

Magazine of the
Reformed Churches
of New Zealand

faith in **focus**

Volume 41/2 March 2014

“ Increasingly, Kiwi women are considering if marriage is right for them when there are other options

Teens' real worlds distorted by net

Church to allow same-sex blessings?

THE PRESS, Christchurch

Sexual predator jailed for 26 mths

Vast child-pickpocket network busted

New Peugeot 508 SW.
Amazing how far we'll go for a bit of glory.

**LIAR, LIAR,
PANTS ON FIRE**

Lisa Scott offers tips for those times when a well-told white lie is a social necessity

Man found guilty of assaults, threats

David Clarkson

LIVE FOR THE MOMENT

Generation ME ME

ME

LIE LIKE A PRO
“The key to convincing someone you’re telling the truth is to keep a balance of fact and fiction,” says Mike*, a used-car salesman.

Fear, Flight or Fury?
How should a Christian respond to a Romans 1 world?

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All correspondence regarding editorial content and advertising should be sent to:

The Editor:
Walter Walraven
7 Winchester Avenue, Pinehaven
Upper Hutt 5019
Email: fnf@rcnz.org.nz
Reformed Churches Home Page
<http://www.rcnz.org.nz>

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Mrs Nicola Wharekawa
79 McLeod Street
Upper Hutt
Email: ricwhare@paradise.net.nz

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Editorial

If I were to ask you if we are living in a hostile world, how would you answer? I can imagine quite a few different responses to that question. I would guess that when you hear the words "hostile world", then maybe one of your reactions to that would be fear.

Regardless of how you may assess things globally, if and when you find yourself in hostile situations, you may respond with fear and want to run, or respond with anger. However, for the serious minded Christian, there is a better way to respond to hostility.

You only need to read your Bible and church history to understand that those who have been before us have endured hostility to the point of death. So, it would seem that any hostilities we might find ourselves in are not quite that bad. David, before he was to be king, was hunted for many years. In his complaint he wrote: "Oh, that I had wings like a dove! I would fly away and be at rest. (Ps 55:6) He certainly displayed a tendency to want to just disappear, but he didn't. Even after saying the words above he steadfastly put his trust in the Lord: "Cast your burden upon the LORD and He will sustain you; He will never allow the righteous to be shaken." (Ps 55:22) and in conclusion he writes: ".... But I will trust in You". (Ps 55:23)

Have a read of Hebrews 11, an account of all the saints who suffered many atrocities, but who endured, and of whom the Scripture says that the world was not worthy of them (Heb 11:38).

Thank you to our contributors who have given us articles that require some serious thought about how we should respond when, as Christians, we face an ever-increasingly hostile world.

Mr Daniel Wilson investigates our fears.

Mr Peter Moelker tells a better way to respond.

Mr Russell Moore (A widely-sought cultural commentator) blogs about the churches' witness to the world in the face of same-sex marriage.

Mrs Sally Davey writes about sharing the gospel in rural New Zealand.

Mrs Veronica Hoyt writes on Colossians and restored relationships.

World in focus provides some news from home and abroad.

Mr Peter Glover, who is a writer, journalist and author, looks at "the seeker" after God.

Mr Peter Kloosterman considers missions and their fruit.

"Christianity asserts that every individual human being is going to live forever, and this must be true or false. Now there are a good many things which would not be worth bothering about if I were going to live only seventy years, but which I had better bother about very seriously if I am going to live for ever."

C S Lewis

The opinions expressed in this magazine are not to be considered the official position of the Reformed Churches of NZ unless they expound the Biblical system of doctrine contained in the Heidelberg Catechism, the Belgic Confession, the Canons of Dordt, or the Westminster Confession of Faith, or reflect the successive Acts of Synod of the Reformed Churches of NZ. On the other hand, care is taken to ensure that articles and opinions do not directly contradict the official position of the Reformed Churches as contained in the above sources without attention being called to that fact.

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Fear, flight or fury? (1)

How should a Christian respond to a Romans 1 world?



Daniel Wilson

Our world seems to be getting worse by the day! In the last year alone, approximately 46 million babies were murdered in the womb worldwide for convenience; and in the last 25 years approximately 1 billion have been slaughtered in the womb. Western governments have grown increasingly hostile toward Christian ideals and morality; and all the while, they continue to preach tolerance of all other religions. In New Zealand, loving biblical corporal punishment has been outlawed (or at least some interpret the law that way). The definition of marriage as given by God Himself at the Creation of the world has been cast away. Sodomy is now enshrined as a right of law, and as such is not supposed to be spoken against. These developments prompt us to ask terrible questions leading to anxious fears which spiral worse and worse into depression!

Read the following questions by slowly getting louder and louder and more intense as you work your way to a frantic pitch. Go on ... at least do it in your mind.

What happens if the police ask our children about the anti-smacking law? What happens if a homosexual couple accuses our church of homophobia? What happens if our rights of worship and freedom of speech are even more restricted in the name of tolerance? What happens if the government continues to get more and more liberal and all remains of Christianity are removed from our culture?! What happens if our culture continues to disintegrate into liberalism and even persecution? What if there are already plans and conspiracies at work to bring this about?! If the very foundations of society are destroyed

WHAT CAN THE RIGHTEOUS DO?!????

These questions have bothered some of you reading this very article, and they are very similar to the questions that have bothered God's people for thousands of years. Open your Bible to Psalm 11 and you see the exact same sentiments: but there you also find the Christian's answer to such fears. The Psalms are rich in cries to the Lord for help, but we all too often relegate those cries to a bygone era – as if we can't experience the same comforts as the people of Israel. However, according to Ephesians 2:11-22, they are our brothers and sisters in the faith. They looked forward to the Messiah, and we look back. Therefore, the answers given by David are still relevant for us today.

In Psalm 11, David begins by asserting that He takes refuge in the Lord. There-

fore, how can people tell him to flee like a bird to his mountain? He continues on by telling us the advice that he is receiving from some friend or friends. They are concerned because the wicked are bending the bow (or in modern language, the wicked are cocking the gun). The wicked are creeping in the shadows, ready to destroy the upright and righteous And the unknown advisers cry out in vs. 3, "When the foundations are being destroyed, what can the righteous do?!" Their reasoning is all too common: They believe that the wicked have the upper hand, and they almost break into that old country song about a gambler: "You got to know when to hold them, know when to fold 'em, know when to walk away, and know when to run." According to these well-meaning advisors of David, when the foundations are de-



“You must keep the pain of this life in perspective. Keep the eternal perspective.”

stroyed, it is the time to run!

But David's first words call all that into question. *In the Lord I take refuge. How then can you say [this] to me?* David gives his answer in verse 4: *The LORD is in His holy temple; the LORD is on His Heavenly throne!* Now, you might say, “David didn't answer the question ...” Yes, he did. It is as if David is saying, “What do you mean the foundations are being destroyed? Don't you know that GOD is still ruling? What foundations are being destroyed? The foundation for life and society and of the whole universe is the might and power of the Creator God – the LORD.” Regardless of what is happening in this life or on this earth – God is STILL reigning on high! Heaven is not affected by the turmoil of this life The New Zealand government can erase morality and godliness from its laws and educational system, but they can't unseat God from His throne! God is observing the sons of men with His all-seeing eye. The Lord examines the righteous and the wicked, and He HATES those who do violence. On the wicked, the LORD will rain fiery coals and burning sulphur; a scorching wind will be their lot. In other words, God will defend and vindicate His people. Therefore, of what are you afraid? Seriously, do not fear what man fears. If God is for us, who can be against us? The answer is: No one! For all the nations are but a drop in the bucket. At their best, the evil forces of this world can never separate us from the eternal love of God in Christ. In those words, many of you will notice the familiar phrases of Isaiah 40, 1 Peter 3, and Romans 8 You can look those passages up to confirm exactly what David says in Psalm 11. If God is reigning on high, then we don't need to be afraid of things going wrong in this world.

This is where all you “realists” will

begin to roll your eyes and shrug your shoulders and shake your heads ... “Here we go again ... Another pastor trying to tell people that they don't need to be anxious about all this bad stuff in the world – Yeah, right. Easier said than done!”

If that is your reaction, then I wouldn't call you a “realist” at all – rather you are the type of people who were trying to convince King David that he should be afraid and run away. You are afraid of all these developments in our world. You may even think that if you aren't worried about them, then they will get worse. Nothing could be further from the truth. If you are a believer in Jesus Christ, trusting that He lived, died, and rose again as your substitute – then you are eternally secure in Him. Therefore, you MUST trust that *in Christ* you have nothing to fear. Our normal reaction to such words (myself included) is to say, “Well, sure our souls are secure, but what about our lives and our bodies?!?” But such questions and such fears for our physical well-being miss the glory of our salvation. If God has sorted eternity for you – do you REALLY think that He hasn't also sorted every detail of this life? Think about that If God has saved you and provided you infinite bliss and blessing in His presence for countless millions of years to come, do you really think He hasn't sorted the measly few years you have here in this life?. Of course He has! He has promised us that ALL things will work together for our salvation. He gave us the example of the life of Joseph to make sure we understood that what others intend for evil – God can and does intend for our good!

The key to confidence in the Christian life is applying that fact to the trials of life. When the waves of life are overwhelming and the wicked are crouching in ambush ready to strike down the righteous, we have to remember that God is seated on His throne. These attacks and these political intrigues and problems are ALL a part of God's perfect plan to love us and do what is right and good for us. Does that mean that we will always be free from pain? Not at all! For God says that WHEN we pass through the deep waters, rivers, and fire, He will be with us, and we will not be destroyed. Trials are a part of life. The call of Christian discipleship is to take up our cross and follow Christ. The cross was the method of public execution. The call to the Christian life is one of taking up our method of execution so

that we might die to this world/self and to follow Christ instead. Therefore, there WILL be pain, but the promise of God is that at the end of time, we will agree with Him that all such pain was infinitely worth it and good for us! Again some of you will want to reply, “But can pain really be good for us?” Yes, absolutely it can! We all know the phrase, “No pain, no gain.” Physical fitness doesn't come without some pain, but the rewards of good health and strength are worth it. There are many medical procedures that cause pain, but the result of improved health is definitely worth it. The joy of a new baby boy/girl makes the pain of labour worth it. David ends Psalm 11 on a beautiful high note – *The Lord is righteous and He loves justice; upright men WILL see His Face!* You'll remember that Moses longed to see God, but God showed Him only the back of His glory – for no man could see God's face and live (Exodus 33:18-23). So, David ends with a contrast: The wicked who oppress God's people will be judged with God's wrath, sulphur, and fire, but those who are righteous in His sight will see His face. At the end of time, when we see God and the new heavens and the new earth, we will say, “Yes, this was ALL worth it!”

