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PROVERBS

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editorial

Shortly after Solomon was installed as king, God appeared to him in a dream and said: "Ask me for whatever you want" (2 Chronicles 1:7). Solomon, knowing the importance of being able to navigate the challenges of national leadership, responded: "Give me wisdom and knowledge that I may lead this people" (1:10).

This story, which explains the legendary wisdom of Solomon, is an important reminder that wisdom is the key to a life that pleases God. Solomon certainly understood this, because he said of wisdom: "Blessed is the man who finds her ... for she yields better returns than gold ... nothing you desire can compare with her" (Prov. 3:13,14).

But what is the substance of true wisdom? According to Solomon it consists of two things: the knowledge of God and a true understanding of ourselves. The book of Proverbs repeatedly urges us to "fear the Lord and understand the Holy One" if we are to attain wisdom (1:7; 9:10).

Our disposition and motives are all-important in successfully attaining wisdom. Solomon says it is an impossible task without having proper reverence and awe for the Lord. In our culture, where many Christians carry bumper stickers which say: "Smile, God loves you", we shouldn't be surprised if the Christian community is often running short of wisdom.

Again, to understand ourselves, we must understand the human heart. Solomon puts it like this: "Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the well-spring of life" (4:23). What goes on within our hearts – especially the choices we make – determines what sort of people we become. The great danger we face is that idols compete for the affections of our hearts.

Proverbs outlines the way to attain wisdom. It comes through prayer, study and reflection upon God's Word (2:1-11); not self-help manuals. Growth in wisdom takes place in stages. First, we must reject the folly of human thought and embrace God's wisdom (Prov. 1-9). Next, we must learn the value of practising righteousness in all our affairs (Prov. 10-22), sustaining it once it has been acquired (Prov. 23-24), and understanding the importance of wisdom for leadership responsibilities (Prov. 25-31). This is the path to life and blessing.

Peter Hastie 

Word to the wise

God's handy hints for daily life begin with God himself.



Dr Tremper Longman III is the Robert H. Gundry Professor of Biblical Studies and head of department at Westmont College in Santa Barbara, California. He is an acclaimed Old Testament scholar and author of several books, including *How to Read the Psalms* and, more recently, *How to Read the Proverbs* (IVP, 2002). He holds a PhD from Yale University in ancient near-Eastern languages and literature. Before moving to Westmont in 1998, Dr Longman was a professor of Old Testament at Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia since 1981. He is a leading scholar in Hebrew wisdom literature and has published a number of outstanding commentaries on Daniel, Ecclesiastes, The Song of Songs, and a soon-to-be released volume on the Proverbs.

Peter Hastie spoke with him recently about the significance of the biblical wisdom literature for our growth in the Christian life.



**Tremper Longman III
talks to
Peter Hastie**

Why is the book of Proverbs so important?

The short answer is that Proverbs is vital to our spiritual growth because it gives us God's wisdom on our situation. God's wisdom involves, among other things, his advice and counsel, observations and insights, as well as his warnings and admonitions about how to live life well.

Living wisely means following the designer's purpose for an orderly existence in a sometimes chaotic world. If you read Proverbs, then you will gain insight into the way that God has structured life from the very beginning. Understanding the basic operating principles of the universe enables us to "go with the grain" of the created order rather than against it. Obviously, such a life promotes harmony and peace.

But even more than that, God's wisdom is a fundamental theological concept. The Bible tells us that God himself is wisdom and the book of Proverbs encourages us to seek God himself as the first step to true wisdom. "Fearing the Lord" is the first step to being truly wise.

Finally, we need to know the Proverbs because life is often messy and confusing and we need to understand how best to navigate our way through it. Life isn't easy. None of us is immune from the perplexities that are created by circumstances and relationships. Everyone has problems and we all experience everything from minor annoyances to major tragedies. And it's particularly at those points that we want to know the best thing to do, the best thing to say, and Proverbs will often throw light on what we should do and say.

Does any research from the social sciences confirm that the wisdom of Proverbs helps us to navigate life more successfully?

That's a good question. There's an interesting book by Daniel Goleman

called *Emotional Intelligence*. It doesn't deal with wisdom specifically, but it talks about the fact that certain types of skills really do help you to live well and in harmony with others. And by living life well I mean such things as developing healthy relationships with other people, having a balanced emotional life, being able to get and keep a good job and other such things. Interestingly, Goleman's studies indicate that these skills don't flow from a high IQ or an ability to do complex mathematical equations or anything like that. Rather, they have to do with what he calls "emotional intelligence", which includes knowing how to react in helpful ways at the right time.

Anyway, it shouldn't surprise us that there are some significant similarities between what the Bible teaches and some of Goleman's observations about intelligent emotional responses to our situation. The writer of Proverbs tells us that God designed the world in wisdom. In fact, "wisdom was the craftsman at his side" (Proverbs 8:30). If we think of how we ought to live in a way that is consistent with the way we are made, then we would expect to be acting in ways that are similar to many of the precepts of the book of Proverbs.

Proverbs has similarities with other ancient near-Eastern traditions. In what way is it different, and why was it accepted as part of the canon?

It's true that the book of Proverbs has some similarities, both in form and content, to other ancient near-Eastern proverbs. For instance, there's an Egyptian text called *Amenemope* that has some distinct similarities to the prologue of the book of Proverbs. However, while there are some similarities in literary form, the book of Proverbs is in a class of its own because it has at its heart a strong emphasis on Yahweh as the source of wisdom. Proverbs claims to be divine revelation. It's not simply human observations about how to get on in life.

The Egyptian wisdom literature is coming from a different angle. The Egyptians and other ancient wisdom writers were shrewd observers of the natural realm and human behaviour. They discovered basic rhythms of life as they looked carefully at the created order. But their observations are their own. They are the result of human endeavour, not divine revelation.

Unfortunately, we don't have any hard information about how the book of Proverbs was processed into the canon.

We simply speculate that faithful Jewish people accepted it when they recognised that it bore the marks of God's authority. There were some discussions about the canonicity of the book of Proverbs at the Council of Jamnia in the first century AD. Apparently, a minority of rabbis were troubled by what they thought was a contradictory proverb – Proverbs 26:4,5.

What is Proverbs' purpose?

The writer states his purpose in 1:2-7 in the so-called "prologue" or preamble. There he says that his aim is to make the simple-minded wise and to increase the wisdom of those who already possess it.

Wisdom is a rich concept that is not easy to summarise. At its most basic level it means skill in living. It's a practical knowledge that helps us know how to act and speak in different situations. Wisdom enables us to avoid problems and it shows us how to navigate around or through them when they arise.

It also includes the ability to interpret other people's speech and writing in order to react correctly to what they are saying. So the writer's purpose is to help us become wise or wiser in our relational skills. And that's something that everyone needs.

Does wisdom imply superior insight or intelligence?

It depends how you define those terms. Actually, it doesn't imply superior intelligence. For instance, in Proverbs there's a saying that refers specifically to wisdom. Interestingly, it uses the ant, the rock badger and the locust as examples. Obviously these creatures don't have a high IQ. But they are creatures that have a practical wisdom. And this wisdom allows them to survive, even thrive, in the harshest conditions.

So I wouldn't say that wisdom was opposed to intelligence; but it's certainly a different type of knowledge. It's a practical knowledge, which has often been described as a skill.

To whom is the book written?

The book is written, according to the prologue, to two classes: the simple-minded and the wise. As you get into the

discourses in chapters 1 to 9, you meet a father talking to his son. Here the implicit reader or addressee is a young man. He's setting out on the journey of life. A bit later in the book, around chapters 22:17 to 24:34, the content is more directed to people who have been serving God for a while and might be tempted to revert back to foolish ways.

Then, a little further on in chapters 25-29, there is a further section. It contains all sorts of advice for those who hold responsible positions in the community, particularly leaders and those who deal with them. In that sense, the book of Proverbs seems to address everyone.

So by virtue of its presence in the canon, I would argue that Proverbs is ultimately written for the whole community of God: young and old, male and female. It's addressed to everybody. But that means sometimes we have to make some adjustments to apply the proverb to ourselves. For instance, there's a proverb that reads: "it's better to live in the corner of an attic than with a cranky woman". That's a rough paraphrase. However, this doesn't mean that a woman shouldn't feel free to substitute "husband" for "wife" as she applies the proverb to her own situation. It's a comparable situation to a New Testament letter that's addressed to a very specific group of people in a first-century historical context. Nevertheless, because it's canonical, its significance is to be applied to the entire community of God in every age and every place.

Some have claimed that Proverbs is sexist because it seems to be related specifically to males. Is this a fair assessment?

It's certainly addressed to young men in the prologue, but I don't think that makes it a sexist book. We need to remember that Proverbs fits into the genre of the broader ancient near-Eastern context. We find a similar form in the earliest wisdom texts from around 2700BC. Certainly the early Egyptian texts take this form. It seems that God used an ancient near-Eastern literary form in order to communicate his message to his people.

Perhaps we shouldn't forget that there is a mention of a mother's instruction in the prologue as well (1:8); we also find a further reference to a woman's wisdom in the final chapter of the book (31:1). In the latter case, she is advising the king. So it's hardly appropriate to call the book "sexist".

I think that we need to recognise that the book contains language and advice

Wisdom is a rich concept that is not easy to summarise. At its most basic level it means skill in living.

that stem most naturally from an ancient family setting. The teaching of the book can be applied to people of both sexes and all ages.

Is there some underlying principle that governs the interpretation of the book?

Actually, there are a number of important principles. The first of these is to recognise the structure or literary form of the text. With respect to Proverbs, this means that we must observe the poetic device of parallelism. This refers to the correspondence that occurs between the successive phrases of a poetic verse. The second line echoes, intensifies, reinforces or even contrasts with the first.

This means that as we read the poetry of Proverbs we must read slowly and reflectively. We are meant to hear an echo and see a further development of thought. As we do so, we should ask: “How does the second part of the parallel line contribute to the idea of the first part?” When you realise the importance of parallelism, it will slow you down and contain your tendency to skim-read. There are other literary forms too, such as imagery (10:26; 11:22) and acrostics (31:10-31).

The second important principle is to recognise the genre of the book. This is especially important in the second half of the book where we find advice and insight in proverbial forms which are not claiming universal application. The Hebrew word for “proverb” is *mashal*, the most likely meaning of which is “to rule” or “to be like”. A proverb is an observation drawn from life which shows us what life is generally like. In that sense, it tells us what are the normal results of wise or unwise conduct. A proverb is not intended to provide us with an absolute guarantee or promise. Its application is conditional upon certain times and circumstances.

That’s why we find so-called “contradictory” proverbs like Proverbs 26:4 and 5. The two stand next to each other, but one says: “Don’t answer a fool”, while the other says the complete opposite: “Answer a fool”. The point is that you have to discern what kind of fool you’re talking to in order to know which one of those proverbs you should apply. That’s a very important principle that’s often lost sight of by people who tend to treat all the proverbs as if they apply in every circumstance. Clearly, they don’t.

This principle applies especially to the so-called promises of the book where you get certain rewards for good behaviour

and the threat of curse for foolish behaviour. For instance, Proverbs 10:4 says: “Lazy hands make a man poor, but diligent hands bring wealth.” This is normally true. Hard workers usually have more than they need while lazy people are often destitute. But occasionally industrious people fall upon hard times. We mustn’t insist that these proverbs are true in each and every case. They show us what is *normally* the case.

Are there other motifs which help us to understand the Proverbs in their true context?

Yes, there are. One that comes immediately to mind is the motif of the two women – Wisdom and Folly – who appear in Proverbs 8 and 9. I think it’s fairly clear to the reader that Woman Wisdom is a personification of Yahweh’s wisdom. If

As we read the poetry of Proverbs we must read slowly and reflectively. We are meant to hear an echo.

you pay careful attention to the text in Proverbs 9:3, you’ll notice that her house is described as being on “the highest point of the city”. In ancient near-Eastern cities, the highest point of the city was where the god’s house was

located. This was where people built their temples. So it seems that the writer of Proverbs is drawing a connection between true wisdom and Israel’s God, Yahweh. Yahweh, he says, is the source of true wisdom. Indeed, he is wisdom itself.

Conversely, Woman Folly, whose house is also on the highest point of the city, represents not just personified foolishness; she represents even more profoundly the idols and false gods that are seducing Israel away from Yahweh. The fundamental decision that a person must make within the book of Proverbs is a religious one, not just a practical one. Proverbs is not just a series of recipes about how to be successful in life. It’s about how to be a wise follower of Yahweh.

What does it mean then to fear the Lord? And why is that the starting point for true wisdom?

If you “fear the Lord” you put yourself in a proper position of subservience to God. It’s a proper human reaction to fear those people who are more powerful than you. Now God is certainly more powerful

than us all. As you stand before him our knees should knock. There’s a debate over whether “fear” here should be simply understood as “awe” and “reverence”, or whether it means something more profound. Personally, I think it means something more profound. It doesn’t mean utter horror, as though you want to run away from God’s presence. But I think it does mean that you feel a tremor up and down your spine.

Of course, the reason why that is the beginning of wisdom is that if you have this response to being in God’s presence, then you know your rightful position in the universe. And if you don’t, then you have a fundamental misunderstanding of who you are in God’s world. And that’s why Psalm 14 and Psalm 53 say that, “the fool says in his heart ‘there is no God’.” That doesn’t refer to a kind of theoretical atheism; it’s a practical atheism where you act as though God is not relevant to your life.

Some say that “fearing God” is not a good basis for a relationship with him. Are you saying that we need to redress our views of God if we are to understand Proverbs?

Yes, I think so. Over the past 30 years I have seen a decline in the healthy view of the “fear of God”. It all began as a move toward a stronger emphasis on God as my friend; God as someone who cares for me, who wants to nurture me. That’s all true, but we have lost sight of the fact that our Friend is also Almighty God, the Creator and Sovereign Lord of all. I think it’s a healthy corrective to re-emphasise the fact that we are to fear God.

