



# the presbyterian

*How many are yours works, O LORD!  
In wisdom you made them all; the earth is full of your creatures.  
Psalm 104:24*

# banner

April 2013

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ISSN 0729-3542

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

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

## Editorial

There was once an interesting sign I came across in an old Church. It was a framed sign that had obviously been there for a long time. That stained, wrinkled and dusty sign said these words: "What would this Church be, if everyone was just like me."

You think about that. What would this Church be, if everyone was just like **you**?

Well, let's see. If this church were made up of fifty of you, would we have what we have? Could all the activities take place? How about meeting the budget? Would we have to close the afternoon worship service?

You see, one way we can take the words on that sign is looking at what we do personally. And then we don't do enough, do we? "There's always room for improvement," as my father says.

But in another sense, the words on that sign couldn't be true. Because in a church, there just cannot be anyone else like you! **You** have to be you.

But are you being the person the Lord wants you to be? Do you use all of your gifts and talents in serving the Lord as much as you can?

Most importantly, though, do we see the others in the church? Are they the people that matter most to us? Could we live without them? Do we pray for them – all of them?

I don't think there could be anything worse than when someone says they don't need the other people in the church. They might be saying that because they feel they have been hurt. But what they're really saying is that they don't need the Lord. It is through His people that the Lord is with each one of His people. And you ignore the church to your eternal peril!

Charity begins at home. The Church is God's home. There is where you find the household of faith, to use Paul's words in Galatians 6:10.

If there's no love here, there isn't much hope out there.

*"For it is time for judgment to begin with the house of God;  
and if it begins with us,  
what will the outcome be for those who do not obey the gospel of  
God?*

1 Peter 4:17

*Cover Photo Credit: Natasha Vedder*

**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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## The Reformed Pastor

### Considering Romans 9

These chapters 9-11 which deal with the people of Israel are obviously the beginning of a new section. They appear as a break in the story. We would expect chapter 12 to follow chapter 8. One writer states; **'Romans chapters 9-11 are as full of problems, as a hedgehog is full of prickles. Many have given it up as a bad job, leaving Romans as a book with eight chapters of 'gospel' at the beginning; and four of 'application' at the end; and three of 'puzzle' in the middle.'** Is this fair? Are these three chapters a mere puzzle with no connection to what goes before or what comes after? The puzzle is solved when we remember the theme of the letter as stated in chapter 1: 16-17; **'the gospel is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith'**. Righteousness is the key word. Let's see then how this section fits into the outline of the letter.

\*Chapters 1: 18-3: 20 - Righteousness is rejected by the sinner.

\*Chapters 3: 21-8: 39 - Righteousness is revealed and realised in the gospel.

\*Chapters 9-11 – Righteousness is required but refused by Israel.

\*Chapters 12-16 – Righteousness is to be reflected in everyday life.

The Apostle deals with the subject of the gospel and the Jewish people because of his own pastoral concern. The gospel was for them first but they seem to have rejected it. Has God cast them off? Is God finished with the Jews? Has God let them down?

For some this subject is a complete yawn. For others however the very mention of Israel; 1948; and the Middle East gets their prophetic juices flowing. This for them is the most important and fascinating subject in the whole Bible. So what should our attitude be toward Israel and the Jews? Let us learn from the concern of the patriotic and passionate Paul – the authentic reformed pastor.

### 1. Paul's Anguish and Sorrow (1-5)

From celebration to lamentation. Such describes the abrupt change of tone from the end of chapter 8 to the beginning of this chapter. What accounts for such a sudden change? Just like his Saviour who wept over the city of Jerusalem, Paul is filled with intense anguish and sorrow as he thinks over the lostness of his own people. He explains, **'I have unceasing sorrow, grief, pain and agony for the sake of my brothers' (2)**. He expresses a willingness to be cursed if it could achieve their salvation i.e. he would gladly go to hell if they could go to heaven (3). It's hypothetical of course – but it expresses nonetheless the sincerity and the compassion of this soft hearted man. The reformed pastor is a man with a heart of compassion for the lost.

Israel's response was a great anomaly. They of all people should have been queuing to get into the kingdom. No other race of people had such advantages and privileges as the Jewish people. Paul mentions eight: Israel had been adopted as God's son; they had seen evidence of God's glory among them; God had made covenants with them; they had the Scriptures in their own language; they had been instructed in Biblical worship; they had received promises; they had a galaxy of godly ancestors; and Jesus himself was a Jew! (4-5). These privileges were great; they were to be used and valued; they prepared the way for and pointed to the Saviour; but they didn't save. Israel was like an estranged son who had been left a great legacy by his father but he refused anything to do with it. Israel's rejection of the Messiah was a national tragedy. It was a scandal. Though an apostle to the Gentiles Paul was always a Jew. Seeing his fellowmen reject the Saviour caused him heartbreak. He was a grieving man.

Paul was no cold analytical theologian or philosopher, but a man with a heart for the Lord and a heart for the lost. We need people and preachers with hearts like that! We need people with hard heads and soft hearts. R.

George Ball

Haldane has stated; **'He, who has no sorrow for the perishing state of sinners, and especially for his kindred, is not a Christian. No man can be a Christian who is unconcerned for the salvation of others'**. Some of us have a son or a daughter, a brother or sister, a husband or wife, a friend, or a neighbour who has turned their back on the Lord. Perhaps you know something of the grief that Paul describes? Many of us have a continual sorrow in our hearts. Jonathan Edwards writes, 'It is now our duty to love all men, even wicked men; we know not but that God loves them. However wicked any man is, yet we know not but that he is one whom God loved from eternity; we know not but that Christ loved him with a dying love, had his name written upon his heart before the world was, and had respect to him when he endured those bitter agonies on the cross. We know not but that he is to be our companion in glory to all eternity.' (Vol. 2, pp 208).

A congregation had dismissed its pastor (it was not Presbyterian!). When asked why the reply was, 'He kept telling us we were going to hell if we did not repent'. They had since obtained a new pastor. 'What does your new Pastor say?' . . . 'He also says that we are going to hell if we do not repent.' So what's the difference? The reply came: **'When our first Pastor said we were going to hell he sounded like he was glad. But when our new Pastor says it, he sounds like it is breaking his heart.'** He may not have been a Presbyterian – but he spoke as a Reformed Presbyterian pastor should.

### 2. God has not Failed (6-13)

How do we explain Israel's failure to repent and believe and be saved? Could the fault lie with God? He after all made promises to Israel which appear to have failed. If they have failed this could have very serious repercussions for all of us. If God let the Jews down how can we

Gentiles trust Him not to let us down? If God has reneged on Israel He perhaps could do the same to us?

