

EDITORIAL

God's Sovereignty

HAITI 2010! WHAT can we say? A nation that was already impoverished, experiences one of the worst disasters in the world! At time writing over 150,000 dead! 'If there is a God, how could He allow this to happen?' many ask.

One of the most instructive and challenging reports appeared in 'The Times' on Monday 25 January. It was a report on what some Haitians themselves were saying about the disaster and how they perceived it as a providence from God. Here is part of the report.

'It was an astounding sight. In the heart of Port-au-Prince, a city reduced to ruins, many hundreds of homeless Haitians gathered yesterday morning to thank God and rejoice.

'Rejoice is precisely the word. So many had died - but they had been spared. God had punished them for their sins - but now they were purified. They held their arms up towards the heavens, swaying, palms outstretched, tears rolling down their cheeks, and sang their hearts out.

"We are alive by the grace of God," the preacher roared...God will provide what we need..." Eliassant

Clair, 50, who lost seven of her children, said "I am rejoicing because the Lord gives and the Lord takes away".

In the Bible we have the account of the disasters that came on Job. He also said "*The Lord gave and the Lord takes away*" [Job 1:21].

In order to come to terms with this tragedy, we need to understand the sovereignty of God. There is nothing new in this tragedy. God's people have always been tested by His providence. "*You have made your people see **hard things**; you have given us wine to drink that made us stagger*" [Psa 60:3].

Why should such awful things happen to people who are in such need in the first place? It seems that the God who 'puts one down and sets another up' is not fair or equal in the administration of His justice.

There are those among the Haitians themselves who are not so puzzled. What an example the Haitians are to us. The very people who are suffering the most, are complaining the least. Personally we have heard and seen very little, complaints from the Haitians. Their confidence to all appearances seems to be that God reigns, let the world

rejoice. Of course not all the Haitians see the tragedy in this light and many will complain and hate God for this earthquake.

How can we reconcile the love and mercy of God with this event? Paul calls us to note *“the goodness and severity of God”* [Rom 11:22]. The earth is full of God’s goodness and severity. The goodness is from God’s own generous and benevolent heart. So is the severity. The severity is to extinguish evil and turn it to good. All things are for His glory. God will be glorified in all that happens in His world for He ordained it to be so.

God **must** punish sin. His nature is opposed to all sin and His wrath is against all sin. But being a sovereign, God can delay or even transfer His wrath in order to expiate sin. Sin cannot go unpunished. Even His sovereignty **cannot** dispose of sin without dealing with its demerit. It must be punished.

Great care must be taken not to attribute to ‘innocents’ the severe providences they may experience in life. Jesus rebuked His disciples for judging a blind man for his blindness [John 9:2]. The blindness was not because of any personal sin or sins he or his parents had committed. God’s judgments are **across** humanity.

Adam was representative of the whole human race. When he fell into sin, the whole human race fell with him. God’s punishment of

Adam’s sin, was and is against the whole **race** of mankind, but His judgment is not proportionate towards each individual who sins. Some suffer more, some less.

Not **until** the Great Judgment Day, will we receive **exactly** what we deserve. As the Apostle Paul says *“we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil”* [2 Cor 5:10].

The earth and all that is in it belongs to God. He created it and all the people in it. As with any sovereign, He has a right to do what He wants with His own. We live in a day when human rights rule but almost no ‘rights’ are attributed to the Creator. But God **has** Divine rights - which no one else has.

However, Divine grace is needed to accept the sore providences that we may be called to endure, and strong faith needs to be exercised to trust and believe the promises God has made to His people.

Thankfully God dispenses this Divine grace to His creatures, and how encouraging it is to hear and read from time to time, that His people today who are experiencing hard times are keeping their faith. There is hope. The Psalmist said *“You who have made me see many **troubles and calamities** will revive me again; from the depths of the earth You will bring me up again...and comfort me again”* [Psa 60:3]. □

Points for Prayer...

GARY McFARLANE is a 48yr old solicitor who was dismissed from his company, a charity named Relate (Avon), for failing to give an unequivocal commitment to help same-sex couples improve their sex lives. Mr McFarlane claimed unfair dismissal and discrimination. He took Relate (Avon) to the Employment Tribunal, and after losing his case there appealed to the Employment Appeal Tribunal, and lost his appeal there also. Mr McFarlane had no objection to others in Relate counselling couples needing advice on same-sex activity.

Mr McFarlane said 'This decision is a stark warning to people of conscience in this nation that, as a result...the British establishment no longer values the democratic rights of its citizens to hold conscience as a matter of principle'.

Please pray that authorities and Courts would allow Christians to exercise their Biblical convictions. Pray also that our Judiciary would recognise Christian values and ideals as legitimate and constitutional.

DUKE AMACHREE, a homelessness prevention worker, was dismissed by his employer, Wandsworth Council, for mentioning God to a client in the workplace. A campaign has been

organised in support of Mr Amachree for which he is extremely grateful.

Please pray that he will get his job back and that local authorities will not prejudice Christians who compassionately help others by mentioning Biblical and Christian solutions and helps.

ALTHOUGH THE majority of Australians (60%) do not practise a religion, more than half (57%) pray at various times during their lives with over a third (36%) praying to God. Of those who do pray, the regularity varies substantially, with more than a quarter (29%) praying daily compared with one in five (19%) who pray just a few times a year.