We need to keep in balance the two biblical ideas that we’re to fear God and we’re to love him. He is our Creator and Judge as well as being our Redeemer and Friend. The Bible presents us with a gallery of pictures of the true God. And I think we’re supposed to hold them all together in a kind of fruitful tension.

If wisdom, according to Proverbs 2:6, is a divine gift, how do we get it?

That’s an important question. The writer gives an answer in Proverbs 2. Structurally, the chapter is one long sentence even though various translations break it up. Essentially, the father says to his son: “pursue wisdom.” How? “If you accept my words and store up my commands within you, turning your ear to wisdom and applying your heart to understanding, if you call out for insight ... And search for it as hidden treasure” (2:1-4).

Here I think the writer has in mind such things as the study of God's word, prayer, observing life and reflecting on our experience. There are certain things we must do to pursue wisdom successfully.

However, the paradoxical thing, according to the text, is that as you pursue wisdom God gives it to you. So wisdom is a divine gift; it's not simply the result of human industry. It's like our salvation. Paul says: "Work out your salvation with fear and trembling," and then in the very next breath he says: "For it is God who works in you" (Phil 2:12,13).

Jesus said in Luke 24 that the writings, including Proverbs, pointed to Him. How do the Proverbs point to Christ?

As you read the New Testament you see that Christ, in both Gospels and Epistles, is described as the incarnation of God's wisdom. He is the one, according to Colossians 2:3, in whom are hidden all the treasures of God's wisdom and knowledge. There are also other passages within the New Testament like 1 Corinthians 1:30, Colossians 1:15, and John 1:1-3 where Jesus is described in terms that remind us of Woman Wisdom in Proverbs 8. This is particularly so in Matthew 11:18-19: "For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, 'He has a demon'. The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, 'Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax-collectors and sinners.' But wisdom is proved right by her actions." In that last sentence, Jesus claims that his behaviour represents the behaviour of Woman Wisdom herself.

And so, as we read Proverbs and reflect on Woman Wisdom, I think it's appropriate for the Christian to think about his or her relationship with Christ.

What are some of the more basic rules that we need to observe for understanding a proverb?

Again, I keep coming back to the need to focus on genre. Two proverbs in particular – 26:7&9 – tell us that proverbs must be wisely and sensitively applied. Here's what they say: in the hands of fools proverbs can be either useless or dangerous. "As useless as a paralyzed leg" is what it says in verse 7 and in verse 9 it says a proverb is "as dangerous as a thorn bush in the hand of a drunkard". A thorn bush in the hand of a drunkard is going to hurt some innocent bystander and is going to cut the hand of the drunkard himself. So the point is this: just memorising proverbs

without a sensitivity to the right time and place is going to be ineffective. That's rule number one.

Rule number two is to keep in mind the theological nature of the book of Proverbs. It calls upon us to choose either wisdom or folly, both of which are theological concepts. We can either choose God's way, which is divinely revealed wisdom, or we can choose what the world thinks best, which is folly. I think those are probably the two most important things to keep in mind when you're reading Proverbs. Then there are a host of other important issues like how to interpret poetry and so on.

Why are the proverbs, especially in chapters 10 to 31, scattered randomly? Why aren't all the proverbs on laziness or sexual conduct, for instance, grouped together?



It's wrong to treat a proverb as some kind of gilt-edged guarantee. It simply tells us what normally happens.

I think that the random order of the proverbs reflects the randomness of life. The problems of life don't come in neat packages in sequential order. It's not like getting up in the morning and spending from 6 to 9am dealing with sexual problems, and 9 to 12pm dealing with laziness problems. Life comes at us randomly. You never know what you are going to get. One of the other consequences of life being a rather random process is that we need to be constantly reading the book of Proverbs. It's not so much a reference book as a source of daily reminders.

Are Proverbs always literally true? For instance, if you give your children proper spiritual instruction, will they grow up to be godly, as seems to be implied by Proverbs 22:6? Many Christians agonize over this question.

The Proverbs are literally true, but we don't understand them correctly if we take them in such a way as to mean that they always guarantee certain results. They tell us what *normally* happens; how life usually works out. There's no absolute guarantee.

What Proverbs 22:6 is saying is that in the normal course of events the way we raise our children will determine what sort of people they will become. You could put it like this: "All things being equal, raising your children in this way will lead to good results." The problem is that all things are rarely equal. In other words, there are other factors that might complicate the situation. For instance, a young man may encounter the influence of bad friends or an immoral woman. These are factors normally beyond a parent's control. Or a child may have some sort of propensity to an addiction. The book of Proverbs contains warnings about all these things. The writer realises that they can happen. So it's wrong, in my opinion, to treat a proverb as some kind of gilt-edged guarantee. It simply tells us what *normally* happens.

Some proverbs, such as Proverbs 26:4,5, seem to suggest contradictory courses of action. What are we to make of them?

The first thing to say is that we are meant to make sense of them. It can be done. We shouldn't be too quick to seize upon apparent contradictions in Scripture. There's almost always a good explanation for them when we have all the information on the text and its background available to us.

Proverbs 26:4 and 5 are proverbs where one begins: "Answer a fool according to his folly", and the other one says, "Don't answer a fool according to his folly." Then the writer gives the motivation clauses. One says: "Don't answer a fool according to his folly or you will be like him yourself", the other one says: "Answer a fool according to his folly or he will be wise in his own eyes." Now, what are we meant to do here? I think we're meant to ask ourselves: "What kind of fool am I talking to?" There are different types of fools.

Some fools will become argumentative and won't listen. They think they have nothing to learn. So arguing with them is a fruitless exercise. They just keep coming back at you. I remember my father telling me once about an argument he got into with my grandfather. At one point my grandfather said, "Even if I'm wrong, I'm right." Which basically meant: "I'm your father-in-law and I'm not listening to you. I'm certainly not admitting to you that you're right, so you might as well stop now." That's the first case. You leave these people alone because you'll never get through to them.

But there's another sort of fool and

By the book


We ignore the practical advice of Proverbs at our peril.

you treat him differently. If you answer this person, he might think: "Maybe I'm wrong. Perhaps this guy has a point. It could be that all my thinking is off-track." This sort of person may just change his tune. Then he will stop perpetuating his foolish ideas and influencing other people. So you have to make a judgement as to which of these two proverbs is relevant for each situation.

How important is moral education and teaching wisdom in our schools?

That's a very pertinent question. Conservative critics like William Bennett and William Kilpatrick are right to point the finger at our poor moral education programs as creating some of the problems that we now have in society. So, on the one hand, I'd want to affirm that moral education is an important component of a young person's upbringing.

But on the other hand, I'd be quick to point out that according to the book of Proverbs you can have all the moral instruction in the world, but if it's not grounded in our relationship to the true God, it's still folly. So, I want to remind people that we might have a safer and nicer world if the virtues were taught, but that won't necessarily give us a more godly world. Let's not kid ourselves that living morally is what the Bible's all about. A godly life begins with faith in Christ. God is not really interested in morality that doesn't arise from saving faith in Jesus. His desire isn't that non-Christians act like Christians; rather, he wants people to become Christ's followers. So we can pass all the laws in the world and encourage all kinds of behaviour, but again, if it's not grounded in our relationship with Christ, it's fundamentally flawed.

Rev. Peter Hastie is AP's themes editor and minister of Ashfield Presbyterian Church, Sydney. 



Richard Lee

He was a leader in his community and church. He also had a good business. But when he weighed out the meat orders for his customers, he put his thumb on the scales to give the impression that they were getting more than they saw. In his eyes, there was nothing wrong with it. Profit was all that mattered.

It raises the question: what difference should being a Christian make to our business or workplace ethics? Should it make a difference in a butcher's shop? Does it mean that a Christian butcher needs to get accurate scales?

Sadly, what the butcher never realised was that while he made handsome profits, he lost the soul of one young man who worked for him. His double-dealing so shocked his assistant that he stopped going to church and resisted the good news about Jesus to his dying day. I know, because the young man was my Dad.

Research in the USA suggests that there's virtually no difference between businesspeople or employees with a professed religious faith and those with none. Even worse, the monetary value of their wrongdoing – whether fraud, theft, or taking the famous "sickie" – is costing us far more than street crime.

Of course, the Bible says that any man or woman who claims to be a Christian should be above reproach. The idea of being a split personality has no place in biblical thought. Faith and life go hand in hand.

This is where the book of Proverbs becomes so useful. It has much to say about life and business ethics. Interestingly, what Proverbs teaches about business ethics starts with the young. "Listen my son" says the writer (1:8).

How we behave in business is usually determined by the moral and religious attitudes that we have formed from early in life. That's why parents need to begin the moral instruction of their children from an early age and why schools need to reinforce ethical behaviour. Courses in business ethics at university come too late.

The first attitude that parents need to instill in their children is "the fear of the Lord" (1:7). It is not enough to simply "love the Lord". We must fear him too.

This is where effective moral education begins – with the right spiritual attitude. Without a profound reverence for God, any set of rules lacks an adequate base.

Proverbs is also direct in teaching young people not to be enticed into evil ways simply because others are engaged in that lifestyle. It warns the young learner not to join in any peer group activity that involves illegal conduct or practice. It will only end in grief. "Don't go along with them, my child! Such is the fate of all who are greedy for gain. It ends up robbing them of life" (1:15,19, NLT)!

The temptation to get rich quick is condemned as well – it may give quick gain, but it usually ends in despair. How often do we see people being enticed into investing in some questionable scheme that's going to set them up for life? Yet Proverbs warns us: "Wealth from get-rich quick schemes quickly disappears; wealth from hard work grows" (13:11, NLT). When you are offered a return that is too good to be true, refuse it. It is too good to be true.

Corrupt conduct is also condemned in Proverbs. In 17:8 we read, "A bribe seems to work like magic for those who give it; they succeed in all they do." Although offering and receiving bribes may not be as big a problem here in Australia as in many other cultures, it can and does happen. As businesses strive to settle contracts or win tenders, people often stoop to shady practices – although these days such payments are termed "facilitation payments" or "trade stimulant", and may be deemed acceptable if no competitive advantage is gained in their payment.

Now here's the hard call. Wise God-fearing people must not live and run their business like the rest of the community! That's difficult when you see corporate high-flyers and workmates succeeding by using dubious methods! What are you supposed to do when your client base is

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being eroded because your competitors use unfair tactics to undercut you? Do you keep on doing the right thing and close up shop, or do you start playing by their rules? The secret here is to “trust in the Lord with all your heart and not rely upon your own understanding” (3:5,6). We simply have to hand over our worries to God.

It shouldn't come as a surprise that Proverbs rejects any form of cheating or exploitation in business. “Do not steal your neighbour's property by moving the ancient boundary markers set up by your ancestors” (22:28). But why, when it's so profitable? Because God hates this double standard of dishonesty – “The Lord despises double standards; he is not pleased by dishonest scales” (20:23). If you want to be wise and be a faithful Christian witness, you should hate unethical business practices too.

When we were starting out in business, my wife, Dianne, and I decided to run our business ethically in a way that honoured Christ and served the customers. The temptation to do what everyone else does was always there and often presented us with an ethical challenge.

Let me give you an example. When we advertised our Rodeo utility for sale, a man came and saw it, paid a deposit and arranged to come back later in the week to pay the rest and pick up the car. We received other calls soon after and people were disappointed that it had gone. Then one man rang and said, “I'll be there in an hour. I'll pay you more than the asking price. I'll take it.” What an opportunity! What were we to do? We decided to keep our word and hold it for the man who had paid the deposit. It was a question of being ethical.

Today we are seeing a return to the exploitation of the worker. While our industrial relations laws usually ensure fair pay and conditions, workers are facing difficult times with enforced redundancies and unattainable production targets. Employers are frequently using their workers' entitlements for their own ends; or they are closing up shop and taking production off-shore and throwing hundreds into unemployment.

Proverbs warns against the exploitation of employees or the disadvantaged: “A poor person's farm may produce much food, but injustice sweeps it all away” (13:23).

Christian managers must not only be concerned about the bottom-line; people's lives are involved as well. We need to have a social conscience too.

On the other hand, Christian men and women should work hard and without



When you are offered a return that is too good to be true, refuse it. It is too good to be true.

having to be supervised (6:6-11). They should be concerned for the good of their employer: “workers who protect their employer's interests will be rewarded” (27:18).

One further point, don't blatantly evangelise on the boss's time — that's robbing him of time he has paid you for. Use only your breaks to do this if the opportunity arises.

Another interesting example of business ethics in Proverbs is the directive against manipulation of prices in times of commodity shortage (11:24-26). This sort of practice is now common through the world. Here in Australia, the drought has

led grain/hay prices to nearly treble due to shortage and desperate need in the farming communities across the nation. Many farmers have been forced to walk off their properties through their hardship. Christians should be known for helping others in hard times.

On the more positive side – sound business practice is commended to the young person as well as warnings against laziness (14:23; 24:30-34). Proverbs also counsels us to work hard and to be innovative. “She finds wool and flax and busily spins it” (31:13ff). The writer also suggests that we establish our business or profession first before building our house (24:27). And of course, honesty is extolled as a necessity — “It is better to be poor and honest than rich and crooked” (28:6).

One admonition that we need to take seriously is the warning against becoming a guarantor for a loan to a stranger, friend or family (6:1-5). Guaranteeing another person's loan is a good way to lose your home and find yourself sitting in the street. Sadly, some Christian parents have learnt this lesson the hard way when their children have defaulted on bank loans. They have been left homeless and penniless.

So the message of Proverbs is simple: conduct your business by the Book. As Christians, we are meant to be different. Trust God and maintain a high ethical standard. If you “trust in your money, down you go! But the godly flourish like leaves in spring” (11:28; 3:9-10).

Richard Lee is pastor of Como Presbyterian Church, Sydney.

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Work it out

Work is part of God's plan, so make the most of it.