So, practically – How do you have this confidence of David? Well, **first** of all, recognize that you won't always have this confidence to the same degree. You will have times when it is easier to trust God and be content and confident ... and there will be times when you find that very hard. It is normal to wax and wane a bit, but guard yourself against extremes by remembering your human proclivity to waver. **Secondly**, when the waves of trial and tribulation rise high in your life, REMEMBER, REMEMBER, REMEMBER! Remember that while it might seem that the foundations of society are being destroyed – they aren't! They just aren't, because God is the foundation of every breath you take and every step of every man, woman, and beast. No matter what is going on in our world, God is STILL reigning on high! God is still in control. God is still keeping His promises by working all things together for our good – even the actions of the vile and wicked. Therefore, **thirdly**, you must keep the pain of this life in perspective. Keep the eternal perspective In these few decades you have on earth, God is at work in you to transform you into the image of His Son, Jesus Christ. Trust Him to do that work in a perfect

way (as He promised), and look forward to the day when the wicked will receive justice and the righteous the promised reward – seeing God face to face! Oh, what a joy that will be! It will all be worth it. **Finally**, when thoughts and feelings of fear and anxiety come to mind, make the conscious decision to put them

off, and to put on the Lord Jesus Christ instead (Ephesians 4:20-24). Consciously decide to put such thoughts out of your mind, and instead focus on the blessings and the good gifts God has given you (See Philippians 4:4-9). And as you do this, you will know the presence of the God of peace, and you will be set free

from the fear of this world. Do you still doubt this is true? Try it. Study the passages I have mentioned, and put these directions of your Lord into practice. You will see that God's Word is true!

Mr Daniel Wilson is the minister in the Reformed Church of Nelson.

Fear, flight or fury? (2)

How should a Christian respond to a Romans 1 world?

I'll fly away

Peter Moelker

Don't tell anybody, but I am a fan of Southern Gospel and Bluegrass music. Having spent some time in the Southern United States while attending seminary, there were certain tunes and lyrics that were so catchy you could not stop singing them. Even when a song seemed to promote a questionable theology, it was all I could do to force myself to stop humming the tune around the house. One such song goes by the title of "I'll Fly Away" and has been recorded by such a broad spectrum of singers as Charley Pride, Andy Griffith, Randy Travis, Johnny Cash, Alan Jackson and Jars of Clay. Of the many variations of the song which exist, one of the versions contains these lines: "When the shadows of this life have gone, I'll fly away. Like a bird from these prison walls I'll fly, I'll fly away. Oh how glad and happy when we meet, I'll fly away. No more cold iron shackles on my feet, I'll fly away."¹ Great tune. Bad theology. Is this what David had in mind when he wrote "the length of our days is seventy years – or eighty, if we have the strength; yet their span is but trouble and sorrow, for they quickly pass, and we fly away"(Psalm 90:10)? Was David giving expression to a desire to escape from the "prison walls" of this world and to be set free from the "iron shackles" of life upon the earth as we know it?

David also makes mention of "flying away" from it all in Psalm 55. When pressed about by enemies and the

wickedness of men which surrounded him and were causing him to suffer, David cries out "Oh, that I had the wings of a dove! I would fly away and be at rest – I would flee far away and stay in the desert"(Ps.55:6). Whether this passage influenced such men as Anthony the Great who, along with

other *Desert Fathers*, moved in the third century to the Egyptian desert to seek a deeper spiritual life in complete isolation from others, is an interesting question. What is clear is that by the 6th century, Benedict of Nursia, considered the father of Western Monasticism, could write a *Rule* for the monks under his care



which included the following description of the anchorite (or "hermit") monks which Benedict considered the best of all kinds of monks: "that is, of those who, no longer in the first fervor of their conversion, but taught by long monastic practice and the help of many brethren, have already learned to fight against the devil; and going forth from the rank of their brethren well trained for single combat in the desert, they are able, with the help of God, to cope single-handed without the help of others, against the vices of the flesh and evil thoughts."² In this understanding, the goal of Christian discipleship is to achieve a spiritual life which consists in complete removal and flight from the world to do battle with sin and Satan in isolation from all others (and the church for that matter).

Rousas Rushdoony, the American theologian and philosopher who died in 2001, in his little book *The Flight from Humanity*, points out that the "lives of the saints" are sometimes painful reading. He relates the fact that "it was considered a virtue in Isodore the elder, guestmaster of the church of Alexandria, that, 'up to the very end of his life he wore no fine linen except for a headband. He neither bathed nor ate meat.'³ In another instance, Melania, who had a reputation for holiness, rebuked Jovinus who had washed his feet and hands with cold water after a hot journey. The sub-

stance of her rebuke was an appeal to her example as being separated from the things of this world. "Look, I am sixty years old and neither my feet nor my face nor any of my members, except for the tips of my fingers, has touched water I have not made concessions to my bodily desires, nor have I used a couch for resting."⁴ Rushdoony humorously comments, "we learn nothing about Biblical holiness from Melania, although we do begin to realise what 'the odor of sanctity' could have meant."⁵ But do we still face this temptation to fly away to the desert today? Do church members long to fly away from their work place or fly away from struggles within the church? Does the church long to fly away from the wickedness of the world?

John Stott, the British evangelical theologian who died in 2011, sounded a warning to the churches in 1985 when he wrote: "Too many of us evangelicals either have been, or maybe still are, irresponsible escapist. Fellowship with each other in the church is more congenial than service in an apathetic and even hostile environment outside. Of course we make occasional evangelistic raids into enemy territory (that is our evangelical speciality); but then we withdraw again, across the moat, into our Christian castle (the security of our own evangelical fellowship), pull up the drawbridge, and even close our ears to the pleas of those who batter on the gate. As for social activity, we have tended to say that it is largely a waste of time in view of the imminent return of the Lord. After all, when the house is on fire, what is the point of hanging new curtains or rearranging the furniture? The only thing that we really should engage in is to rescue the perishing. Thus we have tried to salve our conscience with a bogus theology."⁶

Stott goes on to quote some comments from a student attending a Christian seminar on the topic of the future. "Do you realise," a student asked the speaker, "if we start feeding hungry people, things won't get worse, and if things don't get worse, Jesus won't come?" The logical conclusion to such an argument seems to be that Christians, who of course are looking forward to the return of Christ, should do all that they can to hasten his coming, namely, ensure things don't get better! Just imagine the possible slogans for your next outreach event which such thinking would inspire: "We are the Reformed Church of Anytown, we care for our community and

that's why we want to help you become more impoverished." "Are you concerned about political corruption, the promotion of sexual promiscuity, the breakdown of the family, and the re-definition of marriage? So are we. Please join us next Sunday for a special celebration service as we recognise things are getting worse." Or perhaps your next youth event or an upcoming Youth Camp would draw greater numbers with a slogan such as "are you looking for purpose in life? Would you like to know God's calling for you? Do you want your life to have meaning? Then join us for our next youth event as we continue work on our underground bunker hidden 1 km under the church building."

Where the early church had its desert fathers, the contemporary church has its desert children. But what does the Scripture say? Perhaps the following three contrasts would be helpful to our thinking and to our evaluating of our own temptation to, at times, "fly away."

Not fear, but FOR

In his well-known work, *Christ and Culture*, H. Richard Niebuhr makes this helpful observation regarding the theological difficulty faced by those who posit a fundamental antagonism between the church and the culture, which would drive Christians far away from interaction with their culture. He says: "the knottiest theological problem raised by the Christ-against-culture movement is the problem of the relation of Jesus Christ to the Creator of nature and Governor of history as well as to the Spirit immanent in creation and in the Christian community."⁷ This is simply to recognise that we are not Deists. We do not simply believe that the world has been brought into existence by a Divine Being and then has been left to its own devices (either to evolve upward into greatness or to devolve downwards into oblivion). We believe in the Triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, who is intimately involved with the creation – in the beginning, throughout history, and at the consummation of all things. We do not believe in fate or an abstract principle of devolution working in the world. In fact, we believe in the God who entered history and who told us categorically that "God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through Him."⁸ "The creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God."⁹ Most importantly, the Lord Jesus Christ did not

“The temptation to fly away from it all is never far from each one us. Sometimes we fly away physically and move to another suburb, city, or country.”

seek to get as far away as possible from this corrupt world, but ate with sinners, spoke with tax collectors, drew near by "making himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant,"¹⁰ and taught us to pray that His Kingdom would come and that His will would be done on earth as it is in heaven. The Scripture tells us that the demonstration of God's love, a love which we are called to emulate, is found just here that "while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."¹¹ We can be thankful that the response of the Son of God to a world marred by sin was not to seek a spot in creation as far away as possible from you or me – wicked though we were, but that He drew near and was for us.

Not flight, but FIGHT

The temptation to fly away from it all is never far from each one us. Sometimes we fly away physically and move to another suburb, city, or country. We may physically remove ourselves from a difficult relationship at work, in our extended family, or in the church. At other times, we fly away mentally and escape into a dream world that we prefer to the real world around us. We may fly away to TV Land, Virtual Reality Gaming, or Online farming or social networks and relationships that serve as pleasant substitutes for the wicked world of reality. And again at other times, we may fly away spiritually. We may seek to withdraw spiritually from all that surrounds us and seek greater communion and awareness and experience of God within by immersing ourselves in thousands of books to read, web pages to surf, sermons and podcasts to download, all the while perhaps tuning out our family, the church, and the world around us. We may not physically move to the Egyptian desert or live out our lives on the top of a pillar 15 meters from the ground,¹² but we have nevertheless flown away. We have perhaps unconsciously or consciously adopted a dualistic view of life – the understanding that there is a fundamental distinction to be made between the spiritual and the material, the religious and the secular, the mind and the body. One realm is good and for God, the other is evil and for the devil. And for a good period of early church history, it was this emphasis on the negative, inherently sinful aspect of the body, matter, the created world, etc. that led some professing Christians (like Melania above) to equate, oddly enough, a lack of cleanliness with godliness. Niebuhr

comments on the temptation towards dualism this way: "the dualistic answer has also been accepted in theory and practice by exponents of culture. Political defenders of the separation of church and state, economists who contend for the autonomy of the economic life, philosophers who reject the combinations of reason and faith Dualism may be the refuge of worldly-minded persons who wish to make a slight obeisance in the direction of Christ, or of pious spiritualists who feel that they owe some reverence to culture Radical Christianity has produced its wild monks, its immoral cloisters, and its moral exhibitionists."¹³ But the Bible calls us to fight, not to flight. We are to "fight the good fight of the faith."¹⁴ And if Jesus did not pray that we should be removed from the world,¹⁵ but rather should be protected from the enemy within the world, who are we to pray against Jesus? After all, no matter what city, country, family, school, workplace, relationship, or life situation you are in, the answer is to engage the enemy where you are with the weapons and armour God has provided: "For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms."¹⁶ And those spiritual forces are the same whether in New Zealand or Canada, on a pillar or in the kitchen, driving the tractor or pushing the pencil, mixing chemicals or preparing a sermon. In all things, our response must be fight, not flight.