The most common situations for prayer are said to be when people are faced with challenging times (36%) or when a loved one has fallen ill (34%). However, more than one in three (34%) Australians also feel moved to pray when they are thankful for something good that has happened. When tough times come or bad things happen, (63%) of Australians turn to their partners or spouse for help and emotional support and half of Australians turn to other family; nearly half (49%) turn to their friends and over a quarter (28%) turn to God. At

present, the internet offers the least support to those looking for it, with only 6% turning to online friends and social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter. (*Christian Research*).

Please pray that more and more people, not only in Australia but throughout the world, would turn to the Lord when in trouble. The human heart needs real friendship and fellowship. Digital technology, as the foregoing research shows, cannot produce what the soul of man longs for - and only God can satisfy that longing.

...and Praise

IN 2008, the House of Lords passed Lord Waddington's excellent amendment protecting free speech. However, in the months following, the Government tried repeatedly to remove this amendment. CARE (Christian Action & Research Education) has been involved with this issue from the start, deeply concerned that our freedom of speech would be seriously restricted. After considerable effort and prayer CARE working alongside a number of other Christian organisations - particularly The Christian Institute - the Government finally conceded defeat on 12 November and withdrew their opposition. We thank God that the Waddington

amendment is now enshrined in law.

Please give thanks to God that this amendment has gone on to the statute book despite all the attempts made to remove it. Ask God to strengthen more MPs and Lords to legislate in accordance with God's word.

AS WE GO TO press news has come in that the House of Lord's has defeated the Government's Equality Bill, (an attempt to restrict the freedom of Churches to employ only those of the Christian faith). Baroness O'Cathain's amendments supporting the Christian position, was voted through 216 to 178 on the first amendment and 177 to 172 on the third, with the Government conceding the second amendment.

The Government also tried to pass an additional amendment but was defeated 195 votes to 174. Although the Government maintained this Bill would not affect the Christian position, 'Christian Concern for our Nation' (CCFON) as well as 'The Christian Institute', were decidedly of the opinion the Bill would have further restricted Christian liberty.

'The result shows what can happen when Christians pray and take action. Let us be encouraged that even in an ever increasing secular society, the voice of the Church can still be heard' said Andrea Williams of CCFON. □

Seven Supplements for Spiritual Vitality and Maturity

by Wayne Pearce

“For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love” [2 Pet 1:5-8].

ARE WE MAKING progress in the Christian faith? Are we growing in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ?

In the above text we are given seven supplements which if taken will guarantee progress in our Christian life. These supplements are the ways and means of spiritual vitality and maturity. This is the way to healthy spiritual development for the individual Christian and for the church collectively.

This is the way to ensure that we do not remain spiritual babies all our days which is not acceptable to God who commands His people to grow. This is therefore the way to please God. This is the way to usefulness in and out of the church.

This is the way to full assurance of faith.

Let us firstly note that this is God’s word to His people. Peter is writing *“To those who have obtained a faith of equal standing with ours by the righteousness of our God and Saviour Jesus Christ”* [1b]. It is ultimately pointless taking cognisance of the supplements if you lack faith. You must firstly repent and believe the gospel. This is God’s word in other words to believers; to those who have received the gift of faith and are putting it to work.

Let us be in no doubt that faith works; it must be exercised for faith without works is dead. Therefore this word is particularly and uniquely directed to all those who have been made partakers of the divine nature by the divine power and who are therefore standing on the promises of God. It is not for a special group of Christians but is for each and everyone who is part of the church. This is God’s word to you and me. Will we hear and heed it?

Let us also take note that God is

teaching us that we are responsible for our personal and collective spiritual growth and development. *“For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith”*. It is not enough to simply profess faith in Jesus Christ with our mouths if there is no corresponding transformation in our lives. Instead we must walk the walk as well as talk the talk. While we are saved by grace alone through faith alone in Jesus Christ alone that faith is never alone in God’s people but is always accompanied by good works; and hence our great need to supplement our faith.

This is something we must unceasingly apply ourselves to. We are to make every effort. We must never allow ourselves to become apathetic, complacent, half-hearted, lethargic or neglectful in this matter lest we remain spiritually impoverished or worse. Some Christians start off well but appear to have more in common with the incredible shrinking man for they appear to regress rather than progress in their Christian lives. They start off well but fall away. Instead we must be ever determined to make progress herein. We must make it our constant aim and desire to be growing and developing in the faith. We must be supplementing our faith; we must be adding to it.

Here then is God’s seven step plan for our spiritual maturity. We are all familiar with the concept of taking supplements. Some people

on account of a particular chemical or vitamin deficiency or imbalance are forced to take supplements regularly. The way to spiritual maturity is through taking supplements. For we all have a serious deficiency without these seven qualities. These seven moreover must all be taken. We cannot pick and choose from among them; but this is like a cocktail of supplements that are all essential for our spiritual welfare and witness. They are like links or precious pearls in a chain that we must decorate our lives with.

The first supplement is virtue; the first step on the road to spiritual maturity is by adding virtue to your faith: *“supplement your faith with virtue”*. The word virtue speaks to us of moral excellence; it communicates the sense of being morally good or righteous. By faith we believe in Jesus Christ for salvation. We are justified that is declared righteous by God through faith; for by faith the righteousness of Christ is accredited, imputed or reckoned to our account. This is the only way we can be saved.

