**A selection of minister messages**

**Dr Dennis K. Muldoon 2021**

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Abortion Bill Submission Elizabeth Muldoon

***Dear Member of NSW Parliament Committee on Abortion Bill,***

 *Babies older than 22 weeks are considered viable. They could be born and live a healthy life. It cannot be right to permit their destruction with the sign-off of only two doctors. I feel horrified at the thought of legalising late term abortions. It is known that a foetus can feel pain - how can we allow pain and death to be inflicted on such a tiny vulnerable life? There are other options than killing this little life. There are hundreds of people on the adoption waiting list. If a mother is unable to care for her child, it could go to another loving family.*

*I am a woman, and strongly in favour of equality for women in all areas, except this one. Sometimes one right conflicts with another, and the stronger right may override the other right. Women should have the right to determine what happens to their bodies, except when that right involves the taking of another life that is dependent on it.*

*I also disagree with forcing doctors to recommend another doctor to perform an abortion if they are unwilling to do it themselves because of a conflict with their conscience. Everyone should be allowed to do what they feel is right, provided that “right” does not harm anyone else. Doctors, too, should have this privilege.*

*Finally, the possibility of abortion because the sex of the baby is not what you want is abhorrent. In India, 97% of abortions are because the foetus is a female. How can we allow the destroying of a life just because the child is of the gender we don’t want?*

***Please recommend against the abortion bill that allows gender specific abortion and late term abortion.***

**Law and Conscience** dkm July 2019

Sarah became pregnant when she was 27 years old. She was in a relationship with a loving boyfriend but had just started in her career and wanted to travel before settling down. So she went to the doctor and had an abortion or ‘medical procedure to terminate her pregnancy’. There was no question about abortion being illegal under State law. She went back to work the next day but felt uneasy about telling her workmates, even though they were good people.

Sarah kept her abortion secret - why? She did not speak of shame, or mention the word ‘guilt’ but these words best describe what she felt. She now says that decriminalizing abortion and making it legal up to 22 weeks gestation would have made it easier for her, but she did not consider the law at the time. Changing the law will take away the threat of punishment, but will it take away guilt? Does ‘normalizing’ or legalising a certain behaviour or action remove our guilt? What if we changed the law regarding murder- would it remove guilt and make everyone happy? Abortion is in fact murder, murder of an unborn child, but that is another point.

What Sarah did not realise is that she, like every human being, is made in the image of God. God gave her a conscience, a conscience that may accuse or excuse her (Rom 2:15). Her conscience was, and may still be accusing her, although talking about her sin, and maybe writing about it, shows that her conscience has hardened. It is interesting that after talking to Sarah, the broadcaster encourages anyone who is disturbed by her story to contact ‘Lifeline’. Why should anyone be disturbed if she has done nothing wrong? Anyone who has had an abortion will be disturbed of course, just like Sarah. ‘Lifeline’ will try to comfort her, probably telling her that she has done nothing wrong.

The law of the State may be changed but what about the law of God- and what about conscience? If Sarah seeks counsel from the word of God she will find true and enduring peace in her heart. ‘How much more will the blood of Christ… cleanse your conscience’ (Hebrews 9:14). Sarah has sinned - we have all sinned. The guilt of sin, and indeed divine punishment upon sin, will remain, unless and until she repents and asks God to cleanse her conscience. Such counsel seems harsh, and may be regarded as ‘hate-speech’, but it is the truth according to the word of God. It is the only counsel that will remove guilt and bring peace to Sarah’s heart, and any heart that is guilty of sin.

**Another ‘sorry speech’** dkmNov2018
We recently had the Prime Minister deliver a ‘sorry’ speech in the Parliament. He was saying ‘sorry’ to the hundreds of victims of institutional child abuse. A Royal Commission uncovered this evil, much of it within the Roman Catholic Church. For some reason, the perpetrators of this evil were not necessarily pursued but the institutions they worked in were. The victims seem to have welcomed the ‘sorry speech’. Some ten years ago we had our first ‘sorry speech’ in Federal Parliament. This was to say ‘sorry’ to the ‘stolen generation’. Many questioned the relevance of this ‘sorry speech’ because it happened in a previous generation. Government and non-government organisations thought they were doing a good thing by taking aboriginal children and giving them a ‘better life’ and a good education. Such thinking was misguided, and often harmful to the children.

Will we ever have another ‘sorry speech’, and if so what will it be for? I do not know if, or when, it will be, but it should be a ‘sorry speech’ for the hundreds of thousands of unborn children killed in our nation. These unborn children are the victims of violent homicide, a collusion between mother and medical practitioner under our law- just like the ‘stolen generation’. The big difference is that the victims of this evil are all dead. They do not even have graves to mark their existence.

God said to Cain that the voice of his brother’s blood, whom he murdered, cried out to him from the ground (Gen 4:10). God sees the blood of every child killed in the womb, an estimated 70,000 each year in our nation. Is it not time that we, as a nation, saw this blood also? Are there not some among the living who will speak for the dead?

The Bible teaches that life begins are conception, not when a baby emerges from the womb (Psalm 51:5). The medical profession also recognises that life begins long before birth, although they cannot decide at what point after conception. They do their utmost to keep the *in utero* baby alive, if this is the desire of the mother. But if her desire, or the desire of others, is to kill this baby, a doctor will agree to a medical ‘termination of life’.

Departing from the clear teaching of the Bible leads to confusion. When society starts killing the unborn child and euthanasing the elderly and terminally ill, we know that it has departed from the teaching of God’s word, and humanity itself. We continue to remember the horrors of the Second World War and Hitler’s gas chambers-and rightly so. In that evil regime people whose lives were judged ‘unproductive’, disabled and elderly individuals, were exterminated along with the people Hitler hated. It is true that the Nazis did not allow abortions for Aryan women and girls in their stud-farms called Liebensborn (‘Fountain of Life’), but pregnant, non-Aryan women were encouraged, or forced to have an abortion.

Hitler was doing what some wicked kings in Israel did, as recorded in the Bible. King Manasseh made his sons ‘pass through the fire’; he sacrificed children to the gods (2Kings 21:6). Unborn children are being sacrificed to the gods in our modern age, gods of wealth and happiness. The thousands of children aborted are more than replaced by immigration, so it is not about controlling the population. It is about selfishness, about my rights, my hopes, my dreams, no matter what, no matter the death of an unborn child. Will not our next national ‘sorry speech’ be to the hundreds of thousands of victims of abortion? Let us hope so, and let us pray that this evil will cease in our land!

**Stand on the Rock** dkm Oct 2020

I often get phone calls asking for donations to a cancer foundation or some other charity. The caller on the phone today wanted money for an organisation stamping out bullying in schools. She told me how serious this problem was, with one in four kids experiencing bullying. Before she got to asking for money I asked what was her answer to this problem. I suggested that telling kids about Jesus and his love is the best way to stop bullying and help kids find hope and love in their lives. I did not question her sincerity, although we have had the infamous ‘Safe Schools program’ that purported to be about bullying in schools. Besides, I never give to ‘cold callers’ anyway; I am surprised that anyone does but some must because they keep calling! I fully support the work of Scripture in schools, and the Gideon’s.

Have you noticed that at least one story in the nightly news is followed by the words, ‘If you are disturbed by this story you can call Lifeline or Beyond Blue’? Why is this? Why are these organisations being swamped with calls for help? They help many people, but for how long? When someone calls in saying they are discouraged, depressed, or desperate, they listen and counsel them. But is it not better that they receive counsel from the chief counsellor found in the Bible? When I open my Gideon Bible I find a page directing me to passages of the Bible where I will find help if I am discouraged, depressed or desperate- or even suicidal. I turn to a Psalm telling me that ‘God is my refuge and strength, a very present help in time of trouble’ (Ps 95:1).

Our little grandsons sing the song, ‘Stand on the Rock, its Jesus’. This is a modern version of the old hymn, ‘On Christ the solid Rock I stand, all other ground is sinking sand’. Jesus himself tells us about the wise man building on the rock, and the foolish man building on the sand. Far too many young people are building on the sand because this is the only foundation they are being told about. Far too many older people and middle-aged people are also building on the sand because they don’t want to know about the Rock. So depression and despair is afflicting people of all ages. This ‘disease’ is being exacerbated by the current pandemic - or is it that the pandemic is only exposing the ‘soul sickness’ affecting so many in our society? Including you?



Health and economic conditions in our society may be the worst for decades, the worst since the War, but people in the Bible experienced terrible conditions also. Look at prophets like Jeremiah who saw women in his city cooking their own kids because of a siege, and then saw his city levelled (Lamentations 4:10), and look into the Psalms, as just mentioned. Men and women faced terrible deprivation and suffering but they turned to God, to the Rock of salvation who enabled them to stand when everything around them was crumbling.

Finally, look to the Rock himself, to Jesus, who suffered so terribly at the hands of cruel people. He did not suffer sickness because he has the power to heal the sick, and has the power to stop pandemics. But he suffered death; he died that you might live, and press on in the strength he gives you when you believe in him. He gives the Spirit, the Spirit of power, to all who believe. Will you turn to Jesus today and stand in him if you are lonely or have lost a loved one, if you are depressed, afraid or even suicidal? Jesus says to you, ‘Come to me all you who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest’ (Matthew 11:28). He says, ‘My peace I give to you, not as the world gives do I give you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid’ (John 15:27).

**Race of faith** dkm January 2018

How was your summer holiday? Much too short? You will be back at work by now, putting in long hours. You are working hard to feed and clothe and educate your family. Maybe you have personal goals you want to achieve in 2018. Are you saving up for your next holiday? We don’t know what lies ahead but the Lord does. We can make our plans but we should do so in light of God’s will for us. What is God’s will for you?

One aspect of God’s will is common for us all as believers; God’s will is our sanctification (1Thess 4:3). God wants us to become more like his Son, his perfect Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. If we read our Bible we will learn how Jesus lived, as well as how, and why, he died. Jesus obeyed his Father perfectly, even suffering as he did in going to the cross. Jesus lived trusting in his heavenly Father every moment of every day. Will you live every day of 2018 trusting in God? Will you live obeying his word? Obedience means listening to God’s word as we have it in the Bible, and doing what he says, not listening to dreams or our own ideas.

Jesus is called the author and finisher, or pioneer and perfector of our faith in Hebrews 11:2. If you suffer in any way, know that Jesus has also suffered; he suffered more than you ever will. Know that Jesus understands your suffering and is powerful to help you. Jesus suffered unto death in order that you will not suffer death and hell.

Jesus was a trailblazer as he took on the enemy, Satan, to live a perfect life in this world. You are not called to be a trailblazer but to follow in the path set by Jesus. In fact many have followed Jesus before you - a great cloud of witnesses (Heb 12:1). This is the path of faith and obedience. It is the path Jesus pioneered and also perfected. Through his victory at the cross, through his death and resurrection, you can follow this path; you can be a conqueror and win the race.

In Hebrews 12:1 we learn two things about running this race. Firstly, get rid of anything that hinders; throw off every weight, as in every sin that threatens to trip us up. How tragic to see some getting tripped up in this race. Who will get tripped up in 2018, I wonder? Will it be you? Are you serious about living the Christian life? Are you in the race for the long haul? What threatens to trip you up? Watch out for the cares of this world, the deceitfulness of money, the lust of the flesh. Remember, God’s will is your sanctification.

Secondly, fix your eyes on Jesus. How did Jesus endure the suffering that he went through as he walked in obedience to God’s will? We read that ‘for the joy set before him he endured’ (Heb 12:2). Jesus looked beyond the cross to the glory of being reunited with his Father in heaven (John 17:5). The suffering of the present was not worth comparing to the glory that awaited him. You as a believer must also look forward to the glory that ‘will be revealed in us’ when Jesus Christ returns (Rom 8:18).

Look up and fix your eyes on Jesus today and every day of 2018; and if Jesus has not returned by the end of this year then keep on looking because one day he will return and you will look back saying ‘all that suffering was worth it!’ –provided, of course, that you have stayed in the race.

**The cost** dkmApril2018
A man found treasure in a field so he went and sold all he had to buy that field. A man found a beautiful pearl so he went a sold all he had to buy that pearl. A young man found Jesus and when Jesus asked him to go and sell all he had, and he would have treasure in heaven, he went away sad because he had great possessions. The most tragic story in the Bible comes not long before what seems to be the most tragic story in the Bible but is in fact the most glorious story as far as believers are concerned- the cross and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. As believers, we have given up every earthly desire to follow Jesus, have we not? Or is there some desire that you are clinging to, something more important to you than Jesus?

Not long before Jesus died on the cross, a young man came to him asking what he must do to have eternal life. Jesus asked him to sell all he had and follow Jesus. Jesus personally invited this fine young man to follow him. What an invitation! The Son of Almighty God personally invited this young man to follow him and he would have eternal life. Did this man jump at this opportunity- he wanted eternal life and here was the offer.

Divided loyalties kept this young man from following Jesus. He tossed up between Jesus and his riches, and his riches won the day. ‘He went away sorrowful for he had great possessions’ (Mat 19:22). Eternal life was lost! This fine young man turned down the offer of eternal life! He preferred to keep his riches, just like many today want to keep what they have, and get more of this world’s material things, as well as fame. ‘He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose’ said the missionary Jim Elliot who died serving the Lord.

Have you heard of any similarly tragic stories? They are all too common today. Are you ready to count the cost of following Jesus? Are you trusting in your own resources or are you trusting in Jesus? How would you respond if Jesus put the same question or command to you that he did to the rich young ruler? Actually, Jesus puts that question to everyone who wants to follow him- ‘one thing you lack’. You cannot follow Jesus unless and until he becomes Lord of all your life. Too many people are willing give Jesus rule over most of their life but not all. They say or indicate that family comes first, before Jesus. They say ‘everything but not my family, my career or my sport’.

The story of the rich young ruler is terribly tragic, but what is more tragic is the number of times it has been repeated down through history, and that it continues to be repeated today. Many would-be followers draw a line in the sand when it comes to following Jesus. Even some who want to serve the Lord draw up their own terms of service; ‘I will not go there’ or ‘I will not leave my job’.

Was Jesus asking too much of the rich young ruler? He was a ‘good’ man, obeying the commandments, as he said. Could Jesus afford to lose such an eager young recruit? The truth is, Jesus could not afford to have such a follower, a man or woman whose commitment to him was not absolute. Why? Because anything less than total commitment is to misunderstand the commitment Jesus made to save us from our sins. Did Jesus hold back when it came to saving you from your sin? Did he just half-die? No! He gave his life as a sacrifice for your sin.

If you think anything less than a total offering of your life to Jesus is okay then you are mistaken- tragically mistaken. Jesus said, ‘if anyone would come after me let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me’ (Mat 16:24). The rich young ruler got it wrong. What about you?

**Narcissism**

‘Narcissism on the rise in pop lyrics’ was the headline in a news report out of the USA. What was this news report about? What is narcissism? The report spoke of increasing narcissism in our society after a computer analysis was done on pop lyrics from 1980 to 2007. The study found a distinct change from the words ‘we’ and ‘us’, to ‘I’, ‘me’ and ‘my’ in the lyrics over this time.

Narcissism, according to the dictionary, is a great admiration of oneself or ones own qualities- in other words self-love. In Greek mythology Narcissus was a handsome youth who fell in love with his own reflection in a pool. He pined away as he kept staring at his own reflection and was changed into a flower that bears his name; the narcissus daffodil.

Sigmund Freud popularised the term in teaching psychoanalytical theory. Some people are diagnosed with NPD – narcissistic personality disorder. In other words, self-centred individuals. Narcissism is basically elevated self-esteem. A whole generation has been encouraged to improve their self-esteem. They have been taught they deserve the best, and they can do whatever they choose to do in life.

The advertising industry thrives on self-esteem. ‘You deserve the best so you must have the latest and best mobile phone, or other product’. ‘You are the most important person in the world so you must have this product to make you look the best’. Life is all about how you look and the things you possess, according to this narcissistic culture.

Is it any wonder that young girls - and the not so young - spend hours in front of the mirror trying to look like Barbie! Is it any wonder that when they have money they head for the beauty parlour or the cosmetic surgeon? Young men are doing the same things.

Is it any wonder that such people are having trouble maintaining a relationship with another person? It was great to see a wedding rather than a divorce or rape on the front page recently. Is it any wonder that people are so selfish and self-centred when they are taught to be so self-centred? This is what narcissism is as far as the Bible is concerned.

The verse for today on my calendar is Psalm 36:9 - *in your light we see light*. The accompanying comment is ‘Lord, make us a reflection of you’. Rather than looking into a pool or into the mirror we should look at our reflection in the Bible. We will not see our face but we will see our heart when we do so. When we look at the life of Jesus we see the sort of person we should be.

The apostle Paul said ‘*imitate me, just as I imitate Christ’* (1Corinthians 11:1). Children should be taught to make Jesus their role model, not a celebrity of the movie screen or the sports field. Celebrity culture is a narcissistic culture. Who is writing the lyrics of the pop songs? These are the people our youth idolise!

Did you watch the royal wedding? Did you listen to the Bible reading? It was from Romans chapter 12. You will have heard things like ‘*do not think of yourself more highly than you ought; honour one another above yourself; given to hospitality; do not set your mind on high things; do not be wise in your own opinion’.* We pray that these beautiful words from the Bible will be heard, and taught to our children, and that this terrible word ‘narcissism’, along with self-esteem, will soon be forgotten. Jesus said *love one another as I have loved you*.

**Glory and Joy**

Did you take part in the latest happiness survey? The old question of money and happiness is again the topic of discussion. Money of course is only good for what it can buy but the world offers heaps of things to buy. Many seek happiness in bodily pleasures; others go full on at work, while others try to do good to others or to the planet. Yet lots of people are becoming lonely and unhappy. Where is true happiness to be found?

‘Man’s chief end is to glorify God and enjoy him forever’. The first answer in the Shorter Catechism is very profound. It links joy or happiness with the glory of God. At a recent conference the speaker said ‘God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in him’; which is another way of saying what we have in the Catechism. Because we are created by God and made in his image, our true happiness is bound up with God and his glory. We cannot be happy in loneliness - is anyone truly happy living on an island all alone? Our happiness comes in relationships and supremely in relationship with our Maker.

*The heavens declare the glory of God* (Psalm 19). This word ‘glory’ is not easy to understand but we find it over 300 times in the Bible. We use it in many songs but rarely in our speech. The more we focus on the glory of God the more joy we will have. God’s glory is seen in the creation. We see his power and his majesty in the things he has made. ‘The heavens cannot help declaring the glory of God. But we are given the wonderful privilege of doing it because we want to’. How are we to declare the glory of God?

Jesus glorified God when he was on this earth. How? By doing God’s will; by finishing the work God gave him to do (John 17:4). Jesus was without sin so could do this. Believers are not without sin but still it is our aim or ‘chief end’ to glorify God. ‘*He who glories let him glory in the Lord’* (1Corinthians 1:31). Paul twice quotes Jeremiah 9:24. Let us not glory in our own wisdom, riches or power but in this- that we know the Lord who is loving and righteous and the judge of all. God delights in being acknowledged and worshipped. He is a jealous God.

Moses had it all in terms of worldly pleasures but he turned his back on these ephemeral pleasures. He chose to suffer by following Christ. He sought to glorify God. He once asked God to show him his glory (Exodus 32). God made his goodness pass before Moses and declared his name. Paul saw a very bright light and heard the voice of Jesus. He saw the glory of the risen Jesus. Jesus actually revealed the glory of God in the earth, *full of grace and truth* (John 1:14). He prayed ‘Father glorify me together with yourself’. Jesus will come again on the clouds with power and great glory.

Sin is falling short of the glory of God. To be righteous means to give glory to God. It is in doing this that we have our greatest joy. We were made to glorify God so it follows that in doing this we find true joy. *In the presence of the Lord is fullness of joy and pleasures evermore* (Psalm 16). Come into the presence of God’s glory with exceeding joy (Jude). Delight in the Lord and he will delight in you. God will be pleased and he will be glorified when you find your total joy in him.

**Deceptions of the Devil** dkm 2016
‘Keep me from deceitful ways’: this is what we read in Psalm 119 verse 29 (NIV). In the NKJV it is translated ‘the way of lying’. It is terrible to hear little children telling blatant lies, like saying, ’No, you didn’t give me a sweet’ while holding a sweet in their hand. As they grow up they get smarter and hide the sweet, and they learn all manner of deceitful ways. Jeremiah writes, ‘The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked’ (Jer 17:9). Jesus said, ‘The devil is a liar and the father of it’ (John 8:14). It follows that his followers, that is those not following Jesus, are also liars. Followers of Jesus are commanded to speak the truth in love (Ephesian 4:15). But all too often we are tempted to deceive others and even ourselves. Self-deception is one of the devil’s favourite temptations. Here are some ways the ‘father of lies’ leads unto into deception.  **1**.’I am not to blame’. When Cain murdered his brother Abel he lied to the Lord and also tried to justify himself saying, ‘Am I my brother’s keeper?’ Everywhere we look, we find people blaming others for their own wrongdoing. We can look into our own hearts also.
**2**.’It’s not so bad’. The tendency to minimise sin is a ‘great’ way of deceiving ourselves. Some people try to laugh it off; they turn serious matters into a joke. A lie seems less serious when called a ‘little white lie’ or a ‘slip of the tongue’. Some hate the word ‘sin’ and refuse to call anything sin.
**3**. ‘If it feels good it can’t be wrong’. Many have abandoned any objective, external measure of morality. The only measure they use is subjective, as in their own feelings. ‘If it feels good do it’ they say. Often no consideration is given for the feelings of others; hence the raft of laws now needed to protect people, especially the young, from those with this morality, ‘if it feels good do it’.
**4**.‘Everyone is doing it’. This is one of the devil’s favourites. It ‘moves the goal posts’ as it were, redefining what is sin, what is right and wrong. What is the measure of sin? If you come before a judge after breaking a road rule, will he listen to you pleading, ‘But judge, everyone is doing it’. No! You have broken a road rule and will be punished- if you don’t believe me then try it sometime! Yet we break God’s rules for life and try pleading before Him, ‘Everyone is doing it’. The idea that we are free to make our own moral laws is one of the devil’s deceptions. The devil promises freedom, while leading you into greater bondage. People protested to Jesus, ‘We have never been in bondage to anyone’ but Jesus said, ‘Whoever commits sin is a slave to sin’ (John 8:33, 34). Athletes who take drugs are told by themselves, or others, ‘Everyone is doing it’, and if everyone is doing it then it is okay. Is this the way athletes and sports in general will go? Will laws against doping be removed? Many think God’s laws about marriage and sexuality are no longer valid. Where is divine revelation to this effect? God’s rules have not changed because God does not change.
**5.**’Called by another name’. Satan or the devil is able to transform himself into an angel of light (2Cor 11:14). His followers are clever at calling what is black, white. We are familiar with euphemisms, with referring to unpleasant things in an oblique or pleasant way. We refer to death as ‘passing away’ or ‘expiring’. But deliberately changing language to try and deceive people has reached new heights- or depths- in our society. Years ago homosexuals began calling themselves ‘gays’, deceiving people as to the type of life they lived. Nowadays the idea of homosexual marriage is being advanced under the deceitful banner of ‘marriage equality’. Do stop to think of the reasons for such a banner, and its ramifications. Other moral laws are being challenged in the same manner, with the banner ‘death with dignity’ for assisted suicide or euthanasia. The killing of unborn children is not even called abortion; it is ‘pro-choice’ or ‘termination of a pregnancy’. Words and names are important. Our adversary, the devil, knows how to manipulate words in an attempt to deceive us, so beware and do not play into his hands by adopting his words.

**Backsliding** dkm July 2017In order to ride a bike with just two wheels you have to keep moving- you have to keep pedalling. It takes a while to teach youngsters this fact but there is no other way to cycle- unless you want to stay with training wheels. What happens if you stop pedalling? You fall off and hurt yourself. The Christian life has been compared to riding a bike. If you stop attending to the ‘means of grace’, stop reading your Bible, stop praying and stop attending worship, you are in danger of falling away. Time and again we hear people say they don’t have to attend church to be a Christian, but it is not long before they stop even claiming to be a Christian.

Have you heard the word backsliding? It simply means sliding backwards and away from your goal. It may be less sudden than falling off a bike but the picture is the same. This word is found only twelve times in the Bible, with nine of these being in Jeremiah, and six of these being in Jeremiah 3. The repeated cry of the prophet is, ‘Return, backsliding Israel’. In one place he says, ‘Return, O backsliding children for I am married to you’ (Jer 3:14).

This is what happened in Jerusalem many years ago. Sometimes it was the king, sometimes the priests, and sometimes the people who started slipping away- not that it made any difference who started the slide. They got tired of reading the Bible and soon forgot what was written in it. They were attracted to the things other people were worshipping. The idols they made were less demanding than God- besides they were in control of the idols. Worshipping idols gave them opportunity to indulge the flesh. ‘Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God?’ said James (Ja 4:4).

Why do people stop attending the means of grace? Often it is because of a job, a family function or a sports event. They see such things as more pressing than worshipping God. They may not admit this but Satan certainly sees it this way. He is delighted when people ‘take the bait’ as it were, and it is not long before he starts reeling them in. A week or two becomes a week or four, and soon they have not been to worship for months. ‘You are doing okay, you have more money now’ Satan whispers, and they agree. True believers miss going up to the house of the Lord. If they miss one day they will be there the next. But some get used to doing other things, and before long they are lining up on the enemy’s team. They might even be urging others to get in line with them.

When God’s people stopped worshipping him, worshipping God alone, they were called adulterers and adulteresses. They had broken their solemn pledge to the Lord. People who break vows or agreements are people to be wary of. If you have been betrayed you will know the hurt involved. Can we blame God for being hurt and offended when we turn from him and start loving the things of this world? God hates divorce. God hates backsliders, but in his mercy he calls them to return to him so he can restore them. Is God calling you to return to him, ‘O backsliding children’?

**Fruit** dkm September 2017

Our life can be compared to a tree. In Psalm 1 we read of the person who is like a tree planted by the river and yielding fruit in season. Think of a huge mango tree loaded with fruit and giving lots of shade in the heat of summer. Jeremiah speaks of this person as one who trusts in the Lord (Jer 17:7-8). By contrast, the person who trusts in man is like a desert shrub. Think of the saltbush found in the outback- no fruit and no shade.

What sort of tree would you like to be? What sort of fruit would you like to bear? We all bear fruit of some kind. By nature we produce fruits of a sinful nature: selfishness, covetousness, jealousy, hatred, anger, drunkenness, sexual immorality etc. But those who are born again of the Spirit of God produce the fruits of the Spirit.



The apostle Paul spoke of the fruits of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22. Look at these nine fruits of the Spirit for a moment and tick off the ones you see in your life. How did you score? For sure, no one is perfect but we can be more fruitful. But how? These are called fruits of the Spirit, the fruit of having the Spirit of God dwelling in our hearts. When we walk according to the Spirit rather than according to the flesh or our sinful nature, we will see more fruit in our lives.

A related picture given by Jesus is that of a vine bearing fruit. In this picture Jesus says that he is the vine and we are the branches. ‘He who abides in me, and I in him, bears much fruit’ (John 15:5). This is the secret to bearing fruit, fruit that will last, fruit that will be a blessing to yourself and others- abide in Jesus. And how do we abide in Jesus? We must be ‘in Jesus’ in the first place. It is by grace through faith that we are grafted into Jesus- God’s grace and your God-given faith.

Abiding in Jesus means loving Jesus and listening to his voice. It means praying and reading your Bible. If we stop praying and stop reading our Bible and stop attending worship the fruit will dry up. Notice that the fruit does not consist of what we might think of as blessings, material things like money or fine clothes or even good health. The Lord is powerful to give us material things, and he does, but what he wants to see in our lives is a heart in tune with his. When our heart is in tune with the Lord’s, when we are abiding in the vine, we will see the fruit that is pleasing to the Lord and glorifying to his holy name.

Look at the list of fruit again and consider God’s only begotten Son, Jesus. All the fruits are seen in Jesus, and seen all the time. Love; love for you led Jesus to the cross where he died in your place. For the joy that was set before him Jesus endured the cross. Peace is what Jesus gives us when we believe in him (John 14:27). What patience Jesus showed towards his twelve disciples, and towards you and me! You can think of how Jesus displayed the other fruits in his life. He certainly showed great self-control in the midst of terrible provocation and abuse. How is your self-control?

Remember, it is by abiding in Jesus, by letting his word and Spirit bring faith, hope and love into your heart that you can practice self-control. You can overcome fears and worries, anger and bitterness, selfishness and jealousy, when you abide in Jesus. May you see more of this fruit of the Spirit in your life, and less of the fruit or lusts of the flesh! Those you live with, fellowship with and work with will certainly notice, as will the Lord.

**From fear to faith** dkm May 2020
I like to keep up with local and world news, so often watch the TV news. Sometimes our grandkids jump on the couch to watch the news with Poppy. But pretty soon I have to change channels or switch the TV off. Sometimes there is a warning, ‘Some viewers may be offended by what follows’. Other items on the news fill children with fear without warning; if not about violence, it is about child abuse or drugs or the Mardi gras. The news is R rated, restricted viewing for children.

In school children get taught things that cause them to fear. They are taught about dangerous climate change, so much so that they take to marching in the streets and gluing themselves to bridges. They are taught about domestic violence and child abuse almost every day. No wonder children are filled with anxiety, and no wonder mental illness is on the increase among our children. They fear stepping out the door, they fear whenever there is a hot day. Children fear the destruction of their family home by divorce, which sadly is a fearful reality for too many children.

Rather than filling our children with fear every day, should we not be helping them to live without fear but with faith? Firstly, we should protect our children from horrible images and words, and from ‘facts’ that are not true- which mean no TV news! Some of what we see and hear is true of course, but we as parents need to be more discerning in this regard. Too many news reports and ‘facts’ are dramatized for the very purpose of shock and horror.

Is it not time we gave our children hope, hope in their future in this world- when was the last time you heard the word ‘hope’ in the media? It is a word you will find if you read the Bible. The God of the Bible is called the ‘Hope of Israel’. Jesus came to bring hope to the lost, to people who are like sheep without a shepherd (Matthew 9:36). If ever people were like sheep without a shepherd it is today. People look to politicians to lead them but they are disappointed because politicians are people just like us.

Where can we find hope for ourselves and our children? The Bible makes the comment, ‘having no hope and without God in the world’ (Ephesians 2:12). This means that hope is found is God. Jesus is our great hope, our sure and certain hope. Faith, hope, and love are the greatest gifts we can give our children, and these are all found in Jesus.

As a young man I read a book by Martyn Lloyd-Jones called, ‘From Fear to Faith’; it was book on the prophet Habakkuk. God’s people were living in fear. Enemies were raiding their country; there was drought and disease epidemics, one disaster after another. The prophet called upon the people to trust in the Lord. When we trust in the Lord, and when our children trust in the Lord, they will not fear; they will live with hope. Please tell your children they do not have to fear pandemics or dangerous climate change because this world will come to an end only when God brings it to an end. Not so long ago Christians were derided for teaching ‘doomsday nonsense’. Nowadays it is the unbelievers who are preaching real doomsday nonsense.

We continue to teach the judgment of God but we do not preach a gospel that is without hope. If you turn to Jesus confessing your sin and believing in him, and your children do the same, you and they will find salvation; you will find in Jesus Christ one who, like Noah’s ark, will keep you through whatever dangers you face in this world and the even greater danger of divine judgment. From fear to faith is the message of the Bible. Faith, hope and love are what you will find when you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.

**The Sanctification of a Believer** *taken from a website by dkm*The sanctification of the believer is in three realms-positional, progressive, and ultimate, reflecting the past, present, and future aspects of salvation. In [Romans 8:1-11](https://biblia.com/bible/nasb95/Rom%208.1-11), Paul notes the reality of positional sanctification as the believer is in union with Christ, having been justified and declared righteous. Then He describes how this sanctification is worked out progressively in the life of the believer who walks according the Spirit. Positional and ultimate sanctification are entirely the work of God. Progressive sanctification requires the cooperation of the believer, who is commanded to be filled with the Spirit.

**Positional sanctification** – *justification*. At salvation, believers are justified, declared righteous in conformity to the image of Jesus Christ. “For whom He foreknew, He also predestined *to become*conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the first-born among many brethren” ([Rom. 8: 29](https://biblia.com/bible/nasb95/Rom.%208.%2029)). This is entirely a work of God.

**Experiential sanctification**– *spiritual maturity.*The goal is Christlikeness, the result of the ministry of the Holy Spirit in producing godliness in the life of the believer. In essence, progressive sanctification is becoming in experience what we already are positionally in Christ. The Holy Spirit operates in believers to free them experientially from the power of sin and death. “And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect” ([Rom. 12:2](https://biblia.com/bible/nasb95/Rom.%2012.2)).

The progress of sanctification, or spiritual maturity, is marked by conflict, spiritual warfare, because our new life in Christ is on a *collision course* with the world, is opposed by Satan, and fought by the sinful nature within us. It is the presence of the Holy Spirit that produces the tension or conflict in our life. This conflict in the life of a believer, rather than being proof sanctification’s absence, is evidence of its work.

Progressive sanctification is accomplished by the Holy Spirit as the believer is filled with the Holy Spirit as a result of having no unconfessed sin in his or her life. It is an act entirely of God so that the righteous man lives by faith and not by works. However, it involves a choice: “Be ye holy for I am holy” ([1 Pet. 1:14-16](https://biblia.com/bible/nasb95/1%20Pet.%201.14-16)).

**Ultimate sanctification** – *glorification*. The final stage in the salvation process is the ultimate sanctification of the believer-the future glorification of the believer. It is realized at resurrection when the believer will be transformed into the likeness of Christ and presented to the Lord as holy. The indwelling of the Holy Spirit in the life of a believer is both the promise of and the agency for this future glorification, which includes 1) the redemption of the body, 2) an inheritance undefiled and eternal, and 3) deliverance from the future wrath of God.

“In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation—having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of *God’s own* possession, to the praise of His glory” ([Eph. 1:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/nasb95/Eph.%201.13-14); cf. [1 Cor. 1:22](https://biblia.com/bible/nasb95/1%20Cor.%201.22)).

***Justification* delivers from the penalty of sin: *Sanctification* delivers from the power of sin: *Glorification* delivers from the presence of sin**

**Wisdom** dkm 2017

*‘For Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness’* (1Corinthians 1: 22-23). On his second mission Paul went to Corinth, the greatest city of Greece. He preached- or reasoned- in the synagogue that Jesus is the Christ. Some Jews believed but others became abusive. They could not accept a Messiah who died on a cross because anyone hanged on a tree was cursed of God (Deut 21:23, Gal 3:13). They would not believe the truth of the resurrection, the truth which changed Paul’s whole view of the Bible and of life and death. He believed in Christ crucified and Christ risen from the dead. His Jewish world view turned into a Christian world view. The Jews accused Paul of turning the world upside down with his teaching (Acts 17:6). Paul saw the gospel as turning the world right way up. He saw God as choosing the foolish and weak things of the world to shame the wise and mighty.Paul stayed in Corinth for more than 18months. Some five years later he wrote a letter to the church at Corinth. He had heard about divisions in this church; converts were taking pride in who baptised them. They were departing from the Christian world view. He warned them not to be taken in by worldly wisdom or the world views that dominated the city of Corinth. There were lots of Gentiles in Corinth, people who believed in many gods, or no god at all. Paul refers to ‘the disputer or debater of this age’ (1Cor 1:20). Aristides said of Corinth that on every street corner one met a so-called wise man who had his own solutions to the world’s problems. The nearby city of Athens was a centre for language and literature, science and philosophy. Philosophers like Socrates and Plato made Athens their home. Paul came across exponents of Greek philosophies when he went to the ‘Agora’ or market place in Athens on his second mission (Acts 17:18). He was in Athens before going to Corinth. Their philosophies came out of their own minds, out of their studies of the natural world. These philosophers had no background in the Scriptures of the Jews.

The Greeks attempted to find God and know him by climbing a ladder called ‘philosophy’ or ‘knowledge’. ‘But they found no one there but themselves’, writes Paul Barnett. ‘God knew that human arrogance would be intolerable if people from this corrupt age could reach him with their intellects and say, ‘There is God, we have found him’. Such people never find God for he hides himself from them (Mat 11:25-27, Ps 89:46). “It is only as God reaches down in ‘the word of the cross’ and offers forgiveness of sins, that his hidden identity is at last revealed”. Study of the natural world should have pointed even Gentiles to the God of creation, whose power and majesty are revealed in the creation. But, like many today, they chose to remain blind. ‘Professing to be wise they became fools’ (Rom 1:22). They worshipped created things rather than the creator, as Paul observed when he was in Athens (Acts 17:16). You might think philosophical and scientific people would have nothing to do with idolatry, but you would be wrong. Philosophers and scientists can be quite superstitious, and in their superstition turn to idols. They have nothing against idols as such, even if they think they are the domain of poor and uneducated people. The wisdom from above that came with Jesus was a world view focussed on the cross and resurrection of Jesus. We must try to understand the pain, and the shame, associated with the cross. “According to Cicero it was so unspeakably ugly as to be ‘off limits’ in polite conversation. ‘The very word cross’ he wrote, ‘should be far removed not only from the person of a Roman citizen but from his thoughts, his eyes and his ears’ (Barnett). The wisdom of this world, the wisdom of man, will fail. God will see that it fails. God will bring confusion (James 3:16, Deut 28:28). The wise man of today will be the fool of tomorrow. We do not have to look far to find such people. Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? (1 Cor 1:20). In answer to the Jews requesting a sign Paul wrote, ‘but we preach Christ crucified’. In answer to the Greeks seeking after wisdom Paul wrote, ‘but we preach Christ crucified’ (1Cor 1:23).

**To forgive or not to forgive** dkm 0ct 2013

Have you seen one of those children’s books where you choose how the story proceeds? Well, let us see how the story of Joseph in the Bible might proceed if we get to decide how.

‘Joseph was young, the favourite son of his father. His father made him a fancy coat which he loved to wear. Joseph had ten older brothers who hated father’s pet. They hated him even more when he was silly enough to tell them about his dreams. One day they got their chance to teach him a lesson. They ended up selling their brother to some slave traders who took him to Egypt.

Joseph became a house slave. He hated his brothers for what they did to him. He told himself he would get even with them one day. After two years in prison, for something he did not do, he was bent on getting revenge on his brothers. When things changed for the better he stopped worrying about his evil brothers for a while. After seven years in a good job, one day he saw his brothers. He remembered how they had treated him some twenty years earlier. Here was his opportunity to get even. What would he do to them? He would make them pay dearly for what they did to him. He slammed them all in prison and arranged for their public execution.’

Millions of people (maybe you are one of them) would see nothing wrong with the story ending in this way. Joseph’s brothers expected it to end this way. They feared Joseph was out for revenge. Revenge is our natural response when someone hurts us or criticises us. Stories of revenge fill the media. Revenge that is carefully calculated and exquisitely executed brings satisfaction. I read of a woman who boasted that her ex-husband had to sell his car because of a putrid smell he could not get rid of. She had put prawns in his hubcaps.

Revenge was the way of the world in Joseph’s day, as it is today. But revenge did not rule Joseph’s life, and it does not have to rule yours. The story in the Bible does not end the way I selected. Joseph looked to God (Genesis 50:19, 20). He committed his ways to the Lord- all his ways and all his relationships. Sometimes even good people keep a secret revenge tucked away.

After their father died his brothers still feared revenge from Joseph. They made up a story about their father’s dying words. But Joseph was not bent of revenge. He was not God. It is God’s place to take revenge not ours. God repays evil- in this world or the next. For evils like murder he has appointed the state to punish the evil doer, not the individual. God was with Joseph and he looked to God. Instead of making himself miserable with thoughts of revenge he looked out for his fellow prisoners (Genesis 40:6).

If you are bearing a grudge, unable to forgive someone and bent on revenge, you will be miserable. If, on the other hand, you look to the Lord and forgive, as Jesus commands you (Matthew 6:14-15), you will have peace in your heart. If you know the least of how much God has forgiven you, you will be ready to forgive others- he gives his Spirit to help and comfort those who believe.