Not flee, but FREE

Have you ever wondered what makes a good minister? Paul told Timothy that if he pointed out certain things to the brothers, such a title would be his. What things, you ask? "For everything God created is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, because it is consecrated by the word of God and prayer."¹⁷ Some false teachers were forbidding the people to marry and calling them to abstain from certain foods – even though God created these things to be received with thanksgiving as good gifts from Him. No, says the apostle, everything God created is good and should not be rejected. We are free to use the good gifts of God's creation with thanksgiving, understanding its purpose through the revealed Word of God, and in prayer for its appropriate use for our good and God's glory. Therefore, I will take a bath (or shower)

and enjoy it. A meal of vegetables and meat and wine will be my pleasure. We have been set free from slavery to sin and slavery to self through the redemptive work of Christ. We are free to enjoy God's good creation, but we are not to use our freedom to indulge the sinful nature. Rather, we should "serve one another in love."¹⁸ Holiness does not consist in removing oneself from the world but in living such Christ-like lives "among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day He visits us."¹⁹ I am free to live in God's world serving Him and others and giving thanks for His good gifts, but I am not free to flee away from it all and forsake my calling as a Christian among pagans, or my calling as a member of His body, the church. Free to serve, not free to flee.

Despite David's expressed desire to be removed from all the turmoil and opposition he was facing, he concludes Psalm 55 by reaffirming the utter trustworthiness of God in the face of wickedness. Though he is tempted to flee far away to the desert, his testimony is this: "But I call to God, and the Lord saves me Cast your cares on the Lord and He will sustain you; He will never let the righteous fall"(vss.16,22). Rather than adopt the response of Fear, Flight, and Flee, we must be For, Free, and Fight!

Notes

- 1 <http://www.bluegrasslyrics.com/node/465>
- 2 <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/benedict/rule2/files/rule2.html#ch1>
- 3 Rousas J. Rushdoony, *The Flight From Humanity: A Study of the Effect of Neoplatonism on Christianity*, pp.1-2, Thoburn Press, 1978.
- 4 Ibid., pg.2.
- 5 Ibid., pg.2.
- 6 John Stott, *Involvement: Being a Responsible Christian in a Non-Christian Society*, pg.35, Fleming H. Revell Company, 1985.
- 7 H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*, (Harper & Row, 1956), pp.80-1.
- 8 John 3:17
- 9 Romans 8:21
- 10 Philippians 2:7
- 11 Romans 5:8
- 12 Simeon the Styliste, see S.M. Houghton, *Sketches from Church History* (Banner of Truth Trust, 1980), p. 28.
- 13 Ibid., pp.183-185.
- 14 1 Timothy 6:12
- 15 John 17:15
- 16 Ephesians 6:12
- 17 1 Timothy 4:4-5
- 18 Galatians 6:13
- 19 1 Peter 2:12

Mr Peter Moelker is the minister of the Reformed Church of Avondale.

Fear, flight or fury? (3)

How should a Christian respond to a Romans 1 world?

How should same-sex marriage change the Church's witness?

Throughout the Western world, formerly "Christian" nations are adopting completely pagan ideas regarding sexuality and the value of human life. This recent shift away from Christianity has shocked and scared many believers. For many years, the Southern United States (and other parts of the world) have been blessed with Christian values being accepted as "normal". Even pop-culture was once predominantly moral and "Christian", but all this is changing.

The article below was written to instruct believers in how we should respond to such changes. The author, Dr. Russell Moore, is an American Southern Baptist minister, author, and cultural commentator. He writes as one who has lived in a culture so dominated by Christianity that nearly everyone you met on the street considered themselves to be a Christian! However, with the recent changes throughout the Western world, we no longer live in Andy Griffith's perfect fictional town of Mayberry. Christian morality is no longer mainstream. Dr. Moore's article gives us a refreshingly biblical outlook on these changes, and I am confident that you will be encouraged and comforted in your faith by his words.

~ Pastor Daniel Wilson

Russell D Moore

The Supreme Court has now ruled on two monumental marriage cases, and the legal and cultural landscape has changed in this country. The court voted to strike down the Defense of Marriage Act and remand the decision of the Ninth Circuit in the Proposition 8 case, holding that California's Proposition 8 defenders didn't have standing. The Defense of Marriage Act decision used rather sweeping language about equal protection and human dignity as they apply to the recognition of same-sex unions. But what has changed for us, for our churches, and our witness to the gospel?

In one sense, nothing. Jesus of Nazareth is still alive. He is calling the cosmos toward his kingdom, and he will ultimately be Lord indeed. Regardless of what happens with marriage, the gospel doesn't need "family values" to flourish. In fact, it often thrives when it is in sharp contrast to the cultures around it. That's why the gospel rocketed out of the first-century from places such as Ephesus and Philippi and Corinth and Rome, which were hardly Mayberry.

In another sense, though, the marginalisation of conjugal marriage in American culture has profound implications for our gospel witness. First of all, marriage isn't incidental to gospel preaching.

There's a reason why persons don't split apart like amoebas. We were all conceived in the union between a man and a woman. Beyond the natural reality, the gospel tells us there's a cosmic mystery (Eph. 5:32).

God designed the one-flesh union of marriage as an embedded icon of the union between Christ and his church. Marriage and sexuality, among the most powerful pulls in human existence, are designed to train humanity to recognise, in the fullness of time, what it means for Jesus to be one with his church, as a head with a body.

Same-sex marriage is on the march, even apart from these decisions, and is headed to your community, regardless of whether you are sitting where I am right now, on Capitol Hill, or in a rural hamlet in southwest Georgia or eastern Idaho. This is an opportunity for gospel witness.

“Just because we don't have two brides or two grooms in front of us, that doesn't mean we've been holding to biblical marriage.”

“Some will be disappointed by what they thought would answer their quest for meaning. Will our churches be ready to answer?”

For a long time in American culture, we've acted as though we could assume marriage. Even people from what were once called “broken homes” could watch stable marriages on television or movies. Boys and girls mostly assumed they had a wedding in their futures. As marriage is redefined, these assumptions will change. Let's not wring our hands about that.

This gives Christian churches the opportunity to do what Jesus called us to do with our marriages in the first place: to serve as a light in a dark place. Permanent, stable marriages with families with both a mother and a father may well make us seem freakish in 21st-century culture. But is there anything more “freakish” than a crucified cosmic ruler? Is there anything more “freakish” than a gospel that can forgive rebels like us and make us sons and daughters? Let's embrace the freakishness, and crucify our illusions of a moral majority.

That means that we must repent of our pathetic marriage cultures within the church. For too long, we've refused to discipline a divorce culture that has ravaged our churches. For too long, we've quieted our voices on the biblical witness of the distinctive missions of fathers and mothers in favor of generic messages on “parenting.”

For too long, we've acted as though the officers of Christ's church were Justices of the Peace, marrying people who have no accountability to the church,

and in many cases were forbidden by Scripture to marry. Just because we don't have two brides or two grooms in front of us, that doesn't mean we've been holding to biblical marriage.

The dangerous winds of religious liberty suppression means that our nominal Bible Belt marrying parson ways are over. Good riddance. This means we have the opportunity, by God's grace, to take marriage as seriously as the gospel does, in a way that prompts the culture around us to ask why.

The increased attention to the question of marriage also gives us the opportunity to love our gay and lesbian neighbors as Jesus does. Some will capitulate on a Christian sexual ethic. There are always those professional “dissidents” who make a living espousing mainline Protestant shibboleths to an evangelical market. But the church will stand, and that means the gospel Jesus has handed down through the millennia. As we stand with conviction, we don't look at our gay and lesbian neighbors as our enemies. They are not.

The gay and lesbian people in your community aren't part of some global “Gay Agenda” conspiracy. They aren't super-villains in some cartoon. They are, like all of us, seeking a way that seems right to them. If we believe marriage is as resilient as Jesus says it is (Mk. 10:6-9), it cannot be eradicated by a vote of justices or a vote of a state legislature. Some will be disappointed by what they thought would answer their quest for meaning. Will our churches be ready to answer?

This also means we must change the way we preach. Those with same-sex attractions, who follow Christ, will be walking away from what their families and friends want for them: wedding cake and married life and the American Dream. Following Jesus will mean taking up a cross and following a hard narrow way. It always does.

If we're going to preach that sort of gospel, we must make it clear that this cross-bearing self-denial isn't just for homosexually-tempted Christians. It is for all of us, because that's what the gospel is. If your church has been preaching the American Dream, with eternal life at the end and Jesus as the means you use to get all that, you don't have a gospel that can reach your gay and lesbian neighbors – or anyone else for that matter.

Same-sex marriage is headed for your community. This is no time for fear or

outrage or politicising. It's a time for forgiven sinners, like us, to do what the people of Christ have always done. It's time for us to point beyond our family values and our culture wars to the cross of Christ as we say: “Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.”

And that's good news.

From the website “Moore to the Point, www.russellmoore.com



Russell D. Moore is President of the Southern Baptist Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission, the Southern Baptist Convention's official entity assigned to address social, moral, and ethical concerns. Dr. Moore earned a B.S. in history and political science from the University of Southern Mississippi. He also received the M.Div. in biblical studies from New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, and the Ph.D. in systematic theology from The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.

A widely-sought cultural commentator, Dr. Moore speaks frequently to issues of theology, culture, and public policy, having been quoted or published by many of the nation's leading news agencies and periodicals—including the New York Times, Wall Street Journal, Washington Post, Chicago Tribune, USA Today, and the Associated Press.

Sharing the Gospel in rural New Zealand

We have the honour of taking the message of salvation with us wherever we go. Yes, it's our duty – but loving our Saviour means we can't help talking about him. Whatever we love most is always on our lips. And if we really love the people around us, we'll want to tell them about him. We know that anyone who doesn't love Christ is heading for a terrible outcome when they die. Many people also have big troubles in their lives, caused by their own sin, the sin of others or the effects of the fall in general. We know that the gospel is the only answer to all of this – so of course we'll want to bring them this good news. It's true that we often find ourselves bashful, loath to offend, or stuck for the right words; but if we love people we'll find ways to overcome these obstacles. There is plenty of help available in books,

courses and the encouragement of more experienced friends

A question that many of us ask is – who should I take the gospel to? Who should I speak with? There's a whole world of people out there – and I can't possibly reach them all. Random approaches don't seem very effective ... after all, who wants to listen to a complete stranger – and who wants to bare their heart to one? Would you share your deepest thoughts and struggles about life with someone who'd just come knocking on your door? It seems to me that the most natural and effective situations for introducing people to Christ are those in which we know people best: the places we live, and the places we work. These are the people whom God has put in our path; who know us, who have seen our lives, and who are the most likely

to trust us. We know God arranges all these circumstances carefully. He is not random or careless in any of the details of our lives.

