

Editorial

Today many theologians believe that the stories of Adam and Eve are myths rather than literal history. The books of Job and Esther have also been declared fiction, even by such prominent Christian figures as CS Lewis. Today, so-called experts teach that Sunday observance is no longer required, and that respect for the rights of the individual is more important than respect for God-instituted authority. Even Biblical teachings about women in office, adultery, and the nature of God are coming under fire.

At first glance, it does seem impossible that the contents of the Bible, written 2000 years ago, can still be relevant today. We have seen scientific and technological advances beyond what the Hebrew writers could have dreamed: space travel, the discovery of distant universes, cloning, drugs and medical procedures to prolong life, come to mind. There have also been significant cultural advances: females now have a more dominant role in society, and the postmodern movement has undermined the idea of absolute truth and seen everyone forging their own meanings.

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Editorial (continued)

With this in mind, how can we apply the same standards and require the same level of conduct as we did two thousand years ago? How can we believe that the Bible, which claims to be unchanging and undeniable, is still as pertinent today as when it was written? How can anyone expect a modern society to abide by such rigid and fixed teachings?

The modern trend is to pick and choose from the Bible

The easy answer, the answer for those who want to have it the easy way, is: it can't. Some parts of the Bible just don't apply anymore. And so the modern trend is to pick and choose from the Bible what one feels is relevant, and to discard the remainder because we feel it shouldn't apply to modern society. In this way, we make our own God. We decide which parts of His revelation to believe. We make Him conform to our wishes – God, who is unchanging, and whose ways are so much higher than ours!

However, if the Bible is studied by weighing it against worldly understanding, then it is studied in vain. In 1 Cor 1:20,21 we read, "Where is the wise man? Where is the scholar? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since in the wisdom of God the world through wisdom did not know Him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe." In other words, we cannot judge the Gospel by the standards of men, whose most profound reasoning is nothing more than vanity. Instead, we must learn to submit the whole of our intellectual wisdom to the 'foolishness' of the cross. As Paul says, "God chose the foolish

things of the world to shame the wise" (1 Cor 1:27). We see this in Luke 7, where the common people gave glory to God because the Lord Jesus' words touched their hearts, while the learned Scribes and Pharisees, flattering themselves with confidence in their own knowledge, didn't understand His message. Their humanly devised philosophical systems were stumbling blocks to their salvation.

Therefore, if some aspects of the Bible seem outdated or unlikely, we must still prefer this 'foolishness' of God to all display of human insight. The world may not be happy with the Bible's teachings on women in office, or on divorce, or on joining in with worldly amusements. But we believe heartily that: "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness." (1 Tim 3:16) "For prophecy never came by the will of men, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Spirit." (1 Pet 1:21) Therefore, "we believe without any doubt *all* things contained in them [the Scriptures]." (BC Art 5)

If man is going to pick and choose what he believes from the Bible, then he makes himself to be God. He does not submit himself to God's will. Instead, his own will has the final say. This is a blasphemy against God, and a sinful withholding of that praise which is due to His name. We are warned in Ps 2:12, "Kiss the Son, lest He be angry and you be destroyed in your way, for His wrath can flare up in a moment." Therefore we ought to tremble at His Word, listen in awe whenever He speaks and hold closely onto all that He teaches. Without this approach, we cannot say of ourselves that we serve God.

Collete Groenewold

DON'T BE ANXIOUS

*Article summarised from a sermon preached by Rev van Delden on Philipians 4:6-7
(31st December in Rockingham)*

Anxious has 2 different meanings, it can mean 'eager', as in: 'the youngster was anxious to begin school' or it can mean 'nervous, afraid, worried' as in our text. Here in this verse Paul commands us to be anxious for nothing. More precisely it's not Paul who utters this command but God who guides the hand of Paul through the working of the Holy

Spirit, God forbids all worry, all apprehension and all fear.

Now everyone experiences some measure of anxiety, some in such great measure that it can render him or her dysfunctional. It can even present in clinical symptoms such as a rapid heart beat, shortness of breath, feeling faint and trembling. We

have even been told by mental health experts that some physical conditions can make us more prone to worry and more susceptible to anxiety. All this makes us more inclined to say we can't help it if we're anxious and worried.