However the righteousness that saves us is the righteousness of another – it is of Christ, the LORD our righteousness. In other words it is extraneous to us. We are not made intrinsically righteous thereby but we are declared righteous in the sight of God. However we are then called to be holy; we are called to be saints; we are called to pursue

righteousness; we are called to live morally upright lives as those who are God's children, partakers of the divine nature. Thus living virtuous lives is evidence that we are Christ's; that we are followers of Him. Hence the advice of the apostle Paul to the church in Philippi: *"Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honourable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence [virtue], if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me — practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you"* [Phil 4:8-9]. Let us therefore supplement [our] faith with virtue and virtue with knowledge".

Virtue is founded and grounded on knowledge for right thinking or understanding must precede right acting or doing. What we believe determines our behaviour. By contrast ignorance is a major enemy of the true faith; it is the way of danger and destruction for the Christian individually and the church collectively. Our spiritual development is dependent on our knowledge of God and self, the true way of salvation, and of the manner of making progress in Christ's school of learning.

We are all learners and must be growing from infancy to adulthood in the faith. That is why good

preaching and teaching ought to be at a premium in the church. This also necessitates that we give ourselves to learning from the word of God and the example of Christ. We must be students of the word, searching the scriptures daily, reading sound Christian literature and such like. Let us hear and heed the word of the living God: *"Brothers, do not be children in your thinking. Be infants in evil, but in your thinking be mature* [1 Cor 14:20]. *And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God"* [Col 1:9-10]. Let us therefore supplement virtue with knowledge *and knowledge with self-control*".

Self-control which is one of the fruits of the Spirit speaks to us of our need to lead disciplined lives. *"Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable"* [1 Cor 9:25]. We must thus be disciplined like an athlete in preparing for as well as participating in the race. Just as an athlete watches what he eats so the Christian must take care not to be imbibing things that are spiritually harmful. Just as an athlete has a strict exercise regime so too must

the Christian make full use of the means of grace if we are to prosper spiritually and attain to maturity therein. Just as the athlete is disciplined in keeping to his regimen so must the Christian not allow himself to become distracted or dissuaded by the multitude of things that compete for his time and talents. Just as the athlete must compete according to the rules so must the Christian do according to the revealed will of God which is contained in the sacred scriptures.

Self control also communicates to us the idea of self-restraint, temperance or moderation. We are to exercise self-control when confronted by trials, troubles and temptations. We are to be ever careful not to open the door to the fallen nature, the world and the Evil One. We must *“renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and ...live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age”* [Tit 2:12]. Lack of self-control is just one of the signs of godlessness in the last days according to 2 Timothy 3:3. By contrast the exercise of self-control is evidence that we are Christ's. Let us live self-controlled lives.

We must moreover supplement self control with steadfastness: *“and self-control with steadfastness”*. This is essential for if we continue with the analogy of the athlete, the race we are called to run is more like a marathon than a sprint; we must be prepared for the long-haul - *“let*

us run with endurance the race that is set before us” [Heb 12:1]. We must continue therein through the pain barrier; through the humiliation, scorn, opposition and even persecution that might come our way. Like the salmon that must constantly battle against the tide, current and stream so we must make our way against the prevailing torrent of ungodliness and unrighteousness.

The Christian pilgrimage is uphill all the way to the Celestial City. Therefore there must be *“steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ”* [1 Thes 1:4]. We are to continue steadfastly in following Jesus; in the worship, work and witness that we have been called to. James writes: *“for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness”* [Jam 1:3].

Steadfastness thus speaks of commitment and resolve. It also speaks of endurance: *“For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God you may receive what is promised”* [Heb 10:36].

Steadfastness speaks of patience. There must be patient endurance among us. We must patiently wait for the fulfilment of God's promises. Steadfastness similarly speaks of perseverance. We are to keep alert with all perseverance. We can do so in the knowledge that our great and gracious God is preserving us and will fulfil in us and bring to

completion and perfection what He has started. Let us moreover supplement *“steadfastness with godliness”*. Faith, virtue, knowledge, self-control and steadfastness promote or lead to godliness.

Godliness conveys the idea of a life lived in a God-ward fashion or direction. Our chief end is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever; we are to do all to the glory of God. We are to live God-centred and God-focussed lives in and through Christ our Lord. Thus we ought to model our lives on the commands and example of Jesus Christ as His disciples.

The Bible says: *“Have nothing to do with irreverent, silly myths. Rather train yourself for godliness; for while bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come”* [1 Tim 4:7-8]. As beloved children we are to bear the family-likeness – there must increasingly be God-likeness in our words and deeds. Let us also supplement *“godliness with brotherly affection”*.

If we are Christ’s then we belong to the family and household of God. We are not many different families although we give the appearance today of being a plethora of dysfunctional families but we are part of the one family of God for there is but one true church universal. And we are called to give expression to this fact. We ought to

be labouring to achieve unity in heart and mind in and between the churches, that we might truly be united in the Spirit as brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ.

The apostle Paul can thus write to the church in Rome: *“Love one another with brotherly affection”* [Rom 12:10a]. In the Letter to the Hebrews we are commanded to *“Let brotherly love continue”* [Heb 13:1]. In some churches it does not even appear to have begun!