**Paul's answer is clear. 'It is not as though God's word has failed' (6).** God has kept His promises. That's a relief! We need to understand that His promise of salvation was never a blanket promise. We need to distinguish between **genetic Israel and the genuine Israel**; between **ethnic Israel and spiritual Israel**. There is the **physical Israel and the spiritual Israel**. Like in a football game. Not everybody present is a footballer or an athlete. There are also spectators, stewards, stall holders, policemen, photographers, reporters, and others. Just as in any large congregation of church members there will many names on the roll – but not every name is necessarily in the Lamb's book of life.

**To confirm his point Paul provides two examples from biblical history.** First, God made a promise to Abraham that nations would be blessed through his descendants. Abraham had two sons - **Ishmael and Isaac** (7-9). Ishmael was the son of Hagar. Isaac was the son of Sarah. But the promise of blessing was to be through Isaac; the son born to Abraham and Sarah in their old age. **'In other words it is not the natural children who are God's children but it is the children of the promise'** (8). Not all Abraham's children are the children of God. The true spiritual Israel are not those with Abraham's blood in their veins – but are those who have Abraham's faith in their hearts. Has God failed? No. God has kept His promise.

The second example is **Jacob and Esau** (10-13). They were twins who shared the same parents, the same home and had the same training and upbringing. Yet one was chosen and the other passed over. Was one better than the other? Had one led a better life? Had one better genes? Was one more deserving? No. God made a choice to save one and pass the other by even before they were born (11).

**Has God failed Israel?** No! The promise was never to everyone. God has always been making distinctions based upon His sovereign choice in election. He is a promise

keeper. However when election (and predestination) are introduced it raises some obvious questions!

### 3. God is Fair (14-18)

Is it fair of God to choose some and not others? Was it fair of God to choose Jacob and not Esau? Why should God not choose everybody? Is He guilty of favouritism? Why has He apparently closed the door on the Jews and welcomed Gentiles? Is He like John West? 'It's the fish that John West rejects that makes John West the best!' Does God choose the best and throw away the rest? No – not at all! He should have thrown all of us away! If God was fair and just no one would be saved. 'There is none good – no not one!' R.C. Sproul remarks, **'Why would God ever be under obligation to give us anything after we have fallen, having committed cosmic treason, resulting in the desires of our hearts being only wicked continuously? It is absolutely essential that we understand this. God Almighty owes nothing to us. We have no claim upon Him'**. God owes us nothing. He has no obligation toward us. He was absolutely fair to Pharaoh who got what he deserved (17).

Why are we not all in hell as we deserve? Paul quotes Exodus 33: 19, **'I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion.'** After Israel's appalling behaviour of worshipping the golden calf – they deserved to be punished. They deserved the same fate as Pharaoh. But God showed mercy and compassion because He is free to do so. Mercy is when God withholds what we deserve. Grace is when God gives what we don't deserve. The only reason why anyone is saved is not because of performance or pedigree but because of God's mercy.

Someone (reportedly) came to Spurgeon on one occasion. I have a problem (he said) with the text – **'Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.'** 'How could God possibly *hate* Esau?' Spurgeon replied, 'I too have a problem with that text. How could God possibly *love* Jacob?'

### 4. God is Free (19-29)

There are many things we can't fathom. The doctrine of God's election and predestination is surely one of these things. Its part of His secret counsel (Deut. 29: 29). Someone has said, try and explain this doctrine of election and you may lose your mind; but try to explain it away and you will lose your soul. The doctrine must not be used mischievously to take cheap shots at God. He cannot be blamed for Israel's unbelief or for our sinfulness. We can't get away by saying – 'well I'm just the way God made me – warts and all!' God is not the author of sin. He didn't make us originally with any warts. The doctrine does not allow us to 'pass the buck'. It doesn't negate our responsibility. 'The things that are revealed are for us.' The Bible makes it pretty plain what God requires of all of us – Israel included. After Peter preached at Pentecost the people asked, 'what shall we do?' Peter didn't say, 'get your doctrine of election sorted out!' He said, **'Repent and be baptised every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins.'** (Acts 2: 37-38). Paul replies to the mystery critics' trick question by introducing the powerful illustration of the potter and the clay (19-21). Does not the potter have the power and the right to do with the clay exactly what He wants? (21)! Of course he does. God is like the potter. He is free to do as He pleases. We know however that anything He does is good. There are things that God cannot do. He cannot lie. He cannot sin. He cannot deny Himself. He therefore cannot do anything which is bad. When we don't understand His ways – we should remember we are the clay. His ways are past finding out – but all His ways are just and good and right. We should never 'talk back' to God.

As the potter God can even use His wrath to make known the wealth of His glory: **'desiring to show His wrath and to make known His power, (God) has endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for de-**

**struction, in order to make known the riches of His glory for vessels of mercy, which He has prepared beforehand for glory' (22-23).**

James Boice remarks, **'if you are rebelling, you are glorifying Him even now, because even now His patience is displayed in you by His enduring your sin for a time, rather than sending you to hell immediately, which you deserve.'** He is a longsuffering and merciful God seeking the repentance of sinners. God is free to do His will in the way He pleases. Despite Israel's rejection of the Messiah His plan is not frustrated. The purpose of the string of Old Testament quotations is to dem-

onstrate that what has been happening in the church has always been part of God's plan (24-29).

**Conclusion:** Humanly speaking the apostle could have become demoralised at the lack of gospel response from his Jewish counterparts and resigned the apostleship! There are today many examples of lesser men dropping out of the ministry because of discouragement at the lack of response to the gospel message. Paul, the reformed pastor, clearly shows that we should not be indifferent to gospel indifference (1-5). He informs us how we can continue confidently even when we grieve inside and when the ground is hard. We know

that God's word is still true; we know that God's promises are reliable; we know that God has a chosen people; we know there would be no conversions if there is no election; we know that God owes us nothing and He is free to do whatsoever He wills; and we know that whatever He does is ultimately for His glory. We know that the gospel is still the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes. We know that this is the means whereby He calls His elect. Such convictions reinforce the reformed pastor.

## The Banner on Society

### Is It Ever Right To Fight? **The Biblical case for a 'Just War'**

*Sjirk Bajema*

You will see them, many of them, marching together in many towns and cities across our nation. Some will be quite frail, and walk with difficulty; perhaps they had to travel in an open vehicle. Nevertheless they are proud, and so they march in orderly style. With their chests covered by the medals and reminders of past wars, you couldn't mistake what they have done.

And there were the younger ones. Those who are wearing uniforms now, whether it be of the army, the navy, the air force, the police—right down to the Boy Scouts and Girl Guides.

Who could forget it's ANZAC Day? ANZAC, a word made up of the first letters of Australian & New Zealand Army Corps. It was war that brought these two nations together. And what war made of us is remembered on ANZAC Day.