The apostle Paul urged two women in the church at Philippi to stop bickering and be of one mind. He did not go into the matter of who was to blame. In the light of what Jesus did on the cross and his imminent return, they should be rejoicing in the Lord, not plotting revenge. May the peace of God that surpasses all understanding guard your heart and mind through Christ Jesus (Philippians 4:7).

**Contentment** dkm Oct 2013

Hardly a week goes by without someone in the media talking about happiness. Since 2001 we have had an annual happiness survey, and given ourselves a happiness index. This leads to the question of what makes us happy, and the old question, ‘Can money buy happiness?’ The answer is always, ‘Well no, but…’. Despite being told this, we go on believing that more money will make us happier. And so we go on and on, around and around, asking this question but never believing the answer. Is it that we are not asking the right question? What is happiness anyway?

Not surprisingly, the word ‘happy’ is rarely found in the Bible. Rather, we find on page after page the word ‘blessed’- see the Sermon on the Mount. Maybe we should be saying ‘have a blessed birthday’ rather than ‘have a happy birthday’! The word ‘blessed’ has a sense of being grateful for the things we have rather than looking to things we do not have. The word ‘blessed’ means that someone has blessed us. We do not say we are blessed when we work hard and buy things for ourselves. We say we earned it and we deserve it.

There is another word that is rarely heard these days. It is in the dictionary but you will not find it in the media or in many conversations. It is the word ‘content’. It is found in the Bible more often than the word ‘happy’. The apostle Paul was in prison without charge when he wrote, ‘I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content’ (Phil 4:11). Not many prisoners would rate highly on the happiness index. But Paul was content. Contentment comes from a sense of sufficiency and satisfaction- two more words that we rarely hear today. Does anyone say they have sufficient and need nothing more? Contentment means to be satisfied with who you are, where you are, and what you have- and even to be thankful for such things.

Contentment does not come from comparing ourselves to other people. Many people are happy because they see others who are worse off. They are happy when they can give to others. It is good to give to others but this should not make us proud or happy. The problem is that there will be others who are better off than us, and when we think of them we will not be content. We’ll be wanting what they have, which is coveting not contentment.

‘Godliness with contentment is great gain’ (1Timothy 6:6). What great advice! Many think of ‘great gain’ in terms of money, of winning the lottery, of getting a good tax return or of getting higher pay. But this is not what this advice is about. This advice is given in the context of saying that the desire to get rich is fraught with danger. The desire to get happiness through material things is fraught with danger. Instead, the Bible says that if we have food and clothes we should be content (1Timothy 6:8).

Contentment comes from focussing not on self, or on other people, but on God.

Godliness means to be focussed on God, who made all things and is in control of all things. God is the giver of every good and perfect gift (James 1:17). God will supply all our needs according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus (Philippians 4:19). God gives, and he also takes away. Job learnt this. That is why, when he lost all his property, all his family, and all his health, he did not commit suicide as his wife advised, but looked to God. He was a God-fearing man. He could be content like the apostle Paul.

Are you content? How would you feel is you suffered like Job or Paul? Both men looked to God and committed their way to God. They learned to be content. Forget about trying to be happy. Learn to be content in every situation and remember that godliness with contentment is great gain.

**How to vote** dkm Sept 2013

In a few days all Australian citizens will have to vote for the person they want to represent them in the Federal Parliament. This is the privilege we have of living in a democratic nation. In some democracies voting is not compulsory, but we should treasure this privilege and exercise our right to vote anyway.

You may think your vote will not make any difference but that is not the point. You must have you say and then accept the outcome. Be thankful that we do not live in an autocracy, religious or secular. So while you may be fed up with being bombarded by political messages day after day, this is the democratic process. You will have to make a choice on polling day as to who you will vote for. Before you do, there a number a things a Christian should do.

Firstly, pray. Pray knowing that God is sovereign, even in this democratic process. God will appoint whom he chooses to govern our nation, and the leader of the government (Daniel 2:21, Romans 13:1). We pray that God will overrule in the election, and we will pray for the people who get elected, especially the leader (1Tim 2:1-2).

Secondly, learn all you can about your local candidates. They will represent you locally; you may have cause to consult them one day. You will be interested in their background and their morals. They may belong to a major party and therefore be obliged to vote along party lines. If so, find out what the party stands for. It is good that we have two potential leaders who appear to be faithful husbands.

One major party has given its members a conscience vote on the moral issue of homosexual marriage. In this case you need to know where your local candidate stands on this issue. A minor party has a policy for homosexual marriage on the top of their agenda even if they campaign on other issues.

There are other moral issues, such as abortion and euthanasia, you need to consider as you vote. You will also look at their concern for the truly poor and marginalised in our society, and even other societies. When, in the Bible, the leaders of Israel turned away from God they began to oppress and exploit the poor. It is interesting that the Sabbath day, a day of rest and worship, was a blessing to the poor. A nation that pays heed to the commands of God will be blessed by God.

Thirdly, do not simply vote for the person who promises to put more money in your pocket. We do of course consider the economic management credentials of those who will govern us, but we want them to govern for the benefit of everyone. We want to have a government concerned that people are working, and being paid a fair wage. In the Bible we are told to work hard and provide for our families (1Tim 5:8; 1Thess 4:11, cf. 2Thess 3:3). We are told to share with those in need, the poor and those who suffer loss (Gal 6:10). The Bible tells us not to be hoarding wealth for ourselves (Ja 5:1-3).

Remember that political candidates do not always do what they say. This means you must be wise and discerning. This brings us back to our first point which was to pray.

**Depression**

Opening a ‘To the Householder’ letter in the post recently, I found a Depression Checklist Card. First question: ‘Have you felt sad, down or miserable’ for more than two weeks. Follow up questions included one about loss or gain of weight, or an increase or decrease of appetite. And then there was the question about having ‘recurrent thoughts of death’. Putting the card aside, I opened my Bible to the book of Job. I thought about Job taking a look at this checklist.

Job lost all his possessions and all his children in one day. He had reason to be sad and miserable. The next day he broke out in boils that itched terribly. He was most miserable as he sat on the rubbish heap scratching his sores. Job needed help because his life had become unbearable. His wife was there to help him. She advised him to end it all and die. There are those today who give this sort of advice. But Job did not take this advice.

Three of Job’s friends showed up to help him. They sat with him, silently comforting him for seven days. But as they sought to counsel Job in his grief and misery, they were soon out of their depth. Not that they were uneducated men. They carefully diagnosed Job’s problem and suggested how he could get back on his feet again. But with all the best intentions and all the wisdom of this world, they could not help Job.

Where would Job get help from? Like another man writing in Psalm 121, he looked to the Lord- ‘*From where does my help come? My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth’*. Job looked for a rock on which to stand as waves of sorrow and sadness pounded him. Where did he find that rock? Not in human counsellors but in the divine counsellor. With a torn and broken heart, Job fell to the ground and worshipped God. He uttered some of the most profound words of human history

*‘Naked I came from my mother’s womb and naked I shall return*

*The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away*

*Blessed be the name of the Lord’.*

Job was comforted by the realization of this basic truth. He lost everything he had in this world. He lost his health. He became skin and bones. He understood, however, that all he had was God’s gift, so God could take it away. Job kept on trusting in God because God does not change. No matter what happened, Job knew that God was in charge.

God allowed Job to be tested for his own reasons. Yet he did not let him be tested beyond what he could bear (1 Corinthians 10:13). Job kept looking to God and eventually God did answer him. He reminded Job that he is the sovereign Creator and Sustainer of all things. ‘*Who is this who darkens counsel by words without knowledge’* (Job 38:2)?

How blessed you are if you have the God and Father of Jesus Christ as your counsellor. Life without God is life without an anchor for your soul, without a rock on which to stand in the day of trouble.

**A convenient lie** dkm Sept 2018
In 2006 the politician Al Gore produced a movie called, ‘An inconvenient truth’. It was about climate change, about human-induced global warming. It was very dramatic, a deliberate attempt to recruit disciples into a new global movement, what we could call a new religion. Just the other day a climate-change crusader was asked in a radio interview how he felt about flying half way around the world to be at a climate-change conference; jet planes burn huge amounts of fossil fuel. He replied that, ‘one has to make compromises’!

Don’t you like man-made religions? The people of Israel loved the fertility gods of Canaan with all the temple prostitutes. Man-made gods conveniently approve whatever you do! Hindu gods approve violence, as well as sexual perversion. The god of Muslims allows multiple wives. And some Christians think the God of the Bible allows them to do whatever they like also. Remember the Jew who wanted to justify himself after being told to love God and love his neighbour (Luke 20:29).

We all want to justify ourselves when we sin. If we twist what is in the Bible we can do just that. The apostle Peter writes of ‘ignorant and unstable people who twist the Scriptures to their destruction’ (2Peter 3:16). If you want to sin you will find some verse that you think justifies your sin; but take note of that word ‘destruction’!

The ultimate way to justify sin is to discredit all of Scripture and deny that the God of the Bible exists. God is the one who tells us what sin is and that death came because of sin. In the Bible we are told that this world and everything in it was created by God. But in 1859 a man called Charles Darwin published a book, ‘Origin of the species’ suggesting natural processes by which all living things, including man, could have evolved from a common ancestor. We no longer had to believe that God created man and all the species that we have in the world. It would have taken millions or billions of years but who was going to argue with that, apart from the now-discredited Bible. Evolution is about origins; what about the future?

Al Gore’s theory tells us about the future; another theory, another god to set beside the theory/god of evolution. Al Gore prophesied the destruction of the planet within a few years, **if** we do not stop global warming. You can see global temperature changes since 2006 and before at [www.drroyspencer.com](http://www.drroyspencer.com). Scientists and politicians have rallied to Gore’s call. They are looking for evidence to prove emissions of carbon dioxide are the cause; they are gathering at Paris and elsewhere; they are marching in the streets and forming political groups to save our planet from burning up, or being flooded by rising seas levels. God is no longer creator, and he is no longer in control of his creation- man is!

Yet the only records of man controlling the weather are found in the Bible. Joshua prayed to God for the sun to stop and it did, for about a day (Josh 10:13). Elijah prayed for the rain to stop and it did, for three and a half years (James 5:17). Another record is of the man called Jesus Christ, the Son of God, telling the storm to stop and it did (Mat 8:26). Evidence of man controlling the climate, apart from prayer, is lacking because the God of creation controls the climate.

‘While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, winter and summer, and day and night shall not cease’ (Gen 8:22)

**Heaven Hour**

Enthusiasm for Earth Hour appears to be dimming. Headlines in the SMH (29/3/10) declared ‘millions switch off lights for climate change’, but the news item went on to report that only 41% of Australian adults living in the city took part in the lights-out protest. The drop in electricity usage during this hour was just 6% compared to 9% last year. The shine on this gimmick to make people aware of climate change appears to be fading fast.

Sensible people turn their lights off when they are not needed because electricity is expensive. Sensible people turn their lights on when needed, rather than sitting in the dark for an hour. According to the SMH report, one politician is promoting an alternative ‘human achievement hour’. He wants people to turn their lights on and enjoy life as usual. He has a point. While lights were turned off in cities around the world, millions living in villages in Asia and Africa had no electric lights to turn off. Some rich people make this token effort to reduce energy consumption in the vain hope of prolonging their own existence on this earth, without giving a thought to the millions who struggle to gather sticks or cow dung to cook their food, and stuff rags into a kerosene bottle to make a small lamp for their single roomed hut.

Earth Hour! Human Achievement Hour! What next? What this earth and all human beings in it need most is a Heaven Hour. What after all is this earth? What is a human being? In the Bible we read that in the beginning God made the heavens and the earth. God created all living creatures. God made man in his own image and put him in charge of the creation. All this was perfect. There was complete harmony between man and the creatures while man was obeying God. Adam ruled over the garden and the creatures perfectly. Disharmony began when man thought that he knew better than his Maker. When man’s relationship with God was broken, because of sin, then his relationship with the creation was broken (weeds started to grow in the cursed ground), and his relationship with other human beings was broken (Cain murdered his brother Abel). Broken relationships is what we see in the world today.

Heaven Hour would benefit all human beings, and through them all the creation; because ‘*the creation eagerly awaits the sons of God to be revealed’* (Romans 8:18). What would we do in Heaven Hour? We would stop focusing on ourselves and focus on our creator for an hour. If God made all things and sustains all things, as he tells us, then surely we need to bring God into the picture. We would open the Bible and read how God has dealt with the sin that brought corruption into his perfect world. We would read in the Bible how God sent his Son, Jesus Christ, into this world, and how Jesus died on the Cross and was raised from the dead by the power of God. This is the way God has dealt with the problem of human sin, sin that is at the root of the corruption all around us- and in us. God tells all human beings to confess their sin and believe in Jesus Christ. He will forgive your sin and bring you into a relationship with Jesus. Your relationships with other human beings, and with the whole creation, will be restored.

Heaven Hour! Yes, just an hour when every human being stops what they are doing to open the Bible and hear what God says about this world he created and about what he has done to redeem men and women from the darkness of sin and death. This would make the world of difference to your life and through you to other people and the whole creation. Sit in the dark or in the light- it makes no difference. What we need is the inner light, the light of the glorious gospel of Jesus Christ shining in our hearts today and always (John 1). Heaven Hour will become heaven for eternity.

**Pray for Rain**

A few weeks ago our Prime Minister declared that all irrigation would have to cease in the inland areas of Australia if it did not rain in the next few weeks. There were dire predictions of crops dying as water was cut off. People would only be allowed water for domestic use. There would be no more irrigation. The Government would give money to help families survive and get counselling. But money could not make it rain. We were all asked to pray for rain.

After a week of rain farmers are now rejoicing. Their dams are full and the land is soaked after heavy rains. Wilted crops are beginning to grow again. ‘The worst drought in a hundred years’ has suddenly become ‘the best rain we have had in years’. Farmers always say ‘we need more rain’, but there was no hiding the relief and joy on their faces as they looked out across their soaked paddocks.

But where did the rain come from? What about the prayers we were all supposed to pray? Not a word on the news bulletin. Not a word in the newspaper that a week ago had headline ‘Pray for Rain’. Not a word from the man who asked us all to pray. Some no doubt have stopped to give thanks to our Creator God, to the God who sends the rain and withholds the rain according to his word. But what about the many who take God’s blessing without a word of thanks- not even a simple ‘thank you God’ at the breakfast table?

How does God feel about such ingratitude? If we look into the Bible we will find out. Jesus was going through a village when ten lepers cried out to him ‘*Jesus, Master, have mercy on us’* (Luke 17:13). Jesus had mercy on them and they were all healed as they went off to the priest. How many returned to give thanks to Jesus? Just one! He went back to Jesus and fell on his face giving him thanks. ‘*Were there not ten healed*?’ said Jesus. ‘*Where are the nine*?’ Clearly, Jesus expected them all to give thanks after they cried out to him for healing and he healed them.

Jesus said to the man who thanked him ‘*Arise, go on your way. Your faith has made you well’*. This man received more than physical healing- he was blessed by Jesus, the Son of God. He was a man who came to faith in Jesus, a man who went on to enjoy life and glorify God who healed him and saved him.

To pray and then not give thanks when your prayers are answered is not just ingratitude, but actually to deny yourself the wonderful blessings of God. Sure you got the rain you wanted, you got the healing you wanted, you maybe got the new house or car you wanted. But why be a beggar when you can know God as your heavenly Father and enjoy all the blessings he wants to shower upon you as his beloved child. ‘*Your faith has made you well’* said Jesus to leper he healed. Do you know that faith Jesus was talking about?

**Collapse of civilisation**

These words caught my eye on the front page of the SMH (24/9/05). This must be about another weird religious sect I thought as I started to read. Some self-proclaimed prophet has come up with another ‘end of the world’ scenario. The press will have fun with this fellow I thought. Imagine my surprise to find they were reporting on a scientific book – a book by the director of a museum. ‘Global warming is pushing mankind to the edge and survival depends upon urgent action’. What stimulated this prophetic outburst? A hurricane had virtually destroyed the city of New Orleans- a city renown for voodoo and pagan practices. Global warming is being blamed for this hurricane and many other severe weather phenomena today. Yet just 30 years ago when cyclone Tracy flattened Darwin global warming did not get a mention.

Tim Flannery hopes that by blaming global warming for this disaster Australia will sign the Kyoto protocol on greenhouse gas emissions. If we just signed this and reduced these emissions then the collapse of civilisation could be averted. Now there is good news! I wonder if he sees the paradox here for the evolutionist. Who would ever have thought that an evolutionist, one who believes in the relentless advancement of the human species, would ever have contemplated man bringing about his own demise? It is always good to have someone or something to blame when things go wrong, for then we feel in control of things. If we can’t explain why something is happening we feel vulnerable. The humanistic evolutionist must avoid any recognition of a supreme God. Scientists and politicians especially like to think that they are in control of things in this world.

Weather has always been a challenge to man. He has been seeking to subdue the ‘forces of nature’ for time immemorial. Yet even the might of the US army could not stop the powerful waves breaking the levee bank around New Orleans. Global warming they say is to blame. If we stop greenhouse gases going into the atmosphere we will not have these terrible disasters. This is the argument being thrust upon us today.

The question is not whether global temperatures are increasing or not- the scientific evidence is not conclusive. The truth does not really matter for many people for it is the concept that they like. The concept allows them to believe that man can now control the climate. Man is not much good at stopping wars, but at last he can control the weather! Now our very civilisation can be prolonged if you will just be responsible and cut down your carbon dioxide output!

What does the God who created this planet, and sustains, it have to say on this matter? He tells us that this world as we know it will come to an end. Yes indeed, Dr Flannery has got it right- civilisation will come to an end. There will be widespread earthquakes and famine as signs that the end is approaching (Matthew 24:7). In the Revelation given to John we are told of lightning, thunder, earthquakes and great hail (Revelation 4:5, 11:19). In the end fire will burn up the earth (1Peter 3:10).

As wise as it may be to cut down on our output of greenhouse gases, we cannot avert this end. Only a fool would contend with his maker. Our days on this earth are numbered, not because of global warming but because of sin and the judgment of God. But this does not have to be a doomsday message. The really good news is that we can be saved. Those who believe in Jesus Christ are *receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken* (Hebrews 12:28). *Heaven and earth will pass away* said Jesus *but my words will by no means pass away* (Matthew 12:28). In Jesus Christ we have life, life everlasting.

**Dangerous climate change…activists** dkm Oct 2019

A teenager from a rich home in one of the richest nations of the world recently gained an audience in the United Nations in New York City. She claimed that current world leaders were jeopardising her future because of their failure to stop global warming. What about the future of millions of teenagers growing up in poverty? Will the next teenager to speak at the United Nations be from a poor home in one of the poorest nations in the world? Will this be a teenager deprived of good nutrition because her parents have no electricity to run irrigation pumps, or a fridge to keep food for her? Will she be a poorly educated girl because she had to study by the light of a candle? This girl represents the majority of teenage girls in the world.

Over 30 million homes in India are not yet connected to an electricity grid. A lot of girls live in these homes. What sort of education are they getting? In Africa thousands of villages have no electricity, making it difficult for children to study, not to mention the difficulties faced by their parents in farming or running a small business.

How and when will these poor people get electricity? How did we in the West get electricity connected to our homes, electricity that led to the development of our society? Do we have the right to deny those who live in poverty access to the electricity that we enjoy, and take for granted? ‘Let them use renewable energy’ we say. In fact they have tried! Years ago the government installed a solar street light in thousands of villages across India. But this was not a great help to students in doing their homework. And besides, who would maintain the batteries used by these lights? I once saw a solar powered irrigation system in a village but without a government subsidy no one could afford or maintain such technology.

In a book entitled, ‘The great global warming blunder’ the climate scientist Roy Spencer alerts us to the effect on the poor of alarmists calling for natural sources of energy like coal and gas to be banned. He writes, ‘I do not really care where our energy comes from. If we can develop relatively clean alternative energy sources that are cost-competitive then fine. But I do care that we have energy and that as many people have access to it as possible. Since nearly one billion of the world’s poor do not even have electricity, denying them the chance to acquire it is, in my view, immoral’. He goes on to write of environmentalists that ‘are determined to be miserable… they seem to *hoping* that global warming is a major threat to humanity…they have got theirs [energy] and now want to deprive poor people in other countries of the same opportunity to lift themselves out of poverty’. The amount of energy they burn up flying to conferences on climate change would provide the electricity needed by a village girl to do her homework!

Roy Spencer does not profess to be a Christian but surely Christians should share his concern for the poor. Yet many Christians have jumped on the band wagon of global warming being caused by burning fossil fuel! Some years ago I was critical of a Christian humanitarian agency that turned to advocating action on climate change instead of actually helping the poor. In their misdirected and futile efforts to stop global warming they were actually harming the poor, as indicated by Dr Spencer and many others. Alarmists write of hundreds dying during a heat wave in France without any mention of the suffering and death of poor people in less-developed nations. We will have people dying during heat waves because there will be no electricity to power fans or air conditioners after the sun goes down!

The Pope has also joined the band wagon and put climate change at the top of the agenda for the Roman Catholic Church. In so doing he is admitting that it is more about religion and politics than it is about science. The Bible tells us to be good stewards of God’s creation but I find nothing in the Bible about climate change. On the contrary, I read ‘While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, winter and summer and night and day shall not cease’ (Genesis 8:22). This present world will come to an end; it will do so because of sin, not because of science or the lack thereof. I also read, ‘Open your hand wide to your brother, to your poor and your needy’ (Deut 15:11). If they need to burn coal or oil to keep warm and well feed, should we keep it from them?

**‘The One enthroned in heaven laughs’** dkm Mar 2020

In the beginning God made man, male and female, and gave them dominion over His creation. But man did not obey God. He decided he knew better than God. Man decided he could rule over the creation without reference to God; in fact, he thinks he can do the job better than the Creator himself.

God reminded Job of his creation power by way of rhetorical questions: “Can you lift up your voice to the clouds, that an abundance of water may cover you? Can you send out lightnings, that they may go, and say to you, ‘Here we are!’?” (Job 38:34). God also asked Job, ‘Who shut up the sea with doors?’ God reminded Job that He said to the waves and to the sea, ‘Thus far and no further’ (Job 38:8, 11). Yet lots of people think that by stopping the emission of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere they can stop sea levels rising. We have a generation that thinks they can change the climate when the Bible says that God sends the rain and withholds the rain (Deut 28:24, Mat 5:45). The only person in the world who has ever stopped a storm is Jesus of Nazareth (Mat 8:26). The prophet Elijah did not make it rain but he did pray to God and saw a huge, drought-breaking downpour (James 5:18).

When rulers or anyone plot against the Lord and his Anointed, the Bible says that he sits in heaven and laughs (Psalm 2:4). He laughed at those who built the Tower of Babel, and he laughs at people today building a world that originated with a ‘Big Bang’, and world in which they are controlling the climate- a world that ignores the Creator and Sustainer of all things.

In their rebellion and ignorance (Romans 1:20-25) people turned away from God to worship the creation. They made images of animals and birds to worship. They worshipped the trees. They locked up forests because these were ‘paradise’; this was their heaven on earth. And then came the bushfires that burned up their ‘paradise’. They had to run from ‘paradise’, not unlike Adam and Eve had to run from the Garden of Eden when they refused to obey God (Gen 3:23, 24).

A teenage girl refused to fly across the Atlantic Ocean because of the carbon dioxide emitted by aeroplanes. In England the courts have stopped the building of an extra runway at Heathrow airport because more planes would lead to dangerous climate change. What does the Lord think of such rebellion against his authority as the Creator- remember his words to Job; ‘Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth?’ (Job 38:4). Suddenly, without warning, a deadly virus strikes nation after nation, and stock markets crash. International airlines are cancelling hundreds of flights. Heathrow may not even need the runways they already have as people fear to travel because of this virus.

God sits in heaven and laughs. But this is not all: ‘He shall speak to them in his wrath’ (Psalm 2:5). God has come down from his throne in heaven to speak to a world of clever but confused people. Going through the towns and cities of this world, Jesus saw harassed and helpless people (Matthew 9:36). He saw people having, ‘no hope and without God in this world’ (Ephesians 2:12). Jesus had compassion on such people. His compassion led him to offer himself as a sacrifice for their sin. It is sin that cuts us off from God, leading to a life of darkness and futility. When you humble yourself before the Lord, as Job did, and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, as the apostles and millions of other people have done, you will emerge from the darkness and the futility into a life of hope, of love, and of joy in the Lord. Why not do this now by calling upon the Lord Jesus in prayer?

**Climate change**  dkm2011
Climate change is ‘the greatest moral challenge of our time’ according the previous prime minister. Is it a moral challenge or simply a scientific challenge? Great confusion exists in society today. It is reminiscent of the challenge of evolution. Evolution was hailed as scientific but is really a matter of belief. On the one hand we are told that ‘all scientists agree’ we must stop global warming by cutting CO2levels. On the other hand we have had Al Gore conducting a campaign to get ‘apostles’ to go forth and convince the world that human activity must change if we are to save the planet.

Is global warming science or belief, a scientific challenge or a moral challenge? Is global warming caused by human activity or not? Will changes to human activity reverse changes in the climate? These are complex questions as our leaders are finding out. What is science? Science is ‘the systematic study of the physical world based on reproducible observation, measurements and experiments’. Temperatures are measured around the globe and the results from 1880 onwards have been graphed- look for them on the internet. There has been a trend upwards in the past century, but not a constant trend, amounting to 0.80C. In fact in the last six years there has been no significant change.

Why these temperatures have increased and decreased over time is beyond the realm of reproducible observation or experimentation. It becomes theoretical speculation. Yet the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), an international body of scientists, claims this change is anthropogenic. Carbon dioxide, although comprising only 0.03% of the air, is a greenhouse gas- as are other gases in the atmosphere. Measurement of CO2 concentrations in the air only go back to 1960. They show a consistent increase in concentration since that time. In the last five years CO2 levels have increased steadily while temperature has not increased.

If the science is not proven why are some so loudly declaring that human activity is changing the climate? From this theory it follows that man can change the climate. Man is going to stop the earth warming, stop sea level rising and stop disasters like floods, cyclones, and bushfires. These are all being blamed on climate change. As with evolution, this theory conveniently leaves the Creator out of the picture.

In the Bible we read of a worldwide flood in the days of Noah. The flood was God’s judgment on wicked human beings. The Lord told Noah that there would never be another world destroying flood. He said that ‘while the earth remains there will be seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, winter and summer’ (Gen 8:22). The OT prophets spoke of God blessing the people with rain, and also withholding the rain. Jesus said that God sends rain on the just and the unjust (Mat 5:45). Are we to believe that soon man will controlling the climate?

**Carved images**

Walking through any town in North India you will soon come across a shrine by the roadside or in front of a temple. An idol resembling some animal or person will be housed in this brightly lit shrine. The idols will vary because there are thousands of deities- one for every need in life. There are deities for safety in travel, for learning, for healing, for prosperity and so on. You will see people bowing to this image as they pass by, or stopping to light a candle or burn some incense. Most people in this town will be Hindus.

Walking through a town in South India you will come across shrines by the roadside or in front of churches. Inside the shrine will be an idol of a man, woman, or a woman and a baby. As people pass this brightly lit shrine they bow and cross themselves. Some will stop to light a candle and pray. Some shrines will be of saints to whom the people pray. There are thousands of saints, one for every need in life. Most people in this town will be Roman Catholics.

To the casual observer these towns do not appear very different. The idols in their shrines look different but that is about all. This is remarkable for religions that claim to be markedly different. It is most remarkable that people calling themselves Christians have idols at all when in the book they claim to be following it is clearly written that God said ‘*You shall not make for yourselves a carved image, the likeness of anything that is in heaven or on earth… you shall not bow down to them nor serve them’* (Deuteronomy 5:8). There is no exception here for images of Mary, or even of Jesus.

Why then are carved images part of Roman Catholicism, just like in Hinduism? It is because they have departed from the teaching of Scripture and followed man made teaching. Every man made religion has some man made object of worship. We all want some tangible object to worship and so make something- unless we listen to what God commands.

If Roman Catholics choose not to obey this command it will come as no surprise that they choose not to obey other parts of the Bible. For example, it is natural for man to think that he can in some way merit God’s favour. Millions think that they will go to heaven because they do good works. Some accept that their good works are insufficient but believe, according to the teaching of Roman Catholicism, that the good works of others can somehow be passed on to them- those who have an overabundance of good works!

What does God say about our good works? All our good works are like filthy rags before God (Isaiah 64:6). No one is saved by keeping the law but only by faith in Jesus Christ (Galatians 2:16). Breaking just one part of God’s law makes us guilty of it all (James 2:10). By grace alone, through faith alone, we are saved from our sin- it is the gift of God and NOT of works (Ephesians 2:8, 9).

In India students are fond of Saraswati, the goddess of learning. They make an idol and worship it for a few weeks before carrying it down to the river and throwing it in. In Australia two large planks of wood (a cross) are being carried around in the lead up to World Youth Day. Initially blessed by the Pope, hundreds have been kissing (worshipping?) these pieces of wood. They will end up in Sydney as the focus of worship. Will they be thrown into the harbour? No- they will probably be added to the already overflowing store of images, icons and relics kept and adored by the Church of Rome.

**What profit in Swearing**

Australia is widely known for its convict heritage. We have struggled for over a century to divest ourselves of this image, and establish a more cultured image for our nation. Some of our scientists, academics, artists and church leaders have achieved international acclaim. Yet with one ill-conceived, but officially sanctioned, advertising campaign this reputation has been jeopardised. We have been burdened afresh with the label of a ‘backward, coarse and uncultured’ people.

Europe (those who understand the language of this advertisement as English) and North America judged our Government’s tourism advertisement to be unsuitable for children to see or hear. Yet our Government regarded such a terrible indictment as a joke and hailed the free publicity! Maybe more tourists will come to laugh at these weird and wild people ‘down-under’.

The language used in this Government sponsored advertisement it not just offensive to people in Europe and North America; it is offensive to God-fearing people in Australia and to God himself. Our Prime Minister is to be condemned for using the word ‘hell’ in jest- trying to please men rather than please God. What does the Word of God, the Bible, say on this matter? Jesus said “*let your ‘yes’ be ‘yes’ and your ‘no’, ‘no’. For whatever is more than these is from the devil”* (Mat 5:33-37). He said ‘*do not swear by heaven for it is God’s throne’*. Hell on the other hand is the home of the devil and we should not swear by this place either.

Some people may not accept the reality of heaven and hell, but Jesus did. He said that anyone calling his brother a fool will be in danger of the fire of hell (Mat 5:22)-to tell someone to ‘go to hell’ is to curse them just a much a calling them a fool. Was Jesus just trying to scare us with fairy tale talk? Certainly not! Hell is a place that men and women should fear. Jesus spoke of the fires of hell, of the torment of hell (Luke 16:23), and of weeping and gnashing of teeth (Mat 25:30). Hell (‘*Gehenna*’ in the Greek) is the place of eternal punishment for sinners.

*“But above all brethren do not swear either by heaven or by earth or with any oath. But let your ‘yes’ be ‘yes’, and your ‘no’, ‘no’ lest you fall into judgment”*. This was the teaching of James, a leader in the early church (James 5:12). Are we going to abandon this teaching in the church and in our nation today? Does money come before morality? Are all our morals up for sale to the highest bidder? Let us pray that this descent into language offensive to God’s people and to God himself will be halted by our Government and in our media.

**The judge is judged**

It was such a little thing. It was so easy just to write someone else’s name on the form so the penalty notice would go to them. If that person lived on the other side of the world all the better! If they were deceased even better! Who would ever find out? The judge had done it before and got away with it. So he did it again. But this time he was found out. Had he said sorry at this point, we would not know about it today. But the sinful nature we are born with does not easily say ‘sorry’. He kept on telling lies right into the court. The judge sentenced the judge for perjury, for lying to the court.

Had the judge gone to Sunday school he would have learnt ‘be sure your sins will find you out’. His punishment is a reminder to us all of this truth. Children start to tell lies- it is part of original sin- and if they get away with it they can easily fall into the habit of lying. It is tragic to hear children telling blatant lies and doing so habitually. If not corrected they grow up telling lies and may end up like this judge. Many excuse ‘little’ lies but we have seen the danger of even ‘little’ lies.

Had the judge gone to Sunday school he would also have learnt that there is a God in heaven who sees all that we do and say- and write. This God will one day judge us all. ‘*We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ’* (2Corinthians 5:10). ‘*It is appointed for men to die once and after this face the judgment’* (Hebrews 9:27). Even if we are clever enough to escape the judgment of men, we will not escape the judgment of Jesus.

Jesus will judge with utmost justice. Everyone knows that telling lies is a sin just as the judge knew. He is suffering for his sin now. We will all suffer in the world to come for our sin. We will be judged according to what we have done. We will be condemned even for one sin (James 2:10). Does this sound harsh? Remember Jesus is the holy Son of God. Jesus is in heaven where there is no sin.

There is some good news for you and for the judge now in prison. The Jesus who judges us all is the same Jesus who died for those who believe in him. He died to take away our sin. He took the penalty for our sin. When you repent of your sin Jesus forgives you. ‘*There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus’* (Romans 8:1). You face the judgment of Jesus when you die. Now is the time to set things right with the Judge. Repent of your sin and believe in Jesus and you will not be condemned for eternity but will live for ever in the kingdom of Jesus Christ.

**What is truth?**

The renowned doctor realised that his patient needed a heart transplant. He also knew that she was mentally unstable, and that such a condition reduced her chances of getting a transplant according the hospital’s transplant priority system. He chose to lie about his patient’s condition before the medical board in order for her to get a priority transplant. She got the transplant and survived.

Although this scenario was on a TV drama it is not uncommon in real life. Maybe it is because of such shows in which the hero tells a lie to save his friend, that a child in Sunday School said ‘it’s okay to tell a lie sometimes isn’t it’. Do you believe it is okay to tell a lie in some situations? Do you believe the doctor did an honourable thing in lying to save his patients life?

One of the ten commandments God gave to his people was ‘*do not bear false witness against your neighbour’* (Deuteronomy 5:20). This means do not lie to your neighbour. Do not lie to anyone. ‘*Lying lips are an abomination to the Lord, but those who deal truthfully are his delight*’ said the wise Solomon (Proverbs 12:22). There is no word in the Bible about exceptions to this command. Yes, Rahab did lie to protect the two spies, but this was before she knew God’s command. Moreover, she was not commended for telling a lie.

Why is it wrong to tell lies? Obviously your neighbour who is told the lie is deceived and so hurt in some way. But more than this, Jesus is the truth. The Son of Man and the Son of God never told a lie. He is the epitome of truth. He is the truth. Lies and deception are the very essence of sin. Truth is the essence of righteousness.

Lies were flying thick and fast when Jesus was on trial. In the midst of his trial Jesus said to Pilate that he came into the world that ‘*I should bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears my voice’* (John 18:37). This comment led Pilate to ask Jesus, ‘*What is truth*?’ This profound question has echoed down through history. Most of us seek after truth because we hate lies. But we continue to lie because we have sinful hearts. We cannot stop telling lies because it is so easy, and gets us out of trouble so often. Sin is never difficult!

The crunch will come on Judgment Day when we stand before Jesus. Lies that were so effective before men, will not work with Jesus, for he knows even our thoughts. He is the ultimate lie detector. We will all stand before the Righteous Judge, the One who knows the whole truth about us. There will be no place to hide. There will be no more excuses.

The good news is that if you hear the voice of Jesus today, admit that you are a liar, and repent of your sin, Jesus will forgive you. If you believe that Jesus is the truth you will know the way the heaven. Jesus said, ‘*I am the way, the truth and the life; no one comes to the Father except through me’* (John 14:6). Yes, these are the words of Jesus himself. You can believe what he said for he spoke the truth always. Jesus is the truth.

**Violence** dkm 2014‘Alcohol fuelled violence’ is the term being used to describe the increasing violence on the streets of our city. Authorities are struggling to deal with unprovoked attacks on innocent people, resulting in injury and death. The term ‘king hit’ is changed to ‘cowards punch’ so as not to glorify violence. But violence is glorified all around us. Violence on the football field makes headlines. Most computer games, TV shows and movies are about violence and young people are spending a lot of time in front of such screens. Children once sent to Sunday school are sent to marshal arts classes. Alcohol that fuels the violence is also glorified in our society.

Why do we love violence on the screen, and now on the street? ‘Senseless violence’ they call it, but what is ‘sensible violence’? Why do we so quickly resort to violence as the way to settle disputes? Has violence ever settled a dispute? Street violence is in the headlines, but road signs still remind us of the curse of domestic violence. Violence in the home and violence in the streets- why? No one seems to know, so we have to build bigger jails.

Violence is the use of force to harm or destroy a person or his property. I will not discuss war and just war arguments in this note; my focus is on individual violence. Most violence occurs in the home, but it also found at school, in the work place, on the sports field and on the streets.

The first violent act in the Bible was from Cain, the son of Adam. It came after Adam and Eve sinned against God. Cain got jealous of his brother and killed him. God warned him that sin was crouching at his door. Violence became the way of life in Noah’s day (Gen 6:11). Corruption and violence cause the Lord God grief, and led him to judge the earth. God hates violence (Psalm 11:5, Malachi 2:16). Violence is sin. Violence is always associated with the wicked. The wicked love violence; they ‘drink the wine of violence; they feed on violence’ (Prov 4:17, 13:2).

The wicked delights in his strength and his weapons; he trains for violence (self-defence?).

Evolutionists tell us violence is natural. They say we are just acting like our animal ancestors to gain dominance in the herd, or to gain the female of the species. But the Bible says it is not natural but is the product of our sinful nature. Violence is contrasted to righteousness, which is what God demands from human beings made in his image. Many men are famous because of their violence, but there are some who are famous because of their teaching of non-violence. Yet there is only one man who lived a truly non-violent life, namely Jesus, the sinless Son of God. Isaiah spoke of him as doing no violence, and having no deceit in his mouth (Isaiah 53:9). Jesus came with the message of love and forgiveness. He showed his love when he went to the cross in our place, when were still unloving and even violent sinners.

Jesus shows us the way of love, not violence. He commands us to love our neighbour as ourselves. Violence is contrary to love. If you love someone you will not try to harm them. Love suffers long and does not envy (1Corinthians 13). Would not teaching the young these truths get them thinking about their violent behaviour? Some find fault with Jesus driving the money changers out of the temple (John 2), but there is no indication that he harmed anyone or anything. Jesus was oppressed and afflicted, and he had divine power to destroy his enemies, but he ‘opened not his mouth and was led like a lamb to the slaughter’ (Isa 53:7). Disciples of Jesus must be ready to suffer at the hands of men for the name of Christ. We must turn away from violence and embrace love in our relationships. Love is more powerful than violence. There is no fear in love. He who loves God must love his brother also (1John 4:8, 4:21). Love covers a multitude of sins (1 Peter 4:8).

**Convicted murderer**

Men convicted and sentenced for murder are roaming the streets of our city. Have they escaped from prison? No, they were set free. A woman at a bus stop was attacked and almost killed by a convicted murderer. We read about serial killers, but this is different. This was a man who was caught, convicted and incarcerated. People are asking ‘How can this happen in our civilized society?’ ‘How can we feel safe if convicted murderers are on the street?’ This would not have happened some years ago. In 1967 Ronald Ryan was convicted of murder and was executed in Victoria. Since then the death penalty has been removed from the law in all states. Since 2010 a Federal law, based on the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, prohibits capital punishment in Australia.

Why this change within the last fifty years in the law regarding capital punishment? Surveys shown that there was a change in public opinion. Laws, of course, reflect public opinion. But why the change in public opinion? This change in public opinion parallels other changes in society such as a turning away from theism and the truths of the Bible, and the rise of humanism. The theory of evolution has undermined the truth that human beings are created in the image of God. After the Genesis flood God told Noah ‘whoever sheds man’s blood, by man shall his blood be shed, for in the image of God he made man’ (Genesis 9:7). Human beings are made in the image of God- we have an eternal soul. In the theory of evolution the killing of a man is no different to the killing of a whale or a cat.