The person that God used most to lead me to Christ was also one of the godliest men that I have ever met. One thing in particular that really stood out about him was his own personal discipline.

Every area of his life seemed to flourish – whether it was in the classroom, on the basketball court or even his relationship with God. There was never any doubt that this was all a result of God's grace, but he also emphasised to me the importance of personal responsibility when it came to having a right attitude to work. In fact he used to love quoting to me a saying from his mother. And that was, "Idle hands are the Devil's workshop."

One of the things that really stand out about what Christians think about the topic of work today though is just how unimportant we think it really is. For instance, there are lots of books on how to be a good parent, and yet hardly any on how to be a good employer or employee. Just think, when was the last time, if ever, you read a book on this particular subject?

Now this might seem like a strange point to make, but just consider for a moment how much space the Bible gives

to the topic of work compared to the subject of parenting. For example, in the New Testament there are only two major passages that deal with how to raise children (Eph. 6:1-4; Col. 3:20-21), whereas there are at least seven that address the topic of work (Eph. 6:5-9; Col. 3:22-4:1; 1 Thess. 4:9-11; 2 Thess. 3:6-13; 1 Tim. 6:1-21; Tit. 2:9-10; 1 Pet. 2:11-12, 18-21). Obviously, teaching on how to conduct ourselves in the workplace is something that God sees as needing even more instruction and revelation than on how to raise our children!

In fact, when we look at the issue of work throughout the Bible we find that this is something that God's Word has consistently emphasised. For instance, have you ever noticed that God himself commissioned the practice right back in the Garden of Eden (Gen. 2:15) and also reaffirmed it once again after the fall (Gen. 3:17-19)?

Mark Powell

It was also something that was obviously expected of the Israelites when they were slaves in Egypt, as well as when they were in the Promised Land (Ex. 23:12). It was also required of them during the miserable years of the Exile (Jer. 29:4-5).

The Lord Jesus constantly used the example of hard working "labourers" to illustrate faithful Christian service (eg. Mt. 25:26-30) and the apostle Paul even went so far as to lay down the rule amongst the churches that "If a man does not work, he shall not eat" (2 Thess. 3:6-15).

And last but not least, the prophecies of Isaiah lead us to expect that there will still be work to be done in the new heaven and earth (Isa. 65:21-22).

One of the places in the Bible where the topic of work is given the most attention is in the book of Proverbs. According to the wisdom literature of the Old Testament, hard work is something that is integral to wise living. In particular a person called "the sluggard" is consistently drawn upon to illustrate the folly of not working hard.

When I was at university I was very fond of my afternoon nap – that is until I started reading Proverbs in my quiet times. It seemed that every time I lay down I would hear the words echo in my head, "How long will you lie there, you sluggard? When will you get up from your sleep? A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest and poverty will come on you like a bandit and scarcity like a beggar" (Prov. 6:9-11). Then there was the other one that said, "As a door turns on its hinges, so a sluggard turns on his bed" – what parent with teenagers can't relate to that!

Later, when it came to sitting final exams, my friends and I agreed that the proverb "A sluggard does not plough in season; so at harvest time he looks but finds nothing" (Prov. 40:4) seemed especially apt, even if we hadn't taken heed of it.

Clearly, the instruction to work hard – whether with our hands or brains – is something that is emphasised not only in the wisdom literature of the Old Testament but throughout the Bible. The apostle Paul even chose to forego his "stipend" so he could be a model to those

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he was ministering to (2 Thess. 3:9).

However, many people in the church today don't seem to realise just how important it is spiritually to work hard. For instance, would you ever consider not fellowshiping with another Christian simply because he was known to be lazy? The Holy Spirit says we should (2 Thess. 3:11-15).

Unfortunately one thing that happens all too often is that Christians who work for other believers don't give them the same dedication and conscientious service as they would for someone who did not believe. One of the members of a church I used to minister at even said she'd noticed that the non-Christians she employed to work in her dental surgery were better workers than the Christians.

Just listen to what the apostle Paul has to say on this point though. "Those who have believing masters are not to show less respect for them because they are brothers. Instead, they are to serve them even better, because those who benefit from their service are believers, and dear to them. These are the things you are to teach and urge on them" (1 Tim. 6:2).

Finally, we need to keep in mind the big picture. King Solomon rightly lamented the fact that even work was meaningless outside of being in a right

relationship with God (Ecc. 2:1-11), and he was absolutely right. But in the light of the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus, there is something that is always worth working hard at, and that is the work of the Lord. How many of us have fallen into the trap though of working hard at our jobs but then say that we have no time to read our Bibles and pray, let alone go to Bible study or even be involved in a ministry of some kind?

This would have to be the greatest tragedy of all. That we are so focused on working hard at our jobs or in our responsibilities at home that we fail to apply ourselves to the one thing that is not "meaningless" or "in vain", the work of the Lord. As the apostle Paul said to the saints in Corinth, "Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labour in the Lord is not in vain" (1 Cor. 15:58).

This means that everything we do for Christ has an ongoing impact right on

into eternity – such as sharing the Gospel with our friends and family, glorifying God in how we submit to and faithfully serve our boss at work, and bringing our children up in the training and instruction of the Lord. We should aim to work hard at all of these areas because in Christ these things have an eternal significance.

The friend who led me to Christ was indeed a godly man. He worked hard intellectually, physically and spiritually. His life demonstrated that just because we have been saved by God's grace doesn't mean that we are excused from working hard. In fact, it's precisely because we have been saved by God's grace that we can really throw ourselves into the good works that the Lord has given us to do. We know that these works will have a lasting value right on into eternity.

Thus, we need to realise that Satan will try to do everything he possibly can to make us as lazy, and therefore as ineffective, as he possibly can. As my godly friend's mother used to say, "Idle hands are the devil's workshop". Though it's not in Scripture, there's another of those wise little proverbs well worth pondering!

Mark Powell is minister of Wee Waa Presbyterian Church, NSW.

There are two main New Testament passages on raising children, but seven that deal with work.

Pilbara/Kimberley

Pain's blessing

Suffering bears fruit, if we will let it, insists Martin Goldsmith.

Are we the only soldiers in step? Might it be possible that as Christians we have got it all wrong and the anti-Christian majority are right in their rejection of Jesus as the Messiah and Saviour?"

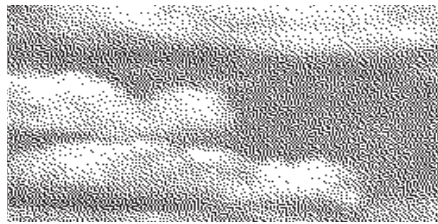
Inevitably the first disciples of Jesus and his other followers asked such questions. Likewise, the early Church, for whom the whole New Testament was written, must have faced similar challenges. They represented just a tiny minority among the masses of their own people. They also stemmed largely from the less-educated classes of society and so were surrounded not only by the unbelieving masses but also by a hostile elite in education, politics and religion.

The first Christians were, of course, almost all Jews. But the great majority of the scribes, Pharisees and other leaders of Israel were implacably opposed to their faith in Jesus as the long-awaited Messiah. And these enemies of the Christian faith were well versed in the Bible and in its apparent prophecies concerning the coming Messiah and the messianic age.

Could all these leaders be wrong? Was it just pig-headedly arrogant of the first Christians to believe in Jesus and follow him? Such doubts were exacerbated by the fierce persecution which assailed those first disciples of Jesus and the early Church.

Recently, a British Christian couple came to talk with me. "We have been facing very real problems in our lives and in

IN THE PRESENCE OF GOD



our family. The children have been ill, we've had to move house twice and we're at the end of our tether." They went on to say how they were asking serious questions about the Christian faith and their own position as Christians. What is Jesus Christ for? What did he come for and what does he offer his people? What is the purpose of being a Christian? What do we expect in life if we belong to Jesus?

This couple were in theory strongly opposed to a theology of prosperity, but actually were deeply influenced by the assumption that as Christians we can expect the Lord to grant us all we desire in life. They had no theology of suffering except the confidence that the Holy Spirit would surely deliver them from their troubles.

They were very excited when I pointed out to them that it is in suffering that we enjoy fellowship with the suffering Christ (Phil. 3:10) and that suffering can produce endurance, character and hope (Rom. 5:3,4). Indeed, I assured them that the power, might and glory of the Lord are given to us in order that we might be able to endure suffering with that miraculous combination of patient endurance and joyful thanksgiving to our gracious Father (Col. 1:11,12).

The early Church was evidently struggling too with such issues. Was Jesus really in charge as the Lord of history when the Christians' persecutors seemed to have all power and good repute?

The New Testament writers are there-

fore carefully showing that Jesus is indeed the Messiah who fulfils all the Old Testament messianic prophecies. He is indeed the true Lord and Saviour of humankind. Despite all evidence to the contrary, Jesus *does* hold all authority and power in his hands. He is YHWH incarnate on earth, and his death *is* in accordance with the divine purposes.

God has vindicated the crucified Jesus by raising him from the dead. Christians may be reassured that their sufferings too are within the purposes of a gracious Father and under his control. And the Father will vindicate us too by giving us the new life of the resurrection.

So the New Testament is partly written

They were very excited when I pointed out that it is in suffering that we enjoy fellowship with the suffering Christ.

in order to reassure those early Christians – and us too – that our faith holds water. Even when we are in a tiny minority as Christians, with the masses of the people against us, we can believe in Jesus with total confidence. Even

when the media and the world of education firmly oppose Jesus and sneer at our faith, the New Testament stands like an unshakeable bulwark against all assaults. Our faith in Jesus has firm foundations.

What a comfort for struggling little churches in modern Europe and for Christians in situations of fierce persecution in Muslim countries, China or other anti-Christian societies. The Christians may feel themselves an insignificant minority with few powerful, wealthy or top-educated adherents, but Jesus is the Messiah and Saviour he claimed to be. He can be trusted.

As we read the New Testament we must never forget that it is written with this aim to encourage Christians who are under siege.

This extract is taken from Good News For All Nations (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 2002).

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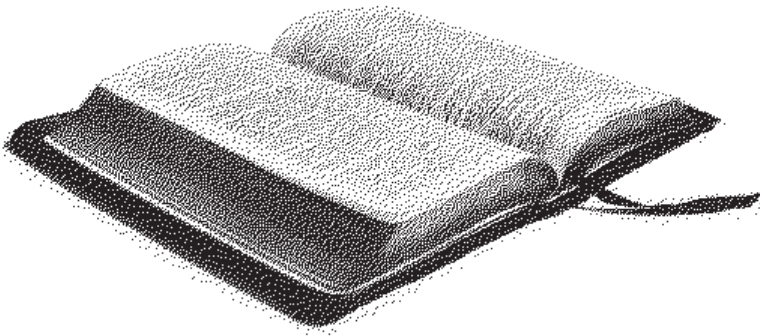
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In his three books, *No Place for Truth, God in the Wasteland, and Losing Our Virtue*, David Wells has looked at how much Western Christianity has been seduced by secular humanism and postmodern thinking, often without realising it. The problem is far from superficial; it is right at the heart of how we think and how we reason. The problem is exactly what Solomon is addressing in the first nine chapters of the Book of Proverbs. It is about whether God and his Word occupy absolutely prime time in our lives, or whether he is just one of many influences on the way we think and the way we behave – the way we respond to the various issues that impact on our lives 24/7.

Proverbs is part of the ‘Wisdom’ literature in the Bible. It deals with God’s wisdom – the way he thinks, the way (and for what reason) he has put the universe together, what he wants us to know about these things, and the practical outworking of it all in our daily lives. This is especially relevant for us as salt and light in our society today. Our society somehow thinks it is ‘Christian’ (at least, that is how the two-thirds non-Christian world classifies us). But nothing could be further from the truth.

Proverbs will help us to see why this is so. It gets to the heart of the problem.

Bruce Christian

DAY 1 *Back to Square One*

THE PASSAGE **PROVERBS 1:1-7**

THE POINT King Solomon, David’s son, will set out plainly, in short pithy sayings or ‘rules’, for everyone (especially the young) to see, what is involved in living the way God designed us to live.

THE PARTICULARS

- Solomon’s sayings will help us to:
 - gain wisdom, insight, understanding, discretion and knowledge;
 - discipline our lives in accordance with the LORD’s ways;
 - be prudent, just and fair in all our dealings;
 - add to our learning;
 - discern the LORD’s will and be guided in it.
- The proverbs are to help the young and inexperienced – the naive.
- Some things in God’s Word are like parables or riddles (see Mark 4:11-12) and the very first step towards understanding them is to acknowledge the Lord alone as the source of all wisdom and to submit to him with awe and reverence (holy fear).
- People who ignore God (fools) will never have real wisdom and will be characterised by a failure to accept his discipline.

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- Did you start at God’s ‘Square 1’ in your search for fulfilment?

DAY 2 *Fools rush in...*

THE PASSAGE **PROVERBS 1:8-19**

THE POINT Solomon is aware of how attractive the world’s ways of greed and violence are to the young (cf. the drift of modern video games). He stresses the importance of parental guidance and points out the plain stupidity of falling into the trap of the world’s ways.

THE PARTICULARS

- Parents are usually proven to be right in the end (but, sadly, we don’t usually appreciate the full truth of this until we are one!).
- Children who obey their parents are the real medal winners.
- The spoils of crime often appear very attractive and easy to come by, but in the end crime never pays; the wages of sin is death.
- Gang mentality assumes there is safety in numbers and is always actively involved in recruiting new members – don’t fall for it.
- The common purse is a fiction; there’s no honour among thieves!
- Setting out on the path of crime leads to deeper involvement, even to the point of shedding blood. It is better never to start.

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- White collar crimes usually start with seemingly innocent little misdemeanours. How careful are you with responsibilities entrusted to you at work? at school? at uni? at home?

DAY 3 *The Day of Grace will end...*

THE PASSAGE **PROVERBS 1:20-33**

THE POINT Wisdom now speaks as a person. (We will hear again from her in chapters 8 and 9.) She calls out to everyone in the market-place to choose between her and foolishness. Her ways are open to all who will listen, not just to a social or intellectual elite, not just the king's family. We ignore her pleadings at our own peril.