But let's shift our eyes now to quite a different scene. It's outside an alleged military communications base. From thousands of kilometres, and even from foreign countries, protesters have come to vent their public displeasure that this place is being used for the worldwide security of the major world power. What a contrast that scene is with the

marches on April 25! They are not neatly dressed at all. They violently tear down the security fence and charge on the centre. For publicity they take off all their clothes, apparently to show what war really does to us. They hurl abuse at any semblance of authority.



Though, much as their appearance and action may repeal us, haven't you asked, **'Is it ever right to fight?'** We know of war too well. Some of us have experienced it personally. And the rest of us are grimly reminded each night on the television news,

and each day in the papers, just how bad it is. Even right now, there are as many armed struggles across the face of this earth as there has ever been before at one time! Despite their disgusting behaviour, perhaps those protesters have a point. Is it ever right to fight?

It's a question that doesn't only affect the nations of the world. It comes right the way down into the school playground and around the dinner table. But it is an issue the Lord helps us with—very clearly!

#### **It is right to fight—in self-defence**

The picture has often been painted that we as Christians should be a bunch of passive dummies. The bit in Matthew 5, about turning the other cheek and all that, has often been thrown against us. It's a

passage pacifist Christians use. And later on we'll consider where that passage fits in. But first of all, God has made us who we are. And God himself has given us what we have. This is what we read in Proverbs chapter

22:28: *“Do not move an ancient boundary stone set up by your forefathers.”*

So, there’s a set property with a set position. The Lord says it even stronger in Proverbs 23 verse 10: *“Do not move an ancient boundary stone or encroach on the fields of the fatherless, for their defender is strong; he will take up their case against you.”*

Believers see already how complicated this is. There are always the powerful and selfish who stop at nothing to trample on top of others and what belongs to them, in order to get to the top. We’ve seen enough megalomaniacs like Adolf Hitler, Josef Stalin, and Saddam Hussein, to realise this is happening.

Our children have them in your neighbourhood, too. They are called bullies—those insecure, forceful people who get their satisfaction from picking on someone else!

You don’t have to simply accept it when they start taking what is yours, and even start hurting you. Stand up to them. Be ready to tell on them!

Now, that might sound a bit harsh. You might even have friends who say you can’t ever tell on anyone.

In some countries it’s almost a tradition not to pimp or dob on anyone, as they call it.

But when you do let someone in authority know, you’re actually fighting a very worldly sin, because if you don’t tell, it only helps evil people. They use it to keep others under their control.

This is shown most vividly by our Lord Jesus himself, that Man whom the pacifists quote and point to so often as their supreme example! Yet, what did he do upon entering the temple courts just a few days before his death? He used violence to throw out the merchants who were desecrating God’s House. And he did this in self-defence!

How could that be, we wonder? It is because the position and property of the LORD God was at stake! And it was God who defended himself, as Jesus hurled those tables and their products across the floor.

It’s this aspect of self-defence that helps explain the difficulty we can have with the Old Testament Israelites. They seem to go through the

countryside with impunity, brutally killing and looting all in their way. But what was it they were doing? Weren’t they reclaiming their land—the “Promised Land”—which God had first pledged to their forefather, Abraham? Deuteronomy 6:10-12 says, “When the LORD brings you into the land he swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give you—a land with large, flourishing cities you did not build, houses filled with all kinds of good things you didn’t plant—then when you are satisfied, be careful that you don’t forget the LORD, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.”

Of course it was all of grace—but it was a gift nevertheless! It was their possession from God. They were taking back their own inheritance.

That also explains the rather harsh language of Psalm 137, for there the Psalmist is speaking about those who took the Israelites away from the land of promise. Babylon was a nation that led God’s people away. Though the LORD may have used them as his way to punish the Israelites, they were still responsible for the evil they did.



So the harshness of the psalm is simply a plea for God to restore his people.

That means you can do a self-defence course. But let that martial art be your master, and let it intimidate another or take you away from your faith—that’s wrong! As the Israelites learnt when the helpless ones in their society were oppressed and abused.

### **It is right to fight—in the defence of another**

And here we come to another aspect

in this whole subject. For when someone else through weakness or ignorance cannot defend their own, then you’re called to do it for them. The weak ones we have just been reminded about.

The law of the LORD to his people spelt out exactly the concern there should be for those helpless ones. And when the people left the ways of the LORD, guess who became oppressed and abused?

Isaiah expressed the anger of God at one of those times in the first chapter of his prophecy. In verse 17 he cried out, *“Stop doing wrong, learn to do right! Seek justice, encourage the oppressed. Defend the cause of the fatherless, plead the case of the widow.”*

Compassion has always been a distinctive mark of Christians. Of all the religions of the world, we are the most involved in reaching out to the poor and oppressed.

That’s not giving ourselves a pat on the back. It’s simply living out the life of Christ in his Body. When Jesus promised he would be with us until the end, he meant it—with his

Spirit working in our lives. And as the Old Testament church when it was faithful showed a shadow of what this great love would be in Jesus, we now are empowered to take it into this world.

Indeed, the way of Christ has already made a great difference to the world. A good example is the ‘Just War’ tradition. This states that it can only be right to fight when the cause is righteous. In the words of John Stott, “It must be defensive, not aggressive. Its objectives must be to secure justice or remedy injustice,

to protect the innocent or champion human rights. It must be taken as a last resort only, after all attempts at negotiation and reconciliation have been exhausted, and then only after a formal declaration (following an ultimatum) by a legitimate authority, not by groups or individuals. Moreover, the intention must be as righteous as the cause. Just causes are not served by unjust motives. So there must be no hatred, no animosity, no thirst for revenge.” (p84, *“Issues Facing*

*Christians Today*.)

Try transferring that to the boy you see being bullied, or your employee suffering at the hands of a fellow worker, or someone else being harassed. It might seem a complicated process, but it's not. Picture it. You see what appears to be a clear act of someone being put down or hurt—or both! You could react straight away. You could let what you feel at that one particular time judge a whole situation. That's what eleven tribes of Israel did in Judges, chapter 20. But hold on! Let's find out why those people are there. Gain some background knowledge on them. Why are we in a rush? It's the Lord's time, isn't it?

It is right to fight in the defence of another, but only if his defence is being genuinely threatened. The Christian isn't chasing after those who cry "wolf" just to get attention.

However, as well as being concerned for the "weak", we are also to show concern for the ignorant. And here we take up that much thrown-about passage from Matthew 5—that well-used part about "turning the other cheek". The usual impression we have there is of a passive action. You let it happen to you. But that view has often led to Christians and the Church being ripped off by professional leeches who suck what they can out of believers. They know they can get away with it! They abuse the Church because they're aware of what the Bible says.