So – where do you live, and where do you work? Perhaps you are like me, and your answer is rural New Zealand. Apart from a few years of boarding school and then university study, I've spent my life on farms. I'm the daughter of a sheep and beef farmer, and grew up in the hill country west of Hamilton. I'm married to a pig and sheep farmer and for thirty years we have lived in the middle of the Canterbury plains, now surrounded by intensive, large-scale irrigated dairy farms. So, for forty-five years or so I've been involved in rural communities; and it's made me think about some of the opportunities we have for bringing the gospel to our friends and neighbours. I've certainly not taken all the opportunities I've had to speak about Christ, but perhaps it would be useful to share some of the thoughts that I've had about it along the way.

You live in a community

The first thing you notice about life in rural New Zealand is that you live in a community. This was especially true of my childhood home in the western Waikato. All our neighbours were sheep and beef farmers like my father. We understood each other's way of life, and knew our neighbours well. We would see them on the road when driving past, and would stop the car and chat with them. My father would see other farmers at the local sheep and cattle sales and the local golf club; my mother would invite friends for afternoon tea and a walk around the garden. My sisters and brother and I attended the local school with all the other farmers' children, spending many hours on the school bus. Our parents attended all the school functions, and in many ways the school was the focus of our community life. Many of the fami-



The country school, hub of the rural community.



A sense of community?



Or not?

lies attended the local Anglican church, though most were nominal Christians at best. We lived far enough out of town that most of our socialising was done with other rural families – and we did a lot of it.

It is no surprise that my mother was introduced to Christ by another farmer's wife; a lady we knew well from church, and whose children we knew well at school. Mother's conversion led to the rest of our family becoming Christians; and we all benefited from the ongoing encouragement of that kind Christian woman and her family. All that happened 50 years ago, in a way which showed us how God uses a community and the bonds of a common way of life.

My husband Paul and I live in a very different kind of rural community – perhaps more the norm these days – and, quite possibly, more like the one you live in if you are a dairy farmer. When we first moved to our district, it was populated by sheep farmers – farming families who all knew each other well; some of whom had been on their farms for several generations. Then, about 20 years ago the "dairy boom" began and one by one, the sheep farms were sold for conversion to large-scale, intensive irrigated dairy farms. The social environment completely changed. Instead of family farmers we had sharemilkers and their employees moving in. Sharemilkers are usually on short-term contracts and move on after a few years to new jobs on other farms. Farm workers are even more transient. Many are from other countries and tend to socialise with their compatriots in the region. So, it can be difficult to develop close relationships. Sometimes it seems a stretch of the imagination to call a rural district like ours a "community".

What are the best opportunities to share the gospel?

Taking a step back to my parents' experience I would say that developing friendships was the key to their opportunities for evangelism. Sheep farming, as they experienced it, was a wonderful way of life. There were busy times, but people generally had time to socialise. Families would invite each other to spend the day together; there were dinners and picnics. Those were the days before distant sporting activities and weekend shopping began to compete for people's time. My mother tells me she was able to get together with a few other younger women and do Bible study and have prayer meetings. They would have lunch and get to know each other really well. Several of these women came to know Christ through these activities. She also taught Bible in Schools for many years

at the local country primary school we attended.

These sorts of opportunities have continued to exist. Not long after we moved to our farm in the mid-1980s I got to know two other young women who, because of some difficulties in their lives, were willing to discuss questions like – does God exist? What is he like? Is there life after death? We decided to read our way through John's gospel together and met for afternoon tea to share the things that had struck us as important. Both of these friends came to believe, and though they have moved out of the district, so far as I know they have persevered in the faith. Many Christians have found that simply reading the Bible together is a marvellous way of explaining the Christian faith. You can pray for your friend, asking God to open her eyes, and often you can see God's Word doing its



Community activities help build friendships.

“The way farming is these days, many of us have staff living on the farm – and that increases the visibility of our lives, for better or for worse.”

own work in someone's heart.

Given the transitory nature of rural life these days, though, the challenges to evangelism would seem to be greater. Yet there are different opportunities. God wants us to be adaptable; and we always need to seize the moments he gives us. For one thing, rural people are probably now in even greater need of meaningful social contact. Lonely single international farm workers do appreciate interest in their country and culture, and always seem to enjoy a meal and someone to talk to. Messy human relationships and family breakdown mean more people in need of practical help, encouragement – and the hope of the gospel. Rural communities are by no means exempt from the big problems of western society. They affect everyone – no matter how outwardly successful they seem – and if we're open to helping someone who lives in our immediate vicinity, God will surely use us. He may even use us to create the sense of community that used to exist – but on a new, Christian footing.

Often on farms these briefer opportunities come by way of business. It might be the machinery salesman who stops for a cup of tea in the kitchen and tells you about his seriously ill wife. Or it may be the truck driver who confides, bloke-to-bloke, his marriage woes while waiting for a delivery of grain to be unloaded. These things are openings to talk about the big questions of life. Paul

and I have heard all manner of stories around our kitchen table, often leading to conversations about the heart of the gospel. Sometimes we've muffed it and missed the opportunity. Sometimes we just couldn't think of the right response at the right time. (Here is one way “two are better than one” – Ecclesiastes 4:9 – since one can be listening and thinking, while the other is talking.) Sometimes we've been unable to pursue a good opening because there's been no time, or because there have been others with us who would have been mighty offended by talk of spiritual matters at this point in their lives. But God alone knows how he wants to use our word or two at any given moment. Sometimes we are just one small link in the chain of people God may be using in someone's life, and yet our brief encounter may count eternally.

Some of the best opportunities the Lord gives farmers for evangelism these days come with working alongside staff. They are special people God has put in our lives, and with whom we get to spend a lot of time. As employers we have an important opportunity for good or harm as far as the gospel is concerned. Once the staff (and their mates at the local pub!) know you are a “relish” they will be watching you. Are you fair, are you patient? Are you too demanding, or hyper-critical? Do you appear greedy for profit, are you stingy or not as honest as you ought to be? Those who work for us see it all. They will also notice things like whether you treat the animals well, and how you react when other staff don't. Some of the best gospel-revealing times come at tense moments, when you're having to explain why something is just “not on”.

The way farming is these days, many of us have staff living on the farm – and that increases the visibility of our lives, for better or for worse. It's also an opportunity. During the 1960s and 70s my mother found she could talk with several farm workers' wives. They were living in a cottage on the farm and she would drop by or have them over for a cup of tea. Getting to know them meant they would talk about what was going on in their lives and what their hopes and fears were. Two came to believe in this way, which was a great joy to her. Paul and I have had many good times with single staff, especially those living with us in our house. Around the dinner table has been a particularly good place for conversation about all kinds of subjects –

and most especially the big issues of life.

It is a privilege to have unbelieving staff with whom you can share the gospel. Have you ever thought about the opportunities this presents? Some of you are keen to employ believers only as far as possible – thinking that will be good for your business. It is true that visitors to your farm may hear less swearing if you employ Christians – but is your witness to the world limited to presenting a “Christian image”? Surely the great commission involves actually telling people about the gospel – and how better than in daily work contact, sharing our lives and hearts?

Are there things about rural life that make evangelism difficult?

While rural living, with our shared occupation and way of life, often provides good opportunities for gospel interaction, there are also some obstacles that we need to figure ways around. First of these can be distance from church. When you've been sharing the gospel with someone, and they've become interested, it is a natural next step to invite them to come to church with you. But what if you – like us and so many other farmers – live some distance away from town? A 30, 40 minute – or even longer – drive to church can present a real difficulty. What if your interested friend is a wife and mother, and she's the only one in the family as yet interested? She may not want to leave her husband and children at home while she spends half of Sunday with you going to and returning from church. It may alienate her family for her to be away like this. You'll need to figure out a way around this – and we've found it's not straightforward. You could try inviting the whole family to come, and then have lunch at home with you. Or perhaps you could enlist the help of some church friends, and take your guests to their place? Or maybe you will just need to keep talking with your friend, and hope God will use your husband and children to befriend the rest of the family, as happened with my own family some 50 years ago. Perhaps you could invite them to do the Christianity Explored course with you in your home. This could involve the whole family in a discussion with your family, which could be very helpful.

Another difficulty can be the demands of busy church life. Let's say you're a family who, though living out of town, does your best to be committed church members. You spend a great deal of

time on the road between home and church commuting to Sunday services, mid-week Bible studies, even catechism classes, session meetings, not to mention birthday and engagement parties and the like. You have become a family with one foot in town and one in the country, and it limits the time and energy you have left to spend with your neighbours in the country. You find you socialise mainly with church people in town, and you don't

know other farmers as well as you'd like. Likewise, if your children aren't at the local school it can become quite difficult to get to know local people. One question I've often had is where to put my efforts. Is it better to go to every social activity at church, or to begin a neighbourhood Bible study for interested local people? How can I get my two worlds to meet, for the benefit of both?

I certainly don't have the answers

to all these and similar questions, but I am convinced that, living in the country and being part of a church in the city, there are both challenges and opportunities. God does call all of us to be his witnesses, wherever we live and work. It's up to us to determine where our best opportunities lie, to focus on using them well, and to pray that he would open the hearts and minds of those he graciously puts in our path.

Feminine focus

Veronica Hoyt

Colossians for Women (4): Restored relationships

I think it's fair to say that maintaining healthy relationships is one of life's most difficult aspects. Strained (or broken) relationships are something we all experience. It may happen with your spouse, a parent, a child, with someone at church or at school, or with your employer. Being in a good relationship with everyone, all of the time, seems well nigh impossible.

Shattered relationships between people, created in God's image and yet so tragically fallen, are also at the heart of much of what is in the news. On just one given day here in January this year, in Christchurch, the papers reported on the brutal attack of a German tourist at the local bus station in town, of another suicide bomber in Afghanistan, of fighting in South Sudan and Syria, and of the latest suspicious death in North Korea. These are just a few examples of the brokenness in our world, where the norm is hatred and discord.