The apostle Peter makes the connection between obedience to the truth and love: *“Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart”* [1 Pet 1:22].

The Lord Jesus says that the world will know that we are His disciples by the love that we have for one another! This is the way to and is a sign of spiritual maturity. Brotherly affection is a good indication of progress in the Christian life.

And finally we are to supplement *“brotherly affection with love”*. Love is the crowning grace; the chief fruit of the Spirit. *“And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony”* [Col 3:14]. Love is like the capstone which holds all in place. God is love and as beloved children we are to be imitators of God and walk in love – this is the way to and the way of spiritual

maturity. It is the most excellent way for *“Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends”* [1 Cor 13:4-8a].

Is the love of God manifest in and through our individual and collective lives? The more we progress in spiritual vitality and maturity the more loving we must become!

Let us acknowledge then our great need for spiritual vitality and maturity. It is to be had by supplementing our faith with virtue, knowledge, self-control, steadfastness, godliness, brotherly affection and love. With spiritual

maturity come usefulness and fruitfulness: *“For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ”* [2 Pet 1:8]. With spiritual maturity moreover comes assurance and confidence in the faith. This is the way to make our calling and election sure: *“for if you practice these qualities you will never fall. For in this way there will be richly provided for you an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ”* [10-11].

Are we on the way to spiritual maturity which means usefulness and fruitfulness in Christ’s church? Let us supplement our faith with these seven qualities for spiritual vitality and maturity for our personal blessing and the blessing of others to the glory of God. □

THERE ARE SOME SINS which all know are indefensible, but there are others which even professing Christians seek to justify. It is almost surprising to see what ingenuity people will exercise when seeking to find excuses where **self** is concerned. The cunning of the old serpent which appeared in the excuses of our first parents seems here to supply the place of wisdom. Those possessing little perspecuity in general matters are singularly quick-sighted in discovering every circumstance that appears to make in their favour or serves to extenuate their fault. Sin, when we have committed it, loses its sinfulness, and appears a very different thing from what it did in others. When a sin is committed by **us**, it is common to give it another name - covetousness becomes thrift, malignant contentions fidelity for the truth, fanaticism zeal for God - and thereby we become reconciled to it and are ready to enter on a vindication, instead of penitently confessing and forsaking it.

A W Pink

Reporting Back

WHEN THE presbytery met on 8 December last year most of its time was taken up with the Licensing of the student, Fletcher Matandika. This was done at the request of the Canadian Presbytery

Fletcher is a native of Malawi, who has been working for the APC in Vancouver for the last couple of years. His father is a pastor responsible for around 2000 people. Before he left Malawi to study in America Fletcher developed a program for helping orphans. Around 4000 children have been helped as a result.

While a student at Westminster Seminary California his father asked him to help the church in a particularly deprived part of Malawi. The result has been provision of fresh drinking water, the growth of small businesses, and a medical clinic and school, in addition to an increase in the influence of the gospel.

The Oban High School Librarian joined Joy to the World Ministries in Malawi during the summer of 2009 and is working to provide internet access for the public as well as a library for the church and school. The Vancouver APC asked Fletcher to give them pulpit supply for a number of months after his

graduation. He has since done additional studies under the supervision of the Canadian Presbytery of the APC and is now a probationer for the ministry.

The Presbytery also dealt with matters at home. A tribute was read to one of its members, Norman MacDonald, who represented the Harris congregation for many years until his death in 2009.

Some presbytery members were deputed to visit the Skye congregation to see what help is needed there in view of Rev Angus Cattanach's uncertain health.

Members were asked to consider information provided by the Church Planting Committee, and the spiritual and ecclesiastical needs of northwest Scotland.

After many years as General Treasurer Kenneth MacLean announced his retirement. As from the start of 2010 his place is taken by Roderick MacKenzie. Kenneth is due the heartfelt thanks of congregations and Presbytery members alike. He has undertaken the duties with wisdom and grace, often in difficult circumstances. The Presbytery wishes to express its gratitude to him, and also to Roderick for offering to take over those responsibilities. □

Congregational News

EDINBURGH

Many, many thanks to everyone who has taken an interest in the work here. Your interest, prayers and support are not only humbling but a great help and blessing to the work and to us. May God graciously and abundantly bless you and all for whom you have a care.

Sophie, our youngest granddaughter has had to have several medical tests. So far the results have eventually been encouraging and we earnestly pray that the remaining results will be good. All in all, this has caused a great amount of anxiety.

We hope to do a Christianity Explored course in the next few months in the Wednesday meeting, please pray for this. It will be good for all our regulars, and we pray they come, but we hope and pray that some completely new ones attend.

Pray that we make the most of our different church meetings whether talking to adults or children. It is, and should be, humbling that people continue to come. It is brought home to us, time and again that some people move on, or loose interest while thankfully others stay around. The question arises for Morag in the Sunday School and Transformers

and me in the services, how well did we use the opportunity? We both feel the need for prayer in this matter that we would strive to do our best.

The family, continuing in their efforts to bring me up to date, insisted I would have an ipod on my most recent birthday and I am extremely glad they did, as it is very handy for listening to sermons as well as many other things. There is such a wealth of gospel on the internet. We can loose sight of this when we read about people misusing it. We should give thanks for all who do this great work of gospel proclamation through the internet. May more and more people use it for good. It would be naive to assume that Satan has not prevented many good preachers from using it in the way they could. Pray that all who should, would!