In the situation of Matthew 5, though, the Lord is speaking of those who treat you harshly as those not knowing the Gospel. For instance, the Romans could press those who were not Roman citizens to carry equipment for a mile. What a witness you were to them when you went that much further! That's giving freely! That's real sacrifice! And that's in Christ's defence! Your active concern for the Romans led you to take the time to think how to show them something of

your Saviour and Lord. Revenge has been put right out of the picture.

As has any idea that you just have to put up with it. Because **you** are looking out for their good! Indeed, in all those instances we read from Matthew 5, the verses 38 till 48, the believer is fighting for his Lord! Do you see it? These are practical ways to struggle for their souls! You want to keep them from ultimate harm, for the glory of the Lord. Just as you defend yourself, because you have his work to do! I know, it's a strange thing to say. But haven't we, of all people, come to know that our only worth is in Christ?

Now, compare that with a man of the

**of the Lord**

The world makes a lot of noise about having no more wars on the outside, yet inside its sinful nature stays exactly the same. This is its hypocrisy. It's because of this utterly rotten world that God tells us it is right to fight in self-defence and in the defence of another. But to really look beyond all this we need to know that it is right to fight—for the offence of the Lord.

This is the offence that is about taking the initiative, not as in being offended, because right throughout our fighting for the right things we know we will win in Christ Jesus the Great King! The new world is coming!

Already now we are preparing the way. Even in our daily lives—at work, at school, at home, at play—we are building up toward the second coming of the Prince of Peace. That's why we pray. We're talking to the Lord now because we want so much for him to take over everything as soon as possible. The vision of Revelation 21 is what we're anticipating! And we have encouraging little glimpses of how it will be. At those times, his Spirit stirs within us His special work. Christ is King! He is ever so busy reigning—right

now! In thousands of thousands of human temples—each one a soul saved by grace—the Lord is living. The picture of being a soldier for the Lord comes up several times in Scripture. Why do you think Paul describes the armour of the Christian soldier in the way he does in Ephesians 6? Isn't so that all those things which make up the soldier can go into battle for the Lord? Everything that God gives us glorifies Him. The way he shows us in his Word is the plan for our attack. Again, John Stott is helpful. He says, "I cannot see that Christian people should remain isolated from public life; they should rather be



V—Day in France, 1945

world who sang and demonstrated all about peace in the 1960's. John Lennon took his concern across Europe with his so-called 'Bagism,' where he and Yoko Ono would stage press conferences in hotel beds to speak for peace. "Give peace a chance" was one of his hits of that time—a song that epitomised his public concern. This same man, though, hated his former song-writing partner and fellow-Beatle, Paul McCartney, with a vengeance. He even sang about him, *"those freaks was right when they said you was dead; the one mistake you made was in your head."*

**It is right to fight—for the offence**

involved in it, knowing that in doing so they are ministers of God just as much as pastors... There's nothing abnormal about Christians serving in the police force or the prison service, as politicians or magistrates or city councillors. For Christians worship a God who is just and are therefore committed to the quest for justice. The Christian community shouldn't stand aloof from the secular community, but seek to penetrate it for Christ."

In a society which has left her Christian foundations and has become multi-religious, as well as multi-cultural, to live with Jesus makes us stand out that much more. For the offence of the Lord, we will be greatly offended!

So let's listen to what Paul tells us in 2 Timothy 2:3-4. "*Endure hardship with us like a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No one serving as a soldier*

*gets involved in civilian affairs—he wants to please his commanding officer.*"

Live the life of love! Hate only compounds because sin abounds! Although the Cold War may be over, there's a whole new enemy now in the Islamic world. To live by his grace puts everything for us in a completely different perspective! Despite the traumas and tragedies of this present time, we're working for the world to come.

Is that the motivation of your heart? It is **most** right to fight—for the offence of the Lord!

In fact, to love anything else in your life is to hate! Yes—you heard me right! Unless you can honestly say that you're claiming every moment for the Prince of Peace, your soul is at war with Him. That's a battle you can't win! And if you're a Christian, you know that is a fight which isn't

right. So, by his grace, you'll change.

But, perhaps, you are one who hasn't been touched by his love deep down? Your heart actually wants to go its own selfish way. Please—there's a better way! There's a path, through a narrow gate, that leads to a wonderful new world. A world where there will be no more war.

And there's been a God-man who has gone through this difficult way before us. He has given us glowing descriptions of what it will be like. Most of all, he calls us to believe in him. Trust Jesus! Turn over to him all that hatred which has kept you from his love—the greatest of all loves! Repent and believe. Then you too can have true and everlasting peace within.

## Missions in the Banner

### A Visit to India via Sri Lanka

A number of our congregations are supporting women and girls at the Pandita Ramabai Mukti Mission in Kedgaon, some 60km east of Pune. Our Synod also sponsors several needy girls. Mukti Australia Inc. provides support and tax deductible funding for child support and for projects such as the school and housing. It has been immensely encouraging to see the progress of the work over the last few years, particularly the large increase in Australian giving. On 21 November I set off for India to participate in the International Conference held every 3 years with representatives from supporting Councils in other Countries – USA, New Zealand, Canada, England etc.. I went via Sri Lanka to see how the John Knox International School, which I had opened in 2002, was doing. It has in recent times located to the outskirts of Columbo. There are 125 students and it has made good progress, although proposed new laws about International Schools may impact on its freedom to teach Christianity.

Then on to Kedgaon where, apparently to everyone's surprise for they thought I was lost, I turned up a day later than the Mission had expected. The Conference was a pretty positive experience. Australia was well represented and we had prepared quite a number of proposals which found

general acceptance. A team of Australian volunteer engineers were also on site attending to the investigation of the sewerage system, the repair of which looks as if it will be more manageable than first thought. I arrived back in Melbourne on 3 December. One of the major issues in India is the difficulty of obtaining front line

### Rowland Ward



Students at John Knox International School, Moratuwa

managers who will accept responsibility and require that from those under them. Indian labour laws are not always helpful either. However, the Mukti farm has blossomed like the rose under good management and now supplies much of the food requirements. The several wells on the property, named by Ramabai



after the fruit of the Spirit, do fine service.  
 Changing traditional practices requires much effort and can be frustrating for those not familiar with cross-cultural ministry, but progress is being made. Lorraine Francis as Mission Director is doing a fine job, but needs a reliable Administration Manager. Lorraine expects shortly to be on deputation in Western Australia, where we have recently appointed a highly regarded part-time State Director.

Time would fail to tell of all that is happening; but Glenda Greswick, whom some on the Northern Rivers will know, and who is a Mukti Australia Board member, tells the story of Mukta below. Mukta is in her early 20s and doing a Master's degree. She is a lovely Christian young woman. Mukta's initial operation (cost \$2,800) was met by Knox PCEA; we pray that other operations this year will see virtually full recovery.  
 Thank you for your prayers and gifts for the work of Mukti.  
 Rowland Ward, Chairman, Mukti Australia Inc.

