rev. Gavin Smith. After we all enjoyed a wonderful dinner on Monday night, Rev. Smith gave an address on the Church as a Relational Community. This idea begins with the relational language of Scripture which finds its vocabulary in God's relationship with the Son and Holy Spirit and extends by His grace and love to us in His Church; such a way of relational living is under attack however from within and without the Church; and finally there is a challenge to live within the relationship that God intended for His Church – with love for the Lord and for the brethren. The theme of Rev. Smith's talk carried through into our deliberations and was mentioned more than once in deliberating on matters to hand, so much was the message taken to heart.

The two whole days of Synod (shorter than last year) each began with a devotion and time of prayer. Rev. Smith led us in devotions on

Acts 4. This was a highlight of the meeting, giving us an opportunity to be spiritually fed and to be refreshed by the word before we began the days' work.

Sometimes the work seemed mechanical and routine as trust corporations, property acts and financial matters required scrutiny. However, this too is essential to the functioning of the denomination and is, with each careful ledger entry and each dry clause of legalese, in the service of the King of Kings.

It was good to hear reports on the work of the various Presbyteries and also to hear from the wider work of Christ's Church from delegates from other churches with which we have links. The Reformed Church of New Zealand was represented by Dr Michael Flinn, and the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Australia in Melbourne sent greetings via the Rev. Lynsey Blakston. (Both men were 'associated' with the Synod which meant they were able to, and did, help us in discussions.)

We have been blessed by the Lord in receiving Mr Denver Boehret as a new candidate for ministry within the PCEA. Denver expects to complete his studies at the Presbyterian Theological College, Melbourne by the end of 2012.

One highlight was a session where Synod delegates put off the formal business of the Synod and got into groups to 'think-tank' strategies for the future. This was not an opportunity to forget who is Lord of the Church, and formulate our own schemes and plans for growth; rather, it was directed by Rev. Sjirk Bajema to consider the structures of leadership in the church and how we function to promote (or hinder) the cause of Christ. It is hoped that these discussions might filter down through Presbyteries into Sessions and Deacon's Courts. It would be good to take the matter up again at the next Synod.

The Synod ended with a Missions presentation on Wednesday evening.

We were treated to a group from the Nuer congregation, including Rev. Tut Wan Yoa, singing some songs and Psalms in the Nuer language. Rev. Dennis Muldoon then gave a report on the work of Dr Rahmat at the Taleem Centre in India. Please pray for the ministry that goes on here under constant threat, and also for Dr Rahmat and his family. Rev. Trevor Leggott then reminded us of his role with AIM and the work that goes on, especially with TEE (Theological Education by Extension).

Overall, the Synod was a positive and constructive time. We pray that the results may be for the glory of the Lord and the benefit of His Church. Thanks have to go to the people of the Knox Congregation, and the helpers from other Melbourne congregations, for the times we have gathered there for Synod meetings, not only this year. The catering, accommodation arrangements and general hospitality has been very much appreciated by all. We in Wauchope hope that we can live up to such a high standard in 2012.

### Ulverstone

The photo shown is of the youth and young adults "athletes" group, during a recent outing.

We camped overnight on a Friday at Bakers Point in a local national park just east of Devonport.

We enjoyed a range of activities, complemented by excellent weather.

### Stamps for Missions

The congregation of St Georges, Sydney, has been collecting and trimming used stamps for the Australian Indigenous Ministries. When a bucketful of stamps has been collected they are taken to the AIM Headquarters in Winmalee in the Blue Mountains. The stamps eventually find their way to philatelists and money returns to AIM.

On a beautiful late summer's day



Ulverstone Youth

some of St George's seniors took the latest collection of stamps to Rev Trevor Leggott, who is the AIM Ad-

ministrator. They were shown around the AIM office, and learnt of the extent of the work. On a large wall map of Australia the AIM churches were marked, so the visitors were able to understand the dedication of the missionaries in the isolated "Outback". Trevor was excited at the number of suitable applicants who had applied to work in this field.

The visitors were then treated to a sumptuous morning tea at the Leggott's home, and shown

Pam's wonderful collection of beautifully dressed dolls and bears, and other "collector's items".

After a walk down the famous Leura Mall, lunch with a bower bird at the Gordon Falls Reserve, and a



Rev Trevor Leggott, AIM General Director, Grace Harris and Emily Vallance in the AIM Office, Winmalee.

visit to the N.S.W Toy and Train Museum, housed in Clive (Doc) Evatt's old home, "Eurella", it was time to return to the city.

Margery Ramsay



*PCEA Synod Delegates for 2011*

Left to right: Rev. Lyndsey Blackston (RPA), Elder Neil Robinson, Rev's G. Smith, D. Muldoon, Elder Ross Campbell, Rev's A. Miranda, D. Kerridge, J. Klazinga, Elder D. Manley, Rev's M. Flinn (RCNZ), R. Ward, Elders D. Hamilton, R. Lawson, Rev T. Yoa, Elers I. Hamilton, A. Steel, Rev. J. MacCallum, Elder. S. Upton, Rev's T. Leggott, S. Bajema, Elders A. Neill, J. Loudon, Rev. G. Ball