One preacher asked, where would we all be if it were not for the wonderful work of Christ? We would be pagans and children of wrath. Where would the church be without the work and power of the Holy Spirit? Utterly defeated and absolutely nothing accomplished. Christ the Lord redeemed us with his own blood. This humbling truth should fill us with gratitude, praise and worship. Why did the beloved

Son of God come to save the sinful sons of men? Because the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, are infinitely loving.

The shop sales were encouraging in the past year. We still long and pray for those customers who have no apparent interest in the gospel, to be open to its wonderful life changing power. Then there are those who have shown some interest, however fleeting. We pray for them to be completely caught up in the all important matter, namely: Where do they stand with God. We pray for those who seem to be hopelessly held in various addictions, that they would know the joy and peace of God that passes understanding.

What a perpetual proof of man's spiritual blindness and sinfulness, that he can go through life showing absolutely no interest in the greatest wonder the world has ever seen or heard of, that is, The character and work of Christ! From His birth to His ascension and all through his ministry it is the most glorious display of miracle, wonder, truth, authority, power, humility, gentleness, service, grace, forgiveness, love, wisdom, obedience, perfection, goodness, righteousness, justice and much more (if we will take time to ponder). Christ is, God's most awesome yet accessible revelation of Himself to a world that needs Him more than it needs anything else.

Yet it is still true that "*Christ crucified: (is) a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles.*" However, "*To those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ (is) the power of God and the wisdom of God.*" Which brings The Apostle Paul to continue in 1 Cor. 1v23ff "*For the foolishness of God is wiser than man's wisdom and the weakness of God is stronger than man's strength.*"

"Brothers, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things - and the things that are not - to nullify the things that are, so that no-one may boast before him. It is because of Him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God - that is, our righteousness holiness and redemption. Therefore as it is written: Let him who boasts boast in the Lord" Doubtless, there is no better way to go into 2010. JR

DUNDEE

We had a very encouraging Community Service at the end of the year with the church filled to capacity with some who had not come to church before. There were

not enough seating for all and it was good to see around a dozen young people giving up their seat to sit on the floor and then listening to the Word of God.

During the service one woman left the hall and stayed in the foyer - she was weeping. When asked if she was well, she said she was just so happy. She was a Roman Catholic, and the simplicity of the service 'got to her'! She came back in and stayed till the end.

We want to thank all those who prayed about this special service we have every year. We long for folk in our area to come and hear God's Word and for them to be affected by the Word sung and preached.

We had a lovely time at our annual meal together in the Invercarse Hotel at the end of November, where our ladies enjoyed a meal that they did not need to prepare! We have a wonderful team of ladies who work very hard throughout the year.

As usual the final service of the year included the Lord's Supper. Some of our regulars were away including Mr Quinn, who has been having a difficult time health-wise, and is again at the time of writing, in hospital once more. Please pray that a Shelter Home will soon be provided for him in a suitable place near his family.

We look forward to the Christianity Explored Course starting again in January and pray that we ourselves will all be

strengthened in our faith and witness as well as visitors being challenged with the gospel.

We wish to thank everyone for their support and their prayers during the past year.

INVERNESS

We must always begin with God – and stay with him. The Christian life, and indeed 'Church life', can easily be distracted, and in the distraction we lose sight of God. For that, as no doubt for other reasons also, the writer of the letter to the Hebrews urges the reader to run the race **looking to Jesus**. The external activities of church-life can become so pressing as to cloud our spiritual vision.

With that preamble, I ask the question – 'What do you want your church to be known for?'. For my part, my answer is, 'A place where Jesus Christ is preeminent in the hearts and lives of those who worship'. Born out of that conviction, we have in Inverness been looking at the ways in which Jesus Christ introduced himself to the Seven Churches of Asia.

Each church group is addressed by a Person who knows their spiritual condition and gives direction for the spiritual progress. He is still the same today – speaking to you and your church fellowship. That is what makes preaching the Word of God such a positive and profitable activity. Both preacher and people should expect God, who

is pleased to use preaching, to advance his purposes.

At the Sunday morning services we have been looking at the book of Hosea. What a story of human departure from God, and of divine love that will not let his people go. In the book of Hosea, our plight has been painted in words, and also the persevering grace of God. God would not give-up on his unfaithful backsliding people. I feel that over the weeks of that study, I have got, not only to know Hosea better, but I have had fresh discoveries of how much God loves his people, even me.

The Creche, the Sunday School Classes, and the Youth Group continue, and we appreciate those who devote their time and talent to that work.

The Lunch Club continues, and not only is good food served, but we hear about Jesus, God's Son and our Saviour. The Ladies Meetings, and the Men's Breakfast Meetings are up-and-running again. At these meetings there is generally a Guest Speaker, each bringing their own particular witness to God's grace. At recent Ladies' Meeting, Doda

Dennis, Esther Dowey, and Kenny MacKenzie gave their testimonies. Kenny also spoke about his work at Madras Street.

In November Kingsview saw the Dr Sookhdeo meetings. The three public meetings on the Friday were followed by the Men's Breakfast Meeting on the Saturday, at which Dr Sookhdeo spoke about his becoming a Christian. At the January meeting Praphat Barot told the men of his conversion from being a Hindu to being a Christian. Every conversion to Christ is a thrilling story, and these accounts, as others before them, have cheered and challenged our hearts.