Mukta ... and Miracles

By Glenda Creswick

What a week of miracles! During my 2011 visit to Mukti, when I established a library for the girls and women, I was very touched by the story of the young girl who was my library assistant during her college vacation.  
 When Mukta came to Mukti at 5 years of age she had already lost one leg amputated at the knee, due to an infection from a thorn, which had caused tetanus and gangrene, resulting in lockjaw. At the age of 10 she underwent surgery to release the tension in her jaw, but as an angry, rebellious and unhappy child, she could not stand the pain and damaged the screw after surgery, which caused her jaw to move sideways, disfiguring her face. Her angry spells increased and she was a difficult teenager, until at a Vacation Bible School, she gave her heart to the Lord, accepting her disabilities and wanting

to use her academic abilities to study and serve God. Mukta is currently at college in Pune studying for a Masters in Social Work.  
 After my return to Australia I discussed the possibility of surgery with a couple of surgeon friends, who both recommended the facilities and expertise at the Christian Medical College at Vellore in South India.  
 Vaishali the Mukti Social Worker, Mukta and myself, flew from Pune to Chennai, in Tamil Nadu, and took a car for 120 kms to Vellore. It would have been over 30 hours by train, but praise God for the gifts given to me before I left Australia, enabling us to fly the 2 hours instead.  
 Vellore hospital has over 8,000 staff, thousands of patients pouring through the campus every day, and around 1200 wards, but we were privileged to have a consultation with the Professor of Dental and Maxillofacial Surgery, Dr Rabin Chacko. He personally took the case and gave us every care and attention. This was indeed the beginning of many miracles. Initial blood tests proved that Mukta's haemoglobin was very low, and when both Vaishali and I offered as blood donors, we were rejected...me due to my age!  
 However, the doctors agreed to go



ahead.  
 When surgery began, it was discovered that the bone in the roof of her mouth was paper thin, and may not hold the surgery. The medical decision was to close up and not continue. The doctors prayed for wisdom and healing, and went ahead. The first surgery of 5 hours was successful. Her nose is now straight and the upper jaw has been moved in symmetry. Vaishali and I were invited to speak about Pandita Ramabai Mukti Mission at the Dental faculty staff devotions because of their interest in Mukta. What a wonderful opportunity to share about Ramabai and Mukti, and equate her with the founder of Vellore, Dr Ida Scudder.  
 We again saw God's hand protecting us as we travelled in heavy rain on flooded roads to the airport. We narrowly missed a collision with a bus. At the airport a wonderful couple who had adopted a little girl from Mukti provided our breakfast and a special drink for Mukta, to bless us with their generosity and kindness. It is so encouraging to see the beginnings of new future for a very special young lady. She is aware of the need for patience in the healing process and we will do everything possible to build her strength, her calcium, her iron levels and her stamina in preparation for the next stage of surgery, which is planned for 20 February 2013.  
 On my return to Melbourne, I had a doctor's appointment and he asked about my trip to India. I shared about the surgery at Vellore and Mukta. He inquired if the



Glenda & Mukta

surgery was costly, and paid for. I assured him that the first surgery was covered, and I was now trying to raise the cost of round two for February. He asked for bank details, with an

offer of \$500. I promised a receipt from Mukti Australia, and on discovering it would be tax deductible, doubled his offer. How great is our God! We move ahead, believing in

Jeremiah ch 29 verse 11, that God indeed has His hand on this dear girl. The journey begins...



**GEELONG BIBLE CONFERENCE**  
**5 - 7, July 2013**

Topic: **Is the Church Past Her Use-By Date?**

Keynote Speaker: **Dr. Derek Thomas**  
(First Presbyterian Church, Columbia, South Carolina and Professor of Systematic and Historical Theology at Reformed Theological Seminary, Atlanta)

Venue: **Reformed Theological College, Geelong**

**Register Online:**  
[geelongbibleconference.org.au](http://geelongbibleconference.org.au)

The Geelong Bible Conference is organised by the Geelong Reformed Presbyterian Church.

## The World in the Banner

### Bell's Recipe for Spiritual Disaster

In the midst of his announcement on Sunday that he now supports same-sex marriage, **Rob Bell** warned American evangelicals to "adapt or die." His counsel, intended to be helpful, is actually a guaranteed formula for failure and a proven recipe for disaster. In fact, the only way for us to make a lasting impact on the culture and maintain a relevant witness to society is to do the opposite of what Bell advised.

Over the last few years Bell, a best-selling author and former megachurch pastor, has steadily distanced himself from the mainstream **evangelical community**. Known for asking provocative questions and challenging the status quo, he amassed a large following that has been drawn to his non-dogmatic approach—an approach I call a "celebration of ambiguity."

To paraphrase this approach: Rather than the leader saying, "This is the way. It is proven and sure. Follow me," the leader now says, "Who am I to know? How can anyone be sure? Isn't it narrow and small-minded of us to be so inflexible and dogmatic?"

Somehow, young people in particular have rallied around this mindset, a mindset that has already lost its way before it even starts. Yet losing one's way is celebrated, too: "The destination is not important," we are told. "It's the journey that matters!"

Personally, I would rather enjoy a terrible journey to heaven than a lovely journey to hell. Speaking of which, Bell's 2011 New York Times best-seller *Love Wins* represented another departure from the evangelical mainstream. In the book, Bell suggested that, to a great extent, hell is here and now, and in the end, everybody will make it into God's heavenly kingdom. Last year, speaking at a church gathering in California, Bell stated his belief that you could be a practicing homosexual and a follower of Jesus at the same time, encouraging his listeners to take their focus off of gay-related issues and to look instead at the "truly big problems in our world; that I believe Jesus would [have] us to band together, and tackle together."

In light of this, it was hardly a surprise when he announced on Sunday during a Q&A session: "I am for marriage. I am for fidelity. I am for love, whether it's a man and woman, a woman and a woman, a man and a man. I think the ship has sailed and I think the church needs ... this is the world we are living in and we need to affirm people wherever they are."

Of course, Bell is right that, to an extent, "the ship has sailed," and affirming same-sex "marriage" is now the politically "in" thing to do, as witnessed by the recent statements of former President Bill Clinton, Sen. Rob Portman and former Sec-

retary of State Hillary Clinton.

But what in the world does that have to do with right and wrong? If society has lost its moral bearings, should the church lose its moral bearings as well? Shouldn't we rather swim against the tide of popular opinion and call the world to turn around?

And since when do we drag down the teachings of Jesus, which were marked by divine authority and absoluteness, to meet the standard of "the world we are living in?" Aren't we supposed to challenge the world to live up to the standards of the Lord?