And yet, there is more to say, of course. As we have seen in previous articles on Colossians, Jesus himself entered this grim scenario. We are told that "he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness" and brought us in to his kingdom (1:13).¹ Jesus died and rose again. He disarmed the powers and authorities and made a public spectacle of them (2:15), able to do this because "God was pleased to have all his full-

ness dwell in [Jesus]" (1:19). Colossians 1:15-20 tells us that Jesus is supreme. There is no one greater than him.

Thus, there is hope, despite what we experience. Jesus himself has "made

peace through his blood, shed on the cross" (1:20). It is through him that peace can be restored.

Colossians points out that this peace is first of all between us and the Father:



“Peaceful relationships result only when our focus is firmly on the Lord Jesus.”

once we were alienated from God, enemies, prone to evil behaviour, but are now reconciled to God through Christ (1:21-22). We are reborn, a new creation, “[risen] with Christ” (2:1), having been given “fullness in [him]” (2:9), a topic we focussed on in an earlier article.

New life in Christ

There's still more to be said, however, because Colossians 3 and 4 indicate that this restored relationship with God results in restored relationships (peace) with each other. Indeed, our king, Jesus, is the Prince of Peace (Isaiah 9:6, Ephesians 2:13-18). The good news of the New Testament is that earthly relationships, too, are able to thrive once more. Our former selves want to live selfishly, pleasing ourselves. Changed people, however, who are now in a right relationship with the Lord, recognise the beauty of harmony within relationships, of submitting to each other, and exhibiting Christ-likeness.

The good news continues. Since we are now “in Christ” he gives us everything we need to, in Paul's words to Titus, say “no” to ungodliness (Titus 2:11) and “yes” to compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience (Col 3:12). Because of what Jesus has accomplished for us, we are able to be people who love others. We recognise that the characteristics of the old nature destroy relationships; Christ-like behaviour, on the other hand, restores and builds others up.

Thus, despite the brokenness we see and experience, we have hope, not just for ourselves, but also for our world. Jesus' restoration work, God's new kingdom, has already begun. You and I, and all believers in Jesus, are proof of it.

Loving God's family

Colossians 3:12-17 addresses a collec-

tive group, the church, “God's chosen people” (3:12), described as holy and much loved (3:12) and “members of one body” (3:15). It follows that the intense love shown to this beloved people – by the God of the universe himself – must in turn also be shown by us to all those whom he has chosen. He calls his church “to peace” (3:15). This certainly applies to the church family you are part of; we need to love those in our local church. This principle of love extends, however, to all of God's chosen people. If Jesus is my king and if I am part of his kingdom, then I need to work within that kingdom (of which my local church, and even the RCNZ, is only a part), and to show the kindness, compassion, humility, gentleness and patience, that he asks me to show to all those whom Jesus has chosen to belong to his kingdom (Matthew 25:31-46).

So, how do you relate with other believers? Do you remember that you are part of the same family? Do you show them the compassion that Jesus has shown you? Are you patient when they say something that you disagree with? Are you humble towards them? Do you respond gently and with grace? Do you show compassion and a helping hand, or, when asked for help, do you say “go, I wish you well, keep warm and well fed” (James 2:16) but do nothing about it? James comments rather bluntly: “faith by itself, if not accompanied by action, is dead” (James 2:17). Or, as Paul puts it in *Colossians*, “you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God” (3:3). Such a person must exhibit the love that Jesus showed her to others also being gathered into the “kingdom of the Son” (1:13).

Paul adds: “Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another” (3:13). He then includes this short sentence, just six words long: “Forgive as the Lord forgave you.” Much could be (and has been) written about this short sentence. At the heart of it is the forgiveness that we have experienced. The restoration of our relationships within this new kingdom of our Lord Jesus can only happen because God has forgiven us all our sins (2:13). We are forgiven, cleansed, made new, and this, in turn, determines our relationships with others: as God forgave us, now we, having “fullness in Christ” (2:10), have been given the spiritual power to forgive others. That is amazing, and also a source of great hope and encouragement. The power

that enabled Jesus to “disarm the powers and authorities ...triumphing over them” (2:15) is the same power that enables us to forgive those who sin against us. Of course, there is far more to be said on this subject, especially in situations where great hurt has been experienced. However, I think that for most of us, most (if not all) of the time, the basic biblical principle to “forgive as the Lord forgave you” is absolutely critical in maintaining Christ-like relationships. We need to be willing to forgive (often).

Another and very important way of bringing peace within God's family is by speaking (and singing) God's words together. Paul writes: “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing ...” (3:16). Teaching the Scriptures to each other, also as women, and using God's words as the basis of admonishing a sister in the Lord, is vital in maintaining good relationships within the church. If our collective focus is on the Word, which is ultimately Jesus himself, then peace and harmony within God's family will follow. In my last article, I extended a challenge for you to find a 1-2-1 Bible reading partner this year. Have you done so? As a further suggestion: is there someone you're struggling to relate to? Then why not get together with her for a season and read the Word of the Lord together? I can't think of a better way of softening a relationship than that!

Loving relationships within domestic families

Of course, everything written in Colossians 3:12-17 for the church family, and commented on above, applies to our domestic families, too. In 3:18-21, Paul zeroes in, in a specific way, in order to show that the death and resurrection of Jesus is relevant also for how we live our individual lives, such as in our families. Without Jesus, our homes would be chaotic, disordered, full of “anger, rage, malice” (3:8), but the new kingdom that Jesus has ushered in also results in homes that are peaceful and orderly. And, as reborn people, the love, compassion, humility, kindness, forgiveness, gentleness, and patience we show to our church family should be demonstrated daily to those we live with.

Paul gives various specific instructions about our relationships that lead to this peace, such as marriage based on love and submission (I wrote more about this in my last article on Colossians). He also

writes about the relationship between parents and children. Children are to obey their parents, and parents are told not to hinder them in this: “fathers, do not embitter your children, or they will become discouraged” (3:21).

True, the instruction is to fathers, and I guess that we women could simply skip this verse as not applicable to us. We do have a role to play, though. Our husband is also our brother in the Lord, and we are to help him in his role as father (and admonish him, if necessary), applying Paul’s words to “teach and admonish each other with all wisdom” (3:16) – this is possible even while being respectful and loving. Standing by, saying nothing to him when our husband is overly harsh, or, on the other hand, reacting in a way that is ungodly (becoming angry, or resentful, or undermining him in some way, for example) could be harmful both for your husband’s relationship with your children, but also between you and him. Instead, we are to love our husbands also by encouraging (and praying for) them to be the best (that is, the most godly, Christ-like) father possible.

However, there is also implicit instruction for mothers here. Mothers, too, should not embitter their children. There are many ways we do this. One way is through inconsistency which, as a child grows older, will be interpreted as being unjust and unfair. A toddler may not consciously notice that one day he is allowed to do something and the next day is disciplined for doing the same thing, but a teenager will. It’s also possible to embitter your children by being overly rigid, or over correcting. This could be a temptation for those, who, for example, are super disciplined themselves, or who are overly worried about their child’s sinfulness. Are you constantly criticising your child? Does your child feel that he can never be good enough to meet your standards? If so, have you, perhaps, fallen into this trap of parenting? In a case like this it’s possible that the mother’s attention is fixed more on how she can control her child than on the Lord Jesus, and the child’s either on how to keep mum satisfied, and/or how miserable he feels. Instead, “wrestle in prayer” for your children (as Epaphras did for the Colossians, 4:12), remember to train them “with all wisdom” (3:16) in order that they clearly see God’s standards first (not yours) and develop into confident young adults who trust in their Lord Jesus (knowing that he

provides everything necessary to meet these standards). And relax, resting in God’s work in your child’s life, even as he has worked in yours.

Finally, what about relationships that don’t seem to heal? I think that Paul’s comments to slaves (3:22-25) are helpful, even if we are not slaves *per se*. Slaves were in relationships (with their masters) over which they had little control, and in which there was no guarantee of change. Yet, they are instructed to do everything they can, with sincerity of heart and reverence for the Lord (3:22), to be diligent in doing what is right. Paul adds a great encouragement (and comfort) in this: their focus on the Lord Christ in this difficult assignment will gain them a great reward, an inheritance from God

himself (3:24). This perspective should guide and motivate us, too, when dealing with fracture and brokenness in our relationships.

Conclusion

To conclude, peaceful relationships result only when our focus is firmly on the Lord Jesus; they are part of the new life he has ushered in for all those who believe in him. It is a very tangible answer to Paul’s prayer in 1:10 that believers would live lives worthy of the Lord, pleasing him in every way: bearing fruit and growing in the knowledge of God.

¹ Unless stated otherwise, Scripture quotes are from *Colossians*.



60th Wedding Anniversary

of

PIETER and SJOERDJE
HEERINGA

Celebrated with family and friends on December 19, 2013

With praise and thankfulness to God

*“I will be your God throughout your life time,
until your hair is white with age
I made you and will care for you.
I will carry you and save you”*

Isaiah 46:3,4

World in focus

Croatia upholds marriage, despite government threats

By Wendy Wright

NEW YORK, December 6 (C-FAM) Croatians cast their ballots last Sunday and the result was swift and clear: 66% voted to add marriage is a "union between a man and a woman" in Croatia's constitution.

Government officials were unhappy, and called the marriage referendum divisive, discriminatory, and a waste of money. Reports of officials intimidating supporters leaked in the weeks before the vote. Yet supporters – many who grew up under communist rule – did not buckle under threats of investigations and being labeled fascists.

The conflict began in May after Croatia's government drafted a law for same-sex couples to register as "life partners." The country already recognises unregistered cohabitation for same-sex couples, including next-of-kin and inheritance rights, but excludes the right to adopt children.

A group quickly formed, called "In the Name of the Family." They gathered over 740,000 signatures in 15 days for a nationwide referendum asking: Do you support amending the constitution to define marriage as a life-long union of a woman and a man? Homosexual groups said the wording was biased.

It was Croatia's first citizen referendum since its independence in 1991.

"We believe that marriage, children and family are such important issues

that the whole society has to decide them," Zeljka Markic, the leader of the initiative, told AFP. People of different faiths – Orthodox, Protestants, Muslims and Jews – supported it.

In a letter read in Catholic churches across the country, Cardinal Josip Bozanic said, "Marriage is the only union enabling procreation." Almost 90% of the population is Catholic.

But supporters feared retaliation.

A popular priest and student chaplain at Zagreb University was pressured to be silent on marriage. Rev. Damir Stoji, who speaks on chastity and runs a pray-rather-than-pay café, was summoned by an official for organising a panel on the referendum, a tactic reminiscent of communist oppression.

Gong, a homosexual group funded by the European Commission, pressured the pro-marriage group to release donors' names. Markic – who endured a government investigation of her business and personal property – declined, explaining volunteers were already "exposed to public lynching."