We plan, the Lord willing, on having a Book-Table on the Wednesday evening every second month, alternating between CFP CLC. I would be remiss in my reporting if I did not again emphasise my conviction that fervent prayer, persisted in, is the 'key' to strength in our spiritual lives. Not only is that a Biblical conviction, but it is encapsulated in these words – 'What a man is on his knees before God, that he is and nothing more'. (*Calum MacInnes*)

In the year 1861 the French Academy of science published a list of fifty-one so-called scientific facts, each of which, it was alleged, disproved some statement in the Bible. Today the Bible remains as it was then, but not one of those fifty-one so-called facts is held by men of science. Distinction should always be made between the speculations in the realm of science and its clearly proven facts. The speculations of science are like the shifting currents of the sea, while the Scriptures have breasted them like the Rock of Gibraltar for two thousand years.

Lorraine Boettner

God is Always Good (1)

by J Cameron Fraser

“And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose” [Rom 8:28 ESV]. Romans 8:28 is one of those well-known Scripture verses which has brought comfort to God’s people in their suffering. It can also be used in an almost clichéd way to give superficial comfort. It shouldn’t be quoted too quickly.

It’s important to recognize at least two important qualifications. First, it is for those who love God. It’s not just a general assurance that everything will work out well in the end. It’s a promise specifically to those who love God. Second, it’s for those who are called according to God’s purpose. That purpose, as the next verses point out, goes all the way back to God’s plan in predestination and all the way forward to the glorification of his people, conforming them to the image of his own Son.

In other words, suffering, when it comes to those who love God and are called according to his purpose, is part of his providential care of his people preparing them for glory. As Paul writes earlier in verse 18 of the same chapter, *“I consider that our*

present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us” [NIV].

Suffering, then, is part of what we call the doctrine of providence. I’d like to illustrate this from my own experience and then show how it prepared me to minister to others, especially the family of a teenaged girl in my congregation. In doing so, my intention is not to suggest that my sufferings have been especially noteworthy. Many have gone through and continue to go through much more than I have.

My hope rather is to illustrate the grace of God in his works of providence. A secondary purpose is to thank those in the APC and elsewhere who prayed for me during my illness.

Like most readers of the *APC News*, I grew up on the Westminster Shorter Catechism, which defines God’s works of providence as “his most holy, wise, and powerful preserving and governing all his creatures, and all their actions” (Q & A 11). For the last several years, I have ministered to congregations of mainly Dutch extraction and have grown to know and love their Heidelberg Catechism. I still believe

the Shorter Catechism is the best and most concise summary of biblical doctrine available, but the Heidelberg Catechism's tone is more personal and pastoral. This is readily seen in Lord's Day 9, Q & A 27 and 28:

Q & A 27

Q. What do you understand by the providence of God?

A. Providence is the almighty and ever present power of God by which he upholds, as with his hand, heaven and earth and all creatures, and so rules them that leaf and blade, rain and drought, fruitful and lean years, food and drink, health and sickness, prosperity and poverty--all things, in fact, come to us not by chance but from his fatherly hand.

Q & A 28

Q. How does the knowledge of God's creation and providence help us?

A. We can be patient when things go against us, thankful when things go well, and for the future we can have good confidence in our faithful God and Father that nothing will separate us from his love. All creatures are so completely in his hand that without his will they can neither move nor be moved.

Lord's Day 10, as it is popularly known (the catechism is divided into 52 Lord's Days for teaching and preaching purposes) is a great favourite in the circles in which I minister. It was often quoted to me during my illness. But what I found

particularly comforting was the previous Lord's Day 9, dealing with the Fatherhood of God:

Lord's Day 9

Q & A 26

Q. What do you believe when you say, "I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth"?

A. That the eternal Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who out of nothing created heaven and earth and everything in them, who still upholds and rules the same by his eternal counsel and providence, is my God and Father, because of Christ his Son. I trust him so much that I do not doubt he will provide whatever I need for body and soul, and he will turn to my good whatever adversity he sends me in this sad world. He is able to do this because he is almighty God; he desires to do this because he is a faithful Father.

That last sentence has become one of my personal favourites: "He is able to do this because he is almighty God; he desires to do this because he is a faithful Father."

I was diagnosed with a lymphoma on the spleen in early 2007. Previously, the intention had been to remove my spleen, but when cancer was discovered during the operation, I was sown back up and began a course of six chemotherapy sessions in Lethbridge, Alberta, where I live.

After this initial treatment, I

had a PET Scan in Calgary, which still showed a large growth on my spleen, but no evidence of cancer cells. However, the cancer returned and so the next step was an autologous stem cell transplant.

This means that some of my stem cells were removed for safe keeping while I had high dose chemotherapy that destroyed my bone marrow. Then the stem cells were reintroduced to regenerate the bone marrow. The procedure was given a 50% chance of success. This was followed by radiation in the spring of 2008 and I returned to part-time and then full-time work at the beginning of 2009.

One reason the doctors initially thought I didn't have cancer is that it is unusual for cancer to begin in the spleen and there was no evidence of it anywhere else. However, a member of my congregation loaned me a very interesting book by David Jeremiah, a prominent pastor in California, who hosts a radio and TV program called *Turning Point*.