THE PARTICULARS

- The offer of wisdom is presented freely, genuinely and passionately to everyone; anyone who is foolish enough to reject the offer must suffer the consequences. Read and compare the offer of the Gospel and the consequences of rejecting it in John 3:16-21.
- God is very open to everyone who turns to him in repentance and faith, helping them to know him more deeply; but he will openly oppose, devastate, and even mock, any who fail to learn from his gentle rebukes, appeals, and advice.
- A time will come when the opportunity for repentance is over.
- There is peace and bliss for all who respond to God's call.

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

• Sadly, this passage is especially applicable to Australia where, in spite of ample opportunity to hear and respond to the Gospel, we persist in our foolish rejection of it. Pray for our nation!

DAY 4 *The big IF*

THE PASSAGE **PROVERBS 2:1-8**

THE POINT God promises abundant wisdom, knowledge and understanding, along with security, success and fulfilment – the sort of things we would all love to be sure of having – but there is an important condition: IF we seek these things earnestly in him alone. This is the same promise Jesus gave us in Matthew 6:33, "Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well".

THE PARTICULARS

- The gaining of godly wisdom does not come without effort – but the effort is richly rewarded.
- It is the LORD, the covenant God of Israel and the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ, who is the fount of all wisdom and knowledge; we must seek these things only in him. (See Colossians 2:2-3)
- IF we walk in his ways he will grant us success and protect us.

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

• If God's promises are conditional, where does grace come in? Is Solomon implying we earn God's favour by our good works? What is the difference between trying to do this and earnestly seeking wisdom in God? (See Deut. 4:29-31 and Jer. 29:11-13)

• Christians suffer. Why is it important to keep heaven in view?

DAY 5 *Wisdom will enter your heart*

THE PASSAGE **PROVERBS 2:9-15**

THE POINT We are being influenced constantly (even more than we realise) by the wrong thinking of a world opposed to God. Even as Christians, the pressure of a secular society from the outside joins forces with the remains of our old nature within and we struggle. The only hope of winning this battle is by God's help from the inside to oppose the outside forces. We need heart surgery that only God can perform. This is why Jesus came.

THE PARTICULARS

- God's wisdom entering our heart makes all the difference. Only then are we able to discern what is wrong with the world's way of thinking and know what is fair and right and good.
- This wisdom and knowledge brings with it peace and joy, a real inner feeling of well-being; it is 'pleasant to your soul' (10).
- We are always surrounded by those opposed to God's ways who are intent on convincing us to join them, often very subtly.

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

• Christ is the ultimate expression of God's wisdom among us. Read the passage replacing 'wisdom' with 'Christ' in verses 10 and 12. Does this help you to see the Gospel clearly expressed?

• Why is secular humanism so dangerous in our society today?

DAY 6 *Losing our virtue?*

THE PASSAGE **PROVERBS 2:16-22**

THE POINT The moral decline of our society and the lack of faithfulness in marriage demonstrate the seductive power of sex. The media thrive on it. Solomon uses this universal reality to drive home a warning about the spiritual danger we are in if we ignore, or even try to minimise, the urgent need for vigilance against the world's seductive ways and schemes. It is a matter of life and death.

THE PARTICULARS

- Marriage is a God-given covenant. Unfaithfulness is the breaking of this covenant with God – with all its consequences.
- Satan's most effective weapon is subtle seduction; it is as powerful as (and sometimes even involves) sexual seduction.
- As Christ's Bride, the Church must be acutely aware of, and actively resist, the seductive power of the world to woo it.
- The 'land' in verses 21 and 22 is a symbolic reference to heaven. These verses are a sobering reminder of the eternal peril of rejecting God's wisdom in Christ or of failing to remain faithful.

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

• In what areas do you think Christians today have already compromised too much with the world?... the movies we watch? ... the magazines we read? ... women's fashion? ... relationships?

DAY 7 *The profile of God's person*

THE PASSAGE **PROVERBS 3:1-10**

THE POINT The gist of Solomon's advice to his son is: put the LORD first in every part of your life – your thinking, your relationships, your planning for the future, your persona to others, your attitude to yourself, your possessions.

THE PARTICULARS

- God's ways are the foundation for longevity and prosperity.
- Love and faithfulness, the two basic aspects of God's own character mentioned together in more than 20 verses in the Psalms (eg Ps 86:15), are to be at the centre of all our relationships.
- In all things, the LORD's ways are more reliable and trustworthy than our own ideas or instincts. If we are openly and unashamedly committed to following him, and don't start thinking we are clever by putting confidence in ourselves, we can't go wrong.
- A good, practical way of demonstrating this commitment is to give at least a tenth of all we receive from God straight back to him (see Malachi 3:6-12); he wants to bless us abundantly.

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

• Read through the 10 Commandments (Exodus 20:1-17) and think about how this advice of Solomon reflects their teaching. How do you rate? Does your life follow God's wisdom or society's?

DAY 8 *God knows what he's doing!*

THE PASSAGE **PROVERBS 3:11-20**

THE POINT God's wisdom is the basis of all that is; it is the foundation of the Universe. The secret of a person's life – true inner peace and happiness – is to find this wisdom. This will, of course, involve accepting God's discipline as a genuine expression of his love!

THE PARTICULARS

- Hard as it may be, we should never question God's right to discipline us, or complain when he does – it is the proof of his love.
- God is a father who derives great pleasure from having us as his children, not one who is removed, or who just tolerates us.
- The wisdom of which God is the source is the greatest thing we can ever discover or grasp; it is like the treasure or the pearl in Jesus' parables (Mt. 13:44-46) – worth selling everything to get. It is the source of pleasure, peace, blessing – of true Life itself.
- This wisdom portrays Christ himself, the root and reason for all Creation (see John 1:1-4, Colossians 1:15-17, Hebrews 1:2-3).

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

• Read the commentary on this passage in Hebrews 12:4-13. The Creator of the Universe is a wise and loving Father who knows what he is doing. Does knowing this help you to submit gladly to his discipline in the troubles you face but can't understand?

DAY 9 *Wise rules for sensible living*

THE PASSAGE PROVERBS 3:21-35

THE POINT Solomon makes it clear to his son that the only sensible and satisfying way to live is God's way; God's outline for a contented and fulfilling life covers every practical aspect and deals with every contingency – only fools would reject it for wickedness.

THE PARTICULARS

- We need to stay alert, wise, and focussed to keep to God's path.
- The outcome of living God's way includes: respect; safety; protection from danger, deception and disaster; restful sleep; success; good things; blessing on home/family; honour.
- The rules for living God's way include: reward the deserving; pay (and just give) on time; don't betray a neighbour's trust; don't be judgemental; don't use violent means; don't mock.
- God gives grace to the humble, but mocks and curses the proud.

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- So many in our present society are rejecting God's simple, practical wisdom and choosing the way of wickedness with all its obviously harmful consequences. Why do you think this is so?
- Self-esteem is an issue today. Why shouldn't Christians worry about it? Compare the two uses of 'confidence' in 26a and 32b.

DAY 10 *Family altar? ...kidding?*

THE PASSAGE PROVERBS 4:1-9

THE POINT Solomon had the privilege of having King David as his father. The example David set in the home in mentoring his children with care and effort had a big impact on Solomon.

(Perhaps there were times when he wished he'd taken more notice!) The key was that the wisdom David taught was God's wisdom, not psychology or sociology or any other form of humanism. There is such an urgent need today for sound, systematic, regular and robust teaching of the wisdom of God's Word in Christian homes!

THE PARTICULARS

- The passion with which Solomon pleads concerning the need to walk in God's ways comes from his own experience as a child. His godly instruction from David and Bathsheba began at a very early age before he had any brothers or sisters* (v.3). (*ie living – his older brother had died, see 2 Samuel 12:15-25)
- The attaining of (God's) wisdom is worth anything it costs.
- Regardless of how the world judges, walking in the path of God's wisdom brings rewards of grace, honour and splendour.

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- Why are we so lax with family devotions? Does it matter?
- What sort of life-style does the world honour with garlands?

DAY 11 *Two roads, two destinations*

THE PASSAGE PROVERBS 4:10-19

THE POINT The path of wisdom and the path of wickedness are quite different and divergent, with completely different destinations. It is not possible to walk with one foot in each. It is dangerous even to investigate, or experiment with, the path of the wicked.

THE PARTICULARS

- The path of wisdom is straight, true and uncluttered by traps.
- Wise instruction is the essence of life: it must be guarded well.
- The path of the wicked must be avoided at all costs: there are to be no test runs or road trials just to see what it is like!
- Restlessness and irresponsible and wanton behaviour mark the life of the wicked. Their mission in life is to make others fall.
- The path of the righteous, those who make the wisdom of God's ways their greatest delight, leads to ever increasing light; the path of the wicked, who reject God's ways, leads more and more to greater confusion and frustration, and deeper darkness.

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- Have you had any experience of experimenting with the way of the world? What did you learn from that experience?
- Read what Jesus said about the 2 paths in Matthew 7:13-14.

DAY 12 *Guard your heart*

THE PASSAGE PROVERBS 4:20-27

THE POINT The heart in Hebrew thinking is more what we would call the mind, although it can be used to refer to emotions, and even the will. However we see it, it is, as it is physically, the 'well-spring of life', the source and sustainer of all that keeps us going. Solomon insists that God's wisdom must be at the heart of all we are and do, and we must carefully guard and hold that position.

THE PARTICULARS

- God's Word, the source of his wisdom for us, is to be our focus.
- God's Word is the source of our whole life, health and wellbeing.
- The guarding of our heart (mind) must be our top priority (cf. Jesus' teaching in Mark 7:20-23 re the importance of the heart).
- Four parts of the body are important for sticking to the right path, the path of wisdom: the heart (thoughts), the mouth (speech), the eyes (what we look at), the feet (where we go).

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- What does v. 21 imply about the need for daily Bible reading?
- What are some ways in which we can be led astray by our hearts (minds)? ... our mouths? ... our eyes? ... our feet? Think about what Jesus said in Matthew 5:27-30 and Mark 9:42-48.

DAY 13 *The destructive power of sex*

THE PASSAGE PROVERBS 5:1-23

THE POINT Sexual sin is singled out in this chapter as being particularly dangerous because it is so easily slipped into and it has such a devastating, life-changing effect. Sex is a wonderful, beautiful thing in its proper context of marriage (verses 15-19), but outside that context it is a far-reaching, soul-destroying evil.

THE PARTICULARS

- Seductive lips can appear very attractive at first. The warning, 'Do not go near the door of her house' (v. 8), must be taken very seriously. How many adulterous liaisons (especially among Christians) begin with what seem to be just harmless gestures?
- Adultery inevitably leads to the disaster of ruined lives. (This is especially the case when it means the end of an otherwise good, productive, God-honouring ministry within the Church!)
- Lack of (self-)discipline and the ignoring of (often well-intended, loving) correction is the basic cause of many a man's downfall.
- Marriage should give abundant opportunity to satisfy needs.
- A man's ways are in full view of the LORD ... all the time!

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- Should we be more vocal against the sexual sins of our society?

DAY 14 *Wear your heart on your sleeve*

THE PASSAGE PROVERBS 6:1-19

THE POINT We cannot hide anything from the LORD (5:20); thus we should always maintain an open attitude towards him, and this is best cultivated by having an open attitude towards each other. We should be 'up front' in all our dealings with our neighbour, be willing always to put in an honest day's work, and never be involved in underhand tactics. God hates deceptive stirrers!

THE PARTICULARS

- It is often pride that gets us into neighbourhood disputes. If we have embarrassed ourselves by a mistake it is better to admit it, have it out in the open, and seek forgiveness and reconciliation. Trying to ignore it or cover up only leads to worse trouble.
- Ants are always on the go. (Have you ever seen one resting?) We should learn from their industry, even when unsupervised! How we use our time should always be open to scrutiny.
- Secretly plotting evil or stirring up strife will inevitably, even without warning, lead to the downfall of the troublemaker.
- "There are six...seven..." (16-19) means the list isn't exhaustive.

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- Do you have someone to whom you are accountable on a regular basis? Why not use the '6...7' things as a check-list?

DAY 15

Don't play with fire

THE PASSAGE

PROVERBS 6:20-35

THE POINT God again warns us, through Solomon's testimony, against the grave danger of sexual sin. It is so insidious we must give careful and constant attention to God's Word (cf Ps. 119:9). Theft born of desperation may even be excusable, but the sin of adultery, so easy to fall into, allows no evasion of its consequences.

THE PARTICULARS

- God's Word should be such a part of our daily life as to guide us, guard us, and govern us. It is a lamp, a light, and a lash.
- A seductress can make herself seem very attractive and even right, but ruin is attached to her as closely as burning is to fire.
- Theft is always punishable but there can be circumstances of desperation when it is, at least, understandable; but this is never the case with adultery – it is never, ever excusable.
- Adultery always hurts someone else who will demand revenge.

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- How are you going with your daily Bible readings? Moral failure is inevitably associated with the deterioration of one's devotional life. A failure to spend time with God each day can be a good alarm bell. I once had in the front of my Bible: "This book can keep me from sin, but sin can keep me from this book".

DAY 16

A highway to the grave

THE PASSAGE

PROVERBS 7:1-27

THE POINT This passage reinforces the warning from the previous chapter but makes clearer how the seductress can use language that can make her actions sound right (verses 13-18). "God is obviously in this relationship because we have such peace about it" is a far too familiar lie. But we should note, too, that God is also warning us against spiritual adultery: attaching our affection and allegiance to other 'gods' instead of remaining faithful to him.

THE PARTICULARS

- We should be more closely and regularly related to God's Word than to our closest family member; it should be a part of us.
- Other people can usually see reality more clearly when we are being seduced into a trap. The counsel of friends is important.
- Effective seduction (of any kind, into any sin) never appears to be what it actually is. We're good at rationalising our actions!
- The trap of seduction springs quickly; go nowhere near it, ever.