Bell said on Sunday, "I think we are witnessing the death of a particular subculture that doesn't work. I think there is a very narrow, politically intertwined, culturally ghettoized, evangelical subculture that was told, 'We're gonna change the thing.' and they haven't. And they actually have turned away lots of people. And I think that when you're in a part of a subculture that is dying, you make a lot more noise because it's very painful. You sort of die or you adapt."

Without a doubt, Bell is right that in many ways the evangelical church has fallen out of touch with the nation, and to the extent we can be culturally sensitive and "understand the times" (see 1 Chr. 12:32), we make an impact. On the other hand, Bell is completely wrong when he warns, "You sort of die

or you adapt.”

In the days of the Maccabees, did the Jewish people survive the onslaught of Hellenism by adapting to paganism, with all its worldly appeal, or did they overcome by resisting at any cost, thereby demonstrating the power of their convictions? Did the early church survive the polytheism of Rome by bowing to the emperor, or did they overcome by refusing to compromise, even to the point of death, thereby pointing to a better life? Remarkably, on Sunday, when the forum moderator tried to get Bell to take a firm position as to whether Christians ‘know’ the truth in some ultimate sense, Bell took the discussion in a completely different direction.

But that is the very heart of the problem. Bell’s celebration of ambiguity has become a dogmatism of uncertainty, and it is because of his lack of spiritual absolutes that he has wandered off the path, leading a generation in his wake.

The truth is that 100 years from now, either in this world or the world to come, history will record that those who conformed their beliefs to the culture were nothing more than a passing curiosity, while those who refused to compromise truth will be regarded as the spiritual heroes and torchbearers.

In the words of Charles Spurgeon, “Character is always lost when a high ideal is sacrificed on the altar of conformity and popularity.”

+ *Michael Brown, CHARISMANEWS*

### ‘Bride’ & ‘Bridegroom’ To Be Removed From Marriage Certificates

Family First NZ says that the terms ‘Bride’ and ‘Bridegroom’ will be removed from Marriage Certificates if the same-sex marriage bill is passed by politicians.

The Select Committee report on the same-sex marriage bill has already confirmed that the terms ‘husband’ and ‘wife’ will be removed from 16 pieces of legislation as it seeks to redefine marriage.

“In the proposed new marriage certificates, brides and bridegrooms will simply be referred to as ‘parties’, and the ‘parties’ will have to clarify what sex they are. If husband, wife, bride and bridegroom are no longer used, what will be next – mother and father? In Spain, the term has already been changed to ‘progenitor’,” says Bob McCoskrie, National Director of Family First NZ.

“Ironically, the proposed new form still asks for the ‘mother’ and ‘father’ of the parties getting married, which will not be appropriate with same-sex couples.

They cannot even keep up with their own social engineering.”

“The equality cause is not advanced by destroying institutions. Equality should respect difference, not destroy it.”

“Marriage will soon become meaningless. We will be using the word to describe something else—not commonly or traditionally conceived, but conceived by politics and political correctness,” says Mr McCoskrie.

Family First says that the National party has a crisis of unity as it gets confused over its identity and values, and John Key has effectively split the party in to two camps on this issue.

“That’s why the government is ramming this bill through because they know that their core voter support bases are not happy with it, and they are desperate to get it off the political agenda—but in the process, they are trampling over the rights of New Zealanders to have their chance to speak up and contribute to the much-needed debate on this issue.”

+ *Family First Media Release, 1 March 2013*

### Taking same-sex marriage step by step

Australian activists for same-sex marriage have always insisted, that it will not lead to polygamy or polyamory. Never, ever, ever. Gay marriage is just like traditional marriage, except for the sex of the spouse. Activist Rodney Croome wrote last year that “studies show most LGBTI people want to be part of a two-person marriage, while partners in polyamorist relationships (most of which begin as heterosexual unions) say they don’t want their relationships recognised as marriages.” Former Greens leader Bob Brown described a push for polyamory as “nonsense”.

This is a crucial point for supporters. If they were to concede that same-sex marriage would ultimately lead to polygamy and more imaginative forms of marriage, they would prove that there is a slippery slope. So they are forced into vehement denials.

How odd, then, that a Polyamory Action Lobby (PAL) has been founded in Australia “to combat the image of poly people as relationship bogeymen”.

PAL is testing the waters by spruiking a public petition on Change.org, an internet site for activists. “For too long has Australia denied people the right to marry the ones they care about. We find this abhorrent. We believe that everyone should be allowed to marry their partners, and that the law should never

be a barrier to love. And that’s why we demand nothing less than the full recognition of polyamorous families.” PAL contends there is no rational reason adults should not be able to form committed relationships with more than one person. “Polyamory often isn’t a choice; if people love more than one person, they can’t help it,” says its manifesto. The argument for same-sex relationships runs in the same groove: it can’t be helped; it can’t be denied; it is wholesome and loving. “We’re sick of being treated like the bottom of a slippery slope, the fat end of the wedge and the scary inevitable consequence of legalizing same-sex marriage,” it continues.

As far as the law is concerned, PAL says that the government must not restrict relationships for consenting adults based on love and respect.

“The legal, health and financial protections enjoyed by a spouse in a monogamous relationship must be extended to all partners in a family.” And in a sentence which has been repeated endlessly in arguments for “marriage equality”, the document adds, “A family should be about security, stability and love; not about its structure.”

Are these activists serious? Is this an elaborate hoax?

No. Although the petition has attracted fewer than 40 signatures, the three people behind PAL are associated with the Greens, a party which at the moment holds the balance of power in the Federal Senate and in the state of Tasmania.

It is quite likely that the Greens will be annihilated in next election, but the polyamory agenda will survive. It is the logical consequence of redefining sexual relationships. It is not the love child of a few extremists in an extreme party.

Polyamory has had supporters in Australia for some time. Nico Antalfy, a lecturer at Macquarie University and a leader in the polyamory movement, made a passionate plea in *The Australian* not long ago. “Would people in multiple relationships want more recognition? Absolutely,” she says.