A commenter on a news website elaborated. In Croatia, 95% of pro-marriage voters didn't speak openly because they were "tagged by mainstream media and TV as fascist, Nazis, uneducated, primitive, as Catholic talibans – this is a new term made up by this horrible campaign."

"In this month I realised what is like to live in a dictatorship, to fear to express your opinion so my business and social

status" are not damaged.

Recently, Croatia's foreign minister joined the LGBT Core Group at the UN that committed to "concerted action" on homosexual and transgender rights.

Last month, a U.S. official spoke in Croatia at the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association (ILGA) Europe's annual conference. She said a top priority for President Obama is "engaging international organisations to fight LGBT discrimination" and criticised expressions of opposing views of gay pride marches.

After voting against the marriage referendum, Croatia's president Ivo Josipovic pledged to push a bill granting more privileges to homosexual persons living together.

Elsewhere, Markic told a cheering crowd, "We showed that we know, like David fighting Goliath, how to direct our small sling stones in the same direction. This time for the protection of marriage, next time for something else of the same importance."

Croatia is the newest member of the European Union, and the sixth to protect marriage in its constitution, joining Poland, Bulgaria, Latvia, Lithuania and Hungary.

Top conservative law professors debate UN lawmaking

By Susan Yoshihara, Ph.D.

NEW YORK, January 24 (C-FAM) Is human rights law really law if there is no way to enforce it and no remedy for the wrongs that are done? Legal experts came down on opposite sides during a week-long seminar for the Edmund Burke Fellows last week in New York.

Not only is the international rights regime "hortatory," but it can do real harm. "It breaks the link between historical and political community, turning citizens into mere subjects," said George Mason University's Jeremy Rabkin. He cited Britain's throwing out a thousand year-old constitutional process after bureaucrats in Brussels told them it was not consistent with EU policy.

What's more, human rights rhetoric can jeopardise national security by displacing serious measures with formulaic answers in difficult and complex situations, Rabkin cautioned. He cited the

Pro-Life Facts

The book "unPLANNED" tells the inspiring story of an American woman, Abby Johnson. Abby got involved with Planned Parenthood after she visited their stall at her university. She became a community services director, worked at their clinic in Bryan, Texas for 8 years (some of this time as the clinic director), and underwent 2 abortions herself. However, in September 2008, she experienced a dramatic conversion while viewing the images on the ultrasound during an ultra-sound guided abortion. She had no choice but to resign. She initially thought there would be a national organisation to reach out to clinic workers. When she discovered there was none, she began a ministry herself, called "And Then There Was None". (www.attwn.org). There will be an opportunity to hear Abby Johnson speak when she visits New Zealand next year from April 24th to 27th. Details of her visit will be updated as they are confirmed at www.fli.org.nz (Family Life International)

Obama administration's anemic response to crises in Libya and Syria in the name of protecting human rights.

Despite serious drawbacks, the United States should still engage other nations through the rights regime, countered Grover Joseph Rees, former US ambassador for economic and social affairs at the UN. He told the group of law students gathered for the annual seminar that he used rights standards effectively as a tool to press recalcitrant governments to comply with democratic ideals. He said the Obama administration has hampered such efforts in places like Vietnam, where diplomats and jurists demur from pressing Hanoi to release political prisoners because the government has complied with Washington's homosexual and transgender agenda, which the Obama administration has given top priority in its diplomatic and military contacts abroad.

Twenty-five countries liberalised their abortion laws between 1997 and 2011 under "significant" international influence, St. Thomas University's Teresa Collett said. Part of the pressure comes from abortion activists' "strategic litigation strategy" which helps convince legislatures and high court judges to change laws by considering the views of UN human rights experts as "jurisprudence" even though they have no such legal significance.

"When the U.S. Supreme Court hears *Roe v. Wade* again, abortion activists want to make sure as many countries as possible have legalised abortion," Collett said. The court has already taken international legal jurisprudence into account when deciding domestic cases. For that reason, and because the US Constitution makes treaties the "law of the land" once ratified, Collett told the fellows that the US Congress is right to be cautious about ratifying any international human rights treaty.

Regional rights bodies also reinterpret governments' legal obligations by "finding" new rights in existing treaties, said Notre Dame University's Paolo Carozza. Carozza served on the America's highest human rights commission when that body used dubious tactics to pressure Costa Rica to legalise in vitro fertilisation (IVF) despite the fact that it was contrary to the nation's constitution.

Carozza and Collett said they remain optimistic that human rights bodies can and should be engaged by members who can persuade colleagues to uphold a proper understanding of the law and not succumb to pressure from special

interests. Collett, who helped prepare legal arguments for Costa Rica in the IVF case, urged the fellows to get involved however they could, such as in the preparation of amicus briefs for nations trying to defend laws protecting human life and the family.

The Edmund Burke Fellowship is a C-FAM program that brings law students and graduate student in international relations to C-FAM's UN office for a week of intensive study and briefings on UN topic

Abortion is losing at the UN

Created on Thursday, 02 January 2014 17:55 Published on Thursday, 02 January 2014 17:55 By Austin Ruse

NEW YORK, January 2 (C-FAM) Pro-abortion forces have spent hundreds of millions of dollars and hundreds of thousands of man-hours in the past twenty years and they have not advanced their agenda even a single syllable past what they got at the Cairo Conference in 1994.

Let that sink if for a moment, because it is something that haunts the days and nights of the UN Population Fund and the International Planned Parenthood Federation. They have dedicated a significant portion of their lives to establish an international right to abortion and all they have achieved is vague language on reproductive health and rights that most countries soundly reject as having any-

thing to do with abortion. They are no nearer to an international right to abortion than they were when they began.

What's more, they have even begun to see their slight gains fade. Two years ago the UN hosted the 20-year review of the Rio Conference on the environment. Delegates rejected language related to reproductive rights. Hillary Clinton denounced the outcome document as did many other pro-abortion figures including Nafis Sadik, former head of the UN Population Fund.

In the past several months the UN Population Fund has hosted regional conferences in preparation for the upcoming negotiations for new development goals and the 20-year review of the Cairo Conference. These stage-managed regional meetings are full of radical pro-abortion language. How have these documents been received by delegates in New York? With polite disdain.

The other hot-button issue at the UN in recent years has been the attempt to make "sexual orientation and gender identity" new categories of non-discrimination in international law. Delegations have opposed this not because they hate gays but because they know that gays are already protected in international law and that these efforts are really about advancing things like gay marriage and gay adoption, things that most of the world rejects.

Pro-Life News

A policy to decriminalise abortion was presented at the Labour Party's Conference in Christchurch, but was not adopted. The Party Conference instead recommended that the proposal be referred, on becoming the government, to the Law Commission for an opinion. David Cunliffe has recently publicly stated that he supports the decriminalisation of abortion, and also supports the Law Commission being asked to provide an opinion. A similar approach was used by the Labour government in Victoria in 2008, where abortion is now decriminalised. In view of the coming general election in 2014, political parties may consider it expedient to sidestep this controversial justice issue until after the election. This would avoid losing voters who are pro-life and would not in conscience be able to vote for a political party openly committed to decriminalising abortion. The following policy was presented: 1. That Labour is committed to women's health and well-being, and strongly endorses a woman's right to make her own decisions about her body. Therefore, Labour in Government will: a) Adopt measures to ensure that a pregnant woman has the opportunity and freedom to make the best decision for her own circumstances; b) Decriminalise abortion; c) Ensure that access to abortion is available to women throughout the country. Decriminalisation of abortion would allow for abortion on demand at all stages of pregnancy. For more information on this topic and other pro-life issues, visit the Right to Life website: www.righttolife.org.nz.

They have utterly failed to gain any real ground on this question. The best they have achieved is a PR campaign run by the Office of High Commissioner for Human Rights and a "study" of violence against gays run out of the human rights office in Geneva.

The coalition against this effort in the General Assembly is substantially larger

than the pro-life coalition so prospects of making any real progress are minuscule.

Anti-life and anti-family forces have made progress and very much control the UN machinery, however. They control the various agencies like the UN Population Fund, UNICEF, the World Bank, the World Health Organisation, and the various human rights bodies that interpret and try to enforce treaties. They control all these and have made great progress in advancing their agenda through them.

Though they have very little to show for their efforts, these forces show no sign of letting up. This is why the UN remains one of the most important battlegrounds in the global fight for life and for family.

It is quite remarkable to think that a small band of largely unknown groups and individuals have delivered such an ongoing defeat to some of the most powerful forces in the world.

Pastor jailed in Iran tells family of death threat

Pastor Saeed Abedini, a U.S. citizen imprisoned for his Christian faith in his native country Iran, has told his wife in a letter that he is being tortured and might be sentenced to death by hanging.

In his letter, written from the notorious Evin Prison in Tehran and addressed to his wife Naghmeh, the 32-year-old pastor said he was uncertain about his fate.

"This is the process in my life today: one day I am told I will be freed and allowed to see my kids on Christmas (which was a lie) and the next day I am told I will hang for my faith in Jesus," Abedini wrote. "One day there are intense pains after beatings in interrogations, the next day they are nice to you and offer you candy."

However, the pastor sees God's hand in the midst of persecution. "I always wanted God to make me a godly man. I did not realise that in order to become a godly man we need to become like steel under pressure. It is a hard process of warm and cold to make steel," he said, referring to the mixed responses he is receiving in prison. "These hot and colds only make you a man of steel for moving forward in expanding His Kingdom."

Abedini's letter, which has been posted on the website of Assemblies of God USA, also speaks about torture.

"When for 120 days you are asleep in a room with one big light that is constantly lit and does not separate day or night and when you can only see true sunlight for a few minutes a week, that's

when you are becoming His Workmanship and you can be a vessel in bringing His Kingdom in a dark place and you are able to share the Gospel of Peace and Life to the dying world," wrote the pastor "in chains for our Lord Jesus Christ." "And this is where you learn you can love your enemies with all of your heart."

The American Center for Law and Justice, which is representing Abedini's family in the U.S., has also said the pastor's life is "in grave danger," as he is facing one of Iran's notorious "hanging judges," Pir-Abassi, known for issuing death sentences.

"And now facing one of Iran's most notorious judges, Pastor Saeed is in a real sense an American abandoned in Iran. The U.S. State Department has done very little to help this U.S. citizen," ACLJ Executive Director Jordan Sekulow said in a report shared with The Christian Post. "When you read Pastor Saeed's own words, you understand that Iran has absolutely no regard for human rights and religious freedom."