Liberal theology also arose at this time, partly as an attempt to accommodate the theory of evolution. This theology served to undermine the authenticity and authority of the Bible. The Old Testament was largely discounted, and a ‘loving Jesus’ was portrayed as being indifferent to sin. Yet Jesus upheld the moral law and the command ‘do not murder’. This law states that ‘if a man acts with premeditation against his neighbour to kill him by treachery, you shall take him... that he may die’ (Exodus 21:14). This is God’s law and it is not abrogated in the New Testament.

Man’s law tends to disregard the rights of the innocent victim because they have no voice. Man’s law puts the rights of the living murderer above those of the dead victim. We rightly question the justice of such law.

The possibility of executing an innocent person must be considered. One criminologist writing on the ongoing debate about capital punishment said ‘Those who argue for the death penalty on the grounds that at least the killer is removed permanently from society, have also to keep in mind that in practice the death penalty is often administered capriciously, and that there is always the possibility that an innocent person may be executed’.

For sure we do not want to see people being executed for all manner of crimes by a corrupt judicial system, as seen in some countries. The Bible does not condone vengeance or capricious execution. But it does say of the governing authority appointed by God that it ‘does not bear the sword in vain’ (Romans 13:4). If we do evil we expect the ruling authority to punish us. We expect this authority to judge every case with credible witnesses and evidence, and to do so without partiality. We expect the offender to be punished according to the crime. We are left to ponder how many more innocent people will be attacked or murdered by convicted murderers set free in our society.

**Tax time** dkm July 2014How do you feel about paying taxes to the government? Is it true that no one likes paying taxes? I once heard a man say he was happy to pay his tax. He explained that if we did not pay tax we would not have roads, schools, hospitals, a police force or an army. Taxes are basic to living in a community or nation. We might question how much we pay or how our taxes are used, but not the principle of personal taxation.

We might think the government misuses our taxes, but it is nothing compared to the misuse and corruption found in many foreign countries. The roads in Kenya are notoriously bad; major sealed roads are marred by huge potholes. Government corruption is such that roads are poorly maintained. On one section we were surprised to see a man repairing the road. Cars stopped to throw money into a tin which he had. He was doing the repair out of his own initiative. Do we call this direct taxation? Our government says that a fuel tax will be used to build new roads- people are concerned that their taxes are not being used to benefit them. Governments are made up of people like us. Rulers are tempted to line their own pockets and look after themselves, to the neglect of the people. Such sinfulness must be curtailed by checks and balances in the government and in society. We are privileged to have elections in which rulers can be removed it they are found corrupt.

The matter of paying taxes comes up in the Bible; in Romans 13 we read that rulers are appointed by God so we must submit to them and obey the law. ‘For because of this you also pay taxes, for they are God’s ministers attending to this very thing’ (Romans 13:6). Rulers are servants appointed by God. Their authority includes the power to punish evil doers or lawbreakers. We should do what is right and good and not give the ruler cause to punish us. We should also do what is right and good for conscience’ sake (Romans 13:5).

We must submit to the governing authority, even in the matter of paying tax. Sometimes, however, we are guilty of dishonesty in our efforts to avoid paying tax. People who are in every other respect law abiding can be guilty of failing to obey tax laws. Is this why paying tax is highlighted in this passage of the Bible?

Back in the first century the Jews did not like paying taxes to the Romans, the foreign power that was ruling over them. We know this from the incident when they came to Jesus asking, ‘Is it lawful for us to pay taxes to Caesar or not?’ (Luke 20:22). Taking a denarius, a Roman coin, Jesus pointed to the image stamped on it. The image was that of Tiberius Caesar. Since the coin had this image on it Jesus said, ’Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s’ (Luke 20:25). This means to give back or pay what is due. It is returning what rightfully belongs to the one in authority, the one from whom you received the money in the first place.

Some people want to hang onto every dollar they earn, but the wise person will understand that without God’s blessing they would not be earning money at all, and that without a police force supported by their taxes they would have difficulty keeping what they earned anyway. Robbers and violent men might trouble them. Your obligation and mine is to pay taxes to whom taxes are due (Romans 13:7). It is not for us to reason that we are being ripped off, or that our taxes are being squandered. That is another matter, and there are legitimate ways to deal with this. We can inform the rulers of their obligation as God’s appointed ministers to serve the people not themselves, and to do good not evil.

**Animals**

On the sixth day of creation God said ‘Let the earth bring forth living creatures according to their kind’. And so it was that God made the animals. Then God said ‘Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule …over the livestock’ (Genesis 1:26). While humans and animals are biologically similar, they are created fundamentally different. Only humans are made in the image of God. Animals are not made for eternal life. Animals are not rational or reasoning moral beings.

God gave humans the responsibility to rule over the animals (Gen 1:28). He brought all the animals to Adam for him to name them (Gen 2:19). Giving a name indicates authority over, and responsibility for, the creature named. The animals appear to have lived in the Garden of Eden in a peaceful manner with man (cf. Isaiah 11:6-8).

God feeds the birds and generally cares for animals, legislating that they be given rest on the Sabbath (Matthew 6:26, 10:29, Jonah 4:1, Exodus 20:10). He expects humans, whom he made ruler over the animals, to do the same. ‘A righteous man regards the life of his animals’ (Proverbs 12:10). A person who is cruel to animals is not reflecting the character of God, nor obeying God.

Why then do we see people being cruel to animals? For the same reason as we see them being cruel to fellow humans- because of sin! There is a difference in that animals are dumb and basically helpless. Animals are not adept at using weapons.

In the Bible we read of a man called Balaam beating his donkey (Numbers 22). Three times this donkey saved Balaam from the angel of the Lord who stood in the road with sword drawn. Balaam did not see the angel but the donkey did. In this unique story God enabled the donkey to speak in its defence.

Without knowledge of God, knowledge of his creation and care for the animals, humans are in the dark with regard to their relationship with, and responsibility towards, animals. ‘The tender mercies of the wicked are cruel’ (Proverbs 12:10). In parts of Asia it is illegal to kill a cow. People actually worship cows. Does this mean they are not cruel? Such people leave sick animals to suffer. They leave animals to die of starvation. A distinction must be made between killing and cruelty. Other people without knowledge of the true God kill animals for meat by cruel methods.

On the other hand some who are without God believe that the life of an animal is equal to the life of a human? Some value dogs more than people. They will die saving their pet. Some advocate killing ‘dumb’ humans like unborn or deformed babies and old people.

God made the animals. He did not make them in his image. He made them without a soul. He made them for man to care for and utilise for his benefit, and for the glory of God. That benefit may be a special companionship. It may be providing man with food and fibre. That food includes meat which God told Noah he could eat after the Flood (Gen 9). After sin entered the world God accepted the blood of sacrificed animals as atonement for sin – until full and final atonement was made in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

**Star gazing**

Dr Karl, a popular science writer in Sydney recently wrote of a trip he made with his family into the Australian outback (‘Open Road’ March 2008). He was impressed by the stars and other bodies he saw in the night sky. ‘The night sky just fills me with awe and wonder and fascination that the universe is so big and we are so small.’ He admitted that we’ll never get to the end of our understanding of the universe.

These words reminded me of what another great star gazer once wrote- ‘the heavens declare the glory of God and stars proclaim the work of his hands’. It was King David who wrote these words which we find in Psalm 19 in the Bible. Another writer put these words in a song- ‘in the stars his handiwork I see, on the wind he speaks with majesty’.

Dr Karl was filled with awe and wonder as he gazed at the stars but was he able to sing the words of this song? We can join him in gazing in awe and wonder at the stars especially as he saw them so clearly out in the Simpson Desert. But what about the creator of these stars? Unlike King David and the song writer, Dr Karl does not mention anything about the maker of these stars. In the Bible we read ‘all things were made through him (Jesus) and without him nothing was made that was made’ (John 1:3). ‘He (Jesus) is before all things and in him all things consist’ (Colossians 1:17).

Scientists today know a great deal about the stars. With the Hubble telescope circling the earth, the new Magellan telescope to be built and space craft being sent to the planets, our knowledge is expanding. Still the scientist, like the child, stands in awe and wonder at the immensity and beauty of the universe in which we live. Did it all just happen as some believe? Are you, like Dr Karl, waiting for aliens to come and reveal the secrets of the universe?

The truth is, you can know today the secret of the universe. King Solomon, arguably the wisest man who ever lived, like his father David, knew the secret of the universe. He knew that God created all things visible and invisible. Of course we know much more about the universe than they did but the question of how it all came about appears to be hazier to the modern scientist than the ancients.

Let not great knowledge blind you to the simple and profound truths of the universe. If children can understand that God created the stars why can’t we all? Is it that we feel a sense of pride in asking questions only ‘aliens’ will be able to answer?

**Life on Mars?** dkm August 2015
Astronomers were very excited when their space probe ‘New Horizons’ reached the planet Pluto, and sent pictures back here to earth. This was an amazing scientific achievement, although the existence of Pluto has been known since 1930. Science is exciting, whether it is probing the universe or probing the workings of the cells in our body. Discovering more about ourselves, our planet earth, or the universe, is a valid activity which often brings benefits to mankind. The true scientist will marvel in the greatness of the universe and the workings of the cell. He will ask who made our solar system and other planetary systems. She will ask who made this minute cell with its mitochondria and DNA.

Science is not able to answer this question. The answer is found in an ancient book called the Bible. In this book we read about the sun, moon and stars. Contrary to popular ignorance, the Bible does not say the sun rotates around the earth. The discovery of Copernicus in 1543 that the earth orbits the sun, just like the other planets, is consistent with the Biblical record. What the Bible tells us is that the heavens are the work of God and that he set the moon and the stars in place (Gen 1:1, Ps 8:3).

In the heavens were see countless stars. These may have orbiting planets just as our sun does. The recent discovery of a planet called Kepler 452b orbiting another star is interesting. It reminds us of the immensity of space- this planet is 1400 light years from earth. I use the word ‘interesting’; we could say ‘exciting’ but not with the religious fervour of some. They hope to find ‘beings’ like us, or even more advanced, on this planet. Years ago the search for ‘intelligent life out there’ focused on Mars and Martians.

Some think such life may be more intelligent and may be able to ‘save’ us, as in give us the secret to never-ending life. Such ideas have been around for generations, especially in science fiction. But what is the reality? What is the truth? In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. ‘All things were made through him (Jesus) and without him nothing was made that was made’ (John 1:3). ‘By the word of the Lord the heavens were made, and all the host of them by the breath of his mouth’ (Ps 33:6). ‘He is before all things and in him all things hold together’ (Col 1:17). So even if ‘intelligent life’ is discovered on another planet it was made by God.

The hope of salvation coming from aliens on another planet is a vain hope. The only way of salvation is through the One who created the universe; through Jesus Christ. He came to planet earth and lived among us. He gave his life as a sacrifice, rose for the dead and then returned to heaven. He is on the throne as the sovereign, uncreated ruler over all that exists. Ever since sin entered the world, people have worshipped other gods. It did not take long for them to start worshipping the sun and the moon. Studying the sun and the planets is acceptable to God, but worshipping them is not- even if this is hidden behind the cloak of ‘science’.

**The second coming** dkm July 2018
‘Is there any event predicted by Scripture to take place in history of which one can say with any certainty that it is yet to be unfulfilled’- so asks Ian Murray in ‘The Puritan Hope’. Before looking at his answer, let us look at what the Bible says about Jesus coming again. The OT prophets spoke of the time of the end (Dan 12:4), and of the Day of the Lord (Isa 13: 6, 9) as a time of judgment. Just before he was crucified, the disciples asked Jesus about his coming at the end of the age (Mat 24:3). The end of the age, or end of this world, is linked to the second coming. Jesus said he would come on the clouds of heaven, just as he went up into heaven (Mat 24:30, Acts 1:11). His coming will not be in secret; every eye shall see him (Rev 1:7) - no mention of satellite TV or internet!

Jesus will come in power and great glory to judge the living and the dead. It will be the resurrection of the dead and judgment of all (2Cor 5:10). It will be a day of rejoicing for those who love Jesus but mourning for those who don’t. Jesus says his angels will ‘gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other’ (Mat 24:31). He says nothing about a two-stage coming, about gathering one ethnic group first and another after a thousand years.

The disciples asked about two things: the sign of his coming and when it would be (Mat 24:3). Jesus gave them many signs to look out for- war, rumours of wars, famines, disease epidemics, earthquakes, and especially persecution of Christians. He also spoke of false prophets deceiving many. Such signs were seen by his apostles, and they have been seen in every generation since. We still see these signs today. They are reminders of the return of Jesus, not precise markers of when he will come.

So when will Jesus come? People have been setting dates based on these signs, and on the visions of John in Revelation, for generations. The temptation to do so is irresistible to many. But Jesus said no one knows the day or the hour apart from God the Father (Mat 24:36). Some students of the Bible are more circumspect as they point to signs yet to be fulfilled.

Murray asked the question. What is his answer? ‘I believe there is at least one event, namely a great revival, which is both promised and, as yet, unaccomplished’- no reference is given. He wrote this in 1971; maybe he no longer holds this view. But he goes on to write, ‘the predictions of Scripture concerning Israel’s conversion, particularly those in Romans 11, cannot be said to be already fulfilled’. So do we conclude that Jesus cannot come tomorrow? Jesus said nothing about a revival or about all Jews being converted- nor does the apostle Paul. What Jesus says is that ‘the gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world …and then the end will come’ (Mat 24:14). Has this happened? Are you prepared to make a judgment? Paul said he had fully preached the gospel from Jerusalem to Illyricum (Rom 15:19). This includes places like Turkey. Has this nation been reached with the gospel? All elect individuals from all nations, tribes, peoples and languages will be saved in the end (Rev 7:9).

When Paul writes to the Thessalonians about the return of Jesus and the end of the age, he does so to comfort them. He gives no indication as to when this return will be, but reminds them of the words of Jesus, that, ‘the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night’ (Mat 24:43, 1Thess 5:2). ‘But you brethren’ he writes (1Thess 5:4)-those who love Jesus and look for his return- will not be surprised. Not because they have determined when he will return but because they are always looking for his return. ‘This day will not overtake you as a thief’. Do not ask ‘when’, and do not assume that it cannot be tomorrow, but ask yourself, ‘am I ready for his return right now’.

**The garden**

How does your garden grow? Is your lawn neatly manicured and the flower beds free of weeds? Or have things got a bit out of hand lately? Some gardens are very beautiful. Trees of all shapes and sizes give pleasant shade in the summer. Bright coloured flowers in a multiplicity of colours can brighten our mood. A beautiful garden is a very relaxing place to be.

But some gardens are not at all beautiful. They are all overgrown and full of weeds. Keeping out the weeds takes a lot of work. Keeping the bugs off the flowers and the fruit is a constant battle. People who have beautiful gardens spend a lot of effort keeping them that way.

When God made Adam he put him in a garden, a beautiful garden called Eden. There were lots of trees in this garden; flowering trees and fruiting trees- and also the tree of life. A river watered the garden. God made all sorts of birds and animals to live in this garden. It was beautiful place. There were no weeds in that garden.

We don’t read much about this garden after Genesis 3. Why is this? Because Adam was thrown out of Eden when he disobeyed God’s command. God ‘*placed cherubim at the east of the garden of Eden and a flaming sword'* to prevent Adam from eating of the tree of life (Genesis 3:24). Adam was thrown out with a curse on his head and on the whole of creation. Weeds grew in the ground that was cursed because of Adam’s sin. He had to start cultivating the soil, and with much toil and sweat grow food to eat. We know what it is like to live outside the garden because we are still outside.

But this is not the end of the story. God sent his Son, Jesus, into this world, this world outside of Eden. He sent him to deal with the sin of Adam, the sin that led to him being thrown out of the garden. Jesus came to reverse the curse, and reopen the garden as it were, as an even more beautiful and glorious place.

In the Book of Revelation (chapter 22) the tree of life appears again. Growing by a crystal clear river it yields lots of fruit and its leaves are for the healing of the nations. The curse has gone. The people of God, descendants of Adam who have been forgiven of their sin though the death of Jesus on the Cross, are back in the garden. They are there in the presence of God, much as Adam was in the beginning.

What we read in Revelation is actually a vision of heaven that was given to John by God. Heaven is pictured as a beautiful garden producing lots of fruit. It is a place of peace, a place where there is no more pain, no more crying, and no more sorrow, all because there is no more sin. But remember that heaven is also pictured as a city, the New Jerusalem. It is also pictured as a temple where God is worshipped. No single place on this earth can adequately portray heaven, not even the most beautiful garden in the world. Heaven is after all a place that is out of this world.

**Angels and Demons**

The writer Dan Brown, of ‘The Da Vinci Code’ fame, has another movie screening called ‘Angels and Demons’. Judging by the reviews it will not be a great success, although the title may get some along to see it. Many are curious about angels and demons, and they might think that Dan Brown has something interesting or new to tell them. He may well have his own ideas and imaginations, but beyond the box office what is the truth about angels and demons?

In the Bible we read about angels and demons. An angel called Gabriel appeared to Mary and spoke to her the well-loved, but not so well understood, Christmas story. Jesus was kept busy exorcising demons that were destroying the lives of people he met.

Angels were created by God before the creation of human beings. Some of these did not keep their proper place in God’s creation (Jude vs6). They rebelled against God becoming fallen angels or demons. Satan or the devil was the leader of this group and he is now the ‘*prince of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who now works in those who disobey God’* (Ephesians 2:2).

Adam and Eve were the first human beings and the first led by Satan to disobey God. He appeared to them as a serpent speaking to Eve and causing her to doubt what God said (Genesis 3, Revelation 12). Later in the Bible, Satan is spoken of metaphorically as a roaring lion (1 Peter 5:8), and then as a dragon (Rev 12:9). Just how he appeared to Jesus we are not told, but he was very real as he tempted Jesus in the desert. Pictures of Satan as a black figure with two horns do not come from the Bible. The picture of him holding a three-pronged fork (*trishul*) is common in Hinduism. Satan was not some surreal power force that Jesus encountered. Jesus said to him, ‘Get behind me Satan’ as he resisted his suggestions to disobey God.

The angels of today did not rebel against God. They kept their proper place as spiritual servants of God. They, like the demons or fallen angels, are higher than human beings but lower than God and Jesus Christ the Son of God. Angels are spirits who minister to the people of God at the command of God. Angels and demons inhabit the ‘heavenly places’ beyond the realm of earth. Jesus was made a little lower than the angels, but he has been raised from the dead and exalted to the throne of God in heaven (Hebrews 2:9, 4:14).

Through his death and resurrection Jesus destroyed him who has the power of death, that is the devil (Hebrews 2:14). It is not for us as humans to mess with the devil. His power is in another league. But Jesus has overcome Satan. He has been defeated to await final destruction in the eternal lake of fire (Jude vs6).

These are some of the things God tells us about angels and demons. If you want to learn more then read further in the Bible. Do not believe what Dan Brown or other ‘earthlings’ tell you!

**Heaven**

‘I did not see any god up here’ are words widely attributed to Yuri Gagarin, the first man to orbit the earth in space. Whether or not the quote is true, it is a common misunderstanding portrayed in cartoons depicting God as an old man sitting on the clouds. But God is a Spirit, not a man. ‘No one has seen God at any time’ (John 1:18).

The word ‘heaven’ may lead some to think that God is ‘up in space’ somewhere. I have not heard of any miners saying ‘we did not see any god down here’. ‘Heaven’ is a very common word in the Bible (267 times on the OT and 237 times in the NT). It is found in the first chapter and in the penultimate chapter of the Bible. It is often used in reference to the creation as that which is above the earth (Gen 1:1). God, of course, is not part of the creation. God put the ‘lights in the firmament of the heavens to give light on the earth, and it was so’ (Gen 1:15). In this verse heaven is a physical place.

Heaven is all that is beyond the earth, including the planets and the stars- so called heavenly bodies. When man sinned the whole creation was subjected to futility and it groans as with birth pains (Romans 8:20-22). God will create a new heaven; the present heavens will pass away (Isaiah 65:17, 2Peter 3:10).

The word ‘heaven’ is also used in a different but related sense- a metaphysical sense. It is the name given to God’s dwelling place. ‘Thus says the Lord, ‘Heaven is my throne and the earth is my footstool’’ (Isaiah 66:1). It is different in that it is not a place we see with our physical eyes- no matter how far we go out into space. It is related in that it is a high and exalted place - there is no higher place (Isaiah 57:15). God’s throne is in heaven. He is on the throne as creator and judge. Jesus taught his disciples to pray to ‘Our Father who is in heaven’. In heaven there is a ‘heavenly host’ including angels and the ‘spirits of just men made perfect’ (Hebrews 12:22-23).

Jesus spoke a lot about the kingdom of heaven or the kingdom of God. He began preaching saying ‘The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe the gospel’ (Mark 1:15). Jesus spoke of people entering the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 7:21). The apostle Paul spoke of those who believe in Jesus being citizens of heaven (Philippians 3:20).

This kingdom of heaven is ‘not of this world’, but it is no less real than the kingdoms that are. It is difficult to comprehend this place where God has his throne, but we dismiss this truth at our peril. Do not turn away as Pontius Pilate did (John 18:38). The words of a children’s chorus may help:

*Heaven is a wonderful place,*

*Filled with glory and grace,*

*I want to see my Saviour’s face,*

*Heaven is a wonderful place.*

John saw into heaven in a vision from God. He saw dazzling beauty, beauty beyond words. He heard God on the throne and Jesus with him being praised day and night (Revelation 4,5). At the resurrection and final judgment God will consign ‘anyone not found written in the Book of Life’ to the lake of fire. The new heaven and new earth will then appear. It will be illuminated by God rather than the sun and the moon (Rev 21:23). It will be the answer to billions of prayers from millions of people praying ‘your kingdom come’. Only people whose names are written in the Lamb’s Book of Life will enter this kingdom of God and dwell there for eternity. Will you be there?

**Year of the Lord**

The year 2009 has been labelled the ‘year of the mouse’ by the Chinese, the ‘year of astronomy’ by the UN and the ‘year of creativity and innovation’ by the EU. It looks like being a mixed us year. Maybe a mouse will make it to mars! I suggest we call it the ‘year of the Lord’. When Jesus began his work he said ‘the acceptable year of the Lord’ had arrived.

As we enter a new year we pause to reflect on the past year and anticipate what 2009 will bring. How was your 2008? Not so long ago Queen Elizabeth II, reflecting on the year just past, called it *annus horribilis*, a most horrible year. I am sure she started that year hoping for peace and happiness but it did not turn out that way. We all hope for peace and happiness in our lives as we enter 2009, but can we be sure this is how it will turn out?

Are you entering this year in financial difficulty because of the global financial crisis? With the dramatic downturn in the share market the life savings of many have been severely eroded making life more difficult and uncertain. Others are uncertain about their job. Others are worried about a natural disaster after being ravaged in the past year. Still others face family problems, illness or general uncertainty. One thing is certain and that is that we cannot be certain about anything as we look to the future- apart from death.

If all this seems gloomy them I have some good news for you. We can be certain about something else. Jesus is coming again soon. He may not come this year- but then again he may. No matter, he will certainly come again. He told his disciples- ‘*if I go and prepare a place for you I will come again’* (John 14:3). The Bible ends with the words, ‘*surely I am coming quickly’* (Revelation 22:20).

Jesus, who was born into this world just over 2000 years ago, lived among us and was put to death on a Cross outside Jerusalem. He was buried but rose from the dead, and now lives in heaven. This Jesus is coming again. I call this good news because Jesus is the king of the eternal kingdom of God. He is bringing that kingdom, and those who believe in him will live with him forever.

The coming of Jesus is not good news for you if you do not believe in him. Please be certain that Jesus is coming again as he said, and reflect on your relationship to Jesus as you enter 2009. Jesus the king will destroy his enemies when he comes. He will sit on his throne judging the living and the dead. If you keep saying no to Jesus, who says, ‘*come to me all you who labour and are heavy laden and I will give you rest’* (Matthew 11;28), he will say to you on that day when he comes ‘*away from me you cursed into everlasting fire’* (Matthew 25:41). What will you say to Jesus in this year? May this year be for you the ‘year of our Lord’!

**Where do you come from? Where are you going?** dkm Sept 2014
Most of us have an innate desire to know where we come from. If you don’t the government still wants to know! We want to know when and where we were born. Adopted children often try hard to find their biological parents. Many are searching their family tree to learn more about who they are. Maybe they will find an ancestor who was a royal, a famous or an infamous person. We have this longing to know who we are. For some this family tree goes way back- they want to know the origin of life. They want to know where they came from in a cosmic sense, and their place in the universe. Some think their family tree goes back to the apes. I am content that mine goes back to Adam. The Bible says that in the beginning God made human beings in his own image, a nobler and more comforting truth than the idea of coming from apes!

Where are we going? This is the other big question we ask. We know that death is up ahead, but is this all we know? Is death the end? Most of us know there is something beyond death- but what? For generations human beings have been searching for an answer. Must we just go on searching? Is there no answer to this question? Do we have to keep living in ignorance- in the dark as it were?

There is one man who knew where he came from and where he was going. That man is unique in that he is the Son of God, but fully human nevertheless. He was born into this world and he died in this world. He was made like us in every way, except without sin (Hebrews 4:15). It is written of Jesus of Nazareth that he knew ‘He had come from God and was going to God’ (John 13:3). How amazing! Jesus was not searching his origins- he knew where he was from. Jesus was not in the dark about his future- he was going to God. Such knowledge allowed Jesus to live the life he did. It allowed him to humbly wash the feet of his disciples. It allowed his to suffer and die on a cruel cross. Knowing where we come from and where we are going has a huge impact on the way we live today. So, where have you come from? You we born into this world as a baby. You know your birthday and hope others remember it also. It is marked on the calendar as your day. This is part of who you are. The day of your death is not yet marked on the calendar, but will be one day. It will be engraved on your tombstone as part of who you are.

You can have a different life and death scenario. It is said that if you are born once you die twice, but if you are born twice you die once. What does this mean? Jesus said to Nicodemus, ‘You must be born again’ (John 3:7) - you must be born of the Spirit. When you repent of your sin and believe in Jesus he forgives your sin and you are born again of the Spirit. This second birth makes you a new creation in Christ Jesus (2Cor 5:17). In this birth you receive eternal life (John 3:16). Eternal life is to know Jesus Christ and be united to him. It means that just as Jesus faced death knowing he was going to God, you can face death with the same knowledge. You will not face the second death (Rev 20:14-15). Death will not separate you from the love of God in Jesus Christ. ‘Whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord’ (Romans 14:8). Wow!

This is not just ‘pie in the sky when we die’. This is the truth, and this is knowledge that affects how we live today. This knowledge led to Jesus washing his disciple’s feet. It led to him going silently to the cross as a lamb to the slaughter- when he had the power to blow his enemies away in an instant. Knowledge of where we come from and where we are going plays a big part in how we live today. Do you know where you are from, and where you are going? Jesus did, and you also will know if you believe in Jesus. **A new age** dkm August 2017
Many of us can remember the excitement, and the fears, of entering the 21st century. Remember the concern about the Y2K bug killing our computers. There was excitement in having the Olympic Games in town. With the turn of the century we looked back at all the changes, good and bad, over the last 100 years. We were encouraged to identify the most significant changes and events of the century. The other day I was flicking through a book with newspaper headlines from each of the 100 years- then I turned to ‘Google’! Was it the internet, or television or the telephone that changed our way of life the most? Or was it the motor car.

When we entered the 20th century we became a nation; the preamble to our constitution refers to ‘relying on the blessing of Almighty God’. Before long we were a nation at war, the Great War- this year is the centenary of the darkest days of that war. Then came the Second World War. In 1969 man landed on the moon. Political changes tend to be highlighted in our national history, along with sporting events. Your own history is of course marked by events within your own family.

Our history is relatively young. If you go to Europe or the Middle East you will find the history of empires going back over two thousand years. That history is also marked by wars and by achievements of men: e.g. the pyramids of Egypt, the only remaining of the seven wonders of the ancient world. Great empires were ruled from places that today are insignificant in terms of world power. The kingdoms of this world come, and they go. The prophet Daniel, who lived in Babylon when it was the dominant world empire, said that God ‘removes kings and raises up kings’ (Dan 2:21).

In the entire history of this world there is one event that stands out above all others. There is one kingdom that stands out above all others. Just over 2000 years ago God sent his Son, called Jesus, into this world. The world has not been the same since. Light and life have come into the world in Jesus Christ. Jesus established the kingdom of God, the kingdom that will never fall, and never fail to be a place of blessing for those who enter it. Have you entered into this kingdom? You can do so by repenting of your sin and believing in Jesus Christ. He is the King of this kingdom and he invites you to enter through him. The kingdom Jesus established is not like the kingdoms of this world, as Jesus himself reminded Pilate, a leader of the mighty Roman Empire (John 18:36). Jesus is the king of this invisible yet real kingdom. It is so real that it is the only kingdom that will remain when all other kingdoms have disappeared. They will disappear when Jesus comes again. If you believe in Jesus then you are in his kingdom, the kingdom that is eternal. ‘Since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken let us have grace by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear’ (Heb 12:28).

Is your citizenship in heaven (Phil 3:20)? Are you eagerly awaiting the Lord Jesus Christ? Our politicians are racing around trying to find out what citizenship they have or don’t have. Some have had to leave parliament because of foreign citizenship. If you want to be a politician you must have Australian citizenship and only Australian citizenship. If you want to be in the kingdom of God, the kingdom that will never be shaken, you must have citizenship in heaven. Citizenship of heaven is free but it requires faith in Jesus Christ. We are saved by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. As a citizen of heaven you will remember the death and resurrection of Jesus as the greatest wonder of the world in all human history, and especially in the history of your own life.

**Eulogy** dkm June 2016

A eulogy is by definition a ‘good word’. We hear eulogies at funerals, where people remind us of the good features of the life of the deceased. It is interesting to hear what people consider as a person’s good qualities these days. The good word a husband spoke of his recently deceased wife was that she loved animals. When once we heard of the deceased as being a loving wife, a caring mother, a carer of poor and disadvantaged people, it seems that in the eyes of some, loving animals can be the most praiseworthy aspect of a person’s life. Surely the grieving husband felt his wife’s love for him was more significant than her love for animals- we can only hope!

The thinking of this husband is the outcome of the teaching of evolution. In this ‘scientific’ theory, human beings are just another species in the animal kingdom. Whereas the Bible teaches that God made man and woman in his own image, this theory teaches that we evolved from the animals. It brings man down to the level of the animals, with basic instincts controlling one’s life. People talk about morals and ethics but the evolutionary school of ethics teaches, ‘if it feels good do it’, ‘every man for himself’ and the survival of the fittest. For those known as animal activists, human life has come be even less valuable than that of an animal. They protest the killing of an endangered gorilla in order to save a little boy because they would prefer to see the boy mauled and killed by a gorilla. The most endangered species on earth today is the unborn child. Millions of children are aborted each year, and that with the approval of ‘evolution ethics’.

In the Bible we read that God made the animals and he also made man, but he made man in his own image. God put the animals into the care of human beings, telling us to have dominion over them. ‘Whoever is righteous has regard for the life of his beast’ (Proverbs 12:10). Adam cared for the animals, giving each species a name. Noah cared for the animals, taking them into the ark to save them from the flood. But these men were not praised as being animal lovers.

Noah was a just man, a man who walked with God; this was God’s assessment of Noah, and it is how we remember Noah. Samuel is noted as growing in favour with the Lord and with man. God’s assessment of David was, ‘a man after my own heart’ (1Samuel 13:14). The apostle Paul, in writing his own epitaph said, ‘I have finished the race, I have kept the faith’. He spoke of ‘all who loved His (Jesus) appearing’ (2Timothy 4:7, 8). What do you want on your epitaph? ‘Here lies a person who loved animals’? ‘Here lies a person who loved his fellow man’? Or, ‘Here lies a person who loves the Lord and has kept the faith’.

Are you concerned at what others might say in your eulogy or write on your headstone, or are you concerned at what the Lord has to say about you? Like everyone born into this world, you are a sinner. You have failed in many ways. People can say good things about you but you remain a condemned sinner until you repent and are forgiven by Jesus. Only in Jesus can you do what is pleasing to God (Romans 8:8). The words from a poem by C.T. Studd are worth remembering: ‘Only one life, t’will soon pass; only what done for Christ will last’.

**Live in the light of death**  dkm Jan 2020

Just before New Year I had the privilege of attending the funeral of an aunt. I say ‘privilege’ because of the words I heard at the funeral service, words from the wisdom of Solomon: ‘Better to go to the house of mourning, than to go to the house of feasting’ (Ecclesiastes 7:2). New Year is a time of feasting and drinking for many people. But in our city New Year 2020 was celebrated under the cloud of bushfires destroying houses up and down the coast of our land. This first week of the New Year saw another funeral, that of a young man killed while fighting these fires. We pray for his grieving widow and children.

People did not know if they should be celebrating New Year or mourning the devastation of the bushfires. We came together here at church to pray for our nation, to pray for those suffering in the bushfires, and to pray for those suffering the terrible drought. We plead with the Lord in his mercy to send rain. At the same time, and in the context of theses disasters, we prayed for the Lord to send revival, spiritual revival to our land.

The Bible makes it clear that the Lord sends rain and withholds rain (Deuteronomy 28:24, 1Kings 18:41-46, James 5:17-18). Jesus said God sends rain on the just and the unjust (Matthew 5:45). Let us not forget this truth, even as our ears are filled with the voices of reporters, ‘experts’ and politicians arguing about the causes of the drought and the bushfires.

As we enter 2020 we do not know what lies before us. People are frustrated, but it has ever been so, and will remain so. The future of our nation, and our own future, is in the hands of God. What we know for certain is that we will die, if not this year then the next, or the one after that etc. My aunty was over 90 years of age so her death not unexpected but still there were tears at her funeral. But there was also hope because we who know the Lord do not sorrow as those who have no hope (1Thessalonians 4:13). Those who are without God have no hope (Ephesians 2:12). So if you are without hope, repent of your sin and come to the Lord Jesus Christ.

In this context we see the wisdom of the words I heard at the funeral. At funerals we are confronted by death; we are forced to stop and think about death. No one thinks about death while partying- unless someone succumbs to an overdose of drugs. At a funeral we are reminded that death ‘is the end of all men, and the living will take it to heart’ (Ecclesiastes 7:2).

We should be living in the light of death at all times. This is not a morbid idea; it is facing up to reality. Moreover, when we believe in Jesus Christ, in his death and his resurrection, we know that death is not the end. In fact, we can look forward to being with Christ on the other side of the grave. ‘I desire to be with Christ’ said the apostle Paul (Philippians 1:23). Paul was not a morbid fellow; he lived life to the full. He travelled all over the world telling people about Jesus. He lived every day in fellowship with Jesus Christ. What more do you desire?

**A funeral and a baby**

Yesterday I was at a funeral. The dead body of my 93 year old stepmother was in the box at the front of the church. We were reminded of the life that she lived, of her good cooking and kind deeds. We were also reminded of how she came to faith in Jesus Christ late in life. Her life was nothing out of the ordinary. She was not listed in the ‘Who’s who’ of the world. She was not rich or famous as far as the world is concerned.

What if she had been rich or famous? She might have been given a state funeral. Her death might have been headlines in the newspaper. Maybe the whole world would be in mourning for her. But when all is said and done, is there any difference between her death and the death of a queen? At death we all become equal. The dead body in the box could have been that of a queen or a prime minister rather than my stepmother. Would it make any difference to the one who is dead?

And today my granddaughter came into this world and we are so excited. We saw a tiny baby who can fit into a shoe box- almost! She cannot walk or talk- much to the consternation of her little sister. She cannot even sit up. She has made no great speeches or ruled over a kingdom as yet. She is not a queen or princess, but would she be any different if she was? Would she have entered this world in another way? Rich or poor, all are born of a woman and enter this world as helpless babies. Rich or poor, all are totally dependent on parents or guardians to feed and clothe them for many years.

A funeral one day, and a birth the next. The end of a life and the beginning of a life. These are big events. Are there any bigger events than birth and death? Yet how often do we reflect on these events? How easy it is to become proud young or middle-aged individuals who think we are the centre of the world. How easily we get fixated on getting rich or famous, forgetting our humble entry into this world and our eventual departure in a box.

In the Bible we read ‘Teach us to number our days that we may gain a heart of wisdom’. And again ’Lord, make me to know my end, and what is the measure of my days’ (Psalm 90:12, 39:4). If you are wise you will think about how you began life and how your life will end.

Jesus once told a story to people who loved money. The story was about a rich man and a poor man (Luke 16:19f). They both died, as we all must. When the poor man died, Jesus said, the angels carried him to Abraham’s bosom- in other words heaven. The rich man, however, ended up in torment in Hades. He cried out for mercy because of the unbearable heat of this place. He was in the everlasting fires of hell. He was in the place of weeping and gnashing of teeth, and would remain there for ever.

You may not believe in heaven and hell, but Jesus did. If you think you know better than the Son of God, you are a fool. If you are wise you will number your days and reflect on where you came from and where you are going. Jesus is the way to heaven; he is the way, the truth and the life, and no one comes to the Father in heaven except through him (John 14:6).

**Funeral or celebration** dkm Oct 2014Every culture and every religion has its own particular way of burying their dead. Death comes to all human beings so all families and societies have to dispose of the body of a member who dies. We cannot bury ourselves, as much as we might like to in our fierce independence. I recall a woman who fell down the stairs at work. As she lay bruised and bleeding friends rushed over to help her, but she screamed, “I’m okay. I don’t need your help”. Not so long ago I visited her grave and reflected that we all need help when it comes to being buried.

Is it ‘Christian’ to have a ‘no fuss’ burial, a simple burial in the backyard at midnight? Should we have a private burial, or should we have a huge affair going on for days? Some think huge funerals inappropriate for Christians, while others see them as a way of paying their respect for the deceased person. We hear requests for no flowers, while also seeing huge bunches of flowers and great outpouring of emotion. The funeral of a true Christian will of course be different to that of an unbeliever. The secular humanist has no hope beyond the grave so emotion can be great, or it can be turned into a strange celebration which almost forgets the person has died. The focus is the eulogy when there is no belief in an after-life. Have some Christian funerals become more of a celebration than a funeral? Surely this is a time to reflect not only on the reality of death but the great Christian hope. The absence of a dead body or casket tends to remove the reality of death.

The Church of Rome enters into great ceremony when a member dies. A special mass (Requiem) is held because of sins taken to purgatory. Prayers are said and candles are lit for the dead person, while the coffin is sprinkled with holy water and decorated with rosary beads and ‘sacred heart’ pictures of Jesus. The Reformers reacted to all this ritual and superstition by having simple funeral services. Even so, they recognised the significance of death, no matter how old or infirm the person, and the importance of dignified, godly burials. The Directory of Public Worship, appended to the Westminster Confession of Faith, refers to the dead body as being ‘decently attended from the house to the place appointed for **public burial**’, and of Christian friends accompanying the body to this place of public burial. It does not appear to be a mere family affair.

This Directory also refers to the minister ‘putting them in remembrance of their duty’. Being present at the graveside, or at least having a casket present, is a solemn reminder to all that this life comes to an end. We all return to the dust from which we were taken (Genesis 3:19). Yes, there is a place for remembering the life of the deceased person, but not to the exclusion of remembering their death, and of mourning their departure from this world. Mourning is not inappropriate for the believer. Abraham wept and mourned for his wife Sarah (Genesis 23:2). Believers mourn, but not without hope (1 Thessalonians 4:13). We believe in the resurrection of the dead – all the dead (John 5:28-29). Those who die in Christ will be raised to meet Christ when he returns. The death of a family member or friend is a time to reflect on this truth, usually with the aid of a minister of the gospel.

‘Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints’ (Psalm 116:15). The Lord takes notice when a believer dies. Friends in the church also notice. They are ready to comfort those who mourn. A death should be time for the fellowship to come together, sharing in the truth of the cross and the resurrection. Great words of comfort are found in the Scriptures. These should be shared at this solemn occasion.

**Burial or burning**

Death comes to all human beings so all families and all societies have to dispose of the body of a member who dies. We cannot bury ourselves, as much as we might like to in our fierce independence. How should Christians dispose of the dead body of a loved one and/or member of the church?