Other academics are shaping the legal, sociological and psychological case for polyamory in the United States. In February, the first International Academic Polyamory Conference took place in San Diego. Dozens of participants gave papers. Using arguments which have been tempered in the fires of the same-sex

marriage debate, they contended that monogamy, both heterosexual and homosexual, is an antiquated lifestyle. "Numerous anthropological surveys have demonstrated that monogamous marriage is required in only a small minority of societies," say the conference organisers. Taking their cue from the dolphins-do-it-why-can't-we argument, they cite compelling research which shows that: "The surprising frequency of polyandry among hunting and gathering people suggests it may have been even more common in very ancient times, and even among pre-human ancestors." A recent article in Scientific American gives a taste of the burgeoning academic sub-specialty of research into "consensual nonmonogamy", a lifestyle which includes a committed couples hooking up with anybody and everybody, and polyamory. According to research published in peer-reviewed journals, these relationships can even be happier and more fulfilling than traditional marriages. Normally there is no jealousy or sexual possessiveness. In

fact, the experts say, polyamorists can teach ordinary married couples how to strengthen their relationships. Admittedly polyamory seems radical, but at every stage of the sexual revolution, the next step has seemed impossibly bold, according to the organisers of the San Diego conference. "Modern society's ideas about love, marriage, family and sexuality have undergone drastic changes in recent decades, and evidence suggests further changes will occur in the near future. At the beginning of 2001, the marriage of gay and lesbian couples was illegal everywhere, and few anticipated the situation would ever change. Virtually no one could have foreseen that within the next 11 years, same-sex marriages would be legalized in a dozen nations, including much of North America and Western Europe..." "Despite claims for some quarters that 'the sexual revolution is over,' there is no reason to believe any kind of stable equilibrium has been reached, or that the situation will not continue to evolve

for the foreseeable future. What is likely to happen next?" That was a question raised by a former High Court judge with an international reputation, Michael Kirby, who is a passionate supporter of "marriage equality". In May 2012 he told an Australian Senate inquiry that if same-sex marriage is passed, there could be further redefinitions in the future. "Nothing is finally written," Justice Kirby said. "The question that is before the parliament at the moment is the question of equality for homosexual people. There may be, in some future time, some other question. The lesson in courts and in the parliament, I suggest, is that you take matters step by step." Which is exactly what is happening. The question is, which step comes after the legalisation of same-sex marriage? The winds are blowing in the direction of polyamory.  
+ Michael Cook (Editor of Mercator-Net)

### MY SALVATION CAME

*Life's wide straight road, it stretched out before me, smooth and gentle and kind.  
The world was mine for the taking, I would go my own way, I would do exactly as I was inclined.  
Beholden to no-one my goals I would pursue, I was destined for wealth and acclaim,  
But deep down inside I was fearful and guilty, before my salvation came.*

*I never doubted a God of creation, His handiwork could not be denied,  
But the message of forgiveness through Jesus Christ I had rejected in blindness and pride.  
Still, no-one is saved based on merit, before I was, my Saviour knew my name,  
Before the earth was formed I was chosen, that's why my salvation came.*

*Images rushed through my guilt-ridden mind, a scourged back, pierced hands, pain-etched face,  
The Son of God's blood flowing down from the cross, and soaking the dust at its base.  
I saw destruction's fires reach toward me, in terror I recoiled from the flame,  
Then I knew my only hope was Jesus, and so my salvation came.*

*Convicted of sin, my desperate prayer of repentance came from deep down in my heart,  
On bended knee I surrendered my life to Him whose it was from the start.  
The Spirit descended, peace came upon me, Satan no longer had a claim,  
For the first time I knew true freedom, when my salvation came.*

*A narrow road is the one I now travel, it has a small gate at its end.  
The Deceiver lurks close, but clothed in God's armour I am able to stand and defend.  
Earth's troubles are all so fleeting, to live is Christ and to die is gain,  
Through that gate lies a glorious forever, because my salvation came.*

Stewart Loudon

# Prescribed Search / Youth Work

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

## APRIL 2013

SENIOR and INTERMEDIATE (Intermediate omit questions 1 and 6)

1 CORINTHIANS chapter 9

1. Which verse in Deut. 25 commands that the ox's mouth not be muzzled when treading out the grain?

For whose sake was this written?

2. Why did Paul have nothing to glory [boast] of?
3. Why did Paul become all things to all men?
4. What sort of crown do Christians strive [compete] to obtain?

chapter 10

5. What was the nature of the Rock that followed the Israelites in the wilderness?
6. Paul gives examples of the Israelites being punished in the wilderness. What relevance does that have to us?
7. How does God help us to overcome temptation?
8. What is to be our motive whether we eat, drink, or whatever we do?

## JUNIOR

LUKE chapter 17

1. What might we do if we had faith as a (grain of) mustard seed?
2. Of the ten lepers who were healed, how many returned to give glory to God? (2 verses)
3. What was Jesus' answer when he was asked when the kingdom of God would come? (2 verses)
4. What will happen to him who seeks to save his life, and to him who loses his life?

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

# Life under the Banner

## Keeping The Law

Jim Klazinga

### Doing the Impossible

Most people don't try to do that which they know is impossible for them to do. Men who try out for a professional rugby team usually do so because they believe they have a chance, even if it's just a tiny one, of making the team. But people like me are not going to bother, because I know they won't even let me out on the field. It would be a hopeless endeavour.

But you know, there is something I am called to do, something every one of us is required to do, yet this something is far more impossible for me than playing professional sports. There is something absolutely impossible for anyone alive today, no matter how smart we are, or how athletic we are, or how much money we have. And yet, we are required to do it. What is this hopeless task? Keeping God's law. We are all obligated to strive with all our might to keep God's law, keep it perfectly. But we can't do it. It's impossible.

### A Hopeless Task

Ecclesiastes 7:20 says, "Surely there is not a righteous man on earth who does good and never sins." We can't avoid sin completely. Our sinful nature simply has too much power over us.

The Bible exposes us for who we are: sinners who will never be able to attain perfection here in this life. In fact, our actions, our words, and our thoughts, they are all impure. And if we were to declare that there is no sin in us, we would be liars.

In light of this, wouldn't you think that when faced with the task of keeping God's law perfectly, we would have to become pessimistic? Wouldn't it be easy to simply say, "Forget it? I can't do it. It's impossible. I stand a better chance of flying by flapping my arms than I do of keeping God's law perfectly. I'm not even going to bother trying."

For instance, when it comes to our bodies, temples of the Holy Spirit, we know we don't treat them as well as

we should. We don't eat properly, we don't exercise enough, we don't give ourselves enough time to sleep. But we can't change, so we don't bother trying.

When it comes to our words, we know we say things that we shouldn't. We boast, we use vulgar language, we speak ill of our neighbour. But it's too hard to change the way we talk. There are so many areas of our lives in which we demonstrate so much unholiness, so much sin. It would be so easy to just simply throw up our arms and give up. I can't help it. I can't do anything about it. It's just the way I am. I'm only human. I'm just like everyone else. I can't be perfect, so don't bother asking me to even try.



### A Necessary Struggle

But is this the attitude we are to have when it comes to trying to live up to the law of God? Do we just sort of give up, and tell ourselves it's hopeless? No. You see, unlike any other impossible task, this is one that we must continue to struggle with. I don't have to bother trying to play professional rugby. But even though following God's law perfectly is infinitely more impossible, I still have to struggle with it and keep on striving. I

must endeavour to obey the commands which God gives to me in the Bible. And not just the ones I happen to like and are convenient for me, but all of them.