PRAYING FOR PERSECUTED BELIEVERS

Pray that they:

1. will persevere under tribulation (Hebrews 10:32-39)
2. will stand firm in their faith (1 Peter 5:8-10)
3. will not be fearful, but trust God (Rev.2:10)
4. would be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer (Rom.12:12)
5. will not repay evil for evil, but will seek to live at peace with everyone (Rom.12:17,18)
6. will be enabled to rejoice, even in suffering (1 Peter 4:12-13)
7. will not take revenge, but leave that completely with God (Rom.12:17-21)
8. will be able to actually love their enemies (Matthew 5:43-44)
9. will bless those who persecute them (Rom.12:14,21; 1 Peter 3:9)
10. will rely on the Lord's strength and not their own (2 Cor.1:8,9)
11. will keep their eyes on Jesus, persevere, and not grow weary or lose heart (Hebrews 12:1-3)

On January 7th 2014, the Lord called home to be with Him

ANTONIE (TOM) POSTHUMA aged 86



Dear loved husband of the late Maria and Dad, Opa and Opa-Opa to:

Yvonne & Tony Stolk
Nicholas & Katrina
Rebecca & Daniel
Rachael
Philip & Janice

Graeme & Jackie Posthuma
Jeremy & Louise
Jackson and Adam
Michael & Alida
Baby due 27.04.14
Amy
Nicola

Sharon & Graham Wood
Lauren
Elliott
Matthew

Jackie & Simon Baines
Brooke
Joel

Job 19:25-27
1 Corinthians 15:50-58

Abedini's case has been transferred to Branch 26 of the Tehran Revolutionary Court, and he is now in the hands of Judge Pir-Abassi, who was named in 2011 by the European Union as an individual subject to sanctions for human rights violations. The judge has reportedly presided over a number of cases against human rights activists, often handing down long prison sentences and even several death penalties.

Despite the hardships he is facing, Abedini remains strong in his faith.

"Saeed's letter is nothing short of a modern-day Pauline epistle," AG General Superintendent George O. Wood said on the church's website. "As I read his letter through several times, I could only marvel at how God's faithfulness tran-

scends time as the same Holy Spirit that was with Paul in his times of desperation is fully evident in the words of our brother Saeed."

Wood said he is amazed to find how a letter from an imprisoned pastor "inspires and ministers to me when he – it would seem – is the one who needs our prayers."

"I encourage believers to allow this letter to inspire them to greater things, to pass it on to friends and to continue to uplift Saeed, Naghmeh and their two young children to God in prayer," Wood added.

Abedini grew up in Iran, before converting to Christianity at the age of 20, and marrying an American woman in 2002, which helped him gain U.S. citi-

zenship. The pastor has traveled with his family back and forth between Iran and the U.S. several times in the past few years to meet his family and for Christian work.

During one such trip in 2009, Abedini was detained by Iranian officials and interrogated for his conversion. While he was released with a warning against engaging in any more underground church activities, he was once again arrested last July while working on a non-sectarian orphanage project.

Abedini was arrested for "his previous work as a Christian leader in Iran," according to the ACLJ.

By Anugrah Kumar,

<http://global.christianpost.com>



The myth of “the seeker” after God

Peter C. Glover

I recently caught some desperately needed rays – England has been very wet and cold this year – at a beach resort in Crete. While my wife read, I listened to music for our first day's relaxation in the sun. For me, there is nothing quite like *The Who's Greatest Hits* warm an early summer "chill." Here, among great

drumming and rock riffs, quite surprisingly, I found myself confronted by the whole nature of evangelism and how to "do" church.

While the opening of "Baba O'Riley" (which fronts *CSI New York*) and the "Won't Get Fooled Again" (*CSI Miami*) always hit the mark, on this particular occasion it was the lyrics of Pete Townshend's oft-overlooked "The Seeker" that

caught my attention. Listening to the song twice-over, it dawned on me that what I had long considered to be the secular anthem for our age – the lyrics of the Jagger-Richards composition "I Can't Get No Satisfaction" – only spells out one half of the human condition: lack of peace. What's missing though is the sheer soul-searching depth of that lack among those living without Christ.

Townshend's lyrics, however, capture much more of the quiet desperation of many lives. But what also emerges, is that far from "seeking God," the preferred answer lies in anything but the Bible-described living God.

*I've looked under chairs, I've
looked under tables
I've tried to find the key to fifty
million fables
They call me 'The Seeker', I've
been searching low and high
I won't get to get what I'm after,
till the day I die.
I asked Bobby Dylan, I asked the
Beatles
I asked Timothy Leary, but he
couldn't help me either
They call me 'The Seeker', I've
been searching low and high
I won't get to get what I'm after,
till the day I die*

All of which merely confirms what most of us in the Reformed church already know, you're thinking: Nothing here to dwell on, right? Until, that is, we realize that diagnosing the true human condition is essential to both how we "do" evangelism and how we "do" church.

Let me be clear. This is not intended to be a "negative" article. Far from it. It is rather intended as a positive reminder in a time when the church can appear irrelevant and we may be tempted to buy into the same unbiblical methods some church leaders consider to be "more relevant." One of those methods is the

"seeker-sensitive" way of doing church that provides a "revised" new gospel to entice new members through its doors.

First, let me nail my colors to the mast: I have no time for Rick Warren's apparently successful *Purpose-Driven Church* or for Bill Hybel's Willow Creek churches. I have made this clear in an extensive survey of seeker-sensitive churches in my e-book *The Great Evangelical Disaster Revisited*. Warren has chosen to move away from a "God-focus" to a "purpose" focus or "felt-need" focus by targeting individuals who are viewed as "seekers after God." In doing so, what is preached and shared is a truncated gospel. For these churches, the front edge of the gospel, the message that we are sinners, is too negative and hurtful to the individual self-esteem; the very antithesis of the Bible's urging to confront people with their sin.

Certainly there is such a thing as seeking God. "Seek the Lord while he may be found" (Is. 55:6); "Seek me and live", Amos prophesied (Amos 5:4). But everywhere, Jesus' injunction "seek and ye shall find" is hemmed in with specifics. That is, seek the Lord whose attributes are alone described in the words of Jesus and the apostles in the Bible. Seek that Lord and you will find him. But this is a far cry from the answer most "seekers" are pursuing. Hybels and Warren believe that "seekers" seek God but, Paul states in Romans: "For all seek their own, not the things which are of Christ" (Phil.2:21), echoing the psalmist: "There is none righteous, no, not one;

“The true gospel must first cut deep into the soul before the Christ of the Bible via his Holy Spirit can do his work of salvation.”

There is none who understands; There is none who seeks after God" (Psalm 5:9).

It is a fascinating axiom that once someone deviates from a course by just a few percent they quickly find themselves diverging by a much greater margin. So it is with those who believe they have discovered "new ways" of doing evangelism and church. In the case of the seeker-sensitive gurus they have grasped the spiritual emptiness – the God hole – expressed in the songs mentioned. But in believing they know better than Jesus and the apostles they mis-diagnose the true "seeker" condition. As a consequence they come up with solutions that bear little resemblance to that posited in God's Word. Indeed, it is hard to understand what Messrs Warren and Hybels understand when they read "none seeks after God."

In consequence, they devise a method of evangelism that emasculates the sin-acknowledging cutting edge of the gospel. They refuse to "offend" or "confront." But then that' is the whole point of the rock of offence that is the gospel. The true gospel must first cut deep into the soul before the Christ of the Bible via his Holy Spirit can do his work of salvation. Indeed, there can be no salvation without knowledge of personal sin – the sin that clings to us and for which Christ's death was necessary. And there's the rub for the seeker-sensitive church mentality: in failing to recognise just how desperate the plight of sinful man really is, they leave adherents



locked into an understanding that he/she is essentially "good."

*People tend to hate me, 'cause I never smile
As I ransack their homes, they wanna shake my hand
Focusing on nowhere,
Investigating miles
I'm a seeker, I'm a really desperate man
I won't get to get what I'm after,
till the day I die.*

In the most extensive survey of seeker-sensitive churches, the results of which were published in his book *Seeker Churches: Promoting Traditional Church in a Non-traditional Way*, Kim Howland Sargeant reports some interesting findings. Given unprecedented access across the Willow Creek Association of churches, Sargeant found that rather than reaching the unchurched, WCA churches tended to sheep-steal from other churches by appealing to the "felt-needs" of members – a move away from the God-focus of traditional churches. Sargeant quotes one WCA pastor who told him that seeker churches are less concerned with saving people from the "fires of hell" and are more concerned to save people from meaninglessness. The pastor admits, "It's more of a soft sell." As Sargeant points out in his conclusions, "Seeker sensitive church advocates are committed to developing a non-confrontational way of presenting the gospel." According to Sargeant, 84% of WCA pastors agreed with the statement: "In order to gain a hearing for the gospel, churches today must meet the felt-needs of seekers." What that means in practice is one thing: don't mention sin. Instantly, the rock of offence that is the gospel of Christ has been undermined. It is replaced with the anaemic "Jesus loves you." Jesus now, instead of being the one sacrificed for our sin, is merely interested in serving whatever the seeker believes are his/her best interests.

Seeker-sensitive churches are almost exclusively concerned with private faith. As Sargeant found, seeker churches do not teach about the public implications of the faith; an anathema to the Reformed faith. Interestingly, Sargeant also records that Robert Schuller's ministry was "inspirational" for Bill Hybels and many of his pastors. Schuller's church, he notes, was in fact the "forerunner" for the seeker-sensitive model. Schuller famously had an heretical view of sin, stating, "What we need is to positivise the words that

have only had a negative connotation. There is no greater damage that can be done than to refer to the lost sinful condition of man." Instead, for Schuller, "Sin is any act or thought that robs myself or another human being of his or her self-esteem." Following in Schuller's footsteps, seeker-sensitive churches are concerned above all else not to confront people with "negative" messages of sin, but rather to offer "positive" messages that build up the self-esteem.

In short, seeker-sensitive churches omit many of the key elements of the Christian message vital to the spiritual well-being of a Christian faith community into which individuals are brought. As Paul puts it, "strangers and foreigners" to God's specific teachings on evangelism and church become "fellow citizens" and "members of the household of God." But they can only do so where the individual is brought in as of first importance by recognising their sin, what Jesus is able to deliver them from and into a community that shares their faith. The real church is thus "built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ being himself being the chief cornerstone." In other words, "citizens" brought in by any other "new ways" are simply illegal immigrants still in need of proper salvic evangelisation. Yet they have been deceived into

“The rock of offence that is the gospel of Christ has been undermined. It is replaced with the anaemic ‘Jesus loves you.’”

believing they are true members of the body of Christ. Paul's righteous anger at the false apostles who turned up at Corinth is matched everywhere in the New Testament wherever false teachers turned up teaching a false gospel. It should be no different for us – and with good reason. Unless "seekers" recognize that they are sinners – just as we still are, though sinners saved by grace –

Wellington Ladies Presbyterial March 15, 2014

Hosted by the Reformed Church of Masterton

37 Herbert Street

The day will begin with morning tea at 9:30am.