However God through Paul tells us "*rejoice in the Lord always*" and to "*be anxious for nothing*". We must rule our emotions and not let ourselves be ruled by them, **we** are responsible for the way we feel and physical disorder will be able to prevent us from obeying God in this.

So why does God forbid anxiety? This can be found in the Sermon on the Mount where Jesus tells His followers, "*do not worry*". Here in the original Greek, the Lord Jesus uses the same word as Paul uses but it is translated differently. In this text He says, "*so why do you worry... O you of little faith*".

Yes, if we are anxious about something it means that we lack faith about that very thing. Now this is difficult for some of us to accept, especially some of us who struggle with anxiety and worry. We feel insulted. It makes us feel as though our faith is inferior to that of others in the congregation who don't struggle with anxiety. But that's not the case. While some of us struggle with anxiety, others struggle with other vices. Some struggle with materialism, the love for and trust in earthly possessions. Others struggle with lusts of the flesh. Some struggle with pride. Others struggle with anger. Anxiety is only one of many sins against which we must struggle. Those who struggle with anxiety are not inferior Christians, neither is their faith inferior. But the truth must be told—where there is anxiety, there is lack of faith. Thus Paul commands us to be anxious for nothing.

Paul knows that some do struggle with anxiety and worry and so he commands us to pray. "*But in*

everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God". We must pray in faith, without doubting that God will give us this peace that dispels all our anxiety and worry. Then when we pray and persevere in prayer God promises us to give us His indescribable peace.

So what is this indescribable peace that God promises? This peace surpasses all understanding, a peace that defies description. We see an example of this peace of Christ in Matthew 8 where He is able to sleep in a boat that was tossed about by the sea and covered with waves. In the midst of this angry storm Jesus sleeps undisturbed. Now this is the peace that God promises to us. No person amongst us can grant us this peace but God, through the work of Christ on the cross. Christ's sacrifice took away all our sins, including becoming anxious, and replaces them with the peace of God.

This peace God gives will be like a sentry posted outside our hearts and minds. It will act as a protector for when we become scared or anxious, when we start to worry or start to feel other sinful feelings. We can see that in the book of Daniel, when his three friends refused to bow down to Nebuchadnezzar even though they were threatened with death by the fiery furnace.

If we too are found in difficult circumstances, fear can make us lose courage and feel powerless; we become vulnerable to wrong thoughts and feelings. Therefore we must rid ourselves of our fears, our worries and our anxieties. Let us cast our anxieties on the Lord in prayer. Let us pray for the peace of God to guard our hearts and minds, the peace that surpasses all understanding.

Ashley Schoof

ARE YOU GOOD ENOUGH FOR HEAVEN?

One of the questions we could ask ourselves might be, "Am I good enough for heaven?" If I was to ask you the question "Have you obeyed the 10 commandments?" you would probably say, "Well, I've broken a couple. Nothing too serious, like murder..." We'll go through them briefly and see how you do.

1. "*You shall have no other Gods before me.*"

Does God come first in your life? Does He come before whatever you want to do? When asked about the greatest commandment, Jesus summarised them by saying "*You shall love the Lord Your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and great commandment.*" Does Christ occupy your whole life;

ARE YOU GOOD ENOUGH FOR HEAVEN? (CONTINUED)

your thoughts, words and actions? Would you rather spend your Sunday at home watching the footy or fixing your car, or be at church hearing God's word proclaimed?

2. *"You shall not make for yourself any graven image."*
Do you mould God in such a way to suit yourself? Does your god mind a little white lie here or a little swearing there? If he does you are guilty of idolatry. Is your god the God that reveals himself in Scripture? Then serve Him the way he asks.

3. *"You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain."*

Have you replaced a four letter word of disgust with God's name? Do you tell other people who blaspheme that it offends you and your God or do you participate in it? Do you show a good example in your workplace or at school? I struggle with this myself but that doesn't give me an excuse to gloss over it. *"Ask and it will be given to you."* Ask God for strength and it will be given to you.