The first question is: burial or burning/cremation? In the Bible we read that Abraham purchased a plot of land with a cave in order to bury his wife, or put her dead body in a cave. Abraham was later buried by his sons in the same cave. The most detailed account of a Jewish burial is that of our Lord Jesus Christ. His dead body was wrapped in linen, anointed with spices and perfumes, and placed in a cave. There is no reference to burning dead bodies, apart from the wicked Achan, and the special case of King Saul and his sons, to prevent further abuse of their dead bodies by the Philistines (Josh 7:25 , 2Sam 31:13). Even so, no specific instruction is given to the church regarding the disposal of the bodies of the deceased. What is important is that, no matter how or where the body is disposed of, the person will be raised on Judgment Day (Rev 20:13).

While the manner of disposal of the body of the deceased has no impact upon the dead and their resurrection, it does have importance for the living. A funeral can arouse all manner of superstitions. ‘You shall not make any cuts on your flesh for the dead’ (Lev 19:28). Sometimes mourners shave their heads. White doves can be hired for a funeral service. A Christian funeral will be different to that of the unbeliever. Christians are not to mourn as those who have no hope (1Thes 4:13).

The secular humanist has no hope beyond the grave, so emotion at a funeral can be great, or it can be turned into a strange celebration which almost forgets the person has died. When there is no belief in an after-life, all the focus is on the eulogy and giving the deceased a ‘good send-off’. But a funeral is a time for solemn reflection, not only on the dead person’s life, but on the reality of death and the great Christian hope. The presence of a dead body or casket reminds us of the reality of death. Should we have a private burial, or should we have a huge affair going on for days? Some think huge funerals inappropriate for Christians, while others see them as a way of paying respect for the deceased person.

The Directory of Public Worship, appended to the Westminster Confession of Faith, refers to the dead body as being, ‘decently attended from the house to the place appointed for public burial’, and of Christian friends accompanying the body to this place of public burial. This Directory also refers to the minister, ‘putting them in remembrance of their duty’. Being present at the graveside, or at least having a casket present, is a solemn reminder to all that this life comes to an end. We all return to the dust from which we were taken (Genesis 3:19). There is a place for remembering the life of the deceased person, but not to the exclusion of remembering their death, and of mourning their departure from this world. Mourning is not inappropriate for the believer. Abraham wept and mourned for his wife Sarah (Gen 23:2). Believers mourn, but not without hope (1 Thess 4:13). We believe in the resurrection of the dead – all the dead (John 5:28-29). Those who die in Christ will be raised to meet Christ when he returns. The death of a family member or friend, is a time to reflect on this truth, usually with the aid of a minister of the gospel.

**Fire**The sky went black and there was a great roar. Fire balls hit houses and they exploded into flames. They were a pile of ash within minutes. The heat was incredible- in the thousands of degrees it was reported. In the intense heat, things that would not normally burn just melted, and were consumed in the inferno. The devastation was almost total. People could only salvage twisted metal and a few bits of pottery. We all pray for those who lost loved ones, and for those who lost their homes on Black Saturday.

The recent bushfires in Victoria are the worst we have even seen. Those in the path of the fire thought the world was coming to an end. Remarkably, the end of the world is actually described in a similar way. The apostle Peter in the power of the Holy Spirit wrote, ‘*The heavens will disappear with a roar, the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare’* (2Peter 3:10).

Will the present world come to an end? Some scoff at the very idea. The world has been around for millions of years they believe and it will keep on for millions more. ‘We do not need to worry’ they say. People also scoffed in the days of Noah. It is interesting that people now think global warming may bring an end to planet earth- that is if we do not act to stop such warming.

Will the present world come to an end? The creator of the universe says-Yes! He has actually set a day when it will come to an end- with or without global warming. It is called the ‘day of the Lord’ in the Bible (2Peter 3:10). He has not told us what the actual day is, despite the careful calculations of some misguided people. All he says is that it will come suddenly, even more suddenly than the Victorian fire, and with less warning. It will come like a thief.

How will the earth be destroyed? If I was living in Noah’s day I would be very worried about global warming and rising sea levels. But God has promised not to destroy the earth by flood again. He gave the rainbow as a sign of this promise (Genesis 9:11-13). The present earth and heavens will be destroyed by fire (2Peter 3:12).

The devastating fires in Victoria are a small reminder of the destruction that will soon come to the whole earth. On the day of the Lord however, the destruction will be total. None will escape to continue living in this world because this world will no longer exist. But the good news is that it is the day of the **Lord**. The Lord has made a way of escape.

Do you know how you must prepare for this coming day of the Lord? The only way of escape is Jesus Christ. Only by believing in Jesus can you escape. Do not think water bombing aircraft, a concrete bunker, or any other piece of technology will save you. Nothing will be left. But in Jesus Christ you will be ushered into a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness. Believe in Jesus today and you will be safe for ever.

**The case against euthanasia**

Euthanasia or assisted suicide strikes at the very heart of being human. Human life is precious and to be protected. God is the giver of life; we are not self-created. We did not determine our own existence. Yet some want to determine their own death. They want this as the supreme- and final- act of human autonomy. Actually promoters of euthanasia do not necessarily want this for themselves; more often than not they want it for others or they want it as part of a God-defying agenda. The commands of the Bible, and of all civilized societies is, ‘You shall not murder’. The taking of a human life is the most serious of crimes. The taking of one’s own life is the most despairing and tragic of human acts. Advocates of euthanasia would have us believe that this is an act of mercy and compassion. The word euthanasia means ‘good death’. No death is a good death, outside of Christ. The argument is that such an act relieves the suffering of a person who is terminally ill. No doubt it does, but is this the only way a civilized society has to relieve suffering? The palliative care available in our society is excellent. Physicians can deal with about 99.9% of pain. Euthanasia is not the answer to pain relief. No one can seriously make this argument anymore. The Netherlands long ago legalised euthanasia but it had, and still has very poor palliative care. Moreover, having taken this step, even with the safeguards we are being assured of, they find 16-18% of all cases of euthanasia take place without the explicit consent or knowledge of the patient. Elder abuse is an emerging problem in our society. Legalising euthanasia will add to this problem.

Medical practitioners are concerned that doctor- patient relations will deteriorate if doctors start offering to assist in death rather than healing or pain relief. Dr Toffler from Oregon, USA, says that legalisation of assisted suicide has been detrimental to patients, degraded the quality of medical care and compromised the integrity of the medical profession. He urges us not to go down the path taken by his State: ‘The sick and aging deserve better than Oregon’s mistake’. Another doctor writes of assisted suicide: ‘It remains bad for medicine to teach that killing is caring’. We must listen to those who have experienced the harmful effects of state-sanctioned suicide. We remember how Dr Nietzsche’s campaign for euthanasia included the ‘right to die’ of a mentally ill young man. This doctor was formally declared ‘a serious risk to public health and safety’. In Europe children as young as 12 are being allowed to choose euthanasia for themselves.

Since we have such good palliative care, why is euthanasia being advocated? It is about human autonomy, about the individual’s right to do what they like with their body. This sounds great, but such rights affect other people, as in the case of aborting an unborn child, and also in the case of suicide. Poet William Henley’s well-known words, ‘I am the master of my fate, I am the captain of my soul’ assert an autonomy that is an illusion. Euthanasia is a mark of defeat, not victory, for human autonomy. The ‘right to die’ will soon become a ‘duty to die’. If ‘quality of life’, as measured by the state, or doctors, or even the individual becomes the touchstone of death, assisted suicide will not be limited to the terminally ill. What about the chronically disabled, the depressed and mentally ill, and the elderly. It is within living memory that such a policy was adopted by Hitler. Job lost all his possessions and all his children. To his suffering was added sickness and ‘unbearable pain’. His wife said, ‘Do you still hold fast to your integrity? Curse God and die’ (Job 2:9). Job refused to commit suicide. He clung to his integrity as a person made in the image of God. As a civilized society of human beings like Job, we urge our government to promote, rather than undermine, the value and integrity of every human life. We pray against any form of state-sanctioned suicide or murder.

**Euthanasia**

Euthanasia is back in the news. It is back on the political agenda thanks to a particular member of the NSW parliament various activists. In a society no longer anchored in the truth of God’s word, many people are ready to go along with the euphemism ‘death with dignity. ‘*Eu*’ is a Greek prefix meaning ‘good’ ‘well’ or ‘easy’. Euthanasia means an ‘easy death’ or ‘good death’ - if ever death could be looked upon as ‘good’?

There was no death in the beginning. ‘*In the beginning God created human beings. He formed man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living being’* (Genesis 2:7). Many think that man somehow evolved out of a primordial slime via fish, frogs and monkeys. But where did life come from in the first place? Evolution has no answer. The Bible does. God our creator is the source of life. Death came into the world when man sinned. It is the direct result of sin according to the Bible; and that is not just Genesis. The apostle Paul believed this when he wrote, ‘*through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and this death spread to all people because all sinned’*  (Romans 5:12). How then can we speak about a ‘good’ death? Death is God’s judgment on sin.

At a friend’s funeral Jesus said, ‘*I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in me, though he die, yet he shall live’* (John 11:25). Jesus is God’s answer to death because in Jesus we have forgiveness of sin. To know the only true God and his only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, is to defeat death and have eternal life.

This truth may be beyond the understanding of humanists- people who think that this world, and our life in this world is all there is, but it remains the truth. It is somewhat ironic that people who say, ‘let us eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die’ turn around and say, ‘we want to die quickly and without pain’. I suppose if they are not enjoying life it is not worth living. Life has no meaning when they are not enjoying it.

One problem with death and with euthanasia is that no one has ever come back from the dead to say, ‘Yes, it was good that my doctor gave me a fatal dose to put me out of my misery’. Some doctors are there with the needle ready to put someone out of their misery, but where are they sending them? To the great blue yonder, to be nothing in the vast expanse of the universe?

There is one man who has come back from the dead and that is Jesus of Nazareth. He does not advocate euthanasia. Why not if death is so much better than living in pain? Jesus knows what comes after death, and it is not nothingness or annihilation. He told a story about a man who died and went to Hades or Hell where he was in torment in the flames (Luke 16:23). He was in pain with weeping and gnashing of teeth. Pain on earth was nothing compared to the pain this man had after his death.

We must keep this matter of euthanasia in perspective. But what about someone with a terminal illness and suffering lots of pain? Many have seen loved ones in such situations. We thank God for the medicines he has given us to relieve pain. We thank him for loved ones who comfort us in such pain. But life is God's gift and he is the one with the right to take it away. It is not a human right; it is a divine prerogative.

**Man and monkey**

*Three monkeys sat in a coconut tree*

*Discussing things as they’re said to be.*

*Said one to the other, “now listen, you,*

*There’s a certain rumor that can’t be true-*

*That man descended from our noble race-*

*The very idea is a disgrace!*

*No monkey ever deserted his wife,*

*Starved her babies and ruined her life,*

*And you’ve never known a mother monk*

*To leave her babies with others to bunk,*

*Or pass them on from one to another*

*Till they scarcely know who is their mother.*

*And another thing you’ll never see,*

*A monk build a fence ‘round a coconut tree*

*And let the coconuts go to waste,*

*Forbidding all other monks a taste.*

*Why, if I’d put a fence around the tree,*

*Starvation would force you to steal from me.*

*Here’s another thing a monk won’t do,*

*Go out at night and get on a stew,*

*Or use a gun or club or knife*

*To take some other monkey’s life.*

*Yes, man descended, the ornery cuss,*

*But, brother, he didn’t descend from us!*

*Those humans they tell us another tale,*

*Babies can come from a male and a male.*

*A baby can have two mums! O my!*

*Things in that race have gone all awry.*

*To us monks here in the coconut tree*

*Same sex ‘marriage’ is utter perversity”.*

This poem is anonymous except for the last verse which is my update. dkm

**150 years**

This year, 2009, marks the 150th anniversary of at least two important events in Australia’s history. 1859 is a year to be remembered, if not celebrated, in our history.

In 1859 Thomas Austin introduced 24 rabbits into Victoria in order to pursue his love of hunting. He soon found that he had more rabbits than he needed for this purpose. The rabbits found conditions here favourable and they ‘bred like rabbits’ spreading out across Victoria and into neighbouring states. They dug burrows all over the countryside destroying much valuable land. They consumed cultivated crops and also the native grassland. Without grass cover the land was vulnerable to erosion. Millions of tonnes of topsoil were eroded across the nation threatening the productivity of the land for future generations. Efforts have been made to reduce the rabbit population but with limited success. Rabbits still run wild destroying our scarce resources and the long term productivity of the land. Was Mr Austin’s introduction of rabbits to Australia such a clever idea? Will you join the celebrations?

This year also marks the 150th anniversary of the publication of ‘*On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection, or the Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life’* (*The Origin of the Species)* by Charles Darwin. Darwin was a naturalist, who on one expedition, observed wildlife on the Galapagos Islands. He noticed how the birds were so wonderfully adapted to their environment. Rejecting what the Bible says about God making all living creatures to multiply according to their kind – and that he made everything very good- Darwin came up with the idea that these creatures had a common ancestor from which they evolved into new species. His new theory was that by genetic mutation and natural selection these creatures adapted to different habitats.

The science of genetic mutation and the probability of natural selection requires millions of years if evolution of a new species was to occur. Having turned away from what is written in the Bible Darwin had no problem with millions or billions of years. He went on to propose that human beings, like all creatures, evolved from a common ancestor. Man was no longer made in the image of God as the Bible says, but was made in the image of the monkey from which he descended.

Darwin’s theory spread throughout the world, including Australia. It eroded the foundation of life based in the truth of the Bible. If we are not wonderfully created by God, but simple an advanced form of monkey struggling to survive in their world, then what hope do we have? It is no coincidence that the last 150 years are marked by two world wars. It is no coincidence that moral values have been eroded and a sense of hopelessness pervades our society - for those without God live without hope.

Was Mr Darwin’s idea of evolution such a clever idea? Will you join the celebrations? We may never undo the action of Austin but we can undo what Darwin has done to the human race. We can return to the Bible and listen to what the apostle Paul wrote. ‘*By Him (Jesus) all things were created that are in heaven and on the earth... all things were created through him and for him’* (Colossians 1:16). This is the message of hope that dispels the doom surrounding the theory of evolution proposed by Darwin just 150 years ago.

**Deluded Dawkins**

Many people live as if there is no God, but some like Richard Dawkins actually believe there is no God. His TV program ‘Root of all Evil’ and book from this program called ‘the God Delusion’ are being widely acclaimed. Dawkins believes in Darwinian evolution and thinks all scientists do. He says that science and religion are incompatible. But is this true? Is it impossible for a scientist to believe in God? Dawkins was taken aback to discover that at least 45% of Americans believe in God. He would be surprised just how many scientists also believe in the creator God.

Science as we know it today was actually established by men who believed in God- men like Pascal, Boyle, Newton, Linnaeus and others. Far from being anti-science the Bible endorses true scientific study. Adam was told to name all the birds and animals- the first taxonomist! Noah was told to save all the animals and birds in the ark- the first conservationist! And King Solomon was given wisdom to speak about trees, animals, creeping things and fish- the first scientist! In fact most advances in science have been through men and women who acknowledged God and feared God.

History reminds us of what happens when scientists do not fear God. Hitler recruited scientists to advance his ideology of a master race and world domination- not to mention extermination of those unfit to live. Hitler was merely following the Darwinian doctrine ‘the survival of the fittest’! Evolutionists find nothing wrong with some of Hitler’s ideas. Designer babies and euthanasia have put eugenics back on the agenda of some scientists, and politicians, today.

Dawkins ridiculed all religions, not just Christianity. Religions that are man- made and involve idol worship are of course open to ridicule. ‘*Their idols are silver and gold, the work of men’s hands… those who make them shall be like them’* (Psalm 115). He was sceptical of the healing miracles claimed by those who went to the idol of Mary at Lourdes.

Dawkins went on to Jerusalem where he confronted a militant Moslem. He failed to convince him that there is no God. With Jews and Moslems fighting over this ‘holy city’, Dawkins blamed religion for all the hatred and hostility in the world. He managed to find a few atheists who were quiet and peace loving- and oppressed! This was in America where he challenged evangelical Christians in their belief in the Bible. ‘How can modern man still believe in these ancient scribblings’ he asked? With little understanding of holiness, sin, and divine justice, he tried to portray the God of the Bible as vindictive and violent. But the Christians were not swayed in their faith by his ridicule.

Would the world be a better place if there was no religion? No doubt much evil has been done in the name of religion, but a careful look at the Bible will show that the true God is holy, just and loving towards all he has made. Maybe next time Dawkins will go back in history and question men like Hitler, Stalin, Mao, Pol Pot, and others who like him believed there is no God.

What does God say about men like Dawkins? ‘*The fool says in his heart there is no God’* (Psalm 53:1). This Psalm goes on to say, ‘*Oh that the salvation of Israel would come out of Zion’*. Salvation has come out of Zion in Jesus Christ the Son of God. He is our hope and salvation, as millions by faith believe, despite the ridicule of deluded men like Dawkins.

**Rocks aren’t Clocks** dkm June 2015

Coming home from kindergarten our granddaughter said, ‘Dinosaurs lived 65 million years ago’. ‘I think we should say thousands rather than millions of years’ I replied. I suddenly felt the need to brush up on my ‘history of the earth’! It’s a long time since I studied the geologic timescale that is found in almost every science textbook. Dinosaur fossils are dated in the Mesozoic era, between 65 and 250 million years ago. So the little one had it right according to the textbook; but is the textbook right? This timescale does not stop at the Mesozoic but goes back to the Palaeozoic then the Pre-Cambrian, back to 4.56 billion years when the earth is supposed to have come into existence. But what is the basis for this ‘deep time’?

In a book called ‘Rocks aren’t clocks’ John Reed says, ‘deep time was a secular reaction against Genesis’. Reed is a Christian geologist who belongs to a creation research group called RATE. He questions the origin and accuracy of the geologic timescale that is used as a template for studying rocks and fossils- and the related ‘deep time’ theory of evolution. This timescale assumed its basic form in the mid-1800s; a Scotsman called Lyell is credited with devising it in 1833. It was extended back over 2 million years in the mid-20th century, and supposedly set in concrete by the International Commission on Stratigraphy in 1012. Science like this does not stand by itself as science should; a panel of experts is needed to make it science.

Lyell believed in uniformitarianism, the theory that rocks were deposited at a steady rate around the globe- meaning older rocks are always beneath younger rocks. This idea does not allow for global catastrophes like the Flood, but some rock formations cannot be explained apart from catastrophes or upheavals in the earth. Deep time is a second belief on which this timescale is based. The third is the theory of evolution. Although Darwin did not publish his ‘Origin of the Species’ until 1859, the theory was known to scientists before this. He was frustrated by the lack of intermediate or transitional forms in the fossil record. The two ideas of evolution and a deep time fell in love such that ‘evolution is the clock by which rocks are calibrated’. Biostratigraphy, as it is called, is the method of dating rocks by fossils. This is the most popular and preferred method although fossils are mainly found in the Mesozoic era. Clearly there is a circular logic involved here- evolution supports the geologic timescale which in turn supports evolutionary theory. Problems with this method are tabled.

What about C-14 dating? This gives accurate dates for rocks. In a very expensive procedure rocks are powdered and put into a machine that reads the relative amount of the isotope, and out comes a date based on the half-life of this isotope- 5730 years from C-14. But again there are many problems as tabled. C-14 decays below detection limits in 100,000 years yet is detected in ‘much older’ rocks. Other methods of radiometric dating like Potassium->Argon, and the newer method of Uranium->Lead also have serious flaws. Reed writes of other dating methods like ‘astronomical timing’ and ‘magnetostratigraphy’ but these are only applicable to more recent times.

It all comes back to philosophy and world views. Though presented as scientific fact the geologic timescale is neither science nor fact. It is founded on evolution, uniformitarianism and deep time ideas, and a determined effort to remove the Bible and the God of creation from such study. The Bible presents a world history in thousands of years, a history that includes a catastrophic world Flood. It is a history which states, ‘In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth’. This is recorded history, not rocks as history. Observed rock formations and fossils fit just as well (or better) into the Biblical time frame as the geologic timescale that secular scientists religiously cling to and promote as science.

**Race and racism** dkm August 2020

My ancestors came from Ireland and those of my wife from Scotland. So our children have a fair complexion- some call us ‘white’. This was particularly evident when we went to India. A student at the university was from South India and dark skinned. One day our infant son was touching his arm and said, ‘your skin is very black’. This student remained our friend, a life-long friend in fact! Our son also commented that when we returned to Australia we would notice Grandad at the airport because he would be white! Children notice different skin colours, as we all do, but they do not associate this with class or culture, unless taught to do so! This student friend now has a PhD and went on to marry a girl from Europe. Our life-long friendship is based on our belief in Jesus Christ.

Christians have not always been ready to treat people of a different skin colour as equal. While not directly involved in the slave trade or keeping slaves in recent times, many went along with this blot upon the history of Western civilization. It was believers like William Wilberforce who saw the wickedness of the slave trade; he petitioned the Parliament to stop it. Slavery existed in ancient civilizations but was not race-based. The Bible refers slavery, it was not race-based. But the question of race remains, or does it? Anthropologists speak of five races of men, and certainly people from different regions look different, but is this of any significance? The differences we associate with ‘race’ are more cultural (language, food, dress) than physical.

The Bible tells us that God created the first man; he did not climb down from a tree in the African jungle, and slowly lose his tail and his fur! Adam had children who multiplied as God told them to do. After nine generations we come to Noah and the Flood in which all human beings perished, apart from Noah and his three sons, and their wives. The earth was repopulated from these three families. There is no indication that Ham was dark skinned. God told man to multiply, to fill the earth and subdue it (Gen 1:28). In the land of Shinar (Babylon) men decided to build a tower and stop filling the earth. So the Lord came down and confused their language (Gen 11:7). It was language that caused division within the human race and made them spread out across the earth.

We do not know the skin colour of Noah and his children but the division after Babel would have led to selection pressures within each language group based on the environment and cultures that developed. Skin colour is determined by the amount of a brown pigment in the skin called ‘melanin’. This is found in special cells called ‘melanocytes’. These cells produce melanin in response to sunlight, with a genetically determined limit. At least two genes are involved which makes for a whole range of colours if both mother and father carry the dominant and the recessive gene (16 in fact- see Wieland ‘*One human family*’ p 88). As people scattered after the tower of Babel, gene recombination and natural selection took place in these populations. The intense sunlight of tropical regions would have favoured dark coloured skin, while in higher latitudes less intense sunlight was not a problem for skin with less melanin. Moreover, light skin absorbs sunlight more readily; this is necessary for vitamin D production. Other factors such as tropical diseases and perceptions of beauty would have been involved in the selection processes.

Every human being, whatever ‘race’ or skin colour, is descended from Adam and from Noah as a single species. It is evolutionists who label some races sub-human, and even different species, thereby justifying racism. As one species, inter-racial marriage is successful and in no way prohibited in the Bible. The Jews were commanded not to marry foreigners because of religion not race; and they never enslaved other populations, having themselves been slaves in Egypt. The apostle Paul put it succinctly in Acts 17: ‘God made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth’ (Acts 17:26). It is in Jesus Christ that men and women from all nations can, and will be, united (Eph 3:28, Rev 7:9).

**Gambling**  dkm March 2014Gambling is widespread in our society. Very few people do not bet or have a ‘flutter’ on the Melbourne Cup. Schools (and some churches) run raffles or games of bingo in order to raise funds. The States run lotteries to raise money for public services. Clubs have poker machines to raise funds for their social work- ‘to help the poor’ they say, when the poor may well have put the money into their machines. Gambling wreaks havoc in many families. Some have lost all their money and even their home through gambling. Yet, just because gambling does so much harm, does not make it a sin. Is gambling a sin or not? To answer this question we must look to Scripture. What does God’s word tell us? Actually, it does not give a definitive statement on gambling. For this reason some Reformed theologians conclude it is matter of Christian liberty. But we cannot dismiss this matter so quickly. Are there not principles in Scripture which might guide us? Before discussing the issue we must try to define gambling. Some see a sweepstake on the horses, or the school raffle as harmless- although some gambling addicts admit their problem began here. Lottery tickets are seen as more serious because more money is involved. Poker machines are seen as particularly harmful- hence attempts to legally curb their operation. All gambling involves the operation of chance. Some say that God in his providence overrules in this (Prov 16:33), but we could also say we are not trusting God but testing Him. While casting of lots was sanctioned under the Old Covenant (Num 26:55), it was done to determine God’s will, not for something of value at risk. Gambling involves the transfer of property without proper (equivalent) payment or gift, but on the basis of chance. There is no equivalent service rendered or product supplied. We are to work with our own hands to provide for our family and help the poor as we are able (Eph 4:28, 1Thess 4:11, 1Tim 5:7).

**Stewardship** (Eph 4:28): Gambling is not faithful stewardship of the money God gives through working. Most money gambled is, by definition, lost. It is not the same as ‘risks’ generally taken in saving and investment where the money is used in productive activity. If you do not have, ask God - do not gamble

**Not covet** (Exod 20:17,1Tim 6:8-10): Most people gamble with the hope of gaining a jackpot- they gamble out of covetousness, not contentment. ‘Do not covet’ is the tenth commandment. If you regard your raffle ticket as just a donation, then why do you not donate instead of going in the raffle? And if you win the raffle, do you return the jackpot to those who joined you in this ‘game’? **Love your neighbour** (Mat 22:39): You cannot covet what your neighbour has and love your neighbour at the same time. It is argued that those who gamble do so voluntarily but this is not necessarily the case. Desperate and addicted people gamble; if you win you are defrauding or stealing from many losers; you are not loving them according to the second commandment of Jesus. Truly voluntary gifts are given without the expectation return.

**Ends not justify the means**: Scripture does not condone attempts to justify gambling by saying the winnings are used for a good cause. We must live with what God gives us though proper means. Churches must manage with free will offerings- raffles and games of chance are forbidden (PCEA Handbook 3:14). Governments must do the same. If they need money they should raise taxes, not lotteries? The official stand of the PCEA is found in our subordinate standard. The Westminster Larger Catechism, in detailing sins forbidden in the eight commandment, refers to ‘wasteful gaming’. It does so in the context of ‘prejudice to our own outward estate’ and ‘defrauding others’. ‘If the gambler wins, he is a thief; if he loses he is a waster of his Lord’s property’ writes Voss.

**No horses, no pokies, no raffles**

The lot of the gambler has not been a happy one in recent days. The gaming ‘industry’ is at a low ebb; even the government is worried that state revenue will be down. A microscopic virus has stopped the horses from racing, leaving gamblers up in the air. Where will they spend their money next weekend? Even the iconic Melbourne Cup in under a cloud. The horse race that brings our nation to a halt, the horse race for which we get a public holiday, may not go ahead. We are the only nation on earth that has a public holiday for a horse race. We are the greatest gamblers on earth. The majority of our population will gamble on Melbourne Cup day- yes even the ‘harmless’ office sweep is gambling.

Many who call themselves Christians think nothing of have a bet on the ‘big race’. Lack of discernment with regard to gambling is rife in many churches. However, the Anglican Church has recently called for church raffles to cease- a belated but welcome move. Many continue to fund church activities through raffles, bingo and other ‘games of chance’ or gambling. Gambling often starts with the church or school raffle, or the small slot machine at the supermarket. Many a problem gambler will tell you this.

Those who run the gambling industry are always ready to defend their ‘industry’. It is difficult to call gambling an industry for it produces nothing and destroys many lives. Yet some also seek to make prostitution respectable by calling it the ‘sex industry’. Trafficking of poor women is part of this industry.

One Sydney sport’s club has decided to remove hundreds of poker machines from its club. But how will it survive as a business without these machines? Many think it will not be possible. How shameful it is if a business cannot survive without gambling. Clubs get millions of dollars from poor people through their poker machines and turn around and say that they are helping the community. They give money back to the community because they have to by law. They fund facilities that are often accessed by richer people. Truly gambling is a means of transferring money from the poor to the rich!

What about our government? Gambling is condoned and promoted by the government because we have come to rely on lotteries, scratchies, and the like for state revenue. To cover up the epidemic of personal and family destruction caused by gambling they fund ‘help lines’ for ‘problem’ gamblers. When will we stop to consider the immense benefits that would flow to our society if gambling was discouraged and even outlawed? After all it is illegal to play ‘two-up’ except on one day of the year!

Most societies in the world exist without the level of gambling that we have. Of course there are many that are ravaged by bribery. We vigourously condemn any form of bribery, but the effect of bribery is the same as gambling. The poor suffer as their money is siphoned off to the rich.

The second commandment that Jesus gave is ‘love your neighbour as yourself’. To love your neighbour means you seek to help, not harm, the other person. The money you **by chance** gain from gambling has come from someone else’s loss. You do not know that person and so feel no concern, but it is someone nevertheless. The Bible tells us to ‘*work and eat our own bread’* (2Thessalonians 3:12). Extortion through bribery is sin (Exodus 23:8), as is extortion through a game of chance.

**Jesus saves**  dkm Dec 2015
‘You shall call his name Jesus’. ‘Jesus’, like ‘Joshua’ in the Hebrew, means ‘one who saves’. Mary was told by the angel that she would have a son and to call his name Jesus (Luke 1:31). An angel of the Lord also told Joseph, ‘you shall call his name Jesus’ (Mat 1:21). There are all sorts of cultural traditions about naming a baby, but being named by an angel is rather rare. In many traditions, including Jewish tradition, the meaning of a name is important. What is the importance of the name ‘Jesus’ – ‘one who saves’? Saves from what?

We can be saved from many different things. We might be saved from falling into a ditch, saved from a burning house, saved from drowning, or saved from a heart attack. Such saving is only for a time. In the end we all die. The angel said that Jesus, ‘will save his people from their sins’ (Mat 1:21). What does this mean? Who wants to be saved from their sins? Do you think you need to be saved from your sin? What is sin anyway?

 The Shorter Catechism Q14 tells us, ‘Sin is any want of conformity unto, or transgression of, the law of God’. Sin is failing to keep God’s law, or breaking God’s law. What is God’s law? It is found in the Bible. The Ten Commandments are a good place to start. In summary: ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind, and love your neighbour as yourself’. Can you honestly say you have always loved as you should? Can you honestly say you have not rebelled against God – sin is rebellion against God?

We sin because our hearts are sinful. No matter how hard we try, we cannot be perfect. Many people say they are good enough, but God is perfect and does not accept ‘good enough’. Many say they are better than most people, but God judges by his standard not the average of everyone else. God’s laws are not majority opinion; he makes the rules. Imagine a school where the children made the rules!

Sin is breaking God’s holy law. Sin begins in the heart. Sin leads to death. What, if anything, can be done to save us from sin and death? The angel said to Joseph that Jesus will save his people from their sins. This is why this very special baby was born. This was the destiny of the son of Mary. This is what we remember at Christmas. This is why we rejoice in the birth of Jesus Christ- because he will save his people from their sins. Has he saved you from your sin? Have you asked him? If not, why then are you celebrating?

**Grace ‘superabounds’** dkm Sept 2019

‘But where sin increased, grace abounded all the more’ (Romans 5:20 ESV). I like the word superabounded because the picture is that of an overwhelming flood or tsunami of grace. There is no sin so great that it cannot be covered by the grace of God. Sin might increase and increase until a person is destitute or in the gutter. Indeed, not a few have ended up in such a place because of drink or drugs or divorce or gambling. But, as the hymn says, even the ‘vilest offender who truly believes, that moment from Jesus a pardon receives’.

The apostle Paul knew the superabounding grace of God in Jesus Christ in a personal way. He was a legalist and a persecutor of the church of God. He called himself the chief of sinners. But ‘the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ was exceedingly abundant, with faith and love which are in Christ Jesus’ (1Tim 1:14-15).

The apostle Peter also knew the superabounding grace of God in Jesus Christ in a personal way. This somewhat brash disciple fell badly; so badly that he denied Christ saying, ‘I do not know the man’ (Mark 14:71). But the risen Jesus came to restore him - ‘Simon, do you love me more than these’, he asked, and then said, ‘follow me’. Paul and Peter knew what it meant be convicted of sin. They knew what it meant to repent and have ‘your sins blotted out so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord’ (Acts 3:19). The question is, do you know in a personal way this conviction of sin and the superabounding grace of God?

You know the law, and you know you have broken God’s law. Your sins may be mountainous- but remember Peter and Paul. Have you repented? If so, may you know this superabounding grace of God that overcomes all sin. Maybe you are burdened trying to repay the debt in some way. Stop and find rest in this grace of God. Know that ‘the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanses us from all sin’ (1John 1:7).

The grace of God does not mean that we can sin with impunity or walk in sin. Sin is serious. Sin brings death, both physical and spiritual. God hates sin and we must hate it also. We must turn to God for mercy, repenting and setting right things in our lives that are contrary to God’s holy law. When we do this we will know something of the depths of his amazing grace.

May you know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, and be filled with all the fullness of God. ‘Now to him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly, above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever, Amen’ (Eph 3:19-21).

***Costly Grace*** by Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906-1945)

*Bonhoeffer was born into a leading German family of seven children in Breslau, Germany. He grew up in Berlin, studied theology in Germany and in New York (UTS). As a leader in the Confessing church he was the first of the German theologians to speak out clearly against the persecution of the Jews. Most theologians and churches were silent in the face of Hitler’s pogrom. He was 39 years old when he was taken out of his prison and hanged as a Nazi traitor in 1945. He was not a Liberal like many German theologians at the time, but not Reformed either.*

Cheap grace is the deadly enemy of our Church. We are fighting today for costly grace. Cheap grace means grace sold on the market like cheapjack's wares. The sacraments, the forgiveness of sin, and the consolations of religion are thrown away at cut prices. Grace is represented as the Church's inexhaustible treasury, from which she showers blessings with generous hands, without asking questions or fixing limits. Grace without price; grace without cost! The essence of grace, we suppose, is that the account has been paid in advance; and, because it has been paid, everything can be had for nothing. Since the cost was infinite, the possibilities of using and spending it are infinite. What would grace be if it were not cheap?

Cheap grace means grace as a doctrine, a principle, a system. It means forgiveness of sins proclaimed as a general truth, the love of God taught as the Christian "conception" of God. An intellectual assent to that idea is held to be of itself sufficient to secure remission of sins. The Church which holds the correct doctrine of grace has, it is supposed, *ipso facto* a part in that grace. In such a Church the world finds a cheap covering for its sins; no contrition is required, still less any real desire to be delivered from sin. Cheap grace therefore amounts to a denial of the living Word of God, in fact, a denial of the Incarnation of the Word of God.

Cheap grace means the justification of sin without the justification of the sinner. Grace alone does everything, they say, and so everything can remain as it was before. "All for sin could not atone." The world goes on in the same old way, and we are still sinners "even in the best life" as Luther said. Well, then let the Christian live like the rest of the world, let him model himself on the world's standards in every sphere of life, and not presumptuously aspire to live a different life under grace from his old life under sin. That is what we mean by cheap grace, the grace which amounts to the justification of sin without the justification of the repentant sinner who departs from sin and from whom sin departs. Cheap grace is not the kind of forgiveness of sin which frees us from the toils of sin. Cheap grace is the grace we bestow on ourselves.

**Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline, Communion without confession, absolution without personal confession. Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the Cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate.**

Costly grace is the treasure hidden in the field; for the sake of it a man will gladly go and sell all that he has. It is the pearl of great price to buy which the merchant will sell all his goods. It is the kingly rule of Christ, for whose sake a man will pluck out the eye which causes him to stumble, it is the call of Jesus Christ at which the disciple leaves his nets and follows Him. Costly grace is the Gospel which must be sought again and again, the gift which must be asked for, the door at which a man must knock.

Such grace is costly because it calls us to follow, and it is grace because it calls us to follow Jesus Christ. It is costly because it costs a man his life, and it is grace because it gives a man the only true life. It is costly because it condemns sin, and grace because it justifies the sinner. Above all, it is costly because it costs God the life of His Son: "ye were bought at a price," and **what has cost God much cannot be cheap for us.** Above all, it is grace because God did not reckon His Son too dear a price to pay for our life, but deliver Him up for us. Costly grace is the Incarnation of God.

Costly grace is the sanctuary of God; it has to be protected from the world, and not thrown to the dogs. It is therefore the living word, the Word of God, which He speaks as it pleases Him. Costly grace confronts us as a gracious call to follow Jesus, it comes as a word of forgiveness to the broken spirit and the contrite heart. **Grace is costly because it compels a man to submit to the yoke of Christ and follow Him**; it is grace because Jesus says: "My yoke is easy and My burden light." [Source:  "Devotional Classics" edited by Richard J. Foster & James B. Smith;   "The Cost of Discipleship" by Dietrich Bonhoeffer]

**No sin-no death** dkm June 2018
‘Through one man sin entered the world and death through sin’ (Rom 5:12). If we don’t accept or understand sin we will not understand death. When God created Adam and Eve there was no sin and no death. It was their sin that brought death, according to the word of God: ‘in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die’ (Gen 2:17). Can you imagine a world without death? Imagine a place where there is no more death, no more sorrow, no more crying, no more pain or suffering. There is such a place; it is called heaven (Rev 21:4).

While many are looking for some sort of utopia here on earth, or looking for a pill to stop them getting old and dying, heaven already exists. Death has already been defeated- by Jesus! He defeated death by rising from the dead. Death has been swallowed up in victory through our Lord Jesus Christ (1Cor 15:54). Heaven is a place of no sin, and no suffering, a much better option than living on and on in this world of sinners! Believers do not see death as the end of life; for us it is the beginning of new life, eternal life in the presence of the risen and glorified Jesus (Phil 1:21). This new life begins when we believe in Jesus. Believing in Jesus means being born again of the Spirit of God (John 3:7). ‘If anyone is in Christ he is a new creation’ (2Cor 5:17).

If it is sin that brings death, how come Jesus died? You and I sinned in Adam, and we commit sin- ‘death spread to all men because all sinned’ (Rom 5:12). But Jesus, through the virgin birth, was born without sin, and he never committed sin. He is the sinless Son of God who said, ‘which of you convicts me of sin?’ (John 8:46). The Jews did their utmost to bring an accusation against Jesus, but they found none, apart from false witnesses and charges of blasphemy.

How come Jesus died? ‘Wicked men took hold of him and killed him’ you say. But they could not do this unless allowed by God. They tried numerous times to kill Jesus but he just walked away because his ‘hour had not yet come’ (Luke 4:30). The God of justice would not allow a sinless man to die. If ‘the wages of sin is death’, then Jesus should not have died. There are people, Mahammad included, who say Jesus did not die, but what do you say? That Jesus died on a cross outside Jerusalem some 2000 years ago is historical fact, recorded in four different accounts in the Bible. As believers, we do not have to make excuses for God allowing a sinless man to die. Jesus had no sin of his own BUT he bore the sin of many as he died on the cross. ‘He who knew no sin became sin for us’ (2Cor 5:21). Jesus became ‘the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world’; he became our sacrifice with our sin being taken by him as he died, and his righteousness being imputed to us (Heb 9:28, 2Cor 5:21).

So Jesus suffered and died because of our sin, not his. Since Jesus had no sin of his own, ‘death could hold him’ (Acts 2:24). No man could kill Jesus unless and until he took our sin upon himself. Having done this, and having died on the cross, God acted to ‘loose the pains of death because it was not possible that he should be held by it’ (Acts 2:24). Jesus did not remain in Hades, nor experience decay, because on the third day he was raised from the dead and exalted to the right hand of the Father in heaven- the place he left through the incarnation.

It was your sin and my sin therefore, that led to the death of Jesus; we are responsible for his death. But he went to the cross willingly; he went out of obedience to his Father, and out of love for you and me (John 3:16, 1John 3:16). He is pleased, and there is rejoicing in heaven, when you believe in Him, believe that Jesus died bearing all your sin, so that you are forgiven and have new life in Jesus Christ our Lord.