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- Why is Solomon spending so much effort warning us against adultery? Is he over-rating its power? What about other sins?
- Does your weakness lie somewhere else? The same rules apply.

DAY 17

Another voice calls out

THE PASSAGE

PROVERBS 8:1-21

THE POINT The thrust of this passage is summed up in Jesus' words as he entered Jerusalem for the last time: read them in Matt. 23:37-39. God is sovereign in his world. He determines the course of history. He makes the rules and brings about judgement. His wisdom is therefore the way that is best for our welfare, our peace and happiness. Out of his great love he pleads with us to reject the seductive voice of the world's ways and to follow his ways.

THE PARTICULARS

- God's wisdom takes every opportunity to call out to all of us in every situation to stop being gullible and foolish in the world.
- God's ways are always right and true (cf Psalm 18:30); we can trust him never to deceive us or lead us astray (cf Job 13:15-16).
- God's wisdom is of more value than any riches the world can offer, it goes hand in hand with discretion, honesty and humility, and must be the basis of all sound and successful government.
- Wisdom forms a loving relationship with all who seek it, and it bears the fruit of prosperity in its fullest and most enduring sense.

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- Our life-style today seems to give much more air time to the world's voice than to Wisdom's. Which influences you more?

DAY 18

Wisdom's identity revealed!

THE PASSAGE

PROVERBS 8:22-36

THE POINT The description of the Logos (Word) in John 1:1-4 makes it clear that Logos is identical with Wisdom of Proverbs as described in today's passage. But John 1:14 tells us that the Logos became flesh and dwelt among us, ie. that Logos is Jesus. Personified Wisdom in Proverbs is therefore none other than Jesus himself, the Second Person of the Trinity! The Universe finds its real meaning and purpose in Wisdom (Proverbs), ie in Jesus (John – see also 1 Cor. 1:24, 30, Colossians 1:15-17; 2:2-3; Hebrews 1:1-4).

THE PARTICULARS

- God did nothing apart from Wisdom (ie. Jesus); how foolish of us to think we can achieve anything without it (ie. him, Jesus)!
- Wisdom (ie. Jesus) was there at the beginning, inhabits Eternity, participated in the whole of Creation, and is the source of its joy.
- God's true blessing is for those who have a constant, personal, and expectant relationship with Wisdom (ie. with Jesus).
- Wisdom (ie. Jesus) is the only source of Life; to ignore it (him) is to have a love-relationship with Disaster and Death.

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- Is your relationship with Jesus the most important of all your relationships? What specific things do you do to cultivate it?

DAY 19

The perfect hostess

THE PASSAGE

PROVERBS 9:1-6

THE POINT Wisdom is the perfect hostess: her dwelling is built to perfection ('seven pillars'); her meal is prepared and laid out ready on the table; the invitation to share in it is made from the highest vantage point so that none will miss hearing it; the maids are ready to welcome all who will accept; and no qualifications are needed to be eligible to accept, apart from a recognition of a personal need for her hospitality and a willingness to leave everything behind in order to come. To eat with her is to live.

THE PARTICULARS

- There is nothing secretive or restrictive about God's offer of salvation; it is strong, free, and open to all who will listen.
- God's salvation is not tight-fisted or penny-pinching; he is not inviting us to something that we will find uninteresting or boring (regardless of what the world might think); he is inviting us to experience Life at a level we have never known before.
- The invitation anticipates Jesus' words: "I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance" (Luke 5:32).

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- Do your non-Christian friends look at your life and get a wrong impression about what they're missing? How will you change?

DAY 20

The choice: Wisdom or Folly?

THE PASSAGE

PROVERBS 9:7-18

THE POINT Like Wisdom, Folly also invites all who will to enter her house to dine. The details of the invitation are almost identical, but with a slight twist: there is the 'excitement' of 'forbidden fruit'! What happens inside, however, is quite different: her ways are Death. Because 'the fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom', the 'mockers', who refuse to acknowledge him, can never be convinced to change his ways and make the wise choice.

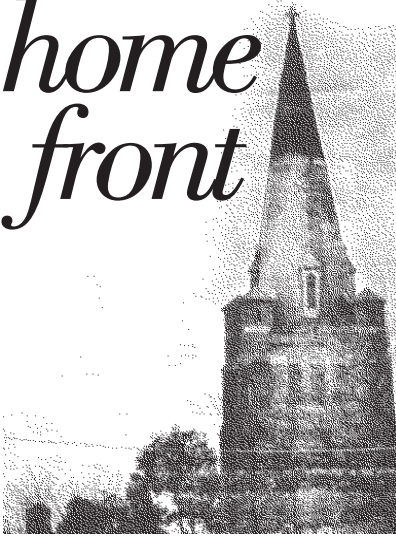
THE PARTICULARS

- Trying to convince someone with a mind-set against God about the error of his ways generates only insult and abuse. Someone with a mind-set towards God, however, is glad of the warning.
- It is useless seeking wisdom without giving God due reverence.
- God blesses the wise with abundant life.
- In the matter of wisdom and foolishness, the ultimate gainer or loser is the man himself. (This is the thrust of verse 12.)
- Forbidden fruit is always more attractive to man's sinful heart.

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- Proverbs 1-9 show clearly the stupidity of rejecting God's way. Why do so many people still do so in the face of the evidence?

home front



Riverwood turns 50

Riverwood Presbyterian Church (NSW) is having a 50th anniversary reunion on Sunday February 9. Anyone who has attended this church in the past 50 years is invited to the service at 10am, held at Hannans Road Public School, and afterwards for a luncheon at the church hall, cnr Belmore Road and Hardwicke Streets, Riverwood, from 12:30pm.

City ministry

Rev. Richard O'Brien has moved to Melbourne from NSW to become assistant minister at **The Scots Church** and establish a ministry to the residential and business community of Melbourne CBD. This is a ministry initiated by senior minister **Douglas Robertson** and the session. Rev. O'Brien conducted his last services at **St Paul's Presbyterian Church**, Armidale, on December 29. He and his wife **Rosemary** and their daughters **Madeline** and **Emily** moved to Melbourne in January.

Ministerial moves

Rev. Phil Simmonds of **Gordonsvale-Babinda-Innisfail** (Qld) has been appointed by the APWM.

Rev. Chris Siriweera of **Reservoir** (Vic) has accepted a call to **Surrey Hills** parish in Melbourne.

Rev. Tony Parle of **The Leigh** (Vic) has accepted a call to **Epping-Lalor** parish in Melbourne.

Rev. Dr. John S. Woodward of **Malvern** (Vic) has accepted a call to **St Ives-Pimble** parish in Sydney.

Rev. Darren Middleton of the **South East Mallee Patrol Area** (Vic) has

accepted a call to **Caringbah** parish in Sydney.

Rev. Graham Nicholson, a minister under the jurisdiction of the Presbytery of **Mowbray** has accepted a call to the **Hawthorn** parish in Melbourne.

The congregation at **Burwood**, Melbourne, has issued a unanimous call to the **Rev. Dr. John Elnatan**. The session has also resolved to change the name from **Burwood Chinese** to **Burwood Community Presbyterian Church**.

Vanuatu move

After 13 years as lecturer in New Testament and systematic theology at the **PTC Sydney**, **Rev. Chris Balzer** has taken up a new ministry at the **Talua Ministry Training Centre** in Vanuatu. Chris took up his appointment as lecturer and Dean of Studies in January. His wife **Leah** will teach English and other subjects.

The new systematic theology lecturer is **Rev. John McClean**, who has been ministering in **Cowra** since 1996. John was brought up in Taree PCEA, and trained for the Presbyterian ministry at Moore Theological College. John and **Liz** have two children – **Michael** (seven) and **Brianna** (four) – and they attend **Winmalee** congregation.

Elders

Mr John Nestel and **Mr Jeff Davis** were inducted onto the **Chatswood** session (NSW) on December 1. On that same Sunday **Ms Janet Newton Kelett** was inducted at **St Johns Waratah-Mayfield** (NSW). On December 20, **Elder D. Lewis** resigned his membership from the **Peninsula** charge (Qld).

On November 17, **Mr David Pearce**, was commissioned at **St Andrew's Church** in Reservoir (Vic). He will be working with **Mission Aviation Fellowship (MAF)** in Kenya.

Bumper crop

While Queensland has three exit students and Victoria one, **Matt James** who, along with his wife **Kathy**, has been appointed to the **Croydon Hills** congregation, New South Wales has eight. The new appointments are **David** (and **Cherryn**) **Hassan** at **Moruya-Narroma**; **Steve** (and **Lisa**) **North** assistant at **Tweed Heads**; **Mike** (and **Corrine**) **O'Connor** at **Wauchope**; **Mike Pittman** (and **Kerry**) at **Tuggeranong**; **Adrian Schepel**, associate at **Hurstville**; **Stephen** (and **Hayley**)

George Johnston

1918 – 2002

George Johnston, an elder for nearly 30 years, died in July aged 84. George grew up near Bell, and attended **St Giles Presbyterian Church**, where his father was an elder.

After war service George moved to **Dalby** and attended the **St Thomas Presbyterian Church** where he was Sunday school superintendent for several years.

In 1974 he was ordained an elder at **St Thomas**. On retiring in 1986, George moved to **Goombungee** and became a member of **Scots Presbyterian Church Oakey**, where he was inducted as an elder in 1988. He served as session clerk for several years after 1990 and represented **Oakey** at the Presbytery of **Darling Downs** and at the state assembly.

L. Bogg, session clerk, Oakey

Soldatas at **Kempsey**; and **Jason** (and **Elizabeth**) **Summers** at **Alstonville**.

Student support

The **Chatswood** parish (NSW) will support three student ministers this year: **Matt Ham**, **David Powell** and **Warren Esdale**. They will be working with **Rev. Jeff Read** in the junior church, youth club, prayer and Bible groups, evening services, and at **St James Church** in **Lane Cove**.

Extra! Extra!

The APWM (NSW) Committee considered the November *AP* on Islam and the Church compulsory reading for every member of the church in Australia, and had an extra 3000 copies printed.

You can buy copies to pass around from their NSW office at
269 Forest Road,
Bexley, NSW, 2207.

Alexander Armstrong Armit

1919 – 2002

Alexander Armstrong Armit, who emigrated from Scotland in 1927 at eight, has died aged 83. His association with the Church of St. Johns Waratah-Mayfield dates back to his arrival as a lad. He served the church over many years as a member of the committee of management and, from 1961, as an elder.

When ill health forced him into a nursing home last year, session granted Alex the status of elder emeritus in recognition of his long service. He served for two periods as clerk, 1964-1974 and 1985-1997.

A. Terry, session clerk, St Johns

Ghana link formalised

The Wentworthville-Girraween Presbyterian Church and the Ghana Presbyterian Church, which worships at the Girraween property, have established a closer link. On November 24, George Freeman, pastor of the Ghana church, assistant pastor Andrew Baryeh and secretary Awa Kwakwa were inducted to the Wentworthville-Girraween session.

Lendon family update

Allan and Narelle Lendon want to convey their sincere appreciation for the many people who have been in frequent prayer since Allan was diagnosed with a highly malignant brain tumour. Allan has been the minister at Geelong North since 1992. He has gradually been regaining strength and has been back in the parish since March, taking on "light" duties.

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Daughter Rebecca Rose was born in April. Examinations, tests and scans continue, so ongoing prayer would be deeply welcome.

Friends for Life

The Christian Education Committee of the GAA is issuing a new edition of David Thurston's *Making Friends for Life*, which helps a congregation plan and run a hospitality evangelism event as it studies the book of Phillipians. The CEC is also reissuing with some minor corrections *At the Coal Face*, an introductory study guide to the eldership largely from the pen of Phil Campbell (Mitchelton). Both are available from Presbyterian Christian Education (02) 9690 9333.

Sizzling carols

A large number of people, including many non-Christian locals, turned up for the annual Presbyterian Youth of Victoria carol service on December 14 at the South Yarra church. The service was preceded by a sausage 'sizzle' held on the extensive grassed area next to the church building. Rev. John Wilson, the Victorian Moderator, gave the message, and of the Victorian Assembly, and the music was provided by the PYV music group.

Blockbuster camp

More than 100 young people, drawn from a wide range of PCV congregations and beyond, came together for the Presbyterian Youth of Victoria's summer camp at Phillip Island. The speaker was Rev. Robert Carner, home mission director of the PCV. Another highlight was the New Year's Eve concert.

Victorian candidates

The Theological Education Committee has recommended to the presbyteries concerned that Bill Medley, Gary Stephens (Presbytery of Melbourne North) and Tony Archer (Presbytery of Maroondah), be made provisional candidates for the ministry of the Presbyterian Church of Australia.

Mission force grows

In recent months a number of short-term and new Australian Presbyterian World Mission missionaries have emerged from different congregations. Claire Schofield (St John's, Hobart) and

Cherie de Garis (Bicton, WA) are preparing for service in Asia and seeking to raise support, as is Joy Hill (Donvale, Vic). David and Ashleigh Burge (Ashfield, Sydney) have been in central Asia and are seeking the Lord's will for future full-time service. Victorians Andrew and Fleur Letcher have just gone to PNG with Wycliffe and David Pearce (Reservoir, Vic) is in Kenya with MAF. Rob Paix (Croydon Hills, Melbourne) was commissioned on 7 December and went to Central Asia soon after.

College dinner

The John Paton Fellowship and the Presbyterian Theological College women's group hosted the end of year dinner at the PTC Melbourne in November for 80 staff, students and TEC members and their wives and husbands. The five students who graduated reflect the exciting way the PTC has developed over recent years: Debbie Wong of the Taiwanese Church, Miles Fagan from Sunshine PC, Colin M'Bawa from the Presbyterian Church in Malawi, Kirk Importante from the Philippines and Matt James from Bundoora PC. Matt is a candidate for the ministry and has been appointed to Croydon Hills as his exit placement.