4. *"Observe the Sabbath Day to keep it holy."*

Do you respect the Sabbath Day as God's Day? Is it a day of rest or do you use it as a day to catch up on all that work you missed during the week?

5. *"Honour your father and your mother."*

Have you always honoured your parents in a way that pleases God? *"My son listen to your fathers instruction and don't forsake your mothers teaching."* (Proverbs 1:8)

6. *"You shall not kill."*

As you know, this law refers not only to the act of murder. Have you had hateful thoughts about other people? Do you bear a grudge against someone, or hold something against them even though they have asked forgiveness?

7. *"You shall not commit adultery."*

Jesus says in his sermon on the mount, *"You have heard it was said to those of old, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say who ever looks at a woman to lust after her has committed adultery with her in his heart."* Are you guilty? Do you have a pure heart? This commandment is punishable by death.

8. *"You shall not steal."*

Do you dodge the tax man? Do you render to the government what is the governments? Do you rip off your customers? Have you ever taken something (irrespective of value) that belongs to

someone else? Then you are a thief and you cannot enter the kingdom of God.

9. *"You shall not bear false witness."*

Have you ever told a lie? Passed on information regardless of its truth? Talked bad about someone behind their back? Do you fall into that category? Remember it only takes one lie to be a liar.

10. *"You shall not covet."*

Have you ever desired that item or person that belongs to someone else? This could easily lead to stealing, murder or adultery, even lying.

Hear also what the bible says as well in James chapter 2. *"For the person who keeps all of the laws except one, is as guilty as a person who has broken all of God's laws."* Listen also to what Solomon has to say. *"Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is everyone's duty. God will judge us for every thing we do, including every secret thing, whether good or bad."* (Proverbs 12)

Often when we compare ourselves to the blackness of sin in this world we seem white, however when we put ourselves in front of the mirror of God's Word, as it were, we are black also. God doesn't judge us according to man but according his Holy Law.

So... are you going to heaven? If this was as far as it went I know I wouldn't be. So what will you do? Try to cleanse yourself and try to live a holy life

**The purpose of a mirror is not to cleanse
but to point us in the direction of a basin**

and think pure thoughts? This is probably the worse thing you could do! Will a judge let a man off his sentence just because he says he will clean up his act? Absolutely not! He will pay for his crime and God most certainly will make us pay for ours.

Maybe then you think God will forgive us because of His goodness? No... it's because of God's goodness that we will be punished.

When we look in the mirror of Gods law and see all our imperfections and dirtiness, do we take the mirror and try to clean ourselves with that? No, the purpose of a mirror is not to cleanse but to point us in the direction of a basin where we can clean ourselves. In the same way we shouldn't try to

cleanse ourselves using the Law but it should point us to Jesus Christ who can clean us from our sins.

I'll ask you again, "Are you going to heaven?" "All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). Thankfully for us we have a Saviour, willing to stand up for us and take the penalty of our guilty verdict. His payment is evidence of His love for us. So are we doing all we can to be thankful for His sacrifice, for the gift of life and his blessings, and working at living according to all his commandments - not with the

goal to being saved, but out of thankfulness? Sometimes we try to do the bare minimum, "I'll just do this or that and I'll get in," but Paul warns in 1 Corinthians 12, "Let he who thinks he stands, take heed, lest he fall."

"So whether you eat or drink, or in whatever you do, do everything to the glory of God." (1 Corinthians 10:31) So... "Are you going to heaven?"

Julian Slobe

"MUM, IT'S MENINGOCOCCAL!"