**Faith not philosophy**  dkm August 2018
A book called, ‘God is good for you’ was released last week by a journalist called Greg Sheridan. In this book he interviews numerous politicians who regard themselves as Christian. Getting them to talk about their religious beliefs, however, was ‘like pulling teeth’, not because of any lack of faith but because of modesty, according to Sheridan. Is modesty a virtue seen in the apostles when it came to telling what they believed about Jesus? Our Prime Minister converted to Roman Catholicism in order to marry, while our opposition leader converted from Roman Catholicism in order to marry. Sheridan’s wife is a Sikh, but he remains a practicing Catholic. He admits to not reading the Bible very much. Sheridan wants to see Christianity resurrected in our nation, but is he talking about faith or philosophy?

Malcom Turnbull sees, ‘the idea of the selfless love of Jesus as a deep mystery [that] penetrates I think, close to the heart of Christian belief’. Mohandas Ghandi said much the same thing over fifty years. Sheridan and many others are impressed with such deep thinking. Bill Shorten’s insight into ‘something bigger than us individually’ comes from watching his children; he is again touched by love, unconditional love.

Is the selfless love of Jesus just an idea, or ideal? Is not love a reality revealed in the Bible? Neither of these politicians admit to actually reading the Bible. This is obvious because both saw homosexual marriage as the ‘loving thing to do’. The love they talk about has nothing to do with the love of Jesus. The love of Jesus is seen in the cross. As with Ghandi, these men like the idea of love but shy away from the cross of Christ and the resurrection. They like the philosophy but not the faith. It is in the cross that we see to the true love of Jesus. ‘This is how we know what love is, Jesus Christ laid down his life for us’ (1John 3:16). ‘In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sin’ (1John 4:10).

Among other politicians who believe in God is Penny Wong: ‘I don’t remember ever having the sense that I denied the existence of God’. If these words sound familiar it is because they are similar to what the Bible says about the devil: ‘You believe there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe – and tremble’. I am not sure that this woman, being in a homosexual relationship, trembles before the Lord.

Are there any politicians who know what it means to ‘fear the Lord’: ‘The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom’? Yes, there are. Andrew Hastie is one; his father is principal of the Presbyterian College in Melbourne. Sheridan records him as saying, ‘This world is but a shadow of the world to come’. A man who believes that Jesus is returning and that it may be soon, will fear the Lord, knowing that this will be the Day of Judgment.

‘God is good for you’ is a book about how useful God has been to our society, and how good it would be to get him back. This is philosophy, not faith. What we need is book called, ‘God in you, the hope of glory’. We have such a book- it is called the Holy Bible (cf. Colossians 1:27).

We hand it Sheridan when he calls upon all Christian schools to have one period of religious instruction each day. If such instruction meant reading the Bible, and if he and those he interviewed read the Bible every day, and humbled themselves before almighty God, we would have reason to hope for revival in our society. This is what we pray for, for revival of personal faith in Jesus Christ. Yes, the Christian faith has been foundational to our society and its values, but it has been the personal faith of men and women at all levels in society, not the ideas or philosophies of men.

**God the Rock**

Some years ago I was taken on a short sight-seeing tour around Bristol. Out on a country road we stopped to see a large rock on the side of the road. On the face of the rock was a crack large enough for a person to hide in. Over 250 years ago during a fierce storm a Mr Toplady did just that. He later wrote the famous hymn ‘Rock of Ages cleft for me’. He likened that rock to the shelter the believer finds in the Cross of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Toplady was not the first person to picture the Lord as a rock. Moses called God ‘the Rock’ in a famous song which he wrote-

*Ascribe greatness to our God the Rock.*

*His work is perfect, and all his ways are just.*

*A God of truth and without injustice*

*Righteous and upright is he.* (Deuteronomy 32:4)

The Lord gave Moses the words of this song, and told the people to teach it to each succeeding generation.

God is *the Rock*. This epithet is used seven times in this song. What do you think of when you think of a rock? Unless you have been hit on the head by a falling rock, you probably think of something firm and solid- something immovable. Rocks make up much of our coastline. They stand firm against the incessant pounding of the waves. If you were to build your house by the sea you would build on the rocks- not on the sand.

Such is the image of God portrayed in the Bible. God is the Rock. He is steadfast and unchanging. The apostle Paul refers to Jesus as the spiritual rock that accompanied Israel through the wilderness. They drank life-giving water from the rock, and that rock was Christ (1Corinthians 10:4).

*Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever* (Hebrews 13:8). These words were a great comfort to first century Christians as they faced opposition and persecution. The authorities had arrested some and put them in prison. Others were challenged by false teachers.

What about today? Do you find comfort in these words about Jesus? We live in a fast changing world and are assailed by wickedness constantly. Many get blown this way and that by different doctrines. Remember Jesus Christ is unchanging. You can stand firm in him.

‘The wise man built his house upon the rock’ said Jesus as he concluded his sermon on the mount. He was referring to those who heard his words and did them. The person whose life is established upon the Lord Jesus Christ and his teaching will not fall in the day of trouble and distress. God is the Rock. Jesus is the Rock of salvation. Are you standing on this rock? Do you ascribe greatness to your God the Rock, whose work is perfect and whose ways are just?

**Death**

Commenting on the death of a medical professor, a journalist wrote ‘a person’s dignity lies in one’s ability to face reality in all its meaninglessness (SMH June 6). In other words, death makes life meaningless. Death continues to defy the power of man and science. When will this change? When will a journalist be able to write ‘a person's dignity lies in one’s ability to overcome death’ rather than simply ‘face the reality of death’? Will this ever happen?

‘I am not frightened of dying’, the professor was quoted as saying. ‘I am at peace with my situation’. What situation- the situation in which death wins in the end? What sort of peace can a man have when he is defeated? What good is it to be brave when you know you face certain defeat? If this man had said he had peace with God, everything would have been different.

A man who has peace with God can truly say he is not afraid of dying. How can this be? A man can have peace with God through Jesus Christ (Romans 5:1). Jesus Christ defeated death. Yes, long ago a man who walked on this earth defeated death. He was not a doctor, though he healed many people and even raised some dead people. He was not a rich man with access to the best hospital in the world. He was an extraordinary man in that he was also God.

Jesus Christ the Son of God defeated death by his own death on the Cross. ‘The death of death in the death of Christ’ is how John Owen put it. Death came into the world because of sin. Without sin there was, and is, no death. Jesus as the Son of God had no original sin nor did he commit any sin. He died on the Cross because of our sin. But having no sin himself, he rose from the grave. It was not possible for the chains of death to hold him.

Jesus is called the second Adam. Death came into the world when the first Adam sinned by disobeying God. Death is the divine penalty for sin. Victory over death comes though Jesus. *By one man's offence death reigned though the one, but how much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the gift of righteousness reign in life though the one man Jesus Christ* (Rom 5:17).

Are you waiting for a medical scientist to discover the key to immortality? Are you waiting for visitors from another planet to bring the secret? The truth is, the secret is already out. You can find it in the Bible. *Death is swallowed up in victory* (1Cor 15:54). It is in the ‘mystery’ of the gospel. Jesus conquered death some 2000 years ago. In his victory you also can have victory. You will not have to put on a brave face and stoically say, ‘I am not afraid of death’.

When you believe in Jesus Christ you are made alive. You are given eternal life. The apostle Paul believed that Jesus died for his sin and that he rose from the dead when he said *for me to live in Christ and to die is gain* (Phil 1:21). Do you understand what he meant? Paul did not face death with despair or defeat. Nor did he face death stoically. To be sure he faced death with reality, the reality of the Cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

**Two ways** dkm July 2016

In Australia we have compulsory voting. We must go along to the polling booth and cast our vote every time there is an election. Other countries have optional voting. When it comes to the gospel of Jesus Christ we all have to make a choice because Jesus says so; and he is the judge. We have to choose between following Jesus or following Satan. We have to choose between the narrow way and the broad way, as Jesus puts it in Matthew 7:13-14. We will all die one day. The Bible says, ‘It is appointed for men to die once and after this the judgment’ (Heb 9:27). Opting out of death and judgment is not an option!

So in Australia we have to front up at the ballot box and make a decision. We have to decide which political party we want running the country. There has only ever been the choice of two parties when it comes to forming government. Other parties come along offering a third alternative but they never come to anything. It is always a choice between two parties. Despite all the promises of a third way, this never leads to anything.

In life there are but two ways, despite all the promises people make. Some religions are as short-lived as some political parties; once the leader goes nothing remains. Other religions have been around a long time; longevity, of course, does not mean they offer the truth. Satan has been deceiving people for a long time. The popular idea that there are many roads leading to heaven is not true. Jesus, the Son of God never spoke about various ways; he spoke of one way, declaring that he is the way, and the truth and the life, and that no one comes to Father except through Jesus (John 14:6). Moreover, Jesus does not share his crown with any others. He said, ‘no one can serve two masters’ (Matthew 6:24).

If you think that there are many ways, or many gods, and see Jesus as one among many, you are not listening to Jesus. Jesus is the truth and the only way to eternal life. What of those who do not follow Jesus? Well, they are following the only other way, the way that leads to destruction (Matthew 7:13). There are only two ways of living, and you, like everyone else, must choose which way you will follow.

**‘God’s Love: How the infinite God cares for his children’ by R.C. Sproul,** 2001.

Dr Sproul is a Reformed minister and Bible teacher. He has written over eighty books. This book delves into the mystery of God’s great love for his chosen children. God’s love is the love by which we are to live. Jesus said we are to love the Lord our God with all our heart, all our soul and all our mind, and love our neighbour as ourselves. Love is one of the attributes of God- ‘God is love’ (1John 4:8). Some turn this around to say, ‘love is God’ but this is ‘a dangerous business indeed’. The truth that God is love does not mean he cannot exercise divine wrath. God is also holy and just. Sproul carefully describes God’s attributes in Biblical terms, not allowing cultural ideas to colour our understanding of love. Love in the Bible is active, a matter of the will, not something we fall into. The love commandments are just that -commands!

God’s love is holy and pure; it is transcendent love, adopting love, eternal love, and covenant love. In chapter 4 Sproul picks up the Hebrew word ‘*hesed*’, translated as covenant love or steadfast love. Loyalty is associated with this love. It is a love that never fails, but also a love than demands obedience. ‘The loyal love of ‘*hesed*’ is both duty and opportunity’. Referring to Deuteronomy 28 Sproul explains that God’s love is one of blessings and curses. He notes that Jesus was cursed by God when he was crucified (Gal 3:10-14).

God’s love continually controls his relationship to his people, Israel. Sproul looks at Hosea, the prophet of ‘*hesed*’. He goes on to ‘the ultimate expression of this loyal love as seen in Paul’s teaching in Romans 8’, where we read that no created thing ‘shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord’ (Rom 8:39). ‘God for us’ is a principle which gripped the sixteenth century Reformers.

In chapter 5 Sproul clearly explains the electing love of God, from Ephesians 1 and Romans 9. ‘Is electing love arbitrary, or is it unfair?’ he asks, and answers. He deals with ‘prescient election’ which is not Reformation teaching; ‘in this schema God peers down through the corridors of time and sees in advance what the future decisions of people will be’. In other words, God elects on the basis of his foreknowledge of a person’s decision. Sproul points out several fatal flaws in this understanding of election. We must remember that no one deserves God’s love. All have sinned and are dead in their trespasses and sin. ‘You did not choose me but I chose you’, said Jesus (John 15:16).

In chapter 6 Sproul deals with the apparent paradox of ‘love and hate in God’. He adheres to the Augustinian view of election and predestination. In chapter 7 he deals with what he calls ‘the threefold love of God’. The word ‘*hesed*’ becomes ‘*agape*’ in the Greek NT. *Agape* love is one of three Greek words for love. In the post-denial and post-resurrection meeting of Jesus with Peter in John 21, we find two words for love, *agape* and *philein*.

The final and longest chapter is a detailed and informative exposition of 1Corinthians 13. Sproul draws insights from the book, ‘*Charity and its Fruits*’ by Jonathan Edwards in this excellent exposition. Commenting on, ‘love rejoices not in sin but in truth’ in 1Corintians 13:6, and verses in Romans 1:28-32, Sproul says that sin loves company. ‘By persuading others to participate in our sins, we make a statement that the sin is not really evil because others are doing it as well. This describes the modern culture, where practitioners of abortion, fornication and homosexual acts not only seek permission but also demand that others approve of their deeds’- prophetic words indeed!

**The Kingdom of God**  dkm April 2014 ‘Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come’. Thousands pray this prayer every day. Maybe you often pray the Lord’s Prayer. What do you understand when you pray ‘Your kingdom come’? What is the kingdom of God? What is the nature of this kingdom? Who is the king, and who belongs to the kingdom?

The king is Jesus. When Jesus began preaching he said, ‘The time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe in the gospel’. (Mark 1:15). John the Baptist announced the coming of the kingdom, but when in prison he sent to see if this was really true. Jesus answered him by pointing to the great works he was doing, healing the sick, the blind and the lame, and raising the dead, and preaching the gospel (Matthew 11:5). Jesus came to inaugurate his kingdom with power and authority- heavenly power. In casting out demons he demonstrated his power over Satan and the rule of evil (Luke 10:18).

When Jesus was arrested he was accused of saying he was a king, and therefore a threat to Caesar. Questioned by the Roman governor he admitted to being King of the Jews, but said clearly, ‘My kingdom is not of this world’; If it were his followers would be out fighting for him, but his kingdom is not from here, not of this world (John 18:36).

The kingdom of God is the same as the kingdom of heaven. Does this kingdom have an earthly reality? No. Some think it is coterminous with the church on earth, such that the Pope in Rome rules over the church and a nation- and in the past has led the church to war. The Reformers emphasised the spiritual and invisible nature of the kingdom. Christ’s kingship of course is supreme over all creation, but his spiritual kingdom in what will endure forever.

‘The frontiers of this kingdom are not coterminous with Israel’s boundaries or history (either): the kingdom embraces all nations and fills all ages until the end of the world comes’. This was the mistake of the Jews who saw and heard Jesus. They thought he would get rid of the Romans and be king in Israel. Still today many look forward to Jesus setting up rule in Palestine, even though he refused to do so in his first coming (John 6:15).

In various parables Jesus describes the kingdom of God. It is very precious, like a pearl of great price. It works inwardly like leaven but also outwardly growing like a mustard seed. It is advancing in this world through the preaching of the gospel and the work of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of men and women. The rule of Jesus is in the hearts of people whom he chooses and who repent of their sin and believe in him. His kingdom is one of human hearts, not of land. It is a vast kingdom because it spans all nations, and all human history- which is not yet ended but will end when Jesus comes again ‘on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory’ (Matthew 24:30). When you pray ‘Your kingdom come’ do you think about these things?

Finally, the kingdom of God is the only kingdom that will remain when Jesus comes again. The last book of the Bible speaks of Satan and his followers being destroyed for ever. A kingdom parable describes wheat and weeds growing together but the weeds being gathered and burnt at the end (Matthew 13:30).

Have you thought about what Jesus says about the kingdom of God? Do you belong to this kingdom? As Jesus said, you must repent and believe in him (John 3:36).

**I know** dkm August 2014Our knowledge of the planet on which we live, and the vast universe in which we are suspended, is astounding- astronomical we might say! Our knowledge about the human body is amazing with new medicines and methods of surgery being developed all the time. Previous generations would stand in awe at the vastness of knowledge we enjoy today, and how readily we can access this knowledge in this computer age. Yet for all this increase in knowledge there seems to be a corresponding decrease in knowledge in certain matters. Knowledge about life and death seems to be on the decrease in our secular society. A well-known TV presenter, now with long grey hair, decided to look at death and the funeral business. He visited Jewish, Christian, Muslim and Buddhist places of cremation and burial. He had people explain what they believed about death and the afterlife. At the end the presenter was asked what he believed about death and life after death. His answer was ‘I don’t know’!

‘One thing I know, once I was blind but now I see’! These are the words of a man born blind but after leaving home received his sight one day. How did this happen? A man called Jesus made clay and put it in his eyes and told him to go and wash in the pool (John 9:25, 11). The educated men of the day would not believe his story. They thought he was an imposter. They kept asking him how he was healed. He kept telling them that Jesus healed him and that he must have done so by the power of God. Many said, and still say, it is impossible for a man born blind to suddenly start to see without some medical intervention. They also say it impossible for a man to rise from the dead, even with medical intervention. But Jesus died and was buried and rose from the dead. He was seen by hundreds of people speaking and eating after he had died. The experts in the law were confounded by the people who saw and believed; ‘What shall we do to these men’? (Acts 4:16).

‘I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day’. This is what Martha said about her brother Lazarus, four days after he died. She believed in a general way that there will be a resurrection of the dead. She had been taught this but did not really understand. She was a sincere woman who loved her brother. She was not a sceptic like Thomas who said, ‘Unless I see I will not believe’. Thomas did see and believe saying ‘My Lord and my God’ (John 20:29). Martha was soon expressing a personal belief. Jesus said to her, ‘I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in me shall never die’ (John 11:25, 26). Jesus spoke of a bodily resurrection and a spiritual resurrection that comes even today when a person is born again of the Spirit of God. With personal faith Martha said, ‘Yes Lord, I believe you are the Christ, the Son of God’. She was left in no doubt about life in this world and in the world to come.

‘I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep what I have committed to him until that Day’ (2 Tim 1:12). These are the words of Paul of Tarsus, a highly educated man of his day. His education did not prevent him from believing the facts of Jesus death, burial and resurrection. More than this, he knew the significance of these events for his own life. He knew that the resurrection of Jesus meant he would also be resurrected. He knew that Jesus died bearing his sin, and that he was a new person in Christ Jesus. He knew his life was in the hands of Jesus, and that ‘nothing could separate him from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord’ (Rom 8:39). ‘Such knowledge is too wonderful for me’ wrote King David (Psalm 139:6).

**Everest- here I come!**

‘I climbed Mount Everest’- would you like to be able to say that? Imagine how popular you would be at a party if you had such a story to tell. Maybe you could get you name into the Guinness Book of Records, though it is a bit late now I think- unless you have only four toes or something like that!

Why are people queuing up to climb Everest? What do they gain? Or is it what they risk that is important? Is it just because it is there? One young man on the radio tried to explain how it taught him so much about himself and who he was. And in the face of danger he appreciated his wife and children much more. The radio host screamed at him ‘can’t you do that without climbing Everest!’

I must confess I have done a little climbing in the Himalayas. It was a great adventure going with my son and his friends up into the magnificent mountains. I did not find myself, nor did I find God there, but I did enjoy the beauty of God’s creation. When we got lost and when I got sick I called upon God there in the mountains, just as I do here much closer to sea level. I found God, or rather God found me, years ago when I was reading the Bible. It is in the Bible that we find out about God. And knowing God we know what life is about.

Do you wonder at times where you came from, why you are here, and where you are going? Jesus knew where he came from and where he was going (John 8:14). He knew why he was in this world. This was the secret of his amazing (and unique) life. Jesus knew he was sent by God the Father into this world. He knew he would suffer at the hands of men and die upon the Cross. He knew he would rise again and return to his Father in heaven. Knowing all this he did not have to seek the praise of men. He did not have to look to himself to find out who he was- he looked to his Father. Jesus lived to please God and he did this by obeying him.

The apostle Paul, a person just like you and me, learnt from Jesus how to live. He wrote, ‘*I know who I have believed and am persuaded that he is able to keep what I have entrusted unto him until that day’* (2Timothy 1:12). Paul had more adventures and faced more dangers than he liked to recall- he was shipwrecked, he was imprisoned, he was stoned, he suffered exposure and more (2Corinthians 11). He did not endure all these things to ‘find himself’ or to ‘find God’. He endured them because he already knew God, he knew where he had come and where he was going and he knew what God wanted him to do. *For me to live* he said *is Christ*.

If you are lost in this life, not knowing where you came from or where you are going, please stop now and ask the way. Jesus said he came to seek and to save the lost. He said, ‘*I am the way the truth and the life*. *All that the Father gives to me will come to me and the one who comes to me I will by no means cast out’* (John 14:6, 6:37). What a wonderful promise!

**Defending God**

Rioting has erupted in many cities around the world as followers of a certain dead prophet seek to defend his honour. In the name of their god, violent mobs have gone on the rampage destroying property and injuring innocent people. Is such religious zeal to be admired? Some might ask why Christians do not show the same zeal for Jesus as these people do for their prophet. There is certainly no lack of pictures and words that mock Jesus and offend his followers. Every day we hear people taking the name of Jesus in vain. Why do those who believe in Jesus not rise up to destroy the perpetrators of such blasphemy?

Firstly Jesus Christ is not dead but alive. He did die. He submitted himself to be crucified at the hands of men, but raised him from the dead and he is alive today. Secondly, Jesus is the Son of God well able to defend himself. This is the great truth of the Bible. Whilst his followers are deeply offended and hurt by such blasphemy they do not take it upon themselves to defend God. As if the Creator of heaven and earth needs weak men whom he created to defend him. Indeed, what sort of god needs men to defend him?

*By the word of the Lord the heavens were made…*

*Let all the earth fear the Lord*

*Let the inhabitants of the earth stand in awe of him…*

*The Lord brings the counsel of nations to nothing*

*He makes the plans of the peoples of no effect* (Psalm 33)

God is omniscient and omnipotent. He is all powerful, and does not need people to defend him. He is the God who defends his people, the God who goes before them and gives the victory.

Furthermore, the Lord specifically instructed his people through Moses and again through the apostle Paul, that vengeance belongs to the Lord. ‘*Vengeance is mine says the Lord I will repay’* (Romans 12). God will judge those who mock him and blaspheme his holy name. His judgment may not be immediate but it is 100% certain. In fact God’s judgment is often delayed to give such wicked people time to repent.

Jesus calls upon his followers to love their enemies, and do good to those who hate them (Matthew 5). *‘If you enemy is hungry feed him, if he is thirsty give him a drink… do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good’* (Romans 12:20, 21). Such behaviour is entirely contrary to the natural reaction of sinful man. As sinners we want to destroy our enemies- and those who mock our God are rightly our enemies. What we see going on in the world today is not holy behaviour it is the natural reaction of sinful men.

Jesus calls upon his followers to be different. ‘*Do not repay evil for evil’* he said. How wonderful it is to have a God who can destroy his enemies without our help, but yet a God who loved the world so much that he gave his only Son to die in order that he might forgive all who repent and believe in Jesus.

**The case against homosexual marriage** dkm April 2017The Australian Marriage Act as amended in 2004 states that, ‘marriage means the union of a man and a woman to the exclusion of all others, voluntarily entered into for life’. An additional amendment refuses to recognise as marriage in Australia any same-sex unions solemnised in a foreign country. Homosexual activists are not satisfied with equal rights granted under civil union legislation but want what they call ‘marriage equality’. The Federal Marriage Act is not a religious document and we strongly oppose any changes to the Act on the following grounds:

1. From the beginning of history, and in every culture around the world, a man and a woman have come together in a life-long union for the purpose of companionship, and the bearing and nurturing of children. This union is called marriage. One reason for this is the biological impossibility of a same-sex couple producing children. To this we would add that this is the design of our Creator: ‘in the beginning God made them male and female’ (Matthew 19:4).

2. Therefore a homosexual or lesbian couple are dependent upon a third party if they want children. A surrogate mother is open to exploitation, as is a sperm donor. In either case, the child is torn away from one biological parent in a legally sanctioned act, if homosexual marriage is legalised.

3. Every child has a biological mother and father. It is their expectation, and right, to know their mother and father, and be raised by them under normal circumstances. Many children are deprived of a mother and/or father, but the State does not sanction such situations or arrangements for the raising of children as would be done in legalising homosexual marriage. Indeed, the State has said ‘Sorry’ for such State-sanctioned removal of children from their biological parents in the recent past.
4. Homosexual couples have all the legal rights of heterosexual couples by way of civil unions and *de facto* relationships- apart from that of adopting children in some jurisdictions.

5. The term ‘marriage equality’ is emotive but misleading. Marriage is not a right for everyone in our society. Our laws do not allow children to marry, do not allow a person to marry a brother or sister (incest), do not allow marriage to more than one man or woman at a time (bigamy and polygamy), and do not allow bestiality.

6. The desire to legalise homosexual marriage is about ‘normalizing’ homosexual behaviour. Many homosexual couples are not interested in getting married. In the Netherlands only 20% of homosexual couples are married, compared to 80% for heterosexual couples. In New Zealand only 12% of homosexual couples got married in the two years after legalisation of homosexual marriage. 7. Children growing up in a legally-sanctioned homosexual marriage face confusion and a high risk of emotional instability. They face the inevitable question of why they have ‘two daddies’ or ‘two mummies’. A little girl should not have to see two men posing as her parents. A teenage boy should not have to ask his dad, ‘Where did I come from’ and be told, ‘Ask your other dad’. Children will have difficulty relating to members of the opposite sex in a whole new way, unrelated to single parenting.
8. Every child has a right to a mother and a father. While adult homosexuals seek their rights under the banner of ‘marriage equality’, the rights of the child are being denied. Homosexual marriage will legally sanction the denial of the rights of the child.

9. It is our desire that the State assist every child born in Australia to grow up with their birth mother and father, while making provisions for those denied this basic human right. ‘Bless the little children!’ (Mark 10:16). **Free speech** dkm May 19
As I write this message Israel Folau, a professional sportsman, is on trial for comments posted on social media. His comments were words taken from the Bible declaring that hell awaits drunks, homosexuals, adulterers, liars, fornicators, thieves, atheists and idolaters, and calling upon sinners to repent and believe in Jesus. Those sitting in judgment over this man are Rugby Australia executives, whose knowledge of the Bible is probably very scant. There was a similar case in Victoria some years ago when two Christians were found guilty of discrimination against Muslims; if the judge had read the Koran he would have seen that they were quoting the Koran! Not that quoting from a holy book makes any difference to a secularist. Many hate the Bible. They make judgments by their own standards. Folau will be judged by the standards of secularists, by the confused and corrupt standards that have taken hold in our society.

We are an advanced, modern society operating under the rule of law. However, free speech is under attack in our society, almost as much as in authoritarian regimes that we condemn. It is said that some of our ‘rule of law’ is derived from Roman law. Maybe we should go back and look at how the Romans ruled. We have a couple of examples in the Bible. Firstly, there is Gallio, proconsul of Achaia (Acts 18:22). The Jews objected to Paul’s preaching of the gospel and dragged him into Gallio’s court. They accused Paul of persuading people to worship God contrary to the law. How did Gallio respond to this charge? The charge was all about words and names in a book. It was about what today is called ‘hate-speech’. They could have accused Paul of being anti-Semitic, or in today’s terms ‘semiphobic’.

Let me explain. It was the apostle Paul who wrote the words used by Folau, so Rugby Australia are in effect accusing Paul of being ‘homophobic’. Islam did not exist in Paul’s day so let’s hope Paul is not accused of ‘Islamophobia’. These are interesting new words- I could not find them in my dictionary. They are words based on ignorance. The Greek suffix ‘*phobos*’ means ‘fear’, even ‘reverent fear’. Is Folau fearful of homosexuality? I think what people mean is ‘hatred’; hence ‘hate speech’. In Greek the prefix ‘*misseo*’ means hatred- as in ‘misogynist’ or hater of women. So the word they should be using is ‘misohomo’, or the like. But when you make up your own moral standards you can make up your own language I guess!

Back to Gallio! Did Gallio slap Paul in prison for offending the Jews? NO. He said his duty of judgment was about matters of wrongdoing and wicked crimes (Acts 18:14). Matters of words were not, in his opinion, wrong or criminal, so he dismissed the case. Rugby Australia, and all the courts of this land should learn from Gallio and dismiss any and every case of so-called ‘hate-speech’. They should follow the lead of this Roman judge and uphold free speech in our society. The apostle Paul was also taken to court by some Gentiles- this was in Ephesus. Demetrius got upset at Paul for saying his gods were not gods at all; his business was being affected by the preaching of the gospel (Acts 19:26). Demetrius gathered his mates and started a riot. This still happens in many places, and even in our streets, but most ‘rioting’ today occurs on social media! If you post something that offends me I will blast back at you, telling everyone to boycott your business, get you sacked, or harm your family. So Demetrius stirred up the whole city, clamouring for their goddess Diana. Most of the crowd were confused, not knowing why they had come together (Acts 19:32). We still have people joining whatever riot is going on on the day! Eventually, the city clerk or magistrate appeared and called for the crowd to be quiet. ‘These men’ he said, pointing to the Christians, ‘are neither robbers of temples nor blasphemers of your goddess’ (Acts 19:37). Like Gallio, he dismissed the crowd even as they accused these men with regard to what they were saying. Would that our courts focus on matters of real criminality, and not judge people on what they say.

**No crying He makes** dkm Dec 2013

Christmas carols are again being heard as we approach the end of the year. What do you make of these songs? Secular songs are creeping into ‘Carols in the park’ programs, but still the old carols can be heard. Some of these carry the message of the incarnation, of God becoming man, as written in the Bible. ‘The virgin will be with child and bear a son and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which means ‘God with us’’. This is what the prophet Isaiah said some 700 years before the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem. This is what the apostle Matthew says was fulfilled at the birth of Jesus some 2000 years ago.

We hear some unusual words in the carols. ‘Emmanuel’ for instance. What about the word ‘Noel’ in ‘The first Noel, the angels did say’. ‘Noel’ is the French word for ‘Christmas’. ‘Angels’ we hear about but many know nothing about and do not even believe exist. The angel called Gabriel appeared to Mary and spoke to her. This angel was sent by God. Angels were created by God. They are heavenly messengers and ministering spirits (Heb 1:14). There are lots of angels around the throne of God in heaven (Rev 5:11).

The carol ‘Away in a manger’ is among the most popular. But what is a manger? It is a feeding trough for animals. From this word we understand that Jesus was born in a stable (Luke 2:7). Another line in this carol says ‘The little Lord Jesus, no crying he makes’. Did the baby Jesus not cry? The Bible does not say this. Some see an element of Docetism in these words; Docetism is a heresy that claims Jesus only seemed to be a man, and that his body was not like ours.

But the thought of the author- which some think was Martin Luther- may have been that Jesus being a perfect baby did not cry. The crying of a baby can hardly be called sinful - although later crying of an infant may well be ‘put on’ in order to get attention.

What the Bible tells us is that Jesus never sinned (2Cor 5:21, Heb 4:15). Jesus kept all of the commandments and always obeyed his heavenly Father. He also obeyed his earthly parents. We are not told much about his childhood but when he was 12 years old he lingered in the temple. When his parents found him he went with them and was obedient to them (Luke 2:51).

How strange (or wonderful!) it must have been for parents to be bringing up a perfect child. It was, of course, a unique situation. Parents sometimes think they are perfect and the child sinful. Children may think they are perfect and the parents are sinful. The truth is all children, apart from Jesus, are born in sin. The truth is all parents commit sin.

Is it any wonder that parent - child relationships get into such a mess? Where can we go to find a model of perfection for child and parent? Do we look to the ‘experts’, to older people or to other societies? Since Jesus was a perfect child should we not look to him, to his life and his words? He did not become a parent but as the perfect man he does teach us many things. In fact the whole Bible is the word of God and of Jesus. All of it is useful for correction and training righteousness (2Tim 3:16) - if you will but read it and seek with God’s help to obey what Jesus teaches us.

**Man becomes God or God became man?**

“The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14). This is my favourite Bible verse for this time of the year when we especially remember the birth of Jesus Christ. ‘The Word’ in this verse refers to Jesus; he is the Word who was with God and was God (John 1:1). Jesus truly is Immanuel, God with us.

Jesus of Nazareth is God become man, not man become God because of his miracles, his love or his teaching. He was born of the virgin Mary after the Holy Spirit overshadowed her and before she ‘knew’ her husband. This is what Luke the physician writes (Luke 1:35). Many followed Jesus because of his miracles, because of the loaves they ate (John 6:26); but this was not the sort of following Jesus wanted. His miracles were but a confirmation of who he is, namely God the Son. Jesus did not come to give material bread or material anything; he came to give spiritual bread. He is the bread of life sent down from heaven.

While Jesus is the only ‘God become man’, there are many who think they are ‘man become god’. This is the very nature of sin. This nature may be hidden as we sing carols, exchange gifts and enjoy a holiday, but it will re-emerge all too soon, and all too often. When Adam and Eve sinned it was because they wanted to be like God (Genesis 3:5). Sin is rebellion against God. Their son Cain rebelled when God accepted his brother’s offering and rejected his. He took control of his own life, and his world, and murdered his brother Abel. He was saying in effect, ‘I am god. My life is mine to do as I like and I will not be stopped by my little brother or anyone else’.

‘Your destiny is in your own hands’ is what many believe and teach. ‘No one is going to tell me what to do, least of all God. I do not have to listen to the words of some old book’ they say, even as they mouth the words of a Christmas carol or greeting.

“Why do the nations rage and the people plot vain or worthless things” (Psalm 2)? Why do kings and rulers set themselves against the anointed of God, the Word who became flesh and dwelt among us? What rage the rulers and people of Jerusalem got into as they shouted against Jesus until they got him crucified? Even at his birth there was rage as Herod sent men to kill baby Jesus, and slaughtered hundreds of babies in this effort (Matthew 2:16).

When God came into this world, men like Herod saw the threat this posed to their position and their way of life. Those who truly understand the birth of Jesus will see this also. Those who want to rule their own lives; those who want to be like God; those whose focus is on man becoming god rather than God who became man, will not be celebrating the birth of Jesus Christ, the son of God. Is Jesus a threat to you and your way of life? Jesus said, ‘I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except though me’ (John 14:6).

**Christmas confusion** dkm Dec 2019

Walking into any shopping mall you will see a Christmas tree on the central stage, and meet a man dressed in a red suit called Santa sitting nearby. Over to the side you might see a small nativity scene in a glass case, a baby in a box in a stable, some shepherds and sheep around this baby and maybe some men who look like kings also in the scene. How is this scene related to the tree and the man in the red suit? And what has all this got to do with the frenzy of shopping and buying gifts at this time of the year? And news bulletins tell us that the national economy depends on how much we buy at this time of the year. Do you find this confusing? Many do. Around the world nations stop for this holiday. How many people know why? The last public holiday in Victoria was for a horse race!

What has this nativity scene got to do with Christmas? It was once the whole focus of this holiday or holy day. What you see in the scene depicts (generally) what is written in the Bible concerning the birth of Jesus. Christmas trees, Santa’s and gift-giving are not in the Bible. The scene depicts the most significant event in human history, an event that shook the world, an event that changed lives and is still doing so today. The birth of this baby in a stinking stable, surrounded by unwashed shepherds and smelly animals, shook heaven and earth. Angels appeared as never before, appearing to Zacharias, Mary, Joseph and the shepherds. Mary, the baby’s mother pondered these things in her heart, and you would do well to ponder them also.

Our world divides history into ‘before Christ’, BC, and ‘after Christ’ or ‘*Anno Domini*’, AD. Pagans want to change this view of history but it persists because ‘history’ is ‘His- story’! Jesus not only divided history, he also divides humanity, as you may have noticed. You are either for Jesus Christ or you are against him (Matthew 10:34-39); you either love him or you hate him. We were all His enemies at one time, but ‘while we were yet sinners Christ died for us’ (Romans 5:8).

The incarnation, or ‘Christmas’ as it was once called (read on), is about God loving us and sending his only begotten Son into this world to save us from sin and death. It was at the cross that Jesus died for us, but there would have been no cross without the incarnation. And there would be no incarnation if Jesus had been just a man. The incarnation was a unique event in history, an event that you must take seriously because your future depends on it.

Christmas is about the incarnation. Have you heard this word before? The meaning of this word is clear, unlike the word ‘Christmas’. Maybe we should change the day we celebrate to ‘Incarnation Day’. After all, trying to ‘put Christ back into Christmas’ has not been very successful. The Americans have ‘Thanksgiving Day’ so they could lead the way with ‘Incarnation Day’ and we could follow them! Not sure what incarnation means? We could call it ‘the day God became man’, or, as the apostle John so beautifully writes, the day ‘the Word became flesh and dwelt among us’- John calls Jesus the Word (John 1:14). We could even celebrate this world-shattering event every week- wouldn’t that be great! On the first day of every week we could celebrate the birth of Jesus, the death of Jesus, and the resurrection of Jesus. This, dear friend, is what God wants us to do.

Let me close with something else we read in the Bible. John tells us that grace and truth came into the world the day Jesus was born (John 1:14). Jesus is the embodiment of grace and truth. Do you see much grace or truth in the world around you? Ponder the birth, death and resurrection of Jesus and you will see grace and truth as never before seen in this world.

**The greatest gift** dkm Dec 2018

Birthdays are great times. It is great to get gifts on your birthday. Family and friends send gifts and cards- you may even get a card from the local real estate agent! This is what we are used to in Australia. But in India we discovered it is the other way around. You are supposed to give gifts to other people on your birthday!

In Jesus Christ our Saviour and Lord we have the greatest gift the world has ever seen. God gave his only begotten Son to us. He gave him to die on the cross to take away our sins. When we believe in Jesus we receive the precious gift of life. Jesus gave his life that we might live.

It was just over 2000 years ago in the village called Bethlehem in the land of Palestine that Mary gave birth to a Son. She was not yet married. The baby was actually conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit. Jesus was born of the Virgin Mary as foretold some 700 year before by the prophet Isaiah (Isa 7:14). Jesus was the promised Messiah or Anointed One whom God sent to save his people. He was, and is, uniquely the Son of God and Son of Man. If Jesus was just as man, if the virgin birth is denied, as it is by many, even in the church, then we are still lost, still in our sin. It is the same as denying the resurrection (1Cor 15:17). We cannot deny these supernatural events recorded as they are in Biblical history, and still claim to be saved and on our way to heaven.

As you enjoy the festive season do listen to the words of some of the carols that are sung. ‘For unto us a child is born, unto us a Son is given’ are words from Isaiah 9:6. Remember the name Jesus means ‘he saves’; ‘He will save his people from their sins’ (Mat 1:21). And the name Emmanuel means ‘God with us’. ‘The Word became flesh and dwelt among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the only begotten to the Father, full of grace and truth’ (John 1:14); do remember this verse and meditate upon it during this festive season, and on into the New Year.

The Word who became flesh died on the cross bearing your sins, if you believe in Him. This same Word rose from the dead and is now on his throne in heaven. He is now King of kings and Judge of all men and women. Jesus was a baby in a manager in stable but he is a baby no longer. He is the eternal King of the eternal kingdom of heaven. He is the King that you will stand before on judgment day.

**Child and King**

The build up has begun. The parties have started. The decorations are going up. The rush and the crush are underway. We are busy sending cards and buying presents. It is called the festive season, the season of joy and gladness.

Is this what Christmas is all about? Most of us have holidays. Holidays are a good time to slow down and relax, a time to gather our thoughts. Will you stop to think where you have come from and where you are going? You are moving towards your destiny whether you think about it or not. What is your destiny?

The birth of Jesus in Bethlehem, some 2000 years ago, has a bearing on your destiny. How can a baby born so long ago have any impact on your destiny? Wise men came to Jesus looking for the King, the King of the Jews. King Herod took them seriously and tried to get rid of the baby Jesus. There were others who kept on trying to get rid of Jesus because they also took Jesus seriously. Do you take Jesus seriously?

‘Can you rule out a challenge to the leadership?’ is a question journalists love to ask our politicians. Pilate, like a journalist, asked Jesus ‘Are you the King of the Jews?’ (John 18:33). Was Jesus a threat to Caesar? Jesus knew it was a loaded question. The Jews were accusing him of being a traitor to Rome.

Jesus said ‘My kingdom is not of this world’. The questioner was taken aback. ‘Are you a king then?’ he asked. 'You are right', said Jesus, ‘This is why I was born and came into his world, that I should testify to the truth' (John 18:37). Pilate was in deep water. Truth was scary to him- as it is to lots of people today.

Jesus was born to testify to the truth. What is truth? Jesus said ‘I am the truth’. The truth is that Jesus is King. He is King of kings, and his kingdom is not of this world. The angel told Mary that ‘of his kingdom there will be no end’ (Luke 1:33). The kingdom of Herod is no more. The kingdom of Rome is no more. All the kingdoms of the world will come to an end. Your rule over your life will come to an end.