Teaching teachers 1

The PTC Melbourne is hosting two sessions (25 February and 4 March) on the application of practical knowledge to issues of faith and belief in the secular classroom. They will also provide an understanding of modern educational practices in primary and middle schools and an introduction to the mandatory agreed syllabus in Victoria, *Religion in Life*. The sessions will be led by Mrs Lorraine Kettels, education manager, Council for Christian Education in Schools.

Teaching teachers 2

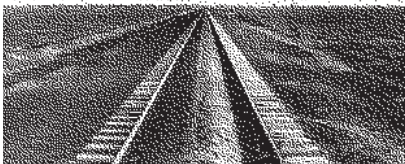
The Christian Education and Nurture Committee is presenting a Sunday School teachers' training day at the PTC Melbourne to be led by Stephanie Carmichael, the author of *Their God is So Big* (Matthias Media). She will cover classroom management, selection of material and adapting pre-written material to suit your specific needs. The cost is \$20, including morning and afternoon tea. For more information, contact Elizabeth Diacos, 0403 448 565

Thatcher to lead WA

Rev. Darrell Thatcher was elected as the WA Moderator when the Western Australia assembly met at the Henderson Memorial Church (Leederville) in Perth on October 25 and 26. The assembly visitor was **Moderator-General Jack Knapp**, who also visited for the 50th anniversary celebrations of the Braemar Presbyterian Homes for the Aged. **Mrs. Margaret Thatcher** was elected president of the PWA.

The following week the **Presbytery of WA** ensured that every congregation, home mission station and ministry has a settled ministry. **Mr Paul Spackman** was received by the Presbytery of WA as a candidate for the ministry. **Rev. Dr. Nigel Lee** spoke at the annual Reformation day, held this year at the **Gosnells Christian Reformed Church** on de-formation and reformation of the Church from 2 Thessalonians. Dr Lee also spoke at St. Columba's Peppermint Grove and the Maida Vale Westminster Presbyterian Church.

across australia

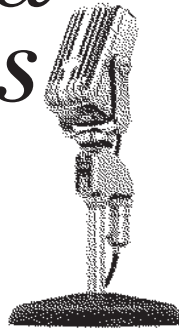


HCJB makes waves

HCJB World Radio-Australia's new shortwave station at Kununurra in the northern part of the country went on the air on Sunday 5 January with its first five-hour transmission to the South Pacific – the culmination of more than five years of planning and praying.

When the facility is in full operation, the shortwave signal will be within hearing range of more than 3.5 billion people — 60 per cent of the world's population. Including the Asian antenna, 10 hours of English programming will air daily: five hours to the South Pacific and five hours to Asia, plus a weekly program in Oromo to Ethiopia. HCJB plans to expand to five transmitters and 16 broadcast towers as land and funds become available.

world news



Christmas fare

For the first time in 13 years of distributing New Testaments in Istanbul, Turkey, Istanbul Authorities allowed the books to be distributed on Christmas Eve and New Year's Eve.

In the report, received at the US office of **Turkish World Outreach** in Grand Junction, Colorado, a Christian worker in Istanbul, Turkey said: "It was an exhilarating experience to distribute New Testaments even when the police came — to not be stopped, arrested, or taken in by them.

"Fifteen of us distributed more than 3200 New Testaments in six hours on the main street of Istanbul. The street police came four times to check and were amazed that we had permission."

Assist News Service

Progress in Belarus

Just over a month after he signed what critics call "Europe's most restrictive religion law", the president of Belarus has agreed to allow a Christian radio program to air daily in his ex-Soviet republic.

President Alexander Lukashenko has made it clear that Christians can broadcast the *Alpha Hour* show on Alpha Radio, the country's second largest FM radio network, said Operations Manager **J. Gator Henry**.

Henry, 38, said the station's president, "has personal ... assurances" that the "Alpha Hour" show "will be allowed to air seven days a week, one hour per day," for a potential audience of 1.5 million in Minsk and the nearby city of Vitebsk.

Assist News Service

Heart of stone

A Bible verse in the traditional Scots language will be written in stone at the

entrance to the Scottish Parliament building.

Officials have selected a quotation from the Lorimer edition of the New Testament as a contrast to the ultra-modernist design of the Parliament.

The words were translated from Greek into Scots by William Laughton Lorimer, who taught classics at Dundee and St Andrews Universities.

The inscription is from 1 Corinthians 13:1: "Gin I speak wi the tungs o men an angels, but hae nae luv i my hairt, I am no nane better nor dunnerin bress nor a ringing cymbal."

The Scotsman

Forging ahead

It's a popular notion that Islam is the world's fastest-growing religion, and Christianity is on the decline.

But it's not true, according to information that suggests both faiths are expanding worldwide, with Christianity on the rise in places like South America, Asia and especially Africa.

"It's not a dying religion. Christianity is a vital religion," says **Rev. Cecil Murray**, of the **First AME Church of Los Angeles**.

Christianity was rare at the turn of the century in Africa, but some say almost half of the continent – as many as 360 million people – now worships Jesus.

Rev. Murray sees those gains as the successful result of decades of missionary work across the continent. "I think it is strong in Africa because Christians went to Africa in the last 75 to 80 years," he said.

Most experts agree Christianity does have the most believers. And recent reports estimate that by 2025, that gap will widen even further, making Christianity by far the world's largest religion.

FoxNews

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Movie Watch

Bowling for Columbine

Reviewed by Jodie Day



Michael Moore

You know how surprises are all the sweeter because you're not expecting them? My husband persisted and succeeded in taking me to see Michael Moore's latest, *Bowling for Columbine*. Now I'm the one saying "you should really see this movie".

For weeks I had explained, "I hate guns" and "I'm not interested in American movies about horrible massacres". (The title refers to Colorado's Columbine High School shootings, on April 20, 1999, which claimed 15 lives.)

What I didn't realise was that the brilliant Michael Moore is a master of the documentary, a very funny comedian and is disturbed enough by the gun culture in his country to take action.

Moore has thoroughly researched the topic of why there are more gun deaths in the US than any other nation. The structure of the movie made me envy his abilities as a student of modern history. His introduction is quite incredible and proves the ridiculousness of gun laws in the States – the cameras follow Moore as he opens an account in Michigan's North Country Bank, which offers a free rifle with every new account. As a licensed gun dealer the bank also sells ammunition to Moore.

The interviews he scores are impressive – especially the one-on-one chat with the NRA's (National Rifle Association's) Charlton Heston – but perhaps not quite as impressive as Moore's uncanny talent for interviewing. I'm still not sure how he does it! Over and over in the movie people divulge critical information to the world, usually making them look quite stupid. I think Moore's slobbish, big softy, avuncular manner may have something to do with it.

There are some particularly striking and disturbing facts in the movie. Look forward to the succinct cartoon of the USA's history which queries a relation-

ship between the Ku Klux Klan and the NRA and highlights the current atmosphere of fear pervading the USA. This fear plays a crucial role in Moore's argument. The US authorities certainly seem to have a lot to answer for, and I found myself wanting to cheer that the information is being exposed.

I do want to stress that there's an excellent balance so that the movie is not too heavy-going. It's a serious topic, but there's lots of laughing at the comedy and absurdity of the reality, especially in some of the interviews.



It was a very good reminder for me as a Christian to show through my actions and words that I don't fear the future.

I've always been encouraged by the number of Christians in the United States. With some justification, it's considered a "Christian nation". And yet *Bowling for Columbine* highlights the lack of hope common to most ordinary Americans. There was simply no evidence in the movie of the hope this Christian nation should have. It's so important we show others the difference Christ makes in our lives. Moore's conclusion was that everyone was scared; I'm hoping he did come across some who were vocal about trusting the One True God for their future.

So is Australia heading the same way? We certainly like to mimic America – the movie is a good reminder of the need to analyse the American example carefully before we imitate it. More than that, it was a very good reminder for me as a Christian to show through my actions and words that I don't fear the future. God does have things in control – the Lord Jesus has risen from the dead and now rules the world. With our trust in him, our future is assured.

With tensions mounting at such a tense time in our world, we all have a great opportunity to share the hope we have in Jesus. Maybe you could take a non-Christian friend to the movie then chat over coffee over the issues it raises about the future?

Jodie Day is part of the ministry team at Mitchelton Presbyterian Church. 

Testament of hatred?

Many charge that the New Testament is anti-Semitic. Is it?

If you don't have a strong stomach, go straight to the second paragraph of this story. Nathan Hannover, who survived the 17th century Ukrainian pogroms, records in *The Abyss of Despair* how Bogdan Chmielnicki, liberator of his nation from the Poles, killed 100,000 Jews. He skinned some alive and fed them to the dogs; he buried others alive; he ripped open the bellies of pregnant women and inserted live cats, after cutting off the women's hands so they couldn't remove them.

For centuries the Jews of Eastern Europe lived in terror of the cry "Christ-killers", which heralded the arrival of the Christian mob intent on destruction, rape and murder. Usually engineered by the government of the day to distract the Christian majority from their own troubles, the pogroms were whipped up from the pulpits. Indeed, the church has an appalling record of persecution of Jewish people over the past millennium.

So it is little wonder that Jews regard the New Testament with deep suspicion. Jewish scholar Daniel Goldhagen, author of the controversial *Hitler's Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust*, has written a new book, *A Moral Reckoning: The Role of the Catholic Church in the Holocaust and Its Unfulfilled Duty of Repair*, in which he calls on the church to admit to its misdeeds and repent.

Goldhagen claimed recently in an interview that "the Christian Bible is replete with the most damaging and inflammatory anti-Semitism. All you need to do is change the word 'Jews' in the Christian Bible to 'blacks' and say blacks are the children of the devil, that they no longer hear God because they reject Jesus, that they killed the son of God, and all blacks are forever guilty of doing so, and let's hand this book to a billion people and say it's the word of God."

Goldhagen is not the originator of this idea. It has been widely held in the Jewish community for centuries, as has the conviction that if this hatred is not present in the Bible, the Bible has certainly been used to justify it.

So is Goldhagen right? Is the New



**Barney
Zwartz**

Testament virulently anti-Semitic? Or is it rather that the church over the centuries is guilty of misinterpreting its scriptures and taking verses out of context?

Goldhagen's charge would have made little sense to the New Testament's authors. After all, 25 of its 27 books were written by Jews (the exception is Luke) chiefly to Jews, arguing for what they considered the true Judaism against the orthodoxy of the day, represented by the Pharisees.

They opposed the contemporary Jewish religion, not the Jewish people – a vital distinction.

The New Testament authors clearly saw themselves as writing in the same tradition with the same prophetic authority.

In fact, they hoped to persuade and convert the Jews, and Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles, made a point of approaching the Jews first in every town he sought to evangelise. For "the Gospel of salva-

tion . . . is to the Jew first, and also to the Greek" (Rom. 1:16).

In the first two centuries of the church's existence the persecution went in the other direction, from Jewish establishment to Christian minority. Even after the destruction of Jerusalem in AD70, Jewish communities were far more important in the Roman empire than Christian communities.

It was the stoning of Stephen (Acts 7) that caused the Christian Jews to flee and take the Gospel outside Judea. Before that the infant church had little theology of mission to non-Jews.

This battle for the "true Judaism" provides the context in which the New Testament strictures later used to justify persecuting Jews should be understood. As early as the fourth chapter of Genesis

humanity is divided into two streams, the lines of Seth and Cain, those who will serve God and those who rebel.

There are no stronger admonitions of the Jews than those in the Jewish Bible (Old Testament) when the authors perceive that the people are deserting God. Moses condemns them as a stiff-necked and rebellious people from their beginnings as a nation (Ex. 33:3, Deut. 9:7). The prophets call them adulterers, idolaters, rulers of Sodom, people of Gomorrah, covenant-breakers, and much more.

For example, in the eighth century BC Hosea wrote: "Hear the word of the Lord, O people of Israel, for the Lord has a controversy with the inhabitants of the land. There is no faithfulness or kindness, and no knowledge of God in the land; there is swearing, lying, killing, stealing, and committing adultery; they break all bounds and murder follows murder" (Hosea 4:1,2).

The New Testament authors clearly saw themselves as writing in the same tradition with the same prophetic authority.

"Anti-Semitism" is a modern term, according to Graham Keith, author of *Hated Without a Cause: A History of Anti-Semitism* (1997). It was popularised by German journalist Wilhelm Marr in *The Victory of Judaism Over the Jews* (1879). Marr, an atheist, had no interest in religion but wanted to oppose Jews on social, economic, political and racial grounds.

But the concept, defined as hatred and persecution of Jews as a group – not the hatred of persons who happen to be Jews, but the hatred of persons because they are Jews – has a venerable history.

It is first documented in Exodus, when Pharaoh is frightened of the Hebrews, so persecutes them. Haman, in Esther, is a Hitler prototype who wants to exterminate every Jew. His defeat, and the salvation of the Jews, is celebrated each year in the Jewish feast of Purim.

This is very different to the sort of opposition found in the New Testament, where the fledgling Christian religion was fighting for its identity and in constant danger of being overwhelmed by orthodox Judaism. Early Christians wrote to

defend their message to pagans and to Jews, and above all to reassure confused members of their own flock.

The apostle Paul writes his letter to the Galatians on this very subject. He had founded the small church there, but later Jewish-Christian teachers were saying that, besides keeping the faith Paul taught, the gentile believers should also be circumcised and observe Jewish law.

“O foolish Galatians!” Paul pleads. “Who has bewitched you ... Let me ask you only this: Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law, or by hearing with faith?” (Gal. 3:1,2).

This tension between Christian faith and Jewish law is a common Pauline theme. But no one could doubt Paul’s love for his people. “I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brethren, my kinsmen by race” (Rom. 9:2,3).

So does the Jews’ blindness about Christ mean they are now God’s enemies? Paul addresses that question two chapters later: “I ask, then, has God rejected his people? By no means! I myself am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, a member of the tribe of Benjamin. God has not rejected the people whom he foreknew.”

