

## Today's Quick Word Titus 1:9

*By Bruce Christian*

**TITUS 1:9** *[An elder] must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it.*

The Presbyterian Church of Australia (to which I belong) requires its ministers and elders to answer in the affirmative a number of questions, including, “Do you engage firmly and constantly to adhere to [the stated doctrinal basis of the Presbyterian Church, focussed on the Bible and the Westminster Confession of Faith (WCF)], and to the utmost of your power to assert, maintain and defend the same?”

This has obviously been drawn from Paul’s instruction to Titus that those given the responsibility of spiritual leadership of God’s people must not only ‘hold firmly to’ (‘adhere to’/‘assert’) the truths of the Gospel, but must ‘encourage others’ in it (‘maintain’) and ‘refute those who oppose’ (‘defend’) this sound doctrine.

Some years ago, a number of my colleagues and I brought a heresy charge against a fellow minister for making a very public statement that, instead of trying to ‘explain away’ a statement by the Apostle Paul (in 1 Timothy 2:12) that doesn’t fit comfortably with our contemporary culture, we would be better to just admit that “Paul got it wrong”!

To hold such a view is quite contrary to Chapter 1 of the WCF which lists ‘1 Timothy’ as part of “The Holy Scripture”, and which states, inter alia, that “The authority of the Holy Scripture, for which it ought to be believed, and obeyed, depends not upon the testimony of any man, or Church; but wholly upon God (who is truth itself) the author thereof: and therefore it is to be received, because it is the Word of God.” Chapter 1 of the WCF also uses phrases like “INFALLIBLE TRUTH” and “DIVINE AUTHORITY” to describe Holy Scripture.

When I was admonished by a friend for bringing potential harm to the Presbyterian Church by initiating this heresy charge, I responded by saying that, in the light of my ordination vow to ‘defend’ the doctrine of the Church, there was more potential for ‘harm’ if I FAILED to act. I suggested that my promise to ‘assert and maintain’ the doctrine of the Church was of little value if I didn’t, at the same time, DEFEND it by ‘refuting those who oppose it’.

Today, the infallibility and authority of Scripture is under constant attack, not only from outside the Church but from inside it, and we would all do well to brace ourselves to take every opportunity, not only to “hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught”, but to “encourage others by sound doctrine and REFUTE THOSE WHO OPPOSE IT”.

## Today's Quick Word Hosea 9:11

*By Bruce Christian*

**HOSEA 9:11** *Ephraim's glory will fly away like a bird - no birth, no pregnancy, no conception.*

This is very sad and disturbing verse. In this chapter, the Prophet Hosea is warning the people of the Northern Kingdom of Israel of the LORD's imminent Judgement upon them because of their apostasy - their allowing their culture to be absorbed into, and dominated by, the wicked, godless culture of the people among whom they live.

Their 'glory' was their relationship with the Living God, the LORD, the Creator, Sustainer, and Sovereign over all things, including and especially the course of their own destiny. It was their 'glory' because they had been called into a Covenant relationship with the LORD God, a relationship that was enjoyed by no other nation. Because of their compromise and apostasy, this 'glory', and all that it represented, was about to 'fly away like a bird'.

But the saddest thing is the Prophet's pointing out the origin, or source, of this problem. Our relationship with the Living God has three stages - conception, pregnancy and birth. At our point in the outworking of God's Plan of Salvation in Human History, we can see clearly that the foundation of this Plan is what Jesus has

achieved for us by his sacrificial death and glorious resurrection. The application of this Plan to each individual life is through its 'conception' in the heart and mind by the powerful initiative of the Holy Spirit; the progress of the 'pregnancy' comes about as the individual responds in faith, and trusts wholly in Jesus' shed blood; and the 'birth' is the assurance the believer has that he/she is fully and permanently part of God's family - he/she is 'born again'.

The sad thing for the recipients of Hosea's prophecy was that they had become so out of touch with the LORD's ways that they were spiritually 'barren' - with no possibility of conception-pregnancy-birth; their 'glory' had 'flown away like a bird'.

The Good News is that, in the later chapters (11-14), Hosea will remind them of the LORD's abundant grace and mercy, of his unquenchable forgiving love for, and commitment to, his people in spite of their sin and obstinacy, showing them that there IS a way back through repentance-and-faith. Are we praying earnestly and constantly that our gracious Lord will powerfully move among his people today, his Church, and will 'forgive our sin and heal our land' (2 Chronicles 7:14) - that we might see an increase in 'conceptions', 'pregnancies' and 'births' in the hearts and lives of people around us?

## Today's Quick Word Psalm 130:1-2

*By Bruce Christian*

**PSALM 130:1-2** *Out of the depths I cry to you, O LORD; O Lord, hear my voice. Let your ears be attentive to my cry for mercy.*

Over the years I have noticed a very significant pattern in my prayer life: the more difficult my circumstances and the more desperate my need, the more earnest and intense are my prayers, and the less likely am I to be distracted from them by other interests! As I reflect on this I find myself wondering about how I would feel if the only conversations I had with my own family were the times when they needed my help rather than their just wanting to talk to me in a meaningful way (which they do do, by the way) because they love me.

So when I read the opening verses of this Psalm, I am aware of two emotional responses.

Firstly, I am glad that my loving Heavenly Father has seen fit to include in his revealed truth to me, this desperate cry for help from the Psalmist; and if it was King David, it is good to know I am of the same spiritual DNA as a godly man who sometimes (often?) found himself in 'the depths'. The Hebrew word is used five times in the OT, and in the other four it is referring to 'deep waters' or the 'sea'. I can't help thinking of Jonah's prayer when he was 'utterly lost' in the stomach of a large fish in the Mediterranean Sea (although Jonah used different words, and

likened it to being in 'Sheol', the place of the departed): "You hurled me into the deep, into the very heart of the seas, and the currents swirled about me; all your waves and breakers swept over me. I said, 'I have been banished from your sight; yet I will look again towards your holy temple.' The engulfing waters threatened me, the deep surrounded me; seaweed was wrapped around my head. To the roots of the mountains I sank down; the earth beneath barred me in for ever. But you brought my life up from the pit, O LORD my God." (Jonah 2:3-6).

My second emotional response is to try harder to make time to spend talking to God just because I love him and not only when I need him (although both of these things are very true). I would like to reciprocate what the Prophet Zephaniah tells me: "The LORD your God is with you, he is mighty to save. He will take great delight in you, he will quiet you with his love, he will rejoice over you with singing." (Zephaniah 3:17). I want to 'delight in him', and I long for the day when I can once more, with my brothers and sisters in Christ, 'rejoice over him with singing'.

But in spite of my weak efforts at this aspect of prayer, I am so glad that I can know that God's 'ears are attentive to my cry' in these overwhelmingly stressful days!