The book is called *A Bend in the Road*, and it's mainly a biblical study of suffering, largely from the Psalms. It includes the stories of a number of people who have suffered in various ways. But it begins and ends with his own story. At the age of 53, he was diagnosed with a lymphoma on the spleen. A decision was made to operate, but while the operation was in process, the doctors decided not to take the

spleen out as the cancer had not spread as much as they'd thought. This was followed by chemotherapy which seemed to take care of the problem, at least in the short term. But four years later, the cancer came back, this time in the neck, and David Jeremiah underwent a stem cell transplant. This was in 1998-9 and he is still preaching today.

What struck me about Pastor Jeremiah's experience was the similarities it had to my own. He was 53 when he was diagnosed, I was 52. We both underwent surgery to remove the spleen, but in both cases a decision was made not to continue, although for different reasons--his because the cancer had not spread too much, mine because cancer was discovered for the first time. He underwent a stem cell transplant four years after his initial treatment; I did so within a year. His was successful; the results of mine appear to be at present.

After introducing his own story and before getting into the Psalms, David Jeremiah discusses two passages of Scripture which have meant a lot to me. The first is 2 Corinthians 12:7-12 which records Paul's three times pleading for his thorn in the flesh to be removed, only to receive this wonderful answer: "*My grace is sufficient for you, for my strength is made perfect in weakness.*" So Paul concludes, "*Therefore most gladly will I rather boast in my*

infirmities, that the power of Christ might rest upon me. Therefore, I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong" [AV]. Who wouldn't want to go through what Paul suffered in order to have that strong assurance?

The second passage is Hebrews 12:5-11, which speaks of God disciplining us as sons, assuring us that "*whom the Lord loves he chastens, and scourges every son whom he receives*" [AV].

This doesn't mean we should go out looking for suffering, but it does mean that it comes as a confirmation of the fact that God does love us as his children, and he is using it to make us the kind of trusting and loving children of God we ought to be, and that perhaps we might not be if life were too good and we were left to go our own way as we please.

A friend wrote to me with a helpful quotation from William Huntington, an English preacher and writer of the past that included this, which really expresses well my heart's desire: "God hath chosen us in the furnace of affliction, and in affliction He will make His choice of us known." This really is another

way of expressing the truth of Hebrews 12:5, that God chastens those he loves and scourges (or disciplines) every son whom he receives.

Of course, that doesn't make it easy. Back in the summer of 2007, after my initial PET Scan when I was told that the doctors simply wanted to monitor my condition without any further treatment, I went into a panic and suffered acute anxiety. I wondered how long my wife and I could afford to live on disability payments, whether we should sell our house, if I should simply resign and go on unemployment benefits. These may seem like extreme reactions and they were, not the kind any Christian should have, much less a pastor who teaches others not to be anxious as Jesus commanded.

At the time I seriously wondered if I could ever preach again. How could I tell others to trust God in a way that I was obviously failing to do? Those who tried to help me during this time assured me that I would be able to relate better to the anxieties as well as the physical sufferings on my parishioners.

In the next article, I'd like to illustrate this, especially in the life of one particular member of my congregation. □

THERE IS AS MUCH difference between the sufferings of the saints and those of the ungodly, as there is between the cords which an executioner pinions a condemned malefactor and the bandages which a tender surgeon binds his patient.

John Arrowsmith

Marginalising Christians

The Christian Institute have published a recent book, 'Marginalising Christians', which gives instances of Christians being sidelined in Britain today. Below is the conclusion in the book. There are 80pp in the book.

IN THE PUBLIC square atheism is held out to be neutral, whilst Christians are told to keep their beliefs private and not to bring them into public life. They are being told to keep their Christianity at home or at church and never bring it to the workplace, the public street, the school, or the market place.

There seems to be a preconception that Christianity ought to be treated as a private eccentricity, an optional extra. This fails to appreciate that genuine faith affects a person's entire life and cannot be turned on and off like a tap. As the Archbishop of York said, a Christian man can no more take off his faith than a black man can take off his skin.

Never have there been more 'equality and diversity' laws. Yet the marginalisation faced by Christians is increasing at an alarming rate. In many instances equality and diversity laws are actually being used as a sword to attack Christians

rather than a shield to protect them.

In education, despite the historic influence of Christianity, there is an increasing undercurrent of intolerance in the system. This is evidenced by children being reprimanded for expressing their faith to classmates, punished for refusing to pray to Allah during an RE class, and forced to attend LGBT events against their will. Much of this is done in the name of equality.

It is inconceivable that this would happen to children of another faith group. Christians are often victims of crime and violence, either directly because of their faith or indirectly because their faith-based social action places them in vulnerable situations. Some twelve per cent of clergy have suffered some form of violence. In several cases Christians have been brutally assaulted while their attackers shouted anti-Christian abuse.

Scores of churches have been firebombed or vandalised, with 20

arson attacks reported in the press in a twelve month period beginning in May 2008. Many will be surprised at these statistics and wonder why there isn't more awareness of the problem. Perhaps it is because hatred against Christians is treated less seriously than it ought to be.

Clumsy and prejudiced stereotypes of Christians pervade the entertainment media. Dramas often depict Christians as objects of ridicule, or moral hypocrites, or cultish brain-washers.