One of the texts often used to foment hatred is Matthew 27:25, when Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor of Judea, is trying to pardon Jesus but the mob refuses. Pilate washes his hands and says “I am innocent of this man’s blood”. Verse 25 says: “And all the people answered ‘His blood be on us and on our children’.” This verse was soon regarded as the self-condemnation of the Jewish people for all time.

But, as Keith points out, this interpretation is hard to sustain. Without getting too technical, there is no verb in the Greek text. The word “be” is put in for sense in English, which makes it sound like a wish or even a prayer.

In the wider context, Matthew’s message – like the rest of the New Testament – is clear that it is Christians who, by their sins, are responsible for Christ’s death. He died to save us.

The charge against the Gospel of John, is more serious. John often speaks of “the Jews”, and sets them in opposition to true believers. But John speaks of “the Jews” in several contexts, sometimes in a geographical sense, sometimes of the Jewish leaders only, and sometimes favourably, as when Jesus is identified as a Jew, or when he says “salvation is from the

Jews” (John 4:9, 22).

The letters of John show the same distinction between those “of God” and “of the world” but in a new context. Some have left the Christian community for a new teaching, showing their allegiance is to the world. As Keith observes, it doesn’t matter whether they were originally Jews or Gentiles, it is their attitude to Christ that is vital.

The passage in John that has understandably caused most concern comes in John 8 where Jesus is addressing some Jews in Jerusalem who reject him, and who pride themselves on being Abraham’s children. Jesus says: “If you

The clerical class built a stereotype of the Jew as “dirty, downtrodden, sinister but contemptible”.

were Abraham’s children you would do what Abraham did, but now you seek to kill me, a man who has told you the truth ... You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father’s desires. He was a

murderer from the beginning, and has nothing to do with the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks according to his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies” (John 8:44).

Reading that today, this side of centuries of persecution and the Holocaust, one can see why it is considered a difficult verse. But it is surely not Jesus’ intention here to condemn all Jews, as some have understood it, for it is clear that these Jews are not beyond hope – there is a way of escape from Satan’s bondage, the same that is open to all.

The language is strong, but no stronger than the Old Testament prophets. It should be seen as hyperbole, a rhetorical device common at the time. For example, in showing how committed his disciples have to be, Jesus says that unless they hate their father and mother, wife, children, even their own lives (Luke 14:25) they cannot follow him. Yet he loves and upholds the law, including the commandment to honour one’s parents, and repeatedly teaches that love is the great commandment. Overemphasis to make a point is common in the Bible and contemporary Semitic culture.

The event that changed Jewish-Christian relations was the conversion of the Roman emperor Constantine in the fourth century. Christianity became the state religion – a mixed blessing. And

from now on it would have power over the Jewish community.

For many centuries relations were relatively tranquil. Keith identifies the bureaucratic revolution at the end of the Middle Ages as the most important element in developing systematic anti-Semitism. The clerical class, envying the skill and influence of Jews at court, built a stereotype of the Jew as “dirty, downtrodden, sinister but contemptible”. Drawings showed Jews with long hooked noses, and the Fourth Lateran Council (1215) segregated them by ordering them to wear special clothing.


The crusades, though theoretically against Muslims rather than Jews, made the latter a legitimate target as “enemies of God”. Some on the first crusade in 1095 even delayed leaving for the Middle East so they could murder Jews in Europe.

Holocaust scholar Raul Hilberg says that since the fourth century “there have been three anti-Jewish policies: conversion, expulsion and annihilation. The second appeared as an alternative to the first, and the third as an alternative to the second ... The missionaries of Christianity had said in effect: You have no right to live among us as Jews. The secular rulers who followed had proclaimed: You have no right to live among us. The German Nazis at last decreed: You have no right to live.”

But after the Holocaust, the horrified world took a fresh look at anti-Semitism. The thawing between Christianity and Judaism was made explicit at the second Vatican Council in the 1960s, which formally repudiated the idea that the Jews were responsible for the death of Christ.

Protestants, though their hands are not nearly so blood-stained as the Catholic and Orthodox (and it could be argued that this is partly an accident of geography), cannot be complacent about their record. When it became evident to Luther that the Jews would not convert, his pen was dipped in vitriol. He advocated burning their synagogues, their Torahs, even their houses.

But the picture would not be balanced without the heroic and sacrificial love of many Christians through the centuries and especially in World War II: sheltering Jews from the mobs and the Nazis. Many helped work for Jewish religious freedom and political emancipation and, finally, a homeland.

This is an edited version of an article that first appeared in The Age, for whom Barney Zwartz is religious affairs writer. 

Seeing the glass darkly

The only time TV doesn't lie is when it's off.

The fact that the average adult in the Western world spends a total of about eight years of his life in front of the television set will probably elicit differing responses among readers. Frankly, the statistic is best treated as a measure of decadence and imbecility.

One of the few times the media ever told the truth was on *The Truman Show*. "Reality TV" is the original oxymoron – indeed, the most violent contradiction in terms. As for the Oscar awards, when Hollywood worships itself – well, the Baal cult in Elijah's day was probably more edifying.

Many will concede that the soaps are as addictive as nicotine and sin. And we have all had the pleasure of visiting a house where the occupants stifle conversation by leaving the television set on at such a volume that any kind of free-flowing conversation is impossible.

Television is not without its problems, most will say. They would probably also say that ancient gladiatorial games were not without their problems.

Against such a strong line, one might object: "What about the Olympic Games? They were marvellous, and they brought people together." I'm not in a



Peter Barnes

position to say much, as I missed most of the opening ceremony. I was busy making pertinent and incisive comments on proceedings – all for the benefit of the family

Current affairs programs are, for the most part, the operations of an electronic lynch mob.

members – when I found myself evicted from the TV room by the ungrateful mob. But what I did get to see looked rather like pantheism dished up with lashings of glitter and corn.

"OK, then, what about the serious shows, such as those

which deal with current affairs and the in-depth interviews?" It would be difficult to sustain the case that they are any better. Back in 1996 Michael Born was arrested in Germany for fabricating nearly half of the

29 documentaries he sold to television stations. For example, in reporting feline abuse, Born paid a colleague to obtain a cat and shoot it.

Current affairs programs are, for the most part, the operations of an electronic lynch mob. Professional wrestling promoters have more integrity. Bernard Goldberg, who worked for CBS for 28 years, refers to current affairs programs as "infotainment". *Today Tonight* and *A Current Affair* are not designed to inform but to compete in the ratings game.

It is not that there is a conspiracy of corruption. Rather, it is probable that many journalists convince themselves that they are telling the truth. Bernard Goldberg has given some recent examples from the United States. When the media launched their crusade against homelessness under Reagan's Republican administration, the numbers of homeless men and women grew from 300,000 to 19 million – in statistics, of course, not in reality.

The media also pushed the line that AIDS as a disease does not discriminate, although it is perfectly clear that it does. More Iraqis would vote against Saddam Hussein than American journalists dissent on matters like feminism, abortion, day-care centres, and homosexual rights.

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A fashionable way of thinking can become almost totalitarian.

The first Governor General of the BBC, Sir John Reith, had inscribed at the entrance to Broadcasting House: "This temple of the arts and muses is dedicated to Almighty God by the first governors of broadcasting in the year 1931, Sir John Reith being Governor General. It is their prayer that good deeds sown may bring forth a good harvest, that all things hostile to peace or purity may be banished from this house, that the people, inclining their ears to whatsoever things are beautiful, honest and of good report, may tread the paths of wisdom and righteousness." All very touching, but alas, it is in Latin. Otherwise, it might have qualified for *Yes Minister*.

The result has been an obvious collapse in standards, shown by the fact that something like *Temptation Island* can be shown and actually attract viewers. Howard Stern has become a celebrity – famous only for being famous.

Perhaps as revealing an indication as any other of the deadened sensibilities now prevalent is the disturbing incident which occurred on 11 June 2000 in New York Central Park. A number of men went on a rampage which resulted in a series of rapes and assaults on women. However, police were able to obtain 26 videotapes from amateur cameramen. In the end, there were more tapes than suspects. In the 18th century idle by-standers only watched the relatively harmless activities of bear-baiting and dwarf-tossing.

When I was involved in the brawl over the state government's outlawing of corporal discipline in all NSW schools – making them the safe places they are today – I was offered a bribe to break my word to appear on one current affairs program in order to appear on its rival programme. This was rather startling – the first time in my life that I have ever been offered a bribe.



If television told the truth, it would be almost as surprising a source as Balaam's ass.

Then we had the *Sun Herald* ring up, and ask if it could send a journalist up to Nambucca the next time the school caned a youngster. The intention was to film the event! Pride of place, however, goes to the journalist who asked me to appear live on *The Today Show*. When I said that I had promised to appear first on another show, he simply said: "But no one keeps his word in this business."

Corporal discipline is out, but beat ups are alive and well.


"I will set before my eyes no vile thing," wrote the Psalmist (Ps.101:3). Or, in John Henry Newman's words: "the world is sweet to the lips, but bitter to the taste. It pleases at first, but not at last. It

looks gay on the outside, but evil and misery lie concealed within." Remarkably, both the Psalmist and the Cardinal wrote before John Logie Baird ever blotted his copybook by inventing television.

Whether the message is subliminal or overt, the result is much the same. It is naïve to maintain that the media are neutral. "Wipe out the infamous thing!" cried Voltaire. But – typically – he took aim at the wrong target. Television aims at what is visually glamorous; the Bible at the daily renewal of the inward man (2 Cor. 4:16). Television revels in the sensational; God speaks in a still small voice (1 Kings 19:12). Television panders to what is instant; the Bible knows that it takes time for crops to grow (Mark 4:26-29). Television exalts egomaniacs; the Bible exalts the lowly (Luke 18:14).

Since Christ has no form or comeliness that we should desire Him (Isa.53:2), it is unlikely that he would have been rushed for media interviews, at least for television. It is not that it is impossible for television to tell the truth, but if it ever did so, it would be almost as surprising a source as Balaam's ass.

In response to all this, some observers want Christians to be sitting up night after night, watching *Survivor*, *South Park*, *Buffy*, *Big Brother*, *Friends*, *Cold Feet*, *Sex in the City*, and *The Footy Show*, and trying to work out a Christian response to it all. Spare me. Rip Van Winkle made better use of his time.

Peter Barnes is minister of Revesby Presbyterian Church, NSW. 

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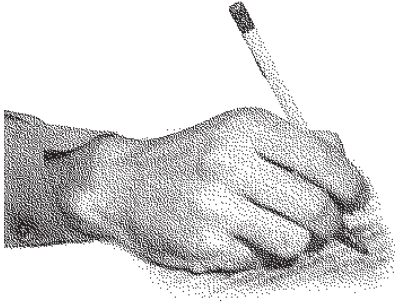
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letters



Persecution in Australia

I write to draw your attention to the persecution of Christians and Mandaeans (followers of John the Baptist) in the immigration detention centres in Australia.

Christian church services at the Curtin detention centre in the far north of Western Australia have been subject to frequent and arbitrary restriction and cancellation. At the Baxter detention centre near Port Augusta in South Australia, a Roman Catholic priest was recently not permitted to take into the centre altar wine for the celebration of mass and at the same time Protestant ministers were not permitted to take their Bibles into that centre.

The Australian Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs seeks to restrict and discourage Muslims who wish to convert to Christianity and has prohibited or delayed Christian baptisms. In more than two years the Department has not permitted any detained Mandaeans to undergo Mandaean Baptism, despite repeated requests.

Christians, Mandaeans and others are compelled to comply with various Islamic religious observances. Christians, Mandaeans and others must either eat Islamic halal meat or have a meatless diet. Mosques have been provided for Muslims without comparable provision being made

for Christians and others.

There are persistent reports from the detention centres of Muslims persecuting Christians, Mandaeans and Tamils with impunity. In almost all cases, Muslims who assault Christians, Mandaeans or Tamils are not prosecuted.

Most disturbingly of all, an alleged sexual assault by a Muslim male against a Mandaean female, reported immediately, has still not been investigated by police six months later, despite representations by the Sabian Mandaean Association, Amnesty International and others.

*John Lockor Clugston,
Springwood, NSW*

Well done, but no war

Warm congratulations on the November *AP*, its theme of "Islam And The Church", a very helpful and insightful overview.

May I make a few comments? On page 11, "A Sensitive Witness", the author's name is Bill Dennett (I have known him for some years). Re page 6, we should note there also has been significant spread of Islam by trade and migration, e.g. sub-Saharan Africa, and also predominantly by migration, e.g. in our own time to Western nations. On page 20, although the article does not ultimately take this position, I think the highlighting of a correspondence of Osama bin Laden to Timothy McVeigh is unfortunate. McVeigh was a loner, and his actions could in no way be derived from any reasonable interpretation of orthodox Christianity. Osama bin Laden is not a loner and his actions can be derived from (an interpretation of) orthodox Islam.

On page 11, under "No Fear" Peter Hastie appears to argue strongly for military action in Iraq. I believe this would be a greater evil than the present situation, if only for the reason that thousands and thousands of Christians – both national and missionary – in Muslim lands would be placed in even greater danger than they

are now, with many hundreds or more losing their lives.

*John Woods,
Winnmalee, NSW*

In good faith

Rev. Paul Seiler's letter (*AP*, December) requires a response, not least because it calls into question my adherence to my ordination vows and my acceptance of the teaching of the Westminster Confession of Faith on the Sabbath.

Mr Seiler has been very selective in his reading of the interview in the October *AP*. He correctly points out that I apply examples of legalism to "older members of our denomination", but does not mention the very next sentence which begins: "You can detect the same thing among younger people, too." Indeed the paragraph goes on to say about these good works: "Of course these are all good things and should not be discouraged. But when people ground their salvation in these sorts of works, they are drifting into legalism." Obviously there is a relationship between good works and being a Christian; but our good works are ever the fruit of salvation and never the means.