“Back to Basics”

Growing gratitude by identifying what the Lord has given us.
Together we will learn to appreciate the extravagant goodness of daily life.

"Now there is great gain in godliness with contentment." 1Tim 6:6

The speaker of the day is Carissa Fairbrother. She is a financial advisor who is enthusiastic about helping people live within their means.

There will also be time to enjoy a few "basic pleasures" during the afternoon sessions.

Friday night, March 14, is an optional opportunity for fellowship; there will be a sit down dinner accompanied by local musicians. Come enjoy some time together at the Ten O'clock Cookie Bakery & Cafe. There is a cost for the dinner. Billets or a motel are available for those interested. Please contact Janneke Stolte at jjestolte@hotmail.com before March 1 for reservations.

they are doomed to remain in their lost condition, no matter what "new way" the seeker churches teach them.

It is a sobering thought that removing the knowledge of our sinful natures is to emasculate the gospel of Christ. As tempting as it may be to "soft sell" the gospel to avoid personal "persecution" or "embarrassment" in social situations, it is not acceptable to God. To preach or to pass on the gospel minus its core message of personal sinfulness is to preach what Paul calls "no gospel at all." And here's the real kicker. In passing on an emasculated "seeker" gospel, the condition of seeker church adherents is now even more desperate than before. Only too aware of the same lack of peace – as many former adherents admit – their

continuing lack of peace is dressed up in "Christianized" language. Like seekers outside their church they must hide their private angst in the belief that peace for the soul in this life is simply unattainable – when we know differently.

*I learned how to raise my voice
in anger
Yeah, but look at my face, ain't
this a smile?
I'm happy when life's good and
when it's bad I cry
I've got values but I don't know
how or why.
I'm looking for me, You're
looking for you
We're looking in at each other,
And we don't know what to
do.*

*They call me 'The Seeker', I've
been searching low and high
I won't get to get what I'm after,
Till the day I die.*

John Calvin wrote that "the excellence of the church does not consist in multitude but in purity." It is a truism worthy of remembrance. The church has never been a numbers game. If numbers were a critical mark by which we test our evangelistic abilities or church "successes," then Paul and the apostles would have adopted seeker-sensitive principles from the beginning. Neither is true conversion our business. Our business is to preach/share the true gospel. Conversion to Christ is the business of the Holy Spirit. As Christians, we are not called to be "successful," only faithful.

Mr Peter C. Glover is an Independent Writer, Journalist and Author specialising in the intersection of politics, government and energy and currently works for Energy Tribune Publishing, Inc.

Christian Renewal, July 2013.

You are invited to the 20th Hamilton Easter Convention

Friday 18th and Saturday 20th April 2014



Our guest speaker this year is

Rev. Peter Collier

Currently Director of the Tim Training Course in Christchurch.

Peter is married to Melissa and they have 2 children, James and Millie. From 2001 to 2009 Peter worked as the Assistant Minister at St John's Anglican Church Latimer Square. Before this he trained at Moore Theological College in Sydney and prior to coming to New Zealand worked in 3 different churches in Sydney. Peter studied Science at University and has worked in Medical Research, as well as in retail.

Inquiries

Pieter van der Wel

Ph. 07-849 6401

E-mail ecapp2014@gmail.com

Brochures will be distributed when more information becomes available

The Thought of God – Maurice Roberts – p6-7

The art of good thinking is to carry thought to its logical conclusion.... . If God be God, then no insoluble problems exist. And if God be *my* God, then no problem of mine is without its appropriate solution. There is in God just exactly what is needed to solve every riddle of life. Such a Being is God that he comprehends in himself all that we could ever need to neutralize all evils, veto all temptations, negative all sorrows and compensate for all losses. More still, there is in God such a supply of competence and wisdom that he is able to transform every ill into good as soon as it touches us. God has, so to say, the 'Midas touch', by which all the Christian's problems turn to gold in his hands. To be told that 'all things work together for good' [Rom 8:28] to us is to have more than a cordial. It is to have the elixir of life.... It must follow from what has been said that the degree of a Christian's peace of mind depends upon his spiritual ability to interpose the thought of God between himself and his anxiety.

The Root and Fruit of Missions

Peter Kloosterman

As I start writing this article I am sitting on the back veranda of the Kiwi Haus in Papua New Guinea. We (John Kloeg and myself for the OMB) have been here a few days engaging in many discussions with the missionaries. These discussions have prompted me to reflect on the work of missions and our commitment to this work.

Looking out on the backyard I see numerous banana trees and several pawpaw trees. These are unfamiliar fruit trees to me, but it reminds me of an important distinction that needs to be made regarding the work of missions. The distinction is the work of tending the root and tending the fruit in the work of missions.

When we first arrived I looked from this same veranda and only saw tall trees with unusually-shaped large leaves. On closer examination, my untrained eyes noticed the fruit that was growing on these trees. Then I realized there was much more here than meets the eye. These were not trees planted ornamenteally, but their produce is vital for food, being one of the staples of the local diet.

Dying spiritually

So it is with the work of missions. We see much and have many appeals for support and assistance with the work of missions. We are limited in resources, and often stretched by the need that we see all around the world, especially in third world countries. Now close examination is required or we will miss an important difference between ornamentation and food, between a tree and its purpose. The Bible is essential for identifying one of the most urgent needs of mankind that we must address: the need for the gospel of Jesus Christ. The absence of the gospel of grace is not only a third world famine: it is also a first world famine. People are dying because they don't have the living water or true spiritual food for their souls.

So what should we do? You may be

familiar with the mission adage – feed a man a fish, feed him for a day; teach a man to fish and feed him for life. Like most adages it oversimplifies a complex reality that needs to be addressed. This adage is true not only of a physical hunger but also of the spiritual need of mankind.

As reformed Christians we need to move beyond the bumper sticker adages and understand what God's word teaches about the work of missions and the need for to prioritise and evaluate. I offer this article to help us reflect on the need for evaluation. Evaluation does not require elimination, and prioritisation is not equal to prohibition.

If someone were starving it would be a cold heart that would plant a tree and say, "Wait till the food grows and then you will have something to eat." That clearly would not show the love of Christ. There are circumstances that require immediate intervention for relief.

Directed by the Word

We must also remember that where the work of God is to be established it requires us to focus not only on the immediate need but also God's long-term calling. This is best summarised in Matt. 28 – make disciples of all nations. We do this by going, baptising and teaching. That is the method that God calls us to as churches. This is a directive for the body of Christ. This warrants a consideration of who may go, what they do, and how we should strive to fulfill God's calling. These are very practical concerns. But every practice must be directed by God's Word and developed in accordance with what God calls us to. This is when the distinction between root and fruit comes to bear.

What is the difference between the root and fruit in God's work of missions? It is the difference between sowing seeds and harvesting fruit. God has designed that the seed of the gospel is to be sown through the preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ. This preaching is something that occurs officially (by an ordained

office-bearer) and in the context of the body of Christ. We are helped in our identification of the root with the identification of the true church. It is that place where the gospel is preached, the sacraments are administered and discipline is exercised.

The fruit is the expression of our Christian life as a display of the work of Jesus Christ in us (John 15). Every Christian has been called to bear this fruit. We look forward to those on the mission field bearing this fruit. But now the question of this article is dealing with the prioritisation of the root work, in anticipation of the fruit development.

By speaking of the official activity of the church as something that has a priority over the individual reflection of the work of Jesus Christ, please be aware that I don't mean that other occasions for witnessing to the gospel and preaching in non-church settings is forbidden or unimportant. That would be to suggest that the only important parts of a banana plant or a pawpaw tree are the root in the ground and not the fruit in the air. There is a whole system of plant structure for the production of fruit



and the productivity of the root. But we must realise the difference. You can eat the tree, leaves and root, but it will not be as easy, healthy, or as beneficial as the fruit. Are we as Christians supposed to be witnessing for Christ, caring for those who are in need, showing mercy to those who suffer? Yes by all means. That is the fruit of the gospel of Jesus Christ. But please don't confuse the root with the fruit. Don't look for fruit where the root should be and don't substitute fruit-bearing activity for what really needs a root.

Fruit of Christian living

With the marvel of modern refrigeration and shipping methods, it is very easy to bring and enjoy fruit in places

where it wouldn't naturally grow. Amazingly, tropical fruit can be consumed in New Zealand. But as the church of Jesus Christ, if we attempt delivering fruit while neglecting the root of gospel proclamation it will require resources and foreign mechanisms which may sustain the fruit for a while but will never be an adequate substitute for the root. What does this look like on the mission field? It is trying to bring a mature expression of Christianity to an undeveloped or underdeveloped church. It is going and bringing the good fruit of Christian living to a place where the church is young and the body is barely rooted.

It is in this latter area that the church often struggles. We struggle primarily because of a confusion of root work

and fruit work. A fixation with fruit work savours the pleasure of missions and the quick display of fruit, but in the end it is an artificial means of developing healthy fruit. We import our expressions of Christian living and hope that we can help others bear this fruit as well. What is the fruit of a mature Christian life? – Christian education in an all-encompassing worldview; faithful family life and raising children in the fear and admonition of the Lord. Self-discipline and God-glorifying work habits and lifestyle; comprehensive understanding of biblical truth and its application to every area of life. In short, the fruit of Christianity is the full orb'd flavour of following Christ: discipleship. Now these certainly are fruits that we have been blessed with and it is desired that all our brothers and sisters in Christ would produce and enjoy such fruit.

Misguided ideologies

Sometimes an eagerness for the enjoyment of fruit, however, may cause us to import our ideals into the mission field and the immature church setting. Other times, a fear of forcing this fruit on others means that we don't look for or work for the cultivation of fruit. We only want to see the ornamental work of Jesus Christ; which in many circles is referred to as seeing souls won for Jesus Christ. But we need to get back to God's Word and prioritise His provision for the root. Faithful preaching and teaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ establishes the church and will serve for the well-being of the body of Christ. His design is that those who have been rooted in Christ will produce the fruit of Christ-like living.

This evaluation and prioritisation will require a change on the field, it will require something of us as well. It means we must trust that God will work in the way that He has promised in His Word. Missions can be just as much a test of our faith as it is a sharing of our faith. Paul says it well: I planted, Apollos watered but God gave the increase. God will cause the fruit of faithful living to grow where a church maintains her priorities and evaluates her activities in the light of God's Word. May God bless the planting of seed, the establishment of the root of a church and the production of fruit among His people for the glory of His name.

Mr Peter Kloosterman is the minister of the Reformed Church of Masterton and Chairman of the OMB.