The freedom to criticise and mock beliefs must be allowed in a healthy democracy, but when the public is shown such a biased portrayal of Christians it fosters a culture of increasing intolerance, while the sensitivity shown by the media to other religious groups compounds this injustice.

In several worrying cases Christians have been detained by police officers for expressing their faith in a public place. This is often caused by a misapplication of public order laws and unbalanced guidance on 'hate incidents'.

The situation has become so severe that a church worker in Manchester was challenged by five police officers and his literature was investigated by the Hate Crimes Unit because he handed out leaflets inviting members of the public to a church Easter service. It turned out that a complainant merely objected to the presence of evangelical

Christians, but the knee-jerk reaction of the police is troubling.

Christians are also frustrated when they perceive that other religious minorities are being treated more sensitively. They wonder why Christian street preachers are being carted off into police vans for talking about sexual ethics, while officers stand by watching extremist Muslims hold up placards calling for their opponents to be beheaded. Police forces must do more to train their officers about laws that protect freedom of expression and religion.

In employment there has been a sharp rise in religious discrimination cases coming before employment tribunals. Polling data reveals that many Christians have been disciplined at work or turned down for promotion because of their faith. Although in theory the law protects Christians from harassment and discrimination in the workplace, these rights are often trumped by equality and diversity codes that have little regard for religious conscience.

When Christians have been asked to perform new duties that conflict with their sincerely held religious beliefs, their objections are ignored. In some cases those very objections are treated as grounds for disciplinary action.

This reveals a prejudiced attitude towards faith, one which assumes faith is a private thing that should be left at the factory gate or

the office door.

Local authorities have displayed an astonishing level of intolerance against Christians. Several councils have inaccurately told Christian evangelists that they need a licence from the council to hand out free Christian literature to the public. Other councils have sought to stop street preachers lawfully expressing their faith in public places. Council-run services, like libraries, have refused to display church notices because of equality rules – even though those same councils advertise events by other religious and minority groups.

Some over-sensitive councils have removed references to Christmas during festive celebrations. Christian groups face huge barriers when trying to access public funds. One charity decided to remove the word “church” from its name because it was causing problems in applying for grants.

The Archbishop of York has spoken about a “chill wind” which blows against Christian groups seeking public money. A care home for elderly Christians had its funding withdrawn because it would not agree to quiz its residents about their sexual orientation every three months.

In the provision of goods and services Christians are being penalised for attempting to act in a manner that is consistent with their core religious beliefs. A Christian couple who run a guesthouse in

Cornwall are being sued under equality laws because they have a well- advertised policy of allowing only married couples to book double rooms.

Faith-based adoption agencies are faced with the choice of either closing down or abandoning their religious ethos – all because they say children should be placed with a married mother and father.

A tolerant society ought to allow Christians to trade in the market place without forcing them to drop their faith to do so. Yet this is what is happening because goods and services equality laws do not take proper account of religious belief.

When it comes to applying equality and diversity laws, Christians seem to be the first to be punished and the last to be protected. This prejudice and intolerance must end.

We highly recommend this book which highlights the various examples of prejudice against Christians in our society today. The Christian Institute are doing an excellent work and are willing to help any person who is being victimised for his Christian faith. For more information contact: The Christian Institute, Wilberforce House, 4 Park Road, Gosforth Business Park, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE12 8DG, Tel 0191 281 5664 www.christian.org.uk □

Concentrated Prayer

MINISTRY IS ITS own worst enemy. It is not destroyed by the big bad wolf of the world. It destroys itself. One survey of pastors asked 'What are the most common obstacles to spiritual growth?' The top three were busyness (83%), lack of discipline (73%), and interruptions and most of our busyness is ministry-related, not 'worldly'.

The great threat to our prayer and our meditation on the Word of God is good ministry activity. Charles Spurgeon put it like this: 'Those incessant knocks at our door, and perpetual visits from idle persons, are so many buckets of cold water thrown upon our devout zeal. We must by some means secure uninterrupted meditation, or we shall lose power'. This is the point of Acts 6:2-4.....

Without extended, concentrated prayer, the ministry of the Word withers. And when the ministry of the Word declines, faith [Rom 10:17]; Gal 3:3,5] and holiness [John 17:17] decline. Activity may continue, but life and power and fruitfulness fade away. Therefore whatever opposes prayer opposes the whole work of ministry.

And what opposes the pastor's life of prayer more than anything? The ministry. It is not shopping or car repairs or sickness or yard work that squeezes our prayers into

hurried corners of the day. It is budget development and staff meetings and visitations and counseling and answering mail and writing reports and reading journals and answering the phone and preparing messages.

The effort to meet needs is, ironically, often the enemy of prayer. Literally, Acts 6:3 says, "*Brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this need*". The care of the widows was a **real need**. And it was precisely this need which threatened apostolic prayer...

If they had thought that prayer a something you do while washing dishes or cooking (or driving a car between hospitals), they would not have seen table-serving as a threat to prayer. Prayer was a time-consuming labor during which other duties had to be set aside.

They had learned from Jacob and from Jesus that whole nights may have to be spent in prayer [Gen 32:24; Luke 6:12]. Under the drain of ministry, we must "*withdraw to solitary places and pray*" [Luke 5:16]. Before significant pastoral encounters we must pray **alone** [Luke 9:18].

John Piper in:
'Brothers, we are not Professionals'

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