Jesus said to Pilate, and he says to us ‘Everyone who is of the truth hears my voice’. King Jesus is the truth. He is a merciful king who reaches out to people who are lost; people who are insecure and unsure about where they are going and where they will end up. He brings us into his kingdom when we confess our sin/rebellion and accept his rule in our life. In truth, Jesus must also be just and condemn his enemies, those who do not believe him, and accept him as King.

If you are celebrating the birth of Jesus think about who Jesus is. You cannot have him as a baby in a manger and not have him as King on the throne. You cannot accept his mercy without his justice, for he is truth- absolute truth. Remember the wise men from the East and be wise.

**Christmas**

Why is it that many people imagine God to be an old man with snowy white hair and a long beard? Is it because Moses was an old man when he led the Israelites out of Egypt? But what about Jesus; he was not an old man. Jesus was just 33 when he was crucified. Yet Jesus did refer to God as his Father.

As I look at a painting of 'jolly father Christmas' on a calendar I wonder if the image of God as an old man is taken from Santa Claus! I have heard that people without Christian backgrounds do think this way. I am sure some children are confused by the message of Christmas and the myth of Santa Claus, of fir trees and all the rest. Is the truth of the birth of Jesus, the Son of God getting through this mythology and commercialism?

Let us be clear that the God and Father of Jesus, who is also the creator of this universe, is not an old man and it is offensive to ever picture him as such. 'God is a spirit, infinite, eternal and unchangeable in his being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness and truth'.

You will not find the word ‘Christmas’ in the Bible. That is because it was not celebrated by the early church. What did the early church celebrate? They celebrated the death of Jesus because it was by his death, by his sacrifice, that our sins are taken away when we believe in Jesus. They celebrated his death in their weekly, not annual, gatherings to worship Jesus. Even in the sixth century the church was more into celebrating Jesus' baptism than his birth.

Christians met each week on the day that Jesus rose on the dead, the first day of the week. In remembering Jesus' death and resurrection they also remembered his birth. They remembered what is written in the Bible, namely that Jesus was born of the virgin Mary in Bethlehem with an animal feed trough for his cradle. That Jesus was born the Son of God was integral to their belief in Jesus. They did not know the day of his birth because it is not recorded. They were not into making things up when it came to worship!

I mentioned Jesus being just 33 years old when he was killed. Jesus said 'he who has seen me has seen the Father, so how can you say show us the Father' (John 14:9). Jesus is the image of the invisible God. Thousands of people saw Jesus when he walked in this world but they left us no painting or photograph. So it is again pure imagination to draw a picture of Jesus, and then God in the image of Jesus. Jesus has returned to the glory of heaven. He will come again and we will all see him soon.

To return to Christmas celebrations; some can remember when Christmas was not all about money and bright lights. It was not even a pubIic holiday in the USA until 1870. Santa was not invented until1773, and the fir tree after that. In fact more widespread celebration of Christmas seems to match a decline in true worship.

If you want to celebrate the birth of Jesus the Son of God you can do so every week in a church service, or every day in your prayers. Is he not worthy of much more than an annual celebration?

**What’s in a name?**

New Zealand is famous (or infamous) for various things. Unlike most other countries it has a law banning certain names parents want to give their children, a ‘weird children’s names’ law. Apparently ‘Lucifer’ is a popular choice but is not allowed. ‘Number 16 Bus Shelter’ was another name refused registration. If India had such a law we might not have had a student called Hitler and another called Ben Hur.

We may not see names and their meaning as significant, but in some societies such things are very important. In the Bible names are significant. We read of names being changed when a person’s status is changed by the Lord e.g. Abram to Abraham, Jacob to Israel.

We also read of different names and titles being given to Jesus who was born to Mary with her husband Joseph. Jesus was in fact named by an angel of the Lord- such was the importance of his name. Mary would never have chosen the amazing names given to her son before he was born or even conceived. She had little idea of how important her son would be to the human race.

The angel told Mary ‘you shall call his name Jesus’ (Luke 1:31). An angel told Joseph the same name saying ‘because he will save his people from their sins’ (Matthew 1:21). Jesus, like Joshua, means ‘one who saves’. While this name is not unique to Mary’s son, the fact that he will save his people from their sins is unique. When the title ‘Christ’ (Messiah) is added (Matthew 1:1,18) his name is unique. He is the anointed (Christ) saviour (Jesus) of God.

Immanuel is another name mentioned to Joseph by the angel. This name actually comes for the Bible and means ‘God with us’ (Isaiah 7: 14, Matthew 1:23). It was not a man or woman but an angel that applied this name to the child in Mary’s womb. The eternal, almighty, creator God was coming to live among human beings on this earth.

Mary was really surprised at the other names by which the angel referred to her yet-to-be-conceived son. ‘He will be called the Son of God’ (Luke 1:35). What mother would not be astounded at such a presumptuous name- ‘Son of God’? It would not be allowed in New Zealand! Not even the proudest of mentally stable parents would give their child such a name.

This is what we read in the Bible. It is amazing but true. It is incredible but true. ‘Jesus Christ’ the ‘Son of God’. Mary didn’t know what to think, but she accepted what she heard from the angel of the Lord. She must have pondered these words as she saw her son grow up and do mighty works, healing the sick, casting out demons and raising the dead.

Mary must have pondered these words as she saw her son suffer and die on the cross, be buried, and then be resurrected from the dead. She would come to believe in the truth and significant of these names given to her son. She came to believe that his name was above every name and that ‘at the name of Jesus every knee should bow... and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father’ (Philippians 2:10,11).

**Child and King**

Christmas and New Year are over for another year. But maybe you are still enjoying holidays. Holidays are a good time to slow down and relax, a time to gather our thoughts. Are thinking about what 2011 holds for you? Will you stop to think where you have come from and where you are going? You are moving towards your destiny whether you think about it or not. What is your destiny?

The birth of Jesus in Bethlehem, some 2000 years ago, has a bearing on your destiny. How can a baby born so long ago have any impact on your destiny? Wise men came to Jesus looking for the King, the King of the Jews. King Herod took them seriously and tried to get rid of the baby Jesus. There were others who kept on trying to get rid of Jesus because they also took Jesus seriously. Do you take Jesus seriously?

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**A joyous new year**

Merry Christmas and a happy New Year! You must have read or heard these words a lot recently- and maybe said them a lot. What do we mean in saying these words? I try to say **happy** Christmas because of the association of merry with drinking and getting drunk- which is what some think this season is all about. I prefer to say happy Christmas and happy New Year. But what do I mean by these words?

Among the text messages I got was one wishing me a ‘joyous New Year’. Why the word ‘joyous’ and not ‘happy’? In the dictionary I found the word ‘happy’ comes directly after ‘happen’. To my surprise the words are related: they both come from the same root meaning ‘chance’. Wishing someone happiness is wishing good things will happen to them, which is like wishing them good luck. Life is a bit of a gamble. Is this what you believe? Are you making plans, maybe some resolutions, and hoping for the best in this New Year? What if bad things happen? Your happiness will be out the door!

We do not find the word ‘luck’ in the Bible. The word ‘chance’ is found only a few times where it expresses a man's point of view. The word ‘happy’ is found only a few times. The original Greek word is mostly translated as ‘blessed’. ‘Luck’, ‘chance’ and even ‘happy’ are rarely found in the Bible. What we do find is this word ‘blessed’ and another word ‘joy’. ‘Blessed’ carries the sense of someone blessing us. ‘Joy’, according to the dictionary, means ‘source of gladness or delight’. ‘Joy’ comes from the mind and heart, not from our senses and feelings. It is an attitude not a reaction to circumstances. ‘Joy’ is a way of life.

A builder called Nehemiah said to his workers *do not sorrow, for the joy of the Lord is your strength* (Nehemiah 8:10). The preacher called Paul said from his prison cell *Rejoice in the Lord always* (Philippians 4:4). Was he happy being in chains? He does not say, but he was rejoicing. What is this rejoicing all about?

Paul believed in God and in Jesus Christ the son of God who took away his sin. Now there is cause for rejoicing! He believed that God was sovereign over the universe, i.e. that he made all things and rules over all. God knows the past, and he also knows the future. That is why he is God. The year 2010 will not be a case of ‘whatever will be, will be’, but a case of ‘whatever God plans and purposes will be’! Knowing this does not make us fatalistic because God says he loves his people and that he works all things together for good to those who love him and are called according to his purpose (Romans 8:28).

If God is in control of the future, as he is, and if he loves us, as he does if we believe in his son Jesus, then we have peace in our hearts and have the joy of the Lord. Our life is not ruled by chance happenings, by other people, and not even by ourselves. Everything is under the sovereign control of God- some call this the providence of God. Rather than our ‘happiness’ being dependent on what ‘happens’ to us this year, our ‘joy’ is in the Lord and is therefore unchanging because God does not change. It is not our circumstances but our Lord that determines our joy. May you know the joy of the Lord in this new year and always!

**Light to those who sit in Darkness**  dkm Dec 2016
Do you look forward to the dawn of a new day? We do not appreciate the light of dawn because we can flick the switch and get light at any time. But if you are out in the forest at night and hear noises you might be afraid. You might lie there anxious for first light of day. You might sit in the darkness in fear if there is a robber or a killer on the loose.

Zacharias, the father of John the Baptist, prophesied of the Dayspring from on high or the Messiah visiting us ‘to give light to those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace’ Luke 1:79). The people of Israel lived in a society darkened by oppression, corruption and violence. They saw the disappearance of truth, justice and mercy. They lived under the tyranny of sin and death. They longed for the dawning of a new day. They longed for Messiah, the Sunrise to come and save them from this tyranny. John would give notice of this new day by announcing the arrival of Messiah, the Son of God incarnate.

Most people thought Messiah would bring a new day politically. He would throw off the Roman yoke and re-establish the nation of Israel. There are still people who believe such things- and not just the Jews. They took an earthly and material view of the Messianic redemption and had no conception of their own spiritual need.

John would have to change the view that Messiah would be a political deliverer. He would call the people to repent for the forgiveness of their own sins, not the sins of others. The Sunrise, the Dayspring, must come to individual hearts, hearts that recognize sin and repent of that sin. So we must change our view if we think political leaders can save us, or save this world, from inherent darkness. We must turn from hoping in our good works and trust only in Jesus Christ for salvation.

Jesus said, ‘*I am the light of the world. He who follows me shall not walk in darkness but have the light of life’* (John 8:12). Has the darkness in your heart been dispelled by the Light of the world? Do you have the light of the Lord Jesus Christ shining brightly in your heart? In that light do you clearly see life everlasting, or does death still cast its shadow across your path?

**Shepherds**  dkm Dec 2017

A royal wedding has been announced from the steps of the palace. The birth of a royal baby is usually announced to waiting media from the steps of a private hospital. How was the birth of Christ the King announced to the world? Mary and Joseph could not even find a hotel room let alone a hospital bed on the night Jesus was born. There was no media pack outside the stable waiting for the birth of this king to be announced. But his birth had to be announced to the world. His birth was, after all, ‘glad tidings of great joy which will be for all people’ (Luke 2:10).

How then was the birth of King Jesus announced? It was announced by angels from heaven. No human being was ready to make this announcement because this was no ordinary king. His kingdom is not of this world. He was from the line of David according to the Scriptures, but it was up to his heavenly Father to make the announcement of his birth. He did this by sending an angel. An angel of the Lord announced, ‘Born to you this day in the city of David is a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord ‘(Luke 2:11). What a title! Royal babies are given impressive titles but none as impressive as this. No other baby in history has been called 'Saviour'. No other baby has been called, ‘Christ the Lord’. No other baby was born with the promise that he will save his people from their sins. This was the announcement made by an angel of the Lord at the birth of Jesus in a stable in Bethlehem just over 2000 years ago.

To whom was this announcement made? There was no media pack waiting despite the importance of this announcement. The news media back then was probably like it is today- more interested in scandal than in good news. A multitude of angels suddenly appeared to hear the announcement and praise God for the birth of His Son. Here on earth a few shepherds were awakened in the middle of the night to hear the good news. Most babies are born at night?

The shepherds were out in the country taking care of the sheep. This was a tough and dirty 24/7 job. Shepherds did not enjoy home comforts like a bed and a shower. They were rather filthy fellows, looked down on by other people. Yet it was to these despised shepherds that God chose to announce the birth of His Son. Why them? If the angel had spoken to someone tucked up in a comfortable bed they would probably have rolled over and gone back to sleep thinking it was a dream. These shepherds knew it was no dream, especially when the sky was filled with angels praising God.

When the angels were done, the shepherds raced off to find this baby down in Bethlehem, a baby wrapped in rags and lying in an animal feed trough- and probably crying despite the words of the popular Christmas carol! So the first people to see King Jesus were these rough shepherd boys. And having seen him they worshipped him. And having worshipped him they went out to tell the world what they saw and heard. Are you worshipping King Jesus? Are you telling the world to do the same?

Mary praised God for scattering the proud, and putting down the rich and mighty, while exalting the lowly (Luke 1:51f). It was poor shepherds to whom God announced the birth of His son. It is the same today- proud men and women are so busy looking out for themselves they have no time for Jesus. It is poor and humble folk to whom God is pleased to make known this news of ‘great joy’, telling them that a Saviour is born; his name is Christ the Lord. Do you know the great joy spoken of by the angel of the Lord?

**Who is the Greatest?**

Young men from various villages would come to our residential college for one year training in rural development and leadership. The coordinators decided to have the group elect a leader according to democratic principles. The election went smoothly and a fine young man was elected leader. One of his duties was to buy meals for the group when the mess was closed on the weekend. The leader was given money for this purpose. Ideally he would buy supplies and they would cook together- or he could give a share to each trainee.

After some time the trainees started to complain that the leader was not using all the money to buy food. He was keeping some for himself. It was hard to believe that this fine young man was abusing the authority and responsibility given to him by the group that had elected him. The coordinator was very disappointed that leadership had brought out a flaw in this young man’s character.

God appointed Moses to lead his people out of slavery in Egypt. He appointed Joshua to lead his people into the land of Canaan. He appointed other men, and a woman, to lead as judges in Israel. But one day the people came to Samuel demanding a king. They rejected God as their king and wanted to be like other nations. Samuel warned them that such a king would take their sons into his army and their daughters as his servants. He warned them that a king would take their land and tax them heavily (1Samuel 8). Many kings in Israel were corrupt and cruel.

The disciples of Jesus argued about who would be the leader when he went away. They argued about who would be the greatest. Jesus said, ‘The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them but it will not be that way with you’ (Luke 22:24). Throughout history men and women have jostled and fought for positions of power in society.

While democratic election may be the best we can do in order to get a leader, this process does not rule out the corrupting influence of power. Leadership brought out the worst of the trainee’s character. The people of Israel were warned of the way human kings would rule. Leadership has the potential to bring out the worst in any person. The saying that ‘Power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely’ is a sad reality.

The sad reality is that every man and woman is a sinner. The sad reality is that all of us are vulnerable to corruption. We are all prone to act in self-interest, or in the interests of family or friends, even if we are elected to serve impartially. Only one man has ever served impartially and without corruption. The only perfect leader of men is Jesus Christ. Some wanted to make him an earthly king but he said, ‘My kingdom is not of this world’.

Those who have Jesus as their heavenly king are much better prepared to serve as leaders among men and women in this world. To the extent that leaders follow the example and the teaching of Jesus, they will be great leaders. That example and that teaching can be found in the Bible. We are thankful that the leaders of our nation have been taught about Jesus in their youth. We pray that they will not forget what they were taught. We pray that they will seek the favour of God, and serve the people in the fear of God.

**What to teach our children**

Schools and education are taken for granted in western society. In fact it is compulsory for children to go to school or be educated. It was not always this way, and still in some nations today many children do not get the opportunity to go to school. Schools were initially established so that children, and also adults, could learn to read and so be able to read the Bible. Christians still place a high value on education- beyond just reading their Bible nowadays, but still on education based upon the truth of the Bible. Many schools are opened and operated by Christians and churches.

Moses told the people of Israel to teach their children diligently- not in schools of course but in the home. Schools should be seen as extensions of the home not as substitutes for education in the home. ‘When you lie down and when you rise up, when you sit and when you walk, teach your children’ said Moses (Deuteronomy 6:7). What were they to teach their children? They were to teach their children how to live. They were to teach the commands that God gave telling them how to live. Each new generation was to learn these commands if they were to live and prosper in the land.

So what of education to today? Where are we teaching our children? What are we teaching our children? Are they being taught how to live? Communities complain about the way young people are living today- they are disobedient and disrespectful (see Romans 1:30), they binge drink and get onto drugs, they are sexually permissive. In school they learn mathematics, English and science, but what about how to live? Leaders have introduced classes on sex education and drug education, with questionable success. They think that information *per se* will solve all the problems of our youth.

Information can be used for good or bad purposes. Some students devise clever ways to cheat. Some criminals are very well informed! Education comes within a context. Children not only learn from books, but by example. What do they see from those who teach them these so called ‘value education’ courses? We are all familiar with the image of the father telling his son not to touch cigarettes while smoke wafts from the cigarette behind his back. Do those who frame these courses really know what to teach? There are often more questions than there are answers. Yet the cry continues – ‘we must teach values to our children’.

Quite a few parents realize that what Moses taught is a very good place to start. Teach what God commanded about how to live. After all, we are all made in the image of God, and live in the world that God made. As the wise man Solomon said

*‘Train up a young child in the way that he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it’* (Proverbs 22:6)

**New Leadership?**

‘It’s time for a change’. Years ago this slogan worked to get a change of government. ‘New leadership’ was the slogan that did it this time. People are always looking for something new. There is this perpetual hope that someone or something new will solve all our problems and make our life much happier. But does it ever happen? If it did we would not be wanting someone or something new!

The new leadership has ratified Kyoto and said ‘Sorry’. They may spend money on education and health, and we may get more money in our pocket- but will we then be contented? Will we say that we have such wonderful leaders we want them to stay for ever?

Jesus spoke about putting new wine into old wineskins. We can elect new political leaders- we can make new wine as it were- but what about the wineskins. What about the society in which we all live. Our political leaders are products of this society. Even if they wanted, their ability to change society is limited. Sure they will make new laws. They will legislate about corruption and immorality- in which way we do not yet know. There will be more laws to govern an increasingly corrupt and immoral society.

‘New wineskins’ means a fundamental change in how we think about ourselves, especially in relation to our creator God. Sinful men, women and children that we are, we go on living in rebellion to God. We keep looking for someone or something new to bring us contentment and happiness. This new person or thing may do so for a while, but soon we need another new thing.

What we need today is not new leadership but true leadership. We never saw that word in the election campaign! But it is the word the best describes the leadership of Jesus Christ of Nazareth. Jesus called people to follow him saying, ‘*I am the way, the truth and the life’* (John 14:6). Jesus spoke the truth always. Jesus told us what our true problem is- it is sin. He told us the true and only way to get victory over sin- repent and believe in Jesus. Jesus made one simple promise to those who do this- you will be forgiven and have eternal life. If you want a true leader who you can trust day after day and year after year into eternity then follow Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

**Promises, promises, promises**

‘If elected I will do this, I will do that’. As the Federal election nears all we hear is bigger and bolder promises from the politicians. And it is all about money. ‘We will spend money on this and money on that’. Is this all we want from our leaders. Will you be voting for the party that promises to put more money in your pocket, or give more money to your favourite concern? In some countries the politicians actually fork out the money before an election to buy your vote! They go around giving people gifts so they will vote for them.

Will the politicians keep their promises? Usually they say that circumstances have changed so they are unable to do what they said. Politicians are of course just people like everyone else. They are not in control of this world as much as they think they are. Can they break the drought? Can they stop us from getting sick?

Wisdom from the Bible tells us to say, ‘*if it is the Lord’s will we shall live and do this or that’* (James 4:15). Do not boast about what you will do tomorrow or next year or if elected to government. Rather say, ‘if it is the Lord’s will I will do this or that’. What a different election campaign it would be to hear such words!

Jesus told the story of a certain businessman who made a huge profit in his business (Luke 12). He had such a great harvest that he did not know what to do with all the produce. He decided to build bigger barns to store all his profits. He said to himself, ‘your life is secure for a long time; eat drink and be merry’. God was not pleased with this man, and that very night he died.

Do you think like this man? Many of us do. And our governments thinks this way also. All are focussed on this one thing- money and a secure future. We live in very prosperous times. ‘We have never had it so good’. And what do we think about- getting more and more for ourselves, and making our life more and more comfortable (and getting more and more obese!). Meanwhile the poor remain poor, and the gap between rich and poor increases. What about the poverty in surrounding nations? Not a word has been said about increasing our aid budget. Why? Because as a nation we are just like the rich fool in the story Jesus told.

What do you look for in the leader of the nation? Do you simply want one who will put more money in your pocket? Are you not concerned about morality and ethical issues? Do you pray for a leader who will take God’s laws seriously when He says *there should be no poor among you* (Deuteronomy 15:4)? Do you look for a leader who takes seriously the command not to murder, which includes unborn babies? What about a man with wisdom to see the havoc that gambling, pornography and drinking are doing to thousands of families in our nation.

Ultimately the leaders we get will be those whom the Lord appoints (Romans 13:1). But this does not preclude you from making an informed and prayerful vote. Whoever is elected we are to pray for them (1Timothy 2:2). We pray that they will serve the people and not just themselves or a select group. We pray that they will honour and fear God. We pray that they will focus on morals more than money. ‘*Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and all these other things will be added to you’* (Matthew 6:33).

**Election time**

Democracy is seen as the ideal model for the government of a society. People are crying out for the right to vote across the Middle East and around the world. We who have the right to vote treasure our privilege to do so. We exercise this right and do so in an informed way. Various people will be vying to be our local member. Before voting find out all you can about them- who they are, what they have done and what they propose doing.

Some will belong to a political party and we listen to what the leaders of these parties have to say and what they propose to do if elected to govern. We are particularly concerned about the laws they will make and how they will administer these laws. Some parties declare openly that they will make laws contrary to the clear teaching of God as we find in the Bible, such as abortion, euthanasia, homosexual marriage and the like. Mark them last on your ballot paper.

Some individuals may belong to a respected party but not be respectable people themselves. They may not be a person of moral integrity. In the end it is the individual that is elected to the parliament. Be informed about the character, as well as the policies, of the person you vote for. We may be disappointed in the choice of persons that we have to vote for, but it is our responsibility, as well as our right, to vote for the best person. After all, the people on the ballot paper have to be one of us.

We must pray as we go to vote; pray with thanks that we can vote, and pray that the Lord would give us God fearing men and women to represent us in the parliament. We must pray for whoever is elected, recognizing that the authorities that exist are appointed by God (Romans 13:1, 1 Timothy 2:2). We should remind our elected representatives that they are just that, representatives of the people, and warn them not to start acting in their own interests.

While we put a high value on democracy it is interesting that it is not exactly Biblical. In the nation of God’s people it was God who appointed the civil leader. God appointed Saul as the first king of Israel- and God removed him because of his disobedience to the word of God. 'Man looks at the outward appearance but God looks at the heart' is what God said to Samuel as he went to anoint David as the next king of Israel (1Samuel 16:7). Do you think it would be good if God, who knows our hearts, appointed our next premier or prime minister?

Before Israel had a king they had an even better form of government. They had a theocracy. God himself was their king. God ruled through prophets and judges that he chose and appointed. With God as king there was no corruption. With God as king there was absolute righteousness, justice, mercy. Imagine such a government!

This is not just something to imagine. When you confess your sin and believe in Jesus Christ he becomes your Lord. You have God to rule in your life. In the wonderful grace of God, righteousness, justice and mercy can be features of your life, and through your life and witness others will come to know these wonderful graces also.

**Holy Matrimony**

God made human beings in his own image. He made us male and female. He has given the gift of marriage to most but not all. God said ‘*a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined/ united to his wife and they shall become one flesh’* (Genesis 2:24). Marriage as ordained by God is between one man and one woman. God intended a marriage to continue for the duration of the person’s life.

‘Marriage was ordained for the mutual help of husband and wife, and for the increase of mankind with a legitimate issue’ (Westminster Confession of Faith: chapter 24). To have legitimate children it is necessary to be legitimately married. In all societies the coming together of a man and woman in marriage is authorised and celebrated publicly. Cohabitation is not sanctioned in the Bible. The term ‘holy matrimony’ is rarely heard these days. Even the term ‘marriage’ is being pushed aside in favour of the word ‘partnership’ – except by those who want homosexual marriage. One is not sure these days if a ‘partner’ is a husband or wife, a work partner or a drinking partner! Efforts to undermine the sanctity of marriage are not new, and will continue as long as Satan is active. Satan and his agents oppose all that God says is good for humanity.

There is no place for same-sex marriage in God’s created order. In no way can same-sex marriage fulfil the Creator’s design and purpose for marriage. Homosexuality is not new. Abraham saw God destroy the city of Sodom because the inhabitants were ‘*exceedingly wicked and sinful against God’* (Genesis13:13). That wickedness included rampant homosexuality.

What about divorce? *The Lord God of Israel says that he hates divorce* (Malachi 2:16). When answering a question about divorce Jesus said ‘*what God has joined together let not man separate’* (Mathew 19:6). That means no person within the marriage or outside of the marriage. If God hates divorce he will not be pleased with anyone who promotes it for any reason. Jesus said, ‘*whoever divorces his wife except for fornication/sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery’* (Mathew 19:9). The WCF chapter 24 states ‘in the case of adultery after marriage, it is lawful for the innocent party to sue out a divorce’. Adultery is grounds for divorce; although in God's grace sin repented of can be forgiven. Our civil law since 1975 makes no provision for an innocent party in a divorce. It states only one ground for divorce, that being irretrievable breakdown of a marriage, which means living apart for 12 months. We see many innocent people hurt by such divorce, not the least being children.

Are there other grounds for divorce in the Bible? A second ground for divorce is permitted in 1 Corinthians 7:15. It is very specific. It relates to an unbelieving husband or wife. A believer should only marry a fellow believer. Yet the case of ‘unequal yoking’ is addressed by the apostle Paul. After explaining how the marriage is sanctified by the believer he says *‘but if the unbeliever departs, let them depart*’. The Westminster Confession of Faith refers to ‘wilful desertion’, along with adultery, as being sufficient grounds for dissolving the bond of marriage.

Jesus, like Moses, recognised that we live in a sinful world. He understood just how hard human hearts can become. He knew about temptation. So did the apostle Paul. Paul urged proper respect and commitment in marriages in the area of sexuality, *lest Satan tempt you because of your lack of self control* (1 Corinthians 7:5). Marriage should be honoured by everyone. This means we should be praying, and doing all we can to strengthen our marriage, and all other God-ordained marriages.

**Marriage in the beginning and now**

On the sixth day of creation the Lord God made man in his own image. God put man in a beautiful garden often called paradise. There were lovely flowering trees and trees with all kinds of delicious fruit. It was just wonderful- except for one thing. Man was alone; he had no one to share his life with. None of the animals were found to be suitable companions.

So God did a wonderful thing. God made woman. He took her out of the man and then gave her back to him to be his companion in life and for life. God told man to leave his father and mother and cleave to his wife- **one wife for life**. She was a helper comparable or ‘opposite’ to him (Gen 2:20). The woman fulfilled man’s need for a companion, for a helper, for a partner in life- and vice versa. Together they made a unit, they made a whole, they made one- no longer two but ‘one flesh’.

‘Women- you can’t live without them and you can’t live with them’- so goes the saying of some disgruntled male! But there is a lot of truth in this saying- provided it is woman not women! God saw that man could not live without a companion and so he made woman, perfect for man in every way! So what went wrong? Why is it so difficult for a man and a woman to ‘live happily ever after’? Read on and the very next chapter of the Bible will tell you why.

There was an intruder in the garden. Satan came along and the woman listened to him instead of God. She was tempted and she fell. She disobeyed God, she sinned against God. They tried to hide from God but he found them. Man blamed his wife, his wife blamed the serpent and God cast them all out of paradise, out of the garden he made for them. How tragic!

Just a story you say? Oh that you were right! But the reality is that today we are still outside the garden. Can you identify with man and woman before they sinned? Never had relationship problems, never been selfish, always act in perfect love? We live in a world of broken relationships, with the marriage relationship being especially vulnerable because it is the most intimate. It is a relationship ordained by God and therefore the special target of his enemies. Our selfishness, pride, and anger keep getting in the way of building a stronger relationship.

Love is a wonderful thing. ‘Love will keep us together’- so go the words of a popular song. Perfect love can mend broken relationships. ‘*Perfect love casts out fear’* and ‘*Love covers a multitude of sins’* (1Jn 4:18, 1Peter 4:8). Perfect love allows us to forgive, and not keep a record of wrongs. Perfect love is patient and kind, it is not proud or rude and it is not self –seeking. But where do we find this love?

What is love, and where do we find it? One thing is sure, you will not find in Hollywood. It is lust not love you see in most movies. You will not find it in the animal world, you will not find it in books, you will not find it in some celebrity, and you will not find it in your own heart. Perfect love is found only in Jesus Christ who ‘*laid down his life for us’* (1Jn 3:16). Jesus gave his life, not for those who love him but for those who rebel against him. Oh the depth and the richness of this perfect love of Christ. Wouldn’t you like to know more about this amazing love?

*‘God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have everlasting life’* (Jn 3:16). Jesus said he will never turn away from you if you come to him. He said, ‘*the one who comes to me I will by no means cast out’* (Jn 6:37). Cast out of the garden because of sin - come to Jesus and you will never be cast out!

**Commitment**

‘I guess we are living in sin’ the young lady said after coming to church for a few weeks. She was coming with a man she had been living with for some years. Although all her friends were living with their ‘partner’ outside of marriage she realized this was wrong in the sight of God. From reading the Bible she understood that God ordained marriage, and that marriage involves commitment to man to be his wife ‘till death do us part’. That commitment is made before God and before public witnesses. It is a legal commitment in our society. This young lady is now married in the eyes of God and under the law of our land.

We might think a person who understands the law would understand how important it is that this most intimate of human relationships is carefully protected under the laws of our land. One might think that a person promoting family values would understand that families need protection under the law and that two people living together in a non- binding relationship affords little protection to children or to society as a whole.

Did God ordain marriage only for those who believe in him? In the beginning God made human beings male and female. He said ‘a man shall leave his father and his mother and be joined to his wife and they shall become one flesh’ (Gen 2:24). What God intended for a man and his wife is very clear. Marriage is a ‘creation ordinance’, by which is meant it is for the human race. In all societies men and women enter into marriage publicly and legally. Marriage and the family unit form the basis of human society the world over.

Our prime minister declares she is an atheist but that does not give her the right to ignore a creation ordinance. ‘What I do in my life is my own business’ she says. But we face the prospect of the prime minister’s residence being occupied by two people living in sin, according to the young lady who came to the church. Our prime minister champions the family and family values but what is the message she gives from her own life. A man and a woman living together without any public or legal commitment to one another is okay it seems.

We have never had a perfect prime minister and we never will. No doubt many sins have been committed in the prime minister’s residence, but never before have we had a person who shuns marriage as the current ‘unelected’ prime minister does. Young women in our society are encouraged to emulate this lady in her attainment of such high office. Are they to also emulate her disdain for the sacred institution of marriage?

**Children not welcome**

Are children a dying breed? What value do children have in our society? In Australia there are over 90,000 abortions each year. A conceived child has only a 60% chance of being born alive. Once born they have a good chance of surviving- compared to many poorer countries. The under-five mortality rate in Australia is only 5.6 deaths per 1000 live births, while in India it is 78.6 and in Afghanistan it is 235.0- almost ¼ of children born do not reach the age of five.

We are thankful for the medical care available to children born in Australia. But still we hear of children being abused and even killed as a result of drug and alcohol fuelled violence, and broken relationships. Sexual abuse of children is on the increase- though thankfully not as bad as in South Africa (ABC Four Corners report). Authorities remain vigilant against the scourge of child pornography, and sexual predators that roam ‘Facebook’ and other websites.

*‘Children are a heritage from the Lord. The fruit of the womb is his reward’* (Psalm 127). Jesus welcomed little children and blessed them (Luke 18:16). Children are a blessing from the Lord, the giver of life. A married couple naturally want to have children- unless they are unusually selfish. Children are a blessing, but they are also a responsibility. They are demanding of our time and energy as well as our money- although less money than some choose to lavish on them. The greatest need the child has is to be taught how to live in this world. This is the greatest responsibly God gives to parents. School teachers can help but parents are responsible. Many parents are challenged in this matter. They hear conflicting ideas and advice, and have trouble discerning what is best for their child.

The author of a book on bringing up boys in today’s world expressed great concern. Boys have trouble sorting out reality from fantasy. They are under pressure to conform. They must wear brand name clothes and shoes. They worry about their hair and body image. Conform to what? you ask. Often it is what advertising portrays. If parents are not alert, such forces will take control of how their children grow up. Even babies’ nappies are becoming advertising boards today! This author said that while children were growing fast physically they were not growing so fast in emotional intelligence. She stressed the importance of family and the ‘village’ or community, but came up short on detail. Should we go back to the 50’s? No. Should parents control the internet? No. That would be to invade the child’s privacy. She made a good diagnosis but what is the cure?

Let us go way back beyond the 50’s to what our Creator tells us in the Bible. The basic problem with children remains the same- that of growing up in a sinful world. ‘*Parents, bring up your children in the training and instruction of the Lord’* (Eph 6:4). Teach them the truth about this world in which we live and about God who made it. Teach them about the One who died and rose again in order break the power of sin and death. Teach your children when they wake up and when they go to bed. Teach them at the table and in the car (Deut 6:7). Turn the TV and PC off and teach your children the truth. Take them out of fantasy land, the land where the devil wants to take them. They will learn little by way of truth listening to those who have not concern for the moral welfare. Children need to learn from their parents. For sure the school teacher can help. The Sunday school teacher can help also. But teach your children in the home, and bring them along to church where they will learn the truth about living a moral and meaningful life in this fallen world.

**What women get**

‘Teacher, this woman was caught in adultery, in the very act’ said the Jewish leaders as they dragged a woman before Jesus. ‘She should be stoned’ they said ‘but what do you say?’ She was caught in the very act. Was she going about without a head covering? Was she dressed provocatively, revealing so much flesh that the man could not help himself? Was she like uncovered meat in the street which cats come and devour?

How tragic it is that most religions sanction the oppression of women and blame women for all sexual sin. ‘She is guilty and should be stoned’ demanded the Jewish leaders. Leaders of other religions would have said the same thing. ‘This woman seduced the man by not wearing sufficient clothes so she is guilty of the adultery, not the man’.

If this woman brought to Jesus was caught in the very act, where was the man? Did the Jews drag him before Jesus and accuse him of adultery? No. Some religious leaders in our society say it is not the men who rape women that should be punished, but the women! Men are not guilty because they cannot control themselves. Like the cat before uncovered meat, they are poor helpless animals.

‘What do you say?’ they asked Jesus. What did Jesus say? He said nothing for a while. The silence made them stop and think about the situation. They kept pressing him for an answer. After some time Jesus said ‘He who is without sin among you, let him throw the first stone’. The religious leaders were dumbfounded. Their guilt was exposed. They were guilty of injustice. They were guilty of discrimination against this woman. Religious leaders of today would be wise to listen to these words of Jesus before blaming women for all adultery and rape.

Jesus did not call for the woman to be stoned. In his grace he forgave the woman her sin. This does not mean he condoned her action. She had sinned but he forgave her, and told her to ‘go and sin no more’. Who do you think the woman would have been eager to follow - the religious leaders or Jesus?

How wonderful it was for this woman that she met Jesus. How wonderful it is for any woman to meet Jesus and have him as their God. Jesus treats women with dignity because they are made in the image of God. God made woman to be ‘a helper comparable to man’ (Genesis 2:18). Husbands are to giver honour to their wife as the weaker vessel and as being heirs together of the grace of life’ (1Peter 3:7). Let us not turn this truth on its head and call men the weaker vessel, unable to control themselves.

Praise God for the dignity that Jesus accorded women. May we all do likewise! In the beginning God created them male and female and saw that his creation was very good. Sin has corrupted men and women alike, and Jesus came to save men and women alike. ‘For there is neither … male nor female for you are all one in Christ Jesus’ (Gal 3:28), ‘heirs together of the grace of life’.

**Domestic violence**

‘This community says NO to domestic violence’ is written on a road sign at the entrance to the suburb. Domestic violence is a major social problem. The Age newspaper (4 March 2012) carried the headline ‘Domestic violence our biggest law and order issue’. It is said to cost the nation $3.4 billion a year, but how we can we put a dollar cost on this problem. Most violence, and in fact most homicides, occur within a domestic setting. Much of this violence goes unreported, but advocacy groups are calling women to speak out and get help. Some states have laws with severe penalties and are fast tracking domestic violence cases in the courts. New groups are reminding us that men are also victims of domestic violence, although only half as often as women.

It is not clear if domestic violence, or more precisely 'intimate partner abuse’ (IPA) is increasing, because statistics are lacking, but it appears this way from the media. An overview paper published by the policy department of the Federal Government in 2011 admits that the study of this problem ‘is complicated by the many different kinds of intimate and family relationships and living arrangements present in Australian communities’. On one hand our society celebrates the variety of ‘living arrangements’ that people choose, but arrangements not ordained by God will have problems. One of Mr. Lionel Murphy’s achievements in Government back in 1975 was his Family Law Act, which included a ‘no fault divorce’ clause. This was supposed to give women the freedom to leave abusive husbands. But it seems moving out does not free them from abuse. Another law allows victims to take out AVOs, but is this stopping abuse and violence? Coincident with Murphy’s Law was the women’s liberation movement and the devaluing of legal marriage. *De facto* living together became common.

In the overview paper referred to, alcohol and drug abuse were cited as major factors in domestic violence. We agree. But it made no mention of divorce, despite the statistic that ex -partners are the greatest abusers (36% cf. 10% for current partners). Would not less ex-partners mean less abuse? In other words, would not the promotion of legal marriage and a lower rate of divorce improve the situation, along with a reduced consumption of alcohol and drugs?

Another factor mentioned in reports is ‘gender equity’. I think this means ‘gender disruption’. Gender equality for many means gender identity. They see no distinct roles for the man and the woman in marriage. But equality does not mean identity. It is this confusion that leads to problems. It is this departure from the Biblical teaching that is bringing problems. The Bible teaches equality but not identity. Women have their role just as men have theirs. Men cannot take the woman’s role of child bearing and women should not be taking the man's role as head of the family. It is true that many men are failing in this role, but what is needed is education and encouragement, not so called ‘gender equity’.

The Age newspaper article already referred to ended by asking the question ‘How did it get this way? Is there a deeper problem within our culture that contributes to violence against women? Indeed there is! That problem is a departure from the standards found in the Bible, the handbook of our Creator. God said a man will leave his father and mother and cleave to his wife. It also says a woman will submit to her husband and a man will love his wife as he loves his own body (Genesis 2:24, Ephesians 5:22f). Although sin is ever present, the problem of domestic violence will be greatly reduced if we pay heed to the directions found in the Bible and live together as husband and wife, respecting each other and loving each other as God intended.

**Shaking the earth** dkm April 2020
During family prayer my wife referred to the corona virus pandemic as the Lord shaking the earth. I was thinking the same thing, but she gets to pray first! I turned to Hebrews 12 and read: ‘Yet once more I shake not only the earth but also heaven’, which is a quote from Haggai 2:6. Why does the Lord need to shake the earth? Because, as the previous verse indicates, people refuse to listen to Him who speaks from heaven (Heb 12:25). Moses went to Pharaoh, king of Egypt, with a message from God. Did he listen? No. And what did God do? He sent plagues upon the land of Egypt. As the pandemic began in China, the government there decreed that ‘religious leaders and organisations display complete devotion to the Chinese Communist Party’.

Back in the days of Noah the people refused to listen to God and he sent the flood that covered the whole earth- but saved Noah and his family through the flood. The Lord promised to never again flood the whole earth -so we do not fear rising sea levels! But Jesus does say that this world will come to an end when he returns from heaven. We are living in the Last Days, in which he says there will be signs such as famine and pestilence or disease (Luke 21:11). When God gives signs it is for the purpose that we might listen and pay heed, that we might confess our sin and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. Without Jesus you will be without an ‘Ark’ when the end comes.