But doesn't this seem a bit unfair? Isn't God asking way too much? I mean, when you're trying to get your children to tidy up their room, you don't tell them that they have to make sure that every single dirt molecule is cleaned up. It's impossible. They wouldn't begin to try. So why does God try to tell us to do something impossible?

Wouldn't it be better if he would let us break a few of his laws every now and then? "Hey, it's OK. Don't worry about it. If you want to cheat on your spouse every now and then, well, I understand. If you want to steal a little from your employer, that's OK, everybody does it. Nobody's perfect."

No, this would not be better. For one thing, this attitude does not fit in with who God is. God is a holy, righteous, perfect God. And sin is imperfection, so it stands in complete opposition to Him.

And besides, such an attitude is not one that the true Christian would even want to take. A true Christian thinking biblically would not want to say, "Hey, it's all right, a little sin now and then will not hurt anybody." Instead, he realizes what sin is. He understands that sin violates the law of God, and the Christian does not want to do that. Because of course, the Christian loves God. The Christian loves the Word of the Lord that confronts him with how he should live his life.

### A Desire for Obedience

So many people do not like to have any sort of law imposed on them. They think that laws are meant to have loopholes. Laws are the attempt of other people to force their authority on me, and I don't want anyone having authority over me. But, this should not be the attitude of the believer. The true Christian

should not say, "Where are the loop-holes?", but instead, "I want to obey God in everything that I do." The true Christian says, with the psalmist, "My delight is in the law of the Lord." He sees the command, "do not kill," and says, "I want to obey this command as much as possible." And so he comes to the conclusion, "This means abortion is wrong."

But it also means that we must not hate our brother. So the Christian does not look at that command and think, "well, the letter of the law does not really deal with the subject of hating. It just talks about unjustly taking the life of another person. Therefore, it's OK for me to hate my neighbour." It doesn't work that way. The Christian wants to obey the sixth command in any way possible. That means: no hatred, no envy, no vindictiveness, no insulting, none of that. The Christian says, "I don't want to do those things. I delight in the law that tells me not to do those things. Oh, I know that while sin is in me, I will not be able to love as perfectly as I ought. But I still love the God who loved me so much that he made it possible for me to love my neighbour as much as I can." And so, the true Christian strives after love. He won't give himself excuses when he doesn't do as well as he could. He goes on and continues striving, because the Law of God is His delight.

You know, whenever we hear the law of God expressed in the Ten Commandments, or in any other portion of Scripture, we should not say, "Well, here we go again. The Law of God. The rules that stop me from having any fun."

No. We should listen to God's law with joy, saying, "This is what I want to do. I don't want to serve other gods. I want to live in such a way that it is perfectly clear just who it is that is in charge of my life. I want others to see that my God, my Lord, is working in me."

You know, I grew up in churches where we would read the Law of God every week during the worship service. This was not a boring ritual designed to fill time. Reading God's law during the worship service gave us a chance to be reminded of just what it is that God wants us to do. We would confess our failure to keep that law,

but then we would pray that the Spirit would give us the strength to keep working at it.

And after praying for the strength of God, we are called to struggle. We see perfection personified in Jesus Christ, and we are called to try as much as we can to be like him.

### **The Temptation to Disobey**

This will not be easy. Of course the world will struggle against such efforts. The world does not at all take delight in the law of God. If you say to people that they are responsible to their Creator for their actions, they will not like it. And so they will find God's law disgusting, or idiotic, or out-of-date, or inappropriate.

And they will try to tempt the Christian to disobey God's law as well. They will put pretty pictures on your TV sets, saying, "You are special, buy our products and you will be important." They will tell you that sinning is funny. They will send you messages saying, "There is no right or wrong. It doesn't matter what you believe."

And the Christian will be tempted. There will be areas where he falls, because, as I've said, the task before us is impossible. We will never attain perfection in this life.

### **The Ongoing Need for Grace**

Now the Christian might be inclined to ask, "Why, God? Why not enable us to be perfect? Our witness to you is so limited because of our imperfection. We could serve you so much better if we didn't have to worry about this constant nagging problem of sin. You're Almighty, you can get rid of this sin in our lives, can't you?"

But look at it this way: there is something beneficial about realizing our imperfection. We are confronted with the law of God, and we are made aware of our sin because of our failure to keep that law. And this in turn forces us to Jesus.

Our ongoing sinfulness continues to remind of what Jesus did for us. It was because of our sins that Jesus died. So when we know of our sins, this makes us turn to Jesus, because it is in him that we find forgiveness of our sins.

A rich man would hardly notice if someone were to pick up the tab for him at a restaurant. But a poor man

who has no money and has had nothing to eat for days would certainly notice the free meal.

We can be much more conscious of the grace of God when we are conscious of our need for it. Isn't this amazing? Even when it reminds of our sin, the law of God is our delight, because the law of God points us to Christ.

### **The Hope of Perfection**

We can also know that even though in this life we will not be able to obey God's law perfectly, even though in this life the law will remind us of our sin, there will come a time when the Christian will obey the law of God perfectly.

Psalm 1 talks about how the man who delights in God's law is blessed. It also talks about how the way of the wicked will perish. Ultimately, if they do not repent, the wicked will perish eternally. But the way of those who belong to God and who love his law will continue on into glory.

When Jesus Christ returns, he will separate the wicked from the righteous, he will separate those who love God's law from those who hate it. He will separate those who were chosen unto salvation from those who weren't. And God's people will go to live with him in perfection. While the goal of perfection is impossible at this point, it will not always be so. And that time of perfection reaches out to us like a beacon, calling us to strive toward it.

Do you consider the law of God your delight? Do you consider the law of God your joy? Can you see that the law shows you your sin, and points you to Jesus? Do you strive after obedience? If you don't, I would call on you to repent of your sin and look to Jesus Christ. Only in Him can we find salvation. And only in Him can you find the strength to help you be obedient.

# Churches in the Banner

*From up North to down South!*



***The children, young people, and teachers of the Brisbane PCEA Sunday School***

*Back row: Aimee Carswell, Naomi Klazinga, Nathanael Carswell; Third row: Ian Lenane, Jessie Carswell, Miriam Pomerantz, Irene Klazinga, Barbara Schmidt; Second row: Julie Klazinga, Caleb Klazinga, Tahnee Carswell, Paul Geerds, Christina Carswell; Front row: Isaac Klazinga, Harrison Carswell, Nick Geerds*



***Southern Presbytery, February 23 2013***

*From left: Elders I. Hamilton, D. Manley, J. Dekter; Rev's A. Miranda, A. Scheepers, T. Yoa, D. Kumnick, R. Ward; Elder D. Boehret; Rev. S. Bajema; Elder T. Buck; Rev. G. Smith*