I cannot see any contradiction between what I have written and chapter 21 of the Westminster Confession of Faith. The Sabbath that is referred to in Colossians 2 is the Jewish observance of the seventh day of the week; what chapter 21 of the Confession refers to is the Christian Sabbath of the Lord's Day on the first day of the week, the day of the Resurrection. It is appropriate that the writers of the Confession viewed the Sabbath Christologically: the entire Old Testament Law needs to be seen through the lens of the ministry of the Lord Jesus. Anything less is to fall into the same error that was present among the Christians in first-century Colossae.

*Ian Smith
Burwood, NSW*

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SERVICING

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FEBRUARY 2003

- 21 Pray for Margaret Price APWM / WEC worker from Canberra serving in the Rainbows of Hope-Children in Crisis ministry.
- 22 Church Christian Education committees; conveners Ian Schoonwater (GAA), Warren Hicks (NSW), Reg Mathews (SA), Andrew Venn (Vic), Robert White (Tas), Keith Morris (WA).
- 23 Queensland Home Ministry and Christian Education department - John Nicol director, John Mansfield assistant.
- 24 Robert Paix from Croydon Hills, Melbourne, and Myles and Robyn Parker from Griffith NSW, APWM / Pioneers workers serving in Kyrgystan, Central Asia.
- 25 Stanthorpe home mission station, Queensland; about 53 communicants and adherents, 11 younger folk and 4 elders; Greg and Gay Fraser.
- 26 St Andrews Christian College, Burwood Vic - all pupils and staff; principal Bob Speck.
- 27 Presbytery of Bendigo Vic.; 5 parishes and 2 home mission stations totalling 9 congregations with 460 communicants and adherents; 1 retired minister; Andrew Clarke clerk.
- 28 Tahmoor home mission station south of Sydney; about 25 communicants and adherents, 15 younger folk and 5 elders; Peter Burge.

MARCH

- 1 Stefan and Sue Slucki as he takes up his appointment at Seaclyff parish, Adelaide; about 85 communicants and adherents, 12 younger folk and 5 elders.
- 2 Philip and Glenda Simmonds as he

- gives administrative assistance to the APWM director Bill Lutton and also ministers in the Engadine parish, southern Sydney.
- 3 Mudgee parish NSW including Hill End; about 100 communicants and adherents, 20 younger folk and 5 elders; Matthew and Fiona Oates.
- 4 Rudi and Heila Schwartz beginning ministry at historic St Andrews, Townsville parish (1884) North Queensland; about 305 communicants and adherents, 55 younger folk and 22 elders; with Walter and Christine Jones assisting.
- 5 Hervey Bay parish (Scarness and Torbay) Qld; about 95 communicants and adherents, 5 younger folk and 6 elders; John and Lorraine Roth.
- 6 Roz Gill APWM worker from Camberwell, Melbourne, teaching in Phnom Penh, Cambodia.
- 7 Ballarat South parish including Ebenezer and Scarsdale; about 105 communicants and adherents, 25 younger folk and 10 elders; David and Carol Stewart.
- 8 David Pearce APWM / MAF worker from Reservoir, Melbourne, serving in Kenya.
- 9 Fawkner Samoan parish, Melbourne; about 60 communicants and adherents, 60 younger folk and 13 elders; together with Pascoe Vale about 85 communicants and adherents, 45 younger folk and 12 elders; Simalu and Urima Cowley.
- 10 Warren parish western NSW; about 70 communicants and adherents, 25 younger folk and 3 elders; David Enderby.
- 11 Presbytery of Brisbane; 11 parishes

- totalling about 1085 communicants and adherents; 3 heads of christian agencies, 1 deaconess, 5 retired ministers, 2 under jurisdiction; Guido Kettmiss clerk.
- 12 God's restraint on violence in the Middle East, our service personnel there and chaplains ministering to them.
- 13 Gardenvale East parish Melbourne; the communicants and adherents and elders; Ted and Margaret Pearsons.
- 14 Armidale parish in the New England district of NSW including Wollomombi; about 215 communicants and adherents, 50 younger folk and 10 elders; seeking to fill the vacancy. Lyle Sims interim moderator.
- 15 Mackay parish north Queensland including Sarina and Gargett; about 165 communicants and adherents, 70 younger folk and 13 elders; Jim and Judith Brown, Rob and Elizabeth Farr.
- 16 The vacant Seaford home mission station, Melbourne; about 35 communicants and adherents and 5 younger folk.
- 17 Steve Lilley APWM / WBT worker from Hurstville, Sydney, serving in South Asia.
- 18 Coffs Harbour parish NSW including Woolgoolga; about 300 communicants and adherents, 65 younger folk and 8 elders; Peter and Ngaire Moore.
- 19 Presbytery of Central Coast NSW; 5 parishes and 1 home mission station totalling about 685 communicants and adherents; 2 missionaries, 6 retired ministers; Neville Wilce clerk.
- 20 Merrylands parish western Sydney; about 50 communicants and adherents, and 3 elders; vacant.

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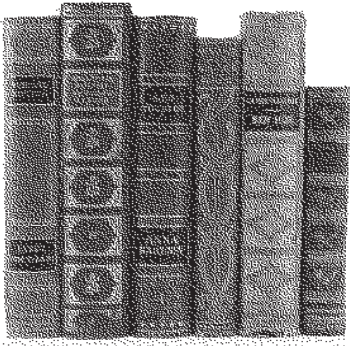
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books



The How and Why of Love

Michael Hill
Kingsford: Matthias Media, 2002.
Reviewed by Peter Barnes

Michael Hill's long-awaited treatment of evangelical ethics has now been published. As might be expected, Hill's premise is that "Biblical ethics starts with doing biblical theology". One might be tempted to comment that Hill seems to believe that it ends there too. Much of the book consists of an outline of biblical theology, drawing upon the work of Graeme Goldsworthy. This is good and necessary, but could have been done more concisely.

One of the book's weaknesses is that it exhibits a certain lack of sharpness. For example, Hill writes that the significance of Israel's law for ethics is "often over-emphasised. The Law of Moses does not provide a complete and binding guide to Christian morality. On the other hand it should not be dismissed as irrelevant". This is true enough, but if John the Baptist had preached it to Herod Antipas, he might have retained his head. Later, Hill tells us that "the moral life would be difficult, if not impossible, without rules".

Hill seems to linger where he ought to summarise, and is concise where he needs to explain. He asserts that the Bible does not divide the law into moral, cultic and civil elements – which surely needs a bit of defending. There are other places where Hill makes statements but does not discuss them in enough depth. To cite three examples, he favours the legal recognition of de facto relationships, he is unclear as to whether abortion is morally right in the case of rape, and asserts that the Sabbath is related to Israel's possessing of the land and so is no longer necessary.

For all that, this remains a useful work, which should be read by evangelical pastors and teachers.

Peter Barnes is minister of Revesby Presbyterian Church, Sydney, and AP's books editor.

The Suicidal Church

Caroline Miley
Annandale: Pluto Press, 2002.
Reviewed by Stuart Bonnington

There are not many books that I have read twice in one month, but *The Suicidal Church* is one. This is not because I agree with everything (or even most things) Miley has written, far from it, but this is an important book that – while people may not like reading it – should be widely read.

Miley is an Anglican but her comments are directed towards anyone who is thinking through what it means to be part of the Christian church in the 21st century. More often than we may want to admit the word "Anglican" could be easily dropped out of the text and "Presbyterian" inserted with little trouble.

I would certainly *not* endorse certain starting points, assumptions or suggested answers to problems confronting the Christian church put forward by Miley. There is a lot of the so-called 'theological' liberalism which actually has caused the problems worrying Miley. Nevertheless I would suggest that ministers especially should be familiar with this book and why they would or would not agree with any particular aspects of its contents.

Stuart Bonnington is minister of South Yarra Presbyterian Church, Melbourne.

Full Circle From Mission to Community – A Family Story

Edie Wright
Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 2001.
Reviewed by Stuart Bonnington

This book is interesting at two levels. First, it contains a wonderful human story 'Full Circle is the remarkable and moving story of three generations of Edie Wright's family. In the early 1900s, aged four, Alfred Brown was taken from his mother in northern Queensland and placed in Mapoon (Presbyterian) Mission.

Eventually, as a young married man employed by the mission he was sent to the far north-west Kimberley. Following the death of his wife, Ina, Alf showed resourcefulness and steely determination in keeping his family together despite great difficulties and unsympathetic government policies.'

Full Circle also contains invaluable insights into the life, ministry and influence of one of the most important but largely forgotten Presbyterians of the 20th century, the Rev. James Robert Beattie Love (1889-1946). Mr Love came from one of the most distinguished Presbyterian families South Australia ever produced and his work among the people at Mapoon and of the West Kimberley (and subsequently the Ernabella Mission in South Australia) – while not perfect in every detail or in every expression used – presents a dramatic challenge to the seeming unrelenting avalanche of criticism the Christian churches face today concerning past policies with regards to the Aboriginal people of our land.

Reverend Love made an enormous impact on Alfred and Ina's life. He guided and supported them first as a young married couple, then as young parents. He shared with them his understanding of people and relationships, finance, the law, religion and much more. It was a relationship based on mutual trust and respect at a time when Aboriginal people were usually treated as servants, without civil rights. Reverend Love was their mentor, friend and confidant.

A Call to Prayer

J.C. Ryle
Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, reprinted 2002.
Reviewed by Peter Barnes

There are few writers who press home the Christian message with greater warmth, vigour and clarity than J. C. Ryle. Ryle's thesis in this little booklet is that a Christian must pray or else admit that his profession is false.

It would be a stony heart indeed that could read Ryle and remain unmoved. He writes as if he had each reader's spiritual welfare in the forefront of his mind, as if it were his greatest delight that each reader would read, understand, apply and obey. This is not cold doctrine at all. He wants us to pray for one another, and says that "he loves me best who loves me in his prayers". If you are feeling sluggish in prayer, read Ryle and get started again.

Forgiveably confused

What sort of forgiveness is possible without repentance?

The parable of the unforgiving servant tells us that we owe God a debt we cannot repay, whereas, by comparison, others owe us quite trifling debts (Matt.18:21-35). One often receives the impression that the parable is telling us to forgive all those who sin against us. That is very close to its message, but a closer look at this subject of forgiveness might help us to understand it better.

Let's compare two events. The first one concerns Pope John Paul II. In 1981 a Turkish national tried to assassinate the pontiff but failed. When John Paul II began to recover from his wounds, he expressed his forgiveness of his assailant – who was a Muslim and who had had not asked for forgiveness.

The record of the second event is found near the end of Corrie ten Boom's *The Hiding Place*. At a church service in Munich, Corrie met a former SS man who had stood guard at the shower room door in the processing centre at Ravensbruck concentration camp. Corrie had lost both her father and her sister through their ill-treatment by the Nazis. Corrie hesitated to shake this man's hand even though he was now a professing Christian.

Here are Corrie's words: "Even as the angry, vengeful thoughts boiled through me, I saw the sin of them. Jesus Christ had died for this man; was I going to ask for more? Lord Jesus, I prayed, forgive me and help me to forgive him.

"I tried to smile, I struggled to raise my hand. I could not. I felt nothing, not the



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slightest spark of warmth or charity. And so again I breathed a silent prayer. Jesus, I cannot forgive him. Give me Your forgiveness.

"As I took his hand the most incredible thing happened. From my shoulder along my arm and through my hand a current seemed to pass from me to him, while

The pope, on the other hand, showed more charity than clarity.



into my heart sprang a love for this stranger that almost overwhelmed me."

Corrie ten Boom forgave a man who had done some dreadful things to her and her family, but who had become a Christian. Pope John Paul II forgave a man who had tried to kill him, but who had not become a Christian. On the surface, it looks as though both Corrie ten Boom and John Paul II were following Jesus' teaching in Matthew 18.

However, the biblical teaching on forgiveness is a little more complicated than that. First, the Bible teaches that where there is no repentance, there is no forgiveness. Twice, Christ tells us that unless we repent we will all likewise perish (Luke 13:3, 5). This is reflected in the issue of church discipline. If the erring Church member "hears" his sin, and repents, that is the end of the matter, but if he refuses to do so, he is to be treated as an outsider – a heathen and a tax collector (Matt.18:15-17).

God does not forgive the sinner who does not repent, nor does He command the Church to do so.

Secondly, it is nevertheless true that we must never nurse a grudge, and must always seek to love even our enemies, and to do good to them (Mt. 5:44; Rom. 12:18-21). God declares himself to be "ready to pardon" those who have rebelled against him (Neh. 9:17).

As Christians, we are obliged to reflect the mind of God. Jesus says: "Take heed to yourselves. If your brother sins against you, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him" (Luke 17:3). This must not be used as an excuse to say: "That person hurt me six months ago, and I do not have to forgive him until he repents." Formally, that is true, but it evades the biblical command to love our enemies, to seek their welfare, and to be ready to forgive.

What it means is this: Corrie ten Boom followed the biblical command to forgive the man who professed repentance and faith in Christ. The pope, on the other hand, showed more charity than clarity. Forgiveness is not to be equated with overlooking a transgression.

While his response was considerably better than the man who might have responded with bitterness and vindictiveness, it remains somewhat confusing. In effect, and no doubt unwittingly, the pope was claiming to be more forgiving than God Himself. It would have been more biblical, and more helpful to his assailant, for the pope to have shown kindness to his enemy and pointed him to the only way of salvation – through repentance and faith in Christ. In summary, the Christian is to forgive all who repent, and to be forgiving to all who do not.

Peter Barnes is minister of Revesby Presbyterian Church, NSW.

Extra! Extra!

The APWM (NSW) Committee considered the November AP on Islam and the Church compulsory reading for every member of the church in Australia, and had an extra 3000 copies printed. You can buy copies to pass around from their NSW office at 269 Forest Road, Bexley, NSW, 2207.

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