I am reminded of what C.S. Lewis said about pain and suffering: **“God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pain: it is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world.”** (*The Problem of Pain*, ch6). Has the Lord got your ear as he shakes our nation, and the world, with this tiny virus? Or are you still intent on controlling everything in your life? Who do you think is in control of the ‘ship’ that is our world- man or God? If you believe that God is sovereign and all-powerful you will not be filled with fear and panic, like so many at this time. Jesus said, ‘In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world’ (John 16:33); he was not specifically referring to corona virus but he knew about it. Nothing ever happens outside the will and purposes of almighty God. This virus came because of the wickedness of men, yet in the purpose of God. God is able to bring it to an end. He is able to protect you and your family. Did not Jesus stop the storm, and heal many lepers and sick people?

This is a time to remember the promises of God. If you are confined within your home why don’t you take your Bible down from the shelf and read what God has to say. If you are listening to the TV news you will be getting more and more confused and worried. If you are watching movies you will only be distracted for a time. Reading your Bible will bring peace to your heart, and peace to your family. Please remember the children getting caught up in the fear and panic that is gripping our cities and our world.

‘And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to his purpose’ (Romans 8:28). This promise is still here in the Bible! Has any good come out of this pandemic? I read that the red light district in an Indian city has been shut down and the girls caught up in this evil sent back to their homes. The note said that people who disregarded venereal diseases are filled with fear because of this virus! The greatest blessing is when men and women turn from sin and believe in Jesus. Is this how you have responded? There is rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents. As a child of God you will not fear this virus or anything in this world because nothing in all creation ‘is able to separate us from the love of God which is in Jesus Christ our Lord’ (Rom 8:39). As a child of God you will sing: ‘My feet will stand with confidence upon a level place, and in the people’s gathering I’ll praise the God of grace’ (Psalm 26:12). ‘Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on thee, because he trusts in Thee’ (Isaiah 26:3).

**A year to remember** dkm Dec 2020It was in March 2020 that a pandemic was declared. A corona virus had escaped out of China. But even before this, the year had begun with what were labelled ‘unprecedented’ bushfires on the east coast of Australia. People fled for their lives as bushfires raged out of control. In early February the Lord sent rain that quenched these fires, filled our dams and gave farmers a bumper crop.

Our sense of things being out of control because of drought and bushfires was exacerbated by the feeling, and reality, of being out of control because of corona virus. Our nation was shaken like never before, or at least since the Spanish flu of 1918. ‘Unprecedented’ has become the catch word of the media, although not exactly the truth. A better word or phrase would be ‘out of our control’ because this is how we all felt. In our prosperity we had grown accustomed to being in control of every aspect of our life, in control of our health, of our finances and in control of our comings and goings. The sudden realization that things were out of our control was devastating. We heard of increased drinking, gambling, and domestic violence and a call for more mental health services.

As we come to the end of the year we look forward to Christmas. We are hoping for a happy end to a disastrous year. But for those who understand the truth about Christmas, this year has not been unprecedented or unbearable. The truth is that God became man and dwelt among us (John 1:14). The truth is that Jesus, the creator and sustainer of all things, came into this world to save us from sin and death. The truth is that the Lord is on his throne in heaven, ruling over all- he has been there for ever and will continue for ever (Ps 103:19).

Jesus came into a world torn by injustice and tyrannical rulers, a world where sickness and diseases such as leprosy were ever present, a world in which storms regularly drowned people out on the seas. No one felt in control of their lives, apart for the rich and powerful. The richer we become the more we feel in control and the less we believe God is in control! In Jesus they saw one who truly is in control because he healed every disease and even raised the dead, not to mention stopping the wind and the waves (Matthew 8:27). Are you worried about global warming and unprecedented storms? Then remember the words of these men who were with Jesus on the sea. The bushfires are out but fears of catastrophic climate change continue to be fanned into flame by those who believe that they, not God, are in control.

Jesus came into the world that we might have life, life to the full (John 10:10). Life to the full does mean a life filled with fear; we can cast all our cares on Jesus who cares for us (1Peter 5:7). Jesus came to give us peace: ‘My peace I give to you, not as the world gives (John 14:27). If you hear the word ‘peace’ this Christmas it will be the first time this year! The message of the incarnation is peace, peace with God and peace with your fellow human beings.

Peace with God means peace with God’s creation, just in case you feel nature is against you and that you have to appease it in some way. God is in control of his creation. So look to the Lord and know that he died for you and rose again to set you free from sin and the fear of death. Jesus said, ‘Come to me you who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest’ (Matthew 11:28). Will you come to Jesus and remember him as we approach the end of 2020? Will you make 2020 a year to remember Jesus Christ our Lord?

**The plagues and economic ruin** dkm Sept 2020
The Indian economy was among the fastest growing in the world- that was until the coronavirus pandemic. The latest news is that the Indian economy will shrink by 25%; their car sales are down 80%. Millions of migrant workers fled the cities when the government imposed a lockdown. The current Hindu nationalist government previously imposed policies of oppression upon Christians and minority religions.

The economy of our state of Victoria is in turmoil because of a similar lockdown. In this once-thriving economy, spending is down 30%. This lockdown will cause the whole nation’s economy to contract by 6%. The treasurer referred to this as an economic disaster. In 2008 Victoria passed a law allowing abortion up to 24weeks gestation, despite the clear teaching of the Bible. In 2010 it introduced teaching on homosexuality into state schools. Along with the rest of the nation, it legalised homosexual marriage in 2017, despite the clear teaching of the Bible.

God afflicted Pharaoh and the people of Egypt with various disasters or plagues. He turned water into blood, sent plagues of frogs, lice and flies, as well as a disease which killed the livestock, and boils on man and beast. God then sent an unprecedented hailstorm that killed animals and people who failed to take shelter- they were given 24hours notice. After this came a locust plague. All the field crops and fruit crops of Egypt were destroyed. Foreseeing economic ruin, Pharaoh’s officials advised him to give Moses what he wanted and let the people of God go to worship as they wanted. ‘Do you not yet know that Egypt is destroyed?’ they told him (Exodus 10:7). They knew famine was imminent.

Egypt was a rich and prosperous nation, and a major world power before Moses came along. It prospered under the leadership of Joseph, a man of God. It was after Joseph died that the oppression started. Using slaves in massive building projects could not go on for long, especially when these slaves were God’s special people. When Pharaoh arrogantly rejected the word of Almighty God, most people knew that the end was near. The Lord sent plague after plague that afflicted the people and devastated the economy of Egypt.

We are being told that it will take years for our economy to recover from this pandemic- and there is still no end in sight! Our only hope, we are told, is a vaccine against coronavirus. No one knows when this will come and who will get access to the vaccine.

We have another hope of course, and that is the Lord. It wasn’t a vaccine that stopped the plagues in Egypt. The people of God were set apart after the fourth plague, and others who believed what Moses said escaped the hail. Anyone who put blood on their doorpost on the night the angel of death passed through was saved. Belief in the word of God delivered thousands from the deadly plague. Tragically, Pharaoh and many others hardened their hearts in unbelief and suffered the wrath of God.

How many hard hearts are yet to suffer at the hands of the Lord? ‘Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God… lest you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin’ (Heb 3:12,13).

**Poverty**

When the Lord brought his chosen people out of Egypt they suffered from hunger until God sent them manna and quail. Hunger is one of the outcomes of poverty. Lack of clothes and shelter are others (Luke 16:20,21). When the manna was gathered each person had sufficient for their needs – no more and no less (Exodus 16:18). When they came into Canaan the manna stopped; their food came from the land. At this point we first read about the poor in the land (Exodus 22:25). The context is about charging interest.

‘There shall be no poor among you’ (Deut 15:4). God’s people in God’s land were each given a plot of land on which to live. Everyone had a job. The Mosaic Law anticipated some people getting into difficulty/poverty. They might get into debt and sell themselves into slavery. In the Sabbath year all debts were to be cancelled and slaves set free. Some might sell their land also, but this was to be returned in the Jubilee year. There were also laws about gleaning. Such measures aimed at preventing persistent poverty. God commanded generosity towards the poor (Deut 15:11, Psalm 82:3).

The Sabbath year and Jubilee were rarely observed (2Chron 36:21). Rather the rich and powerful exploited and oppressed the poor in the land (Psalm 12:5). They charged excessive interest (Psalm 15:5). They denied justice to the poor. They took their land by force (1Kings 21). The prophets condemned this disregard for the poor (Isaiah 1:17, Ezekiel 22:29, Amos 4:1). It was contrary to the commands given through Moses.

‘He who oppresses the poor shows contempt for his Maker; he who has pity on the poor lends to the Lord’ (Proverbs 14:31, 19:17). In Proverbs there is a lot of wisdom about poverty; wisdom about causes and treatment. Oppression is a sin; but the poor are not without sin. Sin is the basic cause of poverty (Proverbs 30:8,9).

Jesus came into this world of sin and poverty. He was born in a stable. He came to preach the gospel to the poor (Luke 4:18, Isaiah 61:1). He spoke of the consequences of neglecting a poor beggar; He told a rich young ruler to sell all that he had and give to the poor (Luke 16:19f, 18:22). It seems that his disciples gave to the poor from their common purse (John 13:29). But Jesus had come to deal with the cause of poverty, namely sin. The poor who were poor in spirit would be blessed. He did not glorify poverty as such, as done in the Roman Catholic Church.

From the very beginning the believers shared their possessions with poor members of the church (Acts 2:45, 4:34). Their focus was upon treasure in heaven not on earth. Deacons were ordained to manage the distribution of food to widows. Paul organised a collection from the churches for the poor believers suffering from famine in Judea. He urged generous and cheerful giving. He saw it a giving to the Lord. He operated on the principle of equality (2Cor 8:5, 8:14). God is the one who graciously gives us all things (Phil 4:19). God is glorified in and through the giver and the receiver (2Cor 8:12-15).

In Reformed churches we have deacons whose duty is to administer church property and finances. Part of their duty is to assess the needs of members and give help to those who have genuine need, such as widows, orphans and the like (James 1:27, 2:15f). Helping the poor is a responsibility and a privilege for all believers. It begins in the household of faith but does not stop there (Gal 6:10).

**7 Billion** dkm 2011

The population of our planet has reached 7 billion. This is almost double what it was in 1970. Even back then many doubted that the planet could support more people. Back then there was concern at feeding so many people. Today the concern is more about how all these people will damage the environment. But still there are questions about how to feed 7 billion people. Notwithstanding technological advances in food production, over a billion people still go to bed hungry.

Can we produce more food for this vast population? Do we have to produce more food? Did you know that over a third of the food produced in the world is wasted? Just 25% of the food wasted in rich countries would feed all the world’s hungry. Wandering through the supermarket our visitor from India asked what happened to all the fresh food on the shelves. What indeed!

It is estimated that we waste 20% of the food we buy; 25-35% of school lunches end up in the bin. Think of the ‘scraps’ from your plate, the left-overs thrown into the bin, and the food you never got around to eating. What happened to the old saying ‘waste not want not’? The instruction ‘eat what is on your plate’ is now, ‘if you don’t like it, bin it’ – of course wise parents will know what to put on the plate. How much food goes to waste in your house? Do you stop to think about those who do not have enough to eat?

As we think about 7 billion people we also ask about where they will live and what they will wear; not to mention access to health care. For such things they need money. Who has all the money? Just 1% of the population have 40% of the world’s wealth. Is it right that some with million dollar salaries, or dare we say half a million or less, live in luxury while another human being lives under a sheet of plastic and draws water from a well or river contaminated by sewage?

When the God of Israel fed his people in the desert he ensured that no one had less or more than they needed. How much is needed you might ask. Do we not all have the same size stomach? But even with this manna from heaven some gathered much more than they needed and tried to stash it away. In the NT church everyone shared what they had. Referring to the manna Paul wrote ‘that there may be equality; that now at this time your abundance may supply their lack, that there abundance also may supply your lack (2Corinthians 8:14). He was not saying this because of some political agenda or concern for the environment. He was concerned about loving one’s neighbour as taught by Jesus.

‘There was a certain rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and fared sumptuously every day’ (Luke 16:19). He lived in luxury while a sick, malnourished beggar sat at his gate. The beggar was called Lazarus but the rich man is not named. Did Jesus leave it open for you to sign on the dotted line?

Consider what you waste. Not that you must eat more, but buy less. Avoid advertising and impulse buying. If it’s not in the fridge you can’t eat it! Think about those who long for the food you waste. Think about how the Lord supplies your needs, be thankful, and be looking to share with others.

**Harassed and helpless**

It is a complex problem but certainly not a new one, and not one confined to indigenous communities in Australia. Poverty has been around a long time, even though the Lord God said there should be no poor among you (Deuteronomy 15). Certainly the problem is exacerbated by other things in this particular case. Since the men do not have to work to get their food they are idle (they can live on Government welfare). Being idle they fill in their time with something, usually sinful activities. Alcohol is readily available, which along with pornography is disastrous, as recent reports show. A pastor friend of mine often had beggars coming to his door. There is no welfare in the country where he lives so it really was like what the Bible says ‘*he who does not work does not eat’* (2 Thessalonians 3:10). This pastor kept a pile of bricks in the corner of his yard. If the beggar was healthy he asked him to shift the pile to the other side of the yard. If he did this work he was given food or other help.

Poverty is complex and not easily overcome, least of all by giving money. Jesus came face to face with poverty when he lived in this world. As the Son of God he had infinite resources. How did he deal with this complex problem? We read in Matthew chapter 9 that Jesus went through villages, villages of poor people like those in Asia, in Africa and in central Australia. He saw the people were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Seeing the people in their poverty Jesus had compassion on them. Certainly sin has to be dealt with and child molesters have to be brought to justice, but Jesus saw to the root of the problem. They were like sheep without a shepherd. Who will shepherd these people? Who will lead these people in the right way? Will people who have no compassion be fit for the task? Will authority figures in uniforms, some who drink alcohol and delight in pornography be fit for the job?

Jesus is the good shepherd, he is the great shepherd who loves the poor and needy and will lead them in the right way. What did Jesus do when he went through the villages in Palestine? He went about ‘*teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and disease among the people’*. They had physical needs. They needed ‘better health outcomes’ in today’s jargon. Jesus healed every sickness and every disease. Indigenous communities must have access to health care, primary health care and health education. But they also had spiritual needs. They needed meaning in life, they needed dignity, and they needed hope. Without hope it is impossible to help a person out of poverty. Poverty and depravity are not only found in central Australia. In thousands of villages in Asia people do not get sufficient food their families. But at the same time you will find men in these villages drinking and abusing children. They leave their little girls to die of exposure or starvation. They are without God and without hope. They are lost and helpless.

Jesus told the villagers about the kingdom of God. He told them the good news; he told them that he had come to seek and to save the lost. He told them that he was the shepherd who would protect them from the ‘wolves’ and from all evil. Poor people are very vulnerable to exploitation by the rich and by the wicked. The good shepherd protects his flock and provides for them according to their needs (but not their greeds). *‘Pray to the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into his harvest’*. This is what Jesus told his disciples. Pray that the Lord send ‘undershepherds’ to the harassed and helpless in our land, and in all lands. May these undershepherds be like the great shepherd who had compassion for the poor, who healed the sick, preached the truth and gave hope to the hopeless!

**CEO takes CUT**

In almost every news bulletin these days the words ‘global economic crisis’ can be heard. Today I heard the acronym ‘the GEC’ for the first time. Even if you have not been affected directly, you might be asking why the government is giving you money all of a sudden. Many are being affected directly with dramatic declines in their investment portfolio. Others even more so with cut backs at work even loss of their job.

The Government is trying to help everyone with a stimulus payment. Some are willing to help others by job sharing or the like. It was surprising but none the less encouraging to read that the CEO of a large bank agreed to take a pay cut of 10% (SMH). He will have to make do with a salary of just $2.7million for the next year. The $310,000 cut will help other workers keep their jobs.

Imagine if all the other ‘greedy CEOs’, as the US President calls them, were to do the same. How can they take these ‘obscene’ and ‘immoral’ amounts of pay at this time, many are asking? Imagine if the bank CEO gave up another 10 or 20% to help others stay in their jobs. Would he find it so difficult to make ends meet?

In the wilderness the people that Moses led out of Egypt were given manna from heaven. Every day they went out to collect this food- every day except the Sabbath. Every day they had sufficient food to eat. But just like today, some people wanted to get more. Some wanted to get rich. They collected lots of manna and stored it up. But the next day they found it had worms and stank. Moses was angry with these greedy individuals. In the end, each one had as much as he needed (Exodus 16).

Jesus told a story about a man who had a bumper harvest. He decided to build bigger barns to store his crop. He was not satisfied with just 1 million bags- he wanted 2 million and 3 million bags stored away. Then he could sit back and enjoy the good life. But God was angry with this man and called him a fool. He died that night (Luke 12).

Is God angry with some people today? Is he angry with a lot of people who think like this farmer, people who have stashed away a lot of money so they can eat drink and be merry for many days? Is he angry with you for trusting in your money and not in Jesus? Is God bringing good out of this GEC?

It is encouraging to see the token ‘sacrifice’ of the bank CEO. May he go even further and help even more to keep their jobs and provide for their families. May many others follow in his steps!

It is no real sacrifice of course compared to the sacrifice of Jesus Christ the Son of God, who ‘*though he was rich yet for your sake became poor’* (1 Corinthians 8:9). Jesus, the king of heaven, left the glory of heaven to come and die for you that you might not just eat, drink and be merry for a few days, but have life, eternal life in him.

**The Power of Prayer**

What is prayer? Almost everyone has prayed at some time in their life. Usually at a time of trouble or distress people cry out for help to ‘one’ who they think is able to help them. Although the dictionary defines prayer as ‘a sincere and earnest request to God, etc’, the plea is not always made to the God and Father of Jesus Christ. In a Tibetan village you will see Buddhist prayer flags waving in the wind. Muslims recite prayers to Allah while others pray to their ancestors or idols.

What is the point of prayer? Why do we pray? Is prayer just a psychological crutch as secular humanists claim? In many cases they are right. Much prayer has no power because it is addressed to a god or gods that have no power, at least no power to do good.

A man of God once called upon 400 men who worshipped idols to pray to their gods to send fire from heaven. These men wielded great political power but did their gods have any power? They accepted the challenge and prayed earnestly all day. They screamed at the top of their voices; they danced about in a frenzy and even cut themselves with knives. This was earnest prayer without a doubt. But nothing happened No fire came from heaven.

The man of God who worshipped the Lord God of heaven, a man called Elijah, prayed to God and an answer came with fire from heaven. You can read the amazing account in the Bible (1 Kings 18). Elijah said ‘the God who answers by fire he is God’. There is no point in praying to an idol or a god you have made yourself, or a god of your own imagination. The power of prayer is the power of God.

Jesus taught his disciples to pray- ‘*Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name’*. We can and should pray to God the Father. Do those who pray to some dead person, whom they call a saint, stop to consider what Jesus taught? How tragic to hear of people praying to Mary McKillop and trying to verify a miracle done by her through this prayer. Why ask a dead person to hear your prayer and bless you when you can ask Almighty God who lives for ever and ever- and what about Jesus the Son of God who lives for ever to intercede for those who pray to the true God. Jesus said, ‘*if you ask anything in my name I will do it’* (John 14:14).

If you want your prayers to be heard and answered for your good then pray to the only God who can hear and answer. Idols of stone and wood can neither hear nor answer. Dead people cannot hear or answer. Our Father in heaven hears and will answer your sincere and earnest prayer. When the door is open to the throne of grace, the throne of the King of kings, why go to the wood heap or to the servant’s house with your request, your thanks and your praise?

**Prayer in parliament**

*Almighty God, we humbly beseech Thee to vouchsafe Thy special blessing upon this Parliament, and that Thou wouldst be pleased to direct and prosper the work of Thy servants to the advancement of Thy glory, and to the welfare of the people of Australia.*

*Our Father, which art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name, Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil; for Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for never and ever. Amen.*

Did you know that the President of the Senate reads this prayer when he takes the chair each day in Federal Parliament? No wonder we are such a blessed country! This prayer has been prayed in the Senate and in the House of Representatives (a slightly shorter version) since the formation of our nation in 1901. It was in 1901 that Senator Walker (NSW) presented a petition from General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in NSW. His motion, that prayer be included in the Standing orders for each day ‘was agreed to after a short debate’ ([www.aph.gov.au](http://www.aph.gov.au)).

Through all the early years of establishing this nation, through two world wars and an economic depression, this prayer has been prayed in our Federal Parliament. It was almost 100 years (in 1997) before Senator Bob Brown moved to remove this prayer and replace it with ‘a time of reflection’. Then in 2008 Harry Jenkins called for debate on the place of prayer in the Parliament. With the institution of a minority government in 2010 a statement acknowledging the ‘traditional custodians of the Canberra area’ was included after this prayer.

May Almighty God continue to be acknowledged at every sitting of our Parliament. We wonder where we might be today if the men and women in our Parliament were not reminded every day that God directs and prospers our way. Such prayers are not said in many parliaments of the world, or where there is no parliament at all, and look at the state of such nations today.

May we who pray ‘our Father in heaven’ in our home and in church remember to pray for our nation also. We cannot be critical of our political leaders if we are not faithful in prayer for them. In the Bible we are told that God has appointed the governing authorities (Rom 13: 1), and to pray for ‘kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence’ (1 Timothy 2:2-3).

You might wonder why it was that the Presbyterian Church was so concerned to have prayers in our Parliament. It is because of the Establishment principle that came out of the Reformation and is written into the Westminster Confession of Faith.

The relationship of church and state is viewed in different ways.

1. Some see the state as subject the church. This is the position of the Roman Catholic Church. The Pope once ruled many nations; now he has his own small state, the Vatican. Islam holds this position also.
2. The reverse of this, that the church is subject to the state, is called Erastianism. Having the Queen as head of state and head of the Church as in the Church of England reflects this position, a position rejected with blood by the Presbyterian Church in Scotland.
3. A third position is that of Voluntaryism. In this the church rejects any relationship with the state. Some like the Exclusive Brethren refuse to vote.
4. The Establishment principle under which the Presbyterian Church wanted prayer in the Parliament is that there are two jurisdictions, civil and spiritual. These are separate but yet connected as being under God the supreme Lord and King of the entire world. The state has ‘the power of the sword’ to maintain justice and peace, but it does not have power to direct worship. It is a case of ‘co-ordinate jurisdiction with mutual subordination’. In the church we are to pray for our politicians as well as offer guidance in spiritual and moral matters, and correct them when they act against the word of God and the spiritual wellbeing of the people.

**Be sure your sin will find you out** dkm May 2018

‘Be sure your sin will find you out’ is wisdom that was once taught in most homes. I am sure Mr Joyce the politician, heard this wisdom growing up, even if he did not take it to heart. His public disgrace, with his extramarital affair resulting in the birth of a baby, is a recent example of this wisdom being ignored. There are many other not-so-public cases of this wisdom being ignored. Maybe you know of some, or have yourself forgotten this wisdom and suffered the consequences. This wisdom applies to all sin of course, not just sexual immorality. Some have told a lie and continue to get away with it. Some have stolen something and continue to get away with it. But the word of God says, ‘be sure your sin will find you out’ (Num 32:23).

The context of this verse is God telling the two tribes of Israel that settled east of the Jordan that they must go over with their brothers to fight the Canaanites. They promised to do so, but with the passing of time they might have forgotten, or with family pressures they might have changed their mind. We so easily forget promises we make before the Lord in the heat of the moment, but the Lord does not forget; He takes the breaking of vows or promises very seriously. He takes the breaking of His commands very seriously. Sexual immorality, theft, lying and breaking promises are all sins.

‘You have sinned against the Lord’ this verse also tells us (Num 32:23). We may sin against others, as in the case of Mr Joyce, but ultimately all sin is against the Lord. ‘Against you, you only, have I sinned and done this evil in your sight’ said David after his sexual immorality (Ps 51:4). All sin is against the Lord and to Him we have to give account for our sin (Rom 14:12). I don’t know if Mr Joyce confessed his sin, but David did. When we confess our sin God is faithful and just to forgive us our sin. If we refuse to confess we will one day have to pay the price- to the Lord! We must take sin seriously because our sin will be found out. If we do sin then sincere confession and setting things right is essential. Zacchaeus confessed his sin to Jesus and paid back money he had wrongfully taken (Luke 19:8).

‘Sin will, without doubt, find out the sinner sooner or later’ writes Matthew Henry. This Puritan preacher goes on, ‘it concerns us therefore to find our sins out that we may repent of them and forsake them, lest our sins find us out to our ruin and confusion’. Diligently seek out your sins and confess them, lest others find out and you are shamed, and/or God calls you to give account. Too often we try to cover up our sins, leading to further sin. We keep digging ourselves into a deeper hole, as we say.

Do write these words from the Bible on your wall and on your heart: BE SURE YOUR SIN WILL FIND YOU OUT. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and these words are central to this wisdom. It is no excuse to say you do not know God’s law. We have God’s law written on our hearts. To say we have no sin we deceive ourselves. So confess your sin and set right what you can. God in his mercy will forgive.

**Jephthah’s vow** dkm Oct 2015

Jephthah vowed to the Lord that if He gave him victory over the Ammonites then: ‘whatever comes out of the doors of my house to meet me, when I return in peace from the people of Ammon, shall surely be the Lord’s, and I will offer it up as a burnt offering’ (Judges 11:31). Do you know the first thing to come out his house when he returned home in victory? His one and only daughter! How tragic! Why did Jephthah make such a foolish vow? Why did Jephthah make a vow at all?

Jephthah blurted out this vow to the Lord as he went to war. Was he trying to manipulate the Lord? The Lord had promised him victory, but still he made this vow. Jephthah did not trust the word of the Lord. He did not know the grace of God. People who fail to appreciate God’s free grace will seek to manipulate God. Manipulation, or trying to twist God’s arm, is when people do things in an effort to get the Lord to give what they want. Some Christians resort to giving up treats or food altogether, or giving money to the poor, in order to get God to heal them or some other person. These things are good works of course, but good works are the fruit of salvation not the cause of it, or the cause of God answering our prayer and blessing us. The arm of the Lord is powerful to save and to bless, but it is not open to being twisted. Sure, repentance is a condition of making a request to the Lord (see Psalm 66:18), but it is not repentance or anything else we do that causes the Lord to bless us; it is purely because of his grace.

Did Jephthah keep his vow? Did he offer his daughter as a burnt offering? Scholars argue about this. Surely he would renege on his vow when he saw it was his own child that became the target of his vow? In a day when written agreements, and even solemn vows like marriage vows, are taken so lightly, we think Jephthah should simply have gone back on his word. Jephthah’s theology may have been less informed than ours, but his fear of God certainly wasn’t.

Jesus warned against swearing oaths because such words are binding. He never condones the breaking of an oath or vow; he warns against making it in the first place. “Let your ‘Yes’ be ‘Yes’, and your ‘No’, ‘No’. For whatever is more than these is from the evil one’ (Matthew 5:37).

Words once spoken cannot be taken back. Jephthah said, ‘I have given my word to the Lord and I cannot go back on it’; his daughter agreed (Judges 11:35). Jesus says that, ‘For every idle word men may speak, they will have to give an account of it on the Day of Judgment’. It is not the government authorities, or internet hackers, getting hold of your texts or tweets that you should be afraid of, but the Lord you should fear. He knows every word you have spoken, not just written. Stop and think, and pray, before you speak or hit that ‘send’ button. In earlier days it took time to write a letter, and many letters were destroyed before they were posted, thus saving many a dispute or falling out.

**Human disorders**  dkm Mar 2010

The SMH of 27 February, 2010 carried the headline ‘Rape becomes an illness’. The article reported that the *Manual of mental disorders,* put out by an international body of psychologists, now includes a new disorder, ‘paraphilic coercive disorder’. Who suffers from this disorder? The definition, as reported by the SMH, refers to ‘intensive sexually arousing fantasies or sexual urges focused on sexual coercion’. It goes on to refer to ‘forcing sex on three or more non-consenting persons on several occasions’. Rape has become a mental illness, according to these experts. It is possible that a rapist- a person who has raped at least three innocent people- will be able to plead diminished responsibility because of mental illness.

Is there any crime for which the plea of mental illness cannot be made? Murderers often make such a plea to avoid conviction. It helps to have committed multiple murders when making such a plea! We hear the plea of mental incapacity for all manner of law breaking, from embezzling money, to telling lies and perjury. Is the day coming when all crimes will be excused on the basis of some mental disorder? Will all criminals soon be set free when they make this plea?

Whilst adults are busy telling children that there will be consequences for their bad behaviour, they are busy telling themselves there should be no consequences. Children are very good at making excuses for their bad behaviour. Are adults any different? Adults are more sophisticated. They use the law, and nowadays ‘science’, to get around the consequences of their actions- be that theft, murder or even rape.

In all this law and psychology the word sin is never heard. Yet the word sin is found all through the Creator’s manual for life. We read in the Bible that the eldest son of Adam and Eve murdered his own brother. The human race did not get off to a good start! God warned Cain that sin was crouching at the door and told him to rule over it (Genesis 4). He did not tell him he was sick and could do nothing other than murder his brother. Sin has infected the heart and affected the life of every descendant of Adam and Eve. ‘*All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God’* (Rom 3:23). Sin is lawlessness. God gave laws for his people to live by in society, and before him. Our society has laws we must obey. If we continue down the path of excusing ourselves when we break these laws, then the law becomes powerless. The end result will be anarchy. The person who murders your brother or rapes your sister will suffer no consequences.

Thankfully God’s law, and the administration of it, is not left in the hand of psychologists or clever lawyers. God’s law does not change nor does the judge. Jesus Christ, who came to this earth, died, and rose again, is the judge of all people. He is the righteous judge. He will not accept excuses for wicked acts. All have sinned and are without excuse (Rom 31:20). ‘*The wages of sin is death’,* so all will die. We read on ‘*but the gift of God is eternal life’* (Rom 6:23).

There is only one plea we can make before the judge of each and every human being, a straightforward plea for mercy. Only a pardon granted by the supreme ruler of the universe will save you. The good news is this ruler promises a pardon when you plead for mercy. If you confess your sins and believe in his son, the Lord Jesus Christ, he will let you live. Why the believing in Jesus? Because he is the one who has taken the penalty for your sin. God does not brush sin under the carpet. He sent Jesus into this world to bear the penalty that was on your head. Stop making excuses for your sin. Acknowledge your sin, confess it to God and ask him, in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, to forgive you.

**The sin of certainty**

To be certain about anything spiritual or religious is frowned upon these days. Such people are labelled ‘fundamentalists’ for being certain about religious truth, including the truth of the Bible. Seeking after certainty in a superannuation fund, or in a health fund, is praised as being wise and prudent. Many feel certain of a long, happy and healthy life and retirement with such funds. But to be certain with regard to anything regarding their soul and eternity is considered foolishness.

According to a recent ‘Compass’ program on the ABC some Christians took a stand against the watering down of Biblical truth back in the 1960s. They declared that there were fundamental truths in the Bible that must be held by those who claim to be Christians. These truths are declared by God not man, so are unchanging and without error. The program tried to show that this certainty of belief led to fear among Christians and to increased political activity.

All Scripture is ‘God breathed’ or ‘inspired by God’ according the Bible itself (2Timothy 3:16). Such a claim is regarded as outrageous by many, but this is what the Bible says. The truth about the virgin birth of Jesus, the truth about the miracles, and the truth about the resurrection, cannot be removed without destroying the whole Bible and denying its teaching.

Jesus also said in the historical record that we have in the Bible, ‘*I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but by me’* (John 14:6). Some say this statement is bold and exclusive, and they would be right. Coming from just any man such words would be arrogant, but from one who lived as Jesus did, and who rose from the dead as Jesus did, it is a different matter.

The truth of the resurrection changed one of Jesus greatest opponents, Saul of Tarsus. This learned man believed in Jesus and took his words seriously. He found great certainty in life, and in death, in Jesus Christ. He said with the utmost of certainty, ‘*I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that Day’* (2Timothy 1:12). Saul, or as he was later called Paul, committed his life into the hands of Jesus. He said ‘*for me to live is Christ and to die is gain’* (Philippians 1:21). He was certain that Jesus Christ would keep him in life and in death.

The certainty of Jesus Christ is not sin. It is fundamental to being a follower of Christ. To not believe or doubt what Jesus said is sin. To seek after certainty in the things of this world is foolishness. It is not the so called fundamentalist Christian who is a fool, but the person who rejects the fundamental truths of the Bible.

**Black and white**

“The ethical landscape is painted in shades of grey, not black and white”. This is a quote from the website of the St James Ethics Centre. Ethics is not morality they say insist. Morality is what the religions of the world teach. According to them ethics is amoral. They try not to use the words ‘good’ or ‘bad’, although in one sentence they say ethics is about “how people should live a ‘good’ life”. They define ethics as being about “what one ought to do”.

“Ethics is about human relationships”. What we say and do affects other people- not in a good or bad way but in an ethical way. We try not to harm the other person. Sounds a lot like what Jesus taught, but Jesus is “religious”! The difference, however, is soon apparent. The St James Centre is there to help us solve ethical dilemmas. What if telling the truth causes a person harm? “This is not a trivial question”. Indeed it is not. But who is going to answer it? Will the head of the ethics centre? Will the minister for education who recently introduced ethics classes into some public schools in NSW? She did admit she would not be a good teacher because she had been taught how and when to tell lies. If there was a class on ‘how to tell lies’ that would be okay. But ethics classes are about letting children learn these things for themselves. I wonder if a child who says ‘always tell the truth’ will pass!

I recall the time when some village children came into the student’s hostel and stole money. This was in a south Asian country. The children were taught that stealing was okay as long as you do not get caught. The students caught these children and bashed them almost to death. The students themselves saw nothing wrong with cheating in exams- except when they got caught and were expelled. They had lived with the ethic ‘do not get caught’. Cheating in exams does not harm anyone. Is cheating ethical according to the ethics taught in NSW schools? The students who cheated went on to get good jobs- after paying a bribe. Having paid a bribe it was their right to take bribes. Taking a bribe does not harm the other person. In the classroom they came to the conclusion that this was all ethical.

So who is going to solve our ethical dilemmas? The teaching of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount is widely accepted. It is teaching about relationships. ‘Turn the other cheek’ and ‘love your enemies’ are well known ‘ethics’ from this sermon. Jesus does better than simply saying ‘do not harm the other person’. He says ‘love your neighbor as yourself’. The question arises –‘how do we love the other person’.

The ethics class poses the dilemma – what if telling the truth harms the other person? It may be ethical in a ‘certain situation’ to tell a lie (situational ethics is not new!). Most lies are told to protect the one telling the lie but let us assume a lie is told so as not to harm the other person- that is for now. That person goes off believing something to be true when it is not so. They have been deceived. They speak and act on the basis of a lie. When they come to know the truth will they be pleased that they were not harmed? Another ethical dilemma arises. How can that person be stopped from finding out the truth? Some inmates in prison found a way!

God says, ‘*do not bear false witness* (i.e. tell a lie) *against your neighbor’.* Jesus endorsed this command. The apostle Paul endorsed it, writing ‘*let each of you tell the truth to his neighbor for we are members of one another’* (Ephesians 4:20). The Bible does not deal with ‘ethical dilemmas’ about the truth. According to God it is black and white, not grey.

**Majority opinion vs. truth**

‘If you keep on worrying like that you will give yourself an ulcer’. This comment was widely heard just thirty years ago because it was thought peptic stomach ulcers were caused by stress, spicy food and acidic food. Medical treatment was based upon this accepted cause. Dr Barry Marshall thought otherwise. Others scientists ridiculed his theory until he took the drastic step of infecting himself with the bacteria which he believed caused ulcers. He was awarded the Nobel Prize for proving that the bacterium *Helicobacter pylori* causes ulcers.

Marshall’s experience in the realm of science is by no means rare. When Copernicus first proposed ‘heliocentrism’, the idea that the earth revolves around the sun, he was afraid of a backlash from the authorities. The majority view at the time was that the sun revolves around the earth. Many other scientific discoveries have proven accepted knowledge wrong. Many great scientists have been a lone voice in the crowd.

We should be wary of the phrase ‘the majority of scientists agree’ or 'all the experts in the field agree’. Just because the majority agree on something does not mean it is true- as the experience of Marshall and Copernicus show. When something is true we do not need to say ‘the majority of experts agree’. Do we hear it being said 'scientists agree that *Helicobacter pylori* causes ulcers'? No! Because the experiments of Dr Marshall proved this bacteria causes ulcers. Advice and treatment for ulcers is now based on this biological truth.

Majority opinion may count in politics, but not in science. Majority opinion may count in economics, but not in religion. Religion is not a numbers game; it is a search for truth- or should be! Because some religions are becoming popular people think this is the way to go. Others say ‘this religion works for me so it is the best’- for a while anyway! Others claim that the antiquity of their religion makes it more reliable. Some say their ancestors followed this religion so it must be good.

Are you a Christian because it is the most popular religion? Are you a Christian because your ancestors were Christians? Are you a Christian because you live in a Christian country? A Hindu man once told me that the very soil of India was Hindu soil. He said everyone born and living in India must be a Hindu. We find similar beliefs in Old Testament times.

The apostle Paul wrote ‘Let God be true and every man a liar’ (Rom 3:4). Just because the Jews did not believe in Jesus did not mean his claims were not true. Jesus said *‘I am the way the truth and the life; no one comes to the Father except though me’* (John 14:6). Jesus is the truth. Will you maintain your Christian faith if you are the last person in the family, in the country or in the world to believe in Jesus?

‘What is truth’ asked Pilate. Jesus was ready to tell him but he did not wait to hear (John 18:38). Like many today, Pilate did not want to know the truth. His proud heart felt better searching. ‘What is left’ people say ‘when we have the truth’. What is left is the peace of certainty, the peace of Jesus Christ. ‘Seek and you shall find’ said Jesus. You will find the greatest treasure there is to be found in this world and the next – Jesus is the truth.

**Self-regulation**

Self-regulation is a popular ideology these days. Governments no longer want to regulate anything in society. Years ago the banks were told to self-regulate, with extensive branch closures and ever increasing fees being the result. The media was also told to be self-regulating. Editors and producers would be sensitive to family and social values- so we were told.

How is it then that we now have pornographic shows on the TV which the Prime Minister calls ‘stupid’ and hopes will be taken of the air? How is it that young people are primed, and paid to act with gross indecency, in a TV show for the whole nation to watch? The major audience of this pornographic show called ‘Big Brother’ is 10-13 year olds we are told. Should we be surprised that self-regulating producers come up with a show like this? Will we be surprised when school children start to act in the same way as their heroes on the TV?

If we read the Bible we will not be surprised at all. Those who choose to live by self-regulation, rather than God’s regulation, will inevitably end up living in lust and corruption. I once saw a bumper sticker- maybe it was on the car of a ‘Big Brother’ producer- that read ‘lust not love’. That is the way of the sinful heart of man. And that is why God gave rules for us to live by. We ignore his rules to our own destruction.

When people turn away from the Creator God and worship created things, including self, the Bible says that God gives them up- Romans 1:24f

Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies among themselves, 25 who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.

26 For this reason God gave them up to vile passions. For even their women exchanged the natural use for what is against nature. 27 Likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust for one another, men with men committing what is shameful, and receiving in themselves the penalty of their error which was due.

It would be hard to write a more fitting review of ‘Big Brother’! The greatest lie perpetrated in our society is that there is no such thing as sin. Do you think we are all inherently good and that left to regulate our own lives we will choose what is upright and good? Then you are deluded and believe a lie. The apostle Paul did not trust his own moral compass. He faced up to the reality that he was a sinner and that no good thing existed within him. Again we read in the Bible (Romans 7:18-19): ‘For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but *how* to perform what is good I do not find. For the good that I will *to do,* I do not do; but the evil I will not *to do,* that I practice’.

The sooner we all realize this truth, that nothing good can be found in us, and that we are sinners from birth, the sooner we will come to repentance, and trust in the Lord Jesus Christ for help. Jesus alone can deliver us from the power and the penalty of sin. He has given us rules for life, and also gives his Spirit to those who believe. As a new creation is Christ Jesus we can live lives that are pleasing to God, upright and moral lives.

**Bushfire** dkm 2016

My youth was spent in the country on a farm. One hot November day, I got home from school to find the farm engulfed in smoke, the smoke of a bushfire. My dad and lots of men were out fighting the fire. They managed to save a neighbour’s house as the fire raged through the night- I am sure my mother was praying. The next day I had the job of walking around putting out any burning logs or stumps. A hot wind would cause these small fires to flare up. I tried to quench these fires with water. I can assure you, I did not throw fuel onto these smoldering logs.

Yet this is what many do when it comes to sin in their lives. Our lives are a bit like a bushfire; Satan is the great arsonist. We are born with a sinful nature. We are full of burning desires, desires to satisfy the lusts of the flesh- basically food, drink and sex. What do we do with these desires for the pleasures and treasures of the world? Do we let our body have its way? This, of course, is what humanists teach in the mantra-‘if it feels good do it’. These people tell us not to condemn a person who gives in to bodily desires lest we damage their psyche. The problem is, their psyche is already damaged- it is a congenital condition. Our hearts are sinful from birth.

It is out of the heart that evil thoughts emanate, and evil thoughts lead to evil actions (Mat 15:19). We recognise this when we try to rehabilitate criminals. We lock them up and hope their attitude will change. But it often happens that when they are released they re-offend in exactly the same way. This is the way of sin. Are you not guilty of committing the same sin again and again?

What has this got to do with a bushfire? Firstly, we must deal with sin at its source- the heart. We need a powerful resource to do this- we do not have the power in ourselves. We need God’s help. If we ask God to help, he will. He will give us his Spirit. He will give a new heart, a heart in which the Holy Spirit is joined to our spirit. This is what it means to be a new creation, to be in Christ Jesus (2Cor 5:17). A new heart has new desires, the desire to please God, not ourselves. With the indwelling Spirit, we are led by the Spirit, not the flesh (Rom 8:9f, Gal 5:24,25). With the Spirit’s help we must subdue the flesh and its desires as a daily task- hence the need to read your Bible and pray every day. Paul writes of ‘making no provision for the flesh, to fulfil its lusts’ (Rom 13:14), and of himself bringing his body into subjection (1Cor 9:27).

We must definitely not pour fuel onto the fire- something we do all too often. If drunkenness is your problem do not visit the pub. If sex is your problem do not visit a pornographic website- or sex will soon be your problem! Do not pour fuel on the fire of fleshly lusts. If food is your problem, as in gluttony (now there is an old word for ‘overeating’!), drive past the fast food joint not into it. All too obvious you say- until you try (see Rom 7:17f). Remember, Satan is always ready to fire up the lusts of the flesh. You must watch and pray. You must quench the fires of evil desires.

You will never, in this life, be able to sit back and say all such fires have been extinguished. The Lord, by his Spirit, has given us control over the bushfire. It is no longer a threat to your life. But dangers remain; we are still in the flesh, in this earthly body. We are still open to temptations aimed at the flesh. Watch out for the burning arrows of the evil one. Watch out for those secret sins. Be on your guard against any flare-ups. And remember, those who play with fire get burnt. ‘Can a man take fire to his bosom, and his clothes not be burned?’ (Prov 6:27).

**Forgiveness in advance** dkm Nov 2019

Shortly after World War II, Donald Grey Barnhouse, who was then pastor of the Tenth Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia, was counseling a certain young man. He was a professor in a major university and had a sad story to recount. He had been a second lieutenant in the American army and had been sent overseas to France where he had fallen in with bad companions. He was not a Christian at the time, and while stationed there he had lived a life of gross sin. Now, however, he had returned home, become a Christian, met a fine Christian girl, and wished to marry her. But he had a problem. He remembered his past sin and feared that he might again fall into it. If so, he would wound the girl he loved. What should he do? Because of his uncertainty he had hesitated to speak of his love for her.

The pastor advised him to speak frankly with the young woman and to tell her briefly of his past life. “She must sense that you love her and that something is holding you back,” he said. “So you must clear the air. If you are going to spend your lives together, there must be no barriers between you.” Still the young man hesitated.

At this point Barnhouse told him a story that is retold here in order to introduce the comment that was wrung from the young professor when he had finished. “Some time ago,” he said, “I dealt with a man whose story was not much different from your own. He too had lived a life of sin and had been converted under conditions similar to those existing in a rescue mission. He had then married a fine Christian woman to whom he had briefly told his sordid story. He said that, after he had told his wife this, she kissed him and replied, ‘John, I want you to understand something very plainly. I know my Bible well, and I know something of the workings of Satan. I know that you are a thoroughly converted man, John, but I also know that you have an old nature to which Satan will certainly appeal. He will do all that he can to put temptations in your way. The day may come—I pray that it never shall—when you shall succumb to temptation and fall into sin. Immediately the devil will tell you that you have ruined everything, that you might as well continue in sin, and that above all you should not tell me because it will hurt me. But, John, I want you to know that this is your home. This is where you belong. I want you to know that there is full pardon and forgiveness in advance for any evil that may come into your life.’ ”

As Dr. Barnhouse told this story, the professor lowered his head into his hands. But when Barnhouse reached the end, the young man lifted his head and said reverently, “My, if anything could ever keep a man straight, that would be it.”

*From Boice commentary on 1John*

**Tattoos**

The number of young people having their bodies tattooed is on the increase. Around 25% of those under 30 in Australia have a tattoo. Why this increase? Why do people want a tattoo? Is it wrong for a Christian to get a tattoo? A tattoo is made by injecting ink into the dermis of the skin to make a permanent mark. In the times of Moses it was made by cutting the skin and rubbing in a dye.

The word ‘tattoo’ does not appear in older versions of the Bible, but it is found in the NKJV and ESV in Leviticus 19:28. In the KJV it is written ‘nor print any marks upon you’. The word ‘tattoo’ came into English from Samoan ‘*tatau*’ after Cook’s Pacific expedition in 1769. Sailors adopted the practice and brought it to the Western world.

In Polynesian and other Asian cultures men and women have tattooed themselves for centuries. They did this to mark a young person’s rite of passage, to ward of evil spirits, or help scare off the enemy. In the Bible it was done by pagans to honour the dead, along with shaving the hair (Leviticus 19:28, Deuteronomy 14:1). Cutting the flesh was also a religious practice among the Canaanites (1Kings 18:28). Hindus in mourning shave their heads and make an offering to the gods. Tattoos have also been used as a form of identification, as with prisoners in Nazi Germany.

Why would a Christian want to tattoo their body? Some defend the practice if they have the symbol of the cross or the name ‘Jesus’ in the tattoo. Others argue that the tattoo is simply cosmetic, having nothing to do with any rite or religion. They say it is simply a form of self expression, or an expression of their love for someone.

We have noted the specific prohibition in the Bible about getting a tattoo for the dead. Some will say ‘but what about the other prohibitions in the Levitical code? These no longer apply’. Nevertheless, this was a specific command not to follow a pagan practice but to be a holy people to the Lord. ‘The disfiguring of the skin …dishonoured the divine image in a person, and was forbidden because it did not reflect God’s holiness’ (R.K. Harrison in Tyndale commentary). Moreover, the second commandment states ‘You shall not make for yourselves a carved image’. A religious symbol carved on the body must qualify as a carved image. So, just because a tattoo is in the form of a cross does not make it acceptable.

When God made man, he said ‘Let us make man in our image, according to our likeness’ (Genesis 1:26). This may not mean physical likeness, although when God sent his Son into this world he came in a body like ours; and there is no record of either Jesus, or the apostles, or any early Christians getting tattoos. The Psalmist, speaking about his physical body wrote, ‘I praise you for I am fearfully and wonderfully made’ (Psalm 139:14).

The apostle Paul writes ‘Do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit… therefore honour God in your body’ (1Corinthians 6:19-20). While the context of this verse is that of sexual immorality, the point remains that God made us in his image and he wants us to glorify him in our body. We must ask how tattoos and other forms of body modification, other than for medical reasons, are glorifying to God.

**Reformation Day (not Halloween)** dkm Nov 2017

On October 31st five hundred years ago Martin Luther nailed his 95 theses to the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg, Germany. It was the eve of All Saints Day when relics were displayed and people came out to offer their indulgences. In posting his theses Luther was calling for a debate on this practice of indulgences. The Pope instituted this practice during the crusades; it proved a good way of raising money. So in 1510 when in need of funds to build St Peter’s Basilica and the Sistine Chapel, Pope Leo X re-instituted the practice. The Pope as ‘head of the church and Vicar of Christ’ promised reduced time in purgatory for loved ones when money was put into these indulgence boxes. Tetzel, a Dominican priest, carried such a box declaring, ‘As soon as the coin in the coffer rings, the soul from purgatory springs’. But Luther questioned the Pope’s jurisdiction over purgatory saying that if he has such power why does he not, in the name of love, let everyone out and abolish it.

Luther was an Augustinian monk holding the chair of Bible at the University of Wittenberg when he posted these theses. He had vowed to become a monk after a close shave with death from a lightning strike. He lived in a day when God was portrayed as more wrathful than loving. Certain elements of old German paganism were blended with Christian mythology in the beliefs of his peasant family. He lived in a day when the Pope, through the Church, ruled in the realms of religion and politics. Luther saw God as a tyrant who had to be appeased. In entering the monastery he became a keen student, regular in prayers, fasting and the mass. The church was his way of salvation. But his spirit was troubled. He was afraid to perform the mass because, as a re-enactment of the sacrifice of Calvary, he feared at seeing God in human form.

Luther felt unworthy, burdened by sin. He was a good monk, declaring, ‘if ever a monk got to heaven by his monkery it was I’. But this striving to balance out his sins was not giving him peace. The church was teaching that merits could be transferred in an indulgence. So Luther took to visiting the relics of the saints to get such indulgences. Rome had the greatest storehouse of relics so he went to ‘holy Rome’ in 1510. But he was disillusioned at the ignorance and irreverence of many priests. He returned doubting the whole matter of the transfer of merits.

The way of good works could not save him. Availing the merits of the saints could not save him. Luther was left with no assurance. He kept on confessing, up to six hours a day in prayer, but never sure he had confessed every last sin. He came to realise man’s whole nature is corrupt. Luther tried the way of mysticism, focussing on the love of God in an effort to find peace, but still his sin, his corrupt nature was not dealt with. Finally Luther turned to the Bible; he had been appointed to teach Bible in 1513. This study proved to be his Damascus road. He looked at the cross of Christ in a new way, seeing the rejection and suffering of Christ. The cross did not show God to be a harsh tyrant, although he must be just.

Luther studied the apostle Paul who appeared to have a solution to the problem he had with justice and salvation. Luther wrote, “I greatly longed to understand Paul’s epistle to the Romans and nothing stood in my way but that one expression, ‘the justice of God’, because I took it to mean that justice whereby God is just and deals justly in punishing the unjust. My situation was that, although an impeccable monk, I stood before God as a sinner troubled in conscience, and I had no confidence that my merit would assuage him. Therefore I did not love a just and angry God, but rather hated and murmured against him. Yet I clung to the dear Paul and had a great yearning to know what he meant. Night and day I pondered until I saw the connection between the justice of God and the statement that, ‘the just shall live by his faith’. Then I grasped that the justice of God is that righteousness by which through grace and sheer mercy God justifies us through faith. Thereupon I felt myself to be reborn and to have gone through open doors into paradise. The whole Scripture took on a new meaning’

From the Bible Luther learned that the cross of Christ is about God’s justice and the justification of sinners, justification by grace through faith. Luther no longer took instructions from the Pope, he took instruction for the Bible. In the protracted doctrinal debates and court appearances he had with the Pope’s men, Luther always asked, ’What do the Scriptures say?’ He questioned the sacrament of penance because it did not agree with Scripture in the Greek original (Mat 4:17).

How we thank God for this man, for his taking the church back to the Bible and the truth of salvation by grace alone through faith alone, even if this was at the cost of the division of the church on earth.

**The Apostles Creed** dkm March 2019
 I believe in God, the Father almighty,

creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,

who was conceived by the Holy Spirit

and born of the virgin Mary.

He suffered under Pontius Pilate,

was crucified, died, and was buried;

he descended to hell

The third day he rose again from the dead.

He ascended to heaven

and is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty.

From there he will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,

the holy catholic\* church,

the communion of saints,

the forgiveness of sins,

the resurrection of the body

and the life everlasting. Amen.

*\*that is, the true Christian church of all times and all places*

*This creed is called the Apostles' Creed not because it was produced by the apostles themselves but because it contains a brief summary of their teachings. It sets forth their doctrine "in sublime simplicity, in unsurpassable brevity, in beautiful order, and with liturgical solemnity." In its present form it is dated no later than the fourth century.*

*While we in the PCEA do not have this creed as part of our confession we agree that it is Biblical and a clear statement of Trinitarian belief. In a day when many claim to be Christian churches while rejecting the truth of Trinity, it is important to know and understand this truth of the Bible, as set forth most clearly in Matthew 28:19. We baptize in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. We can refer to God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. The Bible does not teach baptism of the Spirit subsequent to baptism in the Father and the Son. A true Christian believes in the creator God, the redeeming Son of God and the indwelling Holy Spirit, or Spirit of God, or Spirit of Christ, the third person of the Trinity. The Holy Spirit is a person not just a force or power. It is the Spirit who moves our hearts to believe. If anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ they do not belong to Christ (Rom 8:9).*

*The Holy Spirit helps us in our prayer- are you conscious of this when you pray? The Spirit does not reveal new truth but reminds us of what Jesus said and what is written in the Bible; he guides us into all truth (John 16:13). The Holy Spirit convicts of sin, of righteousness and judgment. Has the Spirit convicted you in this manner? He will if you ask him. We must be careful not to quench the Spirit (2Thess 5:19). We do this when we ignore the Spirit or reject his voice speaking in our hearts reminding us of what God has said in the Bible. When David sinned he was fearful that the Lord would take his Spirit from him: he prayed, confessing his sin and pleading, ‘Take not your Holy Spirit from me (Psalm 51:11). We do not fear God taking his Spirit from us, but we may suffer divine discipline and put ourselves in grave danger if we become slack in our prayer life and quench the Spirit, as just mentioned.*

**The New NIV Bible**

If you go into a bookshop to buy an NIV Bible today you will be given a new translation published in 2011. You will not be able to buy the version published in 1984. In 2005 a new version called, Today’s NIV (TNIV), was published. This version introduced gender-neutral language, following the pattern of the NSRV published in 1989. The TNIV did not sell well. The NIV 2011 version maintains gender-neutral language, but is an improvement in that it backtracks in some places, allowing some generic use of ‘he’, particularly where plurals distort the meaning of the text- text that is singular in the original language (Hebrew or Greek). The NIV 2011, marketed only as the NIV, differs from the NIV 1984 in 12,056 verses or 39% of the text (Slowley). To market this version under the same name, without any indication of it being a new translation, is deceptive; the copyright line reads: ‘1973, 1978,1984, and 2011by Biblica, Inc.’

The Committee (CBT) that translated the NIV was never dissolved. This Committee decided that, among other things, English usage has changed significantly in the last 30 years. The first change was after 370 years, but this change after just 30 years! In the preface, found at the back of this Bible, the translators state their first concern to be, ‘accuracy and faithfulness to the intended meaning of the Biblical writers’; this moves them to, ‘go beyond word-for-word rendering of the original text’. The NIV 1984 was translated on the basis of ‘dynamic equivalence’ rather than ‘complete equivalence’, as we know. The question asked of this new version is, ‘what is the new scholarship that demands such a vastly different translation’? The preface goes on, ‘one of the main reasons … is the change in our own language, English’. ‘No part of language has seen greater change in the last thirty years than the way gender is presented’. So the main reason for this new version is to make a gender-neutral translation. To do this, almost 40% of verses have been changed.

Before looking into some of the changes, we ask, ‘were these changes really necessary’? Some changes are an improvement: in 1John 2:16 it returns to the words, ‘lust of the flesh’, rather than ‘cravings of sinful man’. Other changes are acceptable: the word ‘saints’ becomes ‘holy ones’ or ‘holy people’, which is literal, or ‘the Lord’s people’. The Greek word ‘*adelphos*’ means ‘brothers’, but in most cases includes sisters, so the translation, ‘brothers and sisters’ in the new NIV is acceptable in most cases, although it makes reading tedious. The translation task seems more computerised than considered. In the attempt to gender-neutralise the word ‘son’, the new NIV gets into problems in Psalm 8:4-6, which is quoted in Hebrews 2:6 with reference to Jesus. It uses the word ‘a son of man’ in the Hebrews quote (still not ‘**the** son of man’), but back in Psalm 8:4 has, ‘human beings that you care for them’. It also changes ‘him’ to ‘them’, but includes a marginal reading with ‘him’ because of the confusion created.

It is interesting that Don Carson criticised the KJV for translating ‘children’ rather than ‘sons’ in Matthew 5:9 (Greek ‘*huios*’), but accepts this translation in the NIV 2011: in 1978 he wrote, “The difference is slight but significant. In Jewish thought ‘son’ often bears the meaning of, ‘partaker of the character’ rather than just the position’”.

The most extensive change in the NIV 2011 is the avoidance of generic ‘he’ pronouns’- he/his/him/himself. In a generic sense, we use ‘he’ without specific reference to gender. This singular pronoun is usually changed to a plural, ‘them/their/they’ to avoid ‘gender bias’. The CBT goes into the statistics of changes in the use of pronouns in the English language, but it is hard to avoid the conclusion that feminist sensitivity was the primary motivation. In fact, their policy guidelines were, ‘not to offend modern sensibilities’, and ‘because of patriarchalism in ancient cultures’ they felt they must use alternative ‘modes of expression… though care must be taken not to distort the intent of the original text’- not the text itself, but its intent!

Poythress and Grudem detailed changes made in the TNIV, many of which flowed into the NIV 2011, in the book, ‘The gender neutral Bible controversy 2003’. Changing the generic ‘he’ into the plural ‘they’ leads to confusion and potential error in some places. For example, in John 14:23: “Jesus replied, ‘Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them and we will come to them and make our home with them’”. While the change to plural pronouns avoids the generic ‘he’, this verse can now be understood to mean that the Father and the Son dwell in believers corporately or collectively rather than individually. In Greek the pronouns are singular and masculine. Again in Matthew 16:24: “Then Jesus said to his disciples, ‘Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take us their cross and follow me’”. The TNIV began with ‘those’ followed by ‘themselves’, making everything plural. At least the NIV 2011 begins with the singular ‘whoever’, but still it can be understood as a group of people (plural) taking up their group cross (singular). The singular antecedent helps but it is not good grammar, and it is potentially confusing to follow this with plural pronouns. “The focus subtly shifts from the individual to the group when there is a change from ‘he’ to ‘they’” (Grudem). Hundreds of other verses, especially in the book of Proverbs, present the same problem because of this potentially plural interpretation when the original is clearly singular.

It is difficult to recommend a translation that appears to put political correctness, a concern ‘not to offend modern sensibilities’ or the sensitivities of feminism, before accuracy in translation of the inspired and infallible word of God, and the needs of the body of Christ for such a translation.

**Unity** dkm January 2019

We love to sing the words, ‘We are one; we are Australians’, even as we argue about the day on which we should celebrate the birth of our nation. We hear the cry, ‘Unity’ from all directions- unity within nations and unity between nations. Just over 70 years ago the world was at war. After that war the United Nations organisation was formed in an effort to stop future wars. Many nations have been through a civil war since then and local conflicts continue in many places, but thankfully there has not been another world war.

Unity within families and between families is another concern for our society. The cry for unity is getting louder but are we seeing more unity within families, within nations and between nations. We could also note the cry for unity within churches. Has disunity always been a problem for the human race? When God made us he made us male and female in his own image. He made us to have unity with himself and with one another. The man and the woman he married, making them one flesh (Genesis 2:24). But then sin entered the world. It was sin that destroyed the relationship between the man and the woman, and their relationship with God. That first family broke down to the extent that one brother murdered another. Family unity was destroyed by sin. Man and wife started blaming each other and children started fighting each and, and probably their parents also.

Millions of dollars get spent on marriage counselling and family counselling in an effort to bring harmony or unity within marriages and families. Are we seeing any lessening of the need for such counselling? If not, what is the answer? More money? Money of course, is all that governments have to offer, money for police, for courts, for pensions or for places of refuge. When did family disunity begin? What was the cause? Look again in Genesis 3. A few pages on in the book of Genesis we read of men coming together in a one-world project- a sort of ‘united nations’, although there were no nations as yet. ‘The whole earth had one language’ (Genesis 11). The people said, ‘Come let us build ourselves a city, and a tower whose top is in the heavens’. The Lord came down and saw that the ‘people are one, and they all have one language, and this is what they begin to do’. The Lord confused their language and they were scattered into different nations. He told man to multiply and fill the earth but they were sticking together in a city. God told man to obey him but they were exalting themselves. And so we have thousands of languages and dialects in a world of almost 200 nations that are not very united. Why? Because of sin, because sinful men exalted themselves against God.

But if we turn to the end of the Bible we find a different picture. In Revelation 7:9 we read, ‘Behold, a great multitude… of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues standing before the throne of the Lamb’. People from all nations are standing before the throne of Jesus; the place is heaven of course. Jesus is now in heaven but 2000 years ago he walked on this earth, on ‘our planet’. Jesus spoke about unity, and he prayed for oneness. He prayed that all who believed in him would be one, just as there is oneness in the Holy Trinity. And sure enough, oneness came the day he poured out the Spirit, and the gospel was preached at Pentecost. ‘Now all who believed were together and had all things in common… continuing daily with one accord in the temple’ (Acts 2:44-46).

Unity was broken because of sin. Unity is restored when sin is dealt with, and Jesus dealt with sin on the cross. The word is forgiveness. Jesus and forgiveness go together to give us unity- unity in our marriages, unity in our families, unity in our nation and unity between nations. Remember the picture of heaven in Revelation 7. Such a picture should be seen in the family and in the church of which Jesus Christ is the head.

**Check your wiring!** dkm Aug 13
What a difference a couple of years makes in a child’s communication. Our 7yr old granddaughter will ring up and talk for almost an hour but her 4yr old sister will not talk on the phone. A voice coming from a gadget is detached and weird to her. But with FaceTime (or Skype) on one of the latest gadgets she will talk because she can see who is talking. She still loves to visit and give us a hug and kiss. She loves to hold hands and walk in the park, or to sit on a knee and listen to a story.

The expert on the radio said that as human beings we are ‘hard wired’ to be ‘social animals’. Where did this term ‘hard wired’ come from? I was told, and I believe, that God made us, and made us to live together as his people. When he made Adam he said it was not good for man to be alone. Animals did not provide a suitable companion so he made woman. Adam and Eve had children. Family and community were designed by God for human beings.

Why was this expert talking about ‘social animals’ and community? It was because these things are not working so well these days. Families are being torn apart, and there is little sense of community. How can we bring people together in families and in communities? This is the big question. All agree that we need to do this, but how? Before attempting to solve a problem we should look to its cause. He/she is a poor doctor who simply treats the symptoms and not the cause of the disease.

We just said that God made us and made us to live together. He made us to live in relationship to Him and to one another. He made us to live under his ‘fatherhood’ as his children. What happened? Adam and Eve sinned against God (I am not sure whether the ‘hard wiring’ comes before or after this!). That rebellion or sin separated them from God. Adam tried to hide from God; and then God threw him out of Paradise. That sin also separated Adam and Eve from each other. That sin made them proud and selfish human beings. They started to blame each other and to fight. Sin caused Cain to hate his brother. Sin caused a breakdown in all relationships within this first family. It all started when sin broke their relationship with God.

Sin continues to infect the heart of every human being. Who is not proud and selfish? Who does not try to blame someone else for their problems? Let’s be honest! Sin brings separation. We quarrel and fight to such an extent that we cannot live together in peace. A wise man wrote ‘What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don’t they come from your desires that battle within you? You want something but don’t get it’ (James 4:1). This is why some end up living all by themselves.

Jesus comes to us saying ‘Come to me all you who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest’ (Matthew 11:28). Jesus said, ‘My peace I give to you, not as the world gives’ (John 14:27). When we repent of our sin and believe in Jesus Christ who forgives us, we get peace with God. Our relationship with God our Maker is restored in Jesus- this remember was the start of the problem. In restoring our relationship with God Jesus also restores our interpersonal relationships. When we get right with God we get right with one another. As Jesus forgave us so we can forgive others. As Jesus loved us, and died for us, so we can love others. Relationships in family and in community can be restored. Hallelujah!

A final word. Coming together to worship God should follow from this restoration. We cannot worship in a state of separation. ‘Do not forsake the assembling of yourselves together, but encourage one another’ (Hebrews 10:25). Family worship is important. Community worship is important. Coming together in person is necessary. The Bible says ‘Greet one another with a holy kiss’ (1Thess 5:26). You may prefer a handshake to a kiss, but neither are very edifying when done on Skype or FaceTime!

**Worship God!**  dkm March 2018
Elizabeth, my wife, likes Lebanese food. I like Chinese food. If I want to please my wife, where do I go to eat? Lebanese, of course! If I want to please myself where do I go? Chinese, of course! So if I want to please God I will worship in a way that pleases him. But how do I know what pleases God in worship? How do I know what pleases my wife? I listen to her! So if I want to know what pleases God in worship I will listen to him; this means looking into the Bible.

Christian worship is fundamentally about pleasing God, not ourselves. When we know and love the Lord, remembering his amazing love and grace towards us in the cross of Jesus, pleasing him will please us. Moreover, in pleasing God by worshipping according to his revealed word, we can rejoice together. If worship is about what pleases me it may not be what pleases my brother or sister. If worship is all about pleasing ourselves how can we have corporate worship, particularly when we may come from very different backgrounds?

Agreeing that we want to please God rather than ourselves in worship, we adopt the so-called regulative principle; ‘Nothing is to be admitted in the worship of God but what is prescribed in the Holy Scriptures’ (see WCF 21.1). Many Protestant churches adopt another principle in worship, namely, ‘whatever is not expressly forbidden in the Scriptures is allowable’.

The Bible expressly forbids worship being given to any being other than the Triune God. ‘Worship God!’ John was told by way of rebuke when he fell down to worship the angel (Revelation 19:10, 22:19). Neither angels nor human beings, dead or alive, saints or commoners, are to be worshipped. Roman Catholic worship fails in this regard, as it does in another, bowing down to carved images. The second commandment, which they conveniently leave out of their Ten Commandments, expressly forbids making and worshipping carved images. Too many Christians disregard this commandment by hanging images in their churches and their homes. We may like to have something tangible to focus on in worship but this is the very reason images are prohibited by God. ‘God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth’ (John 4:24).

We have a mediator through whom we approach God in worship; his name is Jesus, the Son of God (1Tim 2:5). Jesus is the truth in whom and through whom we worship. Worship in spirit means worship from the heart. We must worship in both mind and spirit (1Cor 14:15). Let us not be guilty of worshipping God with our lips only, while our hearts are far from him. Let us not be guilty of vain worship (Matthew 15:9). Notice that vain worship is the consequence of teaching the commandments of men rather than the commandments of God. How much of worship today is according to the doctrines of men?

What did worship in the early church look like? We can go back even further to synagogue worship because NT churches often began in a synagogue- not that we know a great deal about synagogue worship. Jesus went to the synagogue where he opened the Bible and read from the scroll/book of Isaiah (Luke 4:17). After reading he explained the text, in what we call as sermon. Paul told Timothy to pray and give thanks and make supplications/requests (1Tim 2:1). Different ones can pray but it must be orderly (1Cor 14:33, 40). Paul also writes, ‘each of you have a psalm’ (1Cor 14:26, Col 3:16). In synagogue worship psalms were sung without instrumental music, as far as we know.

The Reformers not only restored the doctrines of grace to the church but also reformed public worship, in part by removing images, altars and organs. The men who drew up the Westminster Confession of Faith in 1643 also drew up a directory for public worship which lists prayer, reading the word in the language of the people, singing of the psalms, and the preaching of the word.

**Singing Psalms**  dkm April 2015
The book of Psalms is part of the inspired and infallible word of God. Glancing at this book, we see that it is written as poetry, and the titles indicate that they were meant for singing- ‘to the chief musician’. We also see that the Psalms cover a vast range of topics, from historical and scientific, to theology and psychology. They are deeply personal songs of praise, of lament, or just prayers to the Lord in common situations in life.

The Psalms speak to us and they speak for us. We can use them in our praise and our prayer. The Holy Spirt helps us when we pray, and one way he does this is through the Spirit-inspired Psalms. ‘The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want’ is a most comforting word for us to sing and to pray (Ps 23:1). The preceding Psalm is very different; we hear the cry, ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me’ (Ps 22:1). We will have cause to cry out like this during our walk with God. The Psalms are not sentimental, like many modern songs of worship.

We hear the words of Psalm 22:1 coming from the lips of Jesus Christ (Mark 15:34). If Jesus used these words in his prayer, so can we. Yet this Psalm is also prophetic in that it speaks about the unique suffering of Jesus on the cross - as do other ‘Messianic Psalms’. The NT church saw and understood how the Psalms pointed to Jesus. In fact the whole OT, the Law, the Prophets and the Psalms point to Jesus, and are fulfilled in him (Luke 24:44).

Yet Isaac Watts, in the early 18th century, decided that Christ had to be put into the Psalms; this he did in hymns he wrote. Men and women have been writing songs for worship ever since- and copyrighting them also. Many have moved on from putting Christ into the Psalms to putting all manner of man-exalting material into their songs. The Psalms always maintain the sovereignty of God, and give him all the glory.

The Psalms are Hebrew poetry. Translating poetry is not easy, but we have translations in our Bibles, and also in metrical form. We delight to sing these Psalms in our language, knowing that we are singing the inspired word of God, and appreciating the range of topics and emotions covered in these compositions, and also understanding that they point to Christ and are fulfilled in him- as Jesus himself said, and as the NT church understood. We do not think that we can improve on the Psalms.

**A singing faith** dkm Sept 2015
Our family devotion the other night was from Psalm 98. A copy of the comments from our book of devotions follows. It is a song of praise to the Lord for his salvation and judgment. This is a true gospel song. The Lord has made known his salvation in Jesus. This devotion makes clear what it means to sing ‘a new song’. It does not mean we have to be composing new songs all the time; it means that when was are saved we sing new and different songs. Some of the songs you sang before you were saved you can no longer sing. In fact, it is rare to hear words of joy and hope in popular songs today; many are about hurt, hopelessness and death.

When we come to church we come to praise the Lord. Singing is one of the ways we do this, each one opening our mouth to sing to the Lord, not to other people. There is a place for listening to choirs, soloists and instrumental music, but it is not in a worship service. What do you think of a person who comes to praise God but does not sing? When I have a sore throat I am told not to make it worse by singing but it is difficult not to sing. If the words do not express the truth of the Bible then sure, don’t sing. But we sing words from the Bible.

In the country church where I grew up my uncle lead the singing. An older lady was a good singer and she was often racing ahead of him; maybe he was too slow. I now lead folk in a nursing home in singing praises to God. One dear lady is always two or three words ahead of me. But I love it. I know she is singing to the Lord! I look around and notice these old folk with their mouths open singing to the Lord. When I first went they were all aghast that we were going to sing without music. They often have a CD playing when I arrive but know to turn it off because we are going to praise God with our own voice, not the voice of someone else. It is wonderful to look out on a congregation and see every person, young and old, opening their mouth in praise to the mighty, praiseworthy God of creation and redemption.

**In everything give thanks** dkm Feb 2016
A couple of people I know have received wonderful answers to prayer, and they still remember this years later. Week after week they come to the house of God to give him thanks. I also know people who have been richly blessed by the Lord but no longer come to the house of God to give thanks. Jesus found that for every ten people he healed only one returned to thank him. Ten lepers cried out, ‘Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!’ (Luke 17:11f). Leprosy was a terrible, incurable disease in those days. Lepers were forced to live as ‘untouchables’ outside the city. They lived without hope of ever returning to their loved ones. The cry of these men was desperate. They had heard that Jesus was able to heal people, so cried to him while he was still a long way off. Jesus saw them and told them to go and show themselves to the priests, who would certify them clean. And as they went they were cleansed. They must have been so happy to see their rotting flesh restored; so happy they could hug family and friends again; so happy they could get back to work and enjoy the good things of life.

But only one of the ten stopped, turned around, and went to thank Jesus. He fell on his face before Jesus, glorifying God. Jesus said to him, ‘Arise, go on your way. Your faith has made you well’, or literally, ‘Your faith has saved you’. Jesus acknowledged this man’s faith, faith that Jesus was both gracious and powerful to heal. This man was physically healed like the other nine, but more than this, he was saved from sin and from death (Ps 103:3). He received eternal life from the One who not only heals our diseases but gives eternal life to those who have faith in Him.

Naaman was a commander in the Syrian army; but he was a leper. He heard that there was a prophet in Israel who could heal people of leprosy, so he went and found Elisha. He was not at all keen to take a dip in the Jordan River, but he went and was cleansed; ‘his flesh was restored like the flesh of a little child’ (2Kings 5:14). Naaman was so thankful to Elisha, and to God, that he carried two bags of soil back to his heathen home so he could worship the Lord.

When Israel entered the Promised Land, Moses warned them not to forget the Lord who brought them out of Egypt, out of the house of bondage (Deut 6:12). In Canaan they would live in fine houses, and eat good food to the full. Moses knew the dangers of prosperity, the danger of forgetting *Jehovah Jireh*, the great provider. Do we recognise this danger? Our parents had it tough. They wanted their kids to have a better life. They wanted them to have every opportunity to achieve and do well in this country. Unfortunately, many forgot to teach their children about Jesus.

In this land of opportunity, they said the most important thing was to work hard and get ahead. Long hours, seven days a week; work hard and you will get ahead. In this busy life there was no time to stop and give thanks to the Lord for his many blessings. Is it not God who gives you the strength and ability to work? Ask someone who has cancer or some other debilitating sickness. Is it not God who gives you a family, and preserves your beautiful family?

Hannah earnestly prayed for a baby. She was so happy, and thankful to the Lord when Samuel was born. She gave to the Lord the most precious thing she had- her only son. ‘What shall I render to the Lord for all his benefits?’ asked the Psalmist (Ps 116:12). Let us stop, and ask the same question: what shall I give to the Lord in return for all his blessings upon me and my family? What the Lord loves to see is you in church praising him. He loves to hear your prayers; but when you pray do remember to be thankful. ‘In everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God’ (Phil 4:6). **Primacy of preaching** dkm Nov 2014
Why do we go to church on Sundays? What do you like best about church? Is it the singing? Is it the prayer? Is it the preaching? Is it the ceremony or ritual? Is it the friends you meet? Is it the food? For many, preaching is at the bottom of the list. This may be because the preaching is poor, or may be because you are not prepared for listening and engaging the word of God as it is preached. The primacy of preaching was recovered during the Reformation but has waned is various periods since the sixteenth century, and especially today.

At a church I once attended the minister was asked to have the Lord’s Supper before the sermon so the people were free to leave. A modern trend is to label singing ‘worship’ and for this to be the focus of church- as the singing goes longer the sermon gets shorter. The sermon is sometimes referred to as a homily or meditation. I recently heard a preacher in a large evangelical church say we come to church for fellowship. He was exhorting his congregation to engage in fellowship with no mention of the preaching. Even ministers can let preaching take a back seat in their ministry- especially when only a handful of people come to listen. In some places the minister becomes occupied in running schools or ‘op shops’. One church had to drag their minister away from the church school and put him back in the pulpit. For many ministers it is the liturgy and the sacraments that take precedence over preaching.

What about church members? What priority do you give to the preaching of the word of God? Does it come before or after your duty to run youth club, Bible study or visit the nursing home? Certainly we are to use our God given gifts in ministry but this must not come ahead of listening to the word preached. The Reformers would rebuke any who thought they could minister to others while absenting themselves from the public worship and especially the sermon. They would not have accepted anyone saying, ‘I read my Bible at home’ or ‘I listen to a tape’.

In the NT church the new believers ‘continued steadfastly in the apostle’s teaching/doctrine and the fellowship’ (Acts 2:42). Teaching comes first, not fellowship. The teaching was that of the apostles, which is what we now have in the Bible. Preaching is the exposition or explaining of the Bible. It involves bringing out the meaning or sense of what is read, helping you to understand (Neh 8:8). Preaching of the word is done in the power of the Holy Spirit. Peter was filled with the Holy Spirit when he stood up to preach at Pentecost.

When the apostles were called to ‘serve on tables’ they said it was not good for them to leave the task of preaching (Acts 6:2). Paul’s final instruction to the young Timothy was, ‘Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season; rebuke, correct, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching’ (2 Tim 4:2). Paul assumed the church would be assembled listening to Timothy preach the word.

Public worship is just that- public. The Westminster Directory for the Public Worship of God includes: the public reading of the Holy Scriptures, public prayer before the sermon, preaching of the word, and prayer after the sermon- and ‘let a psalm be sung’. Scripture reading and the sermon are central. Preaching is a sacred and solemn task. The preacher prayerfully prepares, prayerfully preaches the word and prays that it will accomplish what God pleases (Isa 55:11). Special grace accompanies the preaching of the word, just as in the sacraments. Do not expect the preacher to entertain- that is not his task. Rather, expect to be fed on the riches of the word of God. The preacher is there to feed you spiritually that you may grow in knowledge and grace, and be equipped to serve God in whatever ministry you have been given.

**Yoga**

Yoga classes are widely conducted across our Western cities. We find advertisements saying ‘Our place is a sanctuary from the pressures of everyday life. Let us help you unwind, reflect, and transform your mind, body, and soul in tranquility’. We say ‘Western’ city because Yoga is an Eastern religion. It was not known in the West until just over a hundred years ago. Yoga is one of six schools of Hindu philosophy. The word ‘Yoga’ comes from the root ‘*yug*’ meaning to unite or yoke. What is being united? The yogi is being united with god, which in this case is the true self. It is a way to the realization that god is within you.

The particular form of yoga practiced in the West is Hatha Yoga: Ha=sun and Tha =moon. This is one of seven branches of Yoga. It focuses on physical purification to rebalance mind and body. Various ‘*asanas*’ are performed to release bad energy and focus good energy. The philosophy is that control of the body brings control of the mind. The aim of yoga is to control the body and the mind in order to change ones state of consciousness and transcend space and time. The aim is to empty the mind so the soul can escape the bondage of nature.

Yoga is promoted as exercise to relax the mind, not as a religion. Transcendental Meditation (TM), another form of yoga (Raja Yoga) in which a mantra is given to assist meditation, is also promoted as scientific therapy rather than a religion. Yet Vishal Mangalwadi, an Indian Christian, writes (in ‘The World of Gurus’) of TM ‘That it empties the mind and the mantra given is often the name of a demon’.

Dr Steve Kumar (in ‘Christianity for Skeptics’) writes of yoga ‘The danger of a mystical experience should not be overlooked’. He quotes a former yoga master as saying ‘I advanced in the occult sphere so fast that I soon became the youngest guru in the western hemisphere, and one of the most advanced and powerful. Twice a week I taught yoga on television. Hatha-Yoga sounds like a nice, simple set of exercises; everyone thinks it is just like gymnastics. I want to warn that it is just the beginning of a devilish trap. After I became an instructor in Hatha-Yoga, my guru showed me that the only thing these exercises do is open your appetite for the occult. They are like marijuana; they usually lead you on to a drug that is worse and stronger, binding you so completely that only Christ can deliver you.’

Yoga is not just a simple exercise program to help you de-stress and get balance back in your life. It is about emptying your mind. When Jesus drove out a demon, he warned that it returns with more wicked spirits if that mind remains empty (Luke 11:26). The Bible never speaks about emptying your mind, and certainly not through physical exercises. We are told to meditate on things that are true not false, things that are noble, pure and lovely (Philippians 4:8). We are told to set our minds on things above where Christ is seated at the right hand of God (Colossians 3:1-2), not to focus on the inner self, hoping to realize that we are god.