I woke up October the 17th 2005 - I didn't feel that well, I thought I was coming down with a cold. Because I had had tonsillitis the week before, I thought I may as well go to work anyway; I'll get over it. By lunch time, after I had cleaned up the kids dining room, my body hurt so much I just burst into tears. My boss said, "Mel, just go home and maybe you'll feel better tomorrow." Because I was so dizzy my boss ended up dropping me off at home. When I got home I just crashed on the couch and fell asleep. I woke up and had a bath, but soon after started throwing up. I went back to my own bed and tried to sleep again. My chest started to hurt so much it was hard to breathe, I remember calling for Mum, who came and rubbed my chest and back. I had to go to the toilet so I got up and

started to walk down the hall way, but I was so dizzy everything was spinning so I crawled. I went back to the lounge where Mum and Dad were, Dad said to me "If you're sick you should be in bed." But I wanted to stay where there were people around. It started to get late so mum said to me, "I'll set up some beds in the lounge so I can sleep with you." I tossed and turned groaning because everything hurt. At about 2.00am my legs were going numb, which I thought it was a bit strange because I hadn't been leaning on them. So I said to Mum, "Mum, can you switch the light on and look at my legs?" When the light was on we pulled my pant legs up and my legs were covered in purple splotches. "Mum, it's meningococcal!" I said, "You have to take me to the hospital!"

I go over and over this day all the time, amazed that we didn't think of going to the hospital quicker, but at the time I thought it was just a flu. Everything I was experiencing was classic symptoms of meningococcal; I had even studied it for my childcare course. If we had gone earlier I wonder if I would not have lost my limbs. 'Why, why, why', I think to myself 'if only, if only!' However, everyone experiences this disease in different ways, and by the time the rash has come most people have already died - and if alive, amputation is the only way to keep the person alive. The doctors had told Mum and Dad to say goodbye because they didn't think I would wake up from the coma. Medically speaking I wasn't going to make it, but God did preserve me, reminding everyone that He is in control no matter what the doctors said. He answered everyone's prayers by preserving me, but I also think God had a bigger plan behind this sickness. Because even though I survived I still had a long way to go.

This experience strengthened my faith so much more; what I know and feel now is something so much different then before I got sick, still keeping in mind that there are ups and downs and it never stops. While in hospital, I experienced the downs when at 5.00am on the dot I would throw up everyday, when dressing changes took 2-3hrs while screaming out in pain, when I was drugged up so much I would hallucinate terrible dreams, when learning to sit up again caused pain and nausea, and the embarrassment of having people wash and feed me, at the time it seemed like it was never going to end. Now, I don't experience the pain like I used to and can do pretty much everything myself, but those 'downs' don't stop. When I got home the realization of everything set in, the fact that 'No, I'm not going to get my hands and feet

*Doctors told Mum and Dad to say goodbye
... but God did preserve me!*

"MUM, IT'S MENINGOCOCCAL!" (CONTINUED)

back.' Usually these were the times when I felt so far away from God that I would question why He has allowed this to happen and what was going to happen with the rest of my life. Paul writes in Romans 8:28 *"And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose."* Even in hardship and suffering of any kind, we can be comforted by the fact that God is in control and everything will work to His good purpose. And that, even though it seems like our sufferings will never end, when Christ returns we will return to our former perfection to which God created us. We will become whole again in body and soul.

We also learned to appreciate things we do have and what

we can do. Often able bodied people look at those with disabilities, or illnesses, and pity them and feel sorry for them. They look at what we don't have without realizing what we do have. I may not have hands and feet, but I still have the ability to move and I still have knees which allowed learning to walk so much easier.

Going through hardship and suffering teaches you things no other person can teach you, you become so much more reliant on God and the strength of your faith in God increases so much more. I feel sorry for those who have everything and yet don't have God. Physically they have everything, maybe even materially they have everything, but they don't have the comfort of God - they don't have faith and trust in God. Who are they to praise for the things they have - themselves? What about when a sickness or tragedy happens in their life, who are they to turn to - themselves? Sometimes we don't appreciate what we have as Christians, what comfort God has given us, what Christ has done for us, even knowing that this life is temporal.

Another thing people may struggle with is what to say to the person with the disability or illness. God will give you the strength to go and talk to that person and I think people forget that. For myself, I am still the same person I was before I got sick, just without limbs. And that's the same for others with disabilities and illness. We are everyday people who would love to have a chat, who would love to go out with friends, who love to joke around and have fun, who love to do normal everyday things. Sometimes people are worried about saying the wrong thing. For me, I don't care if people say the wrong thing I usually

make a joke about it and laugh my head off. It's something everyone has to adjust to and learn.

Another thing I have learned is that my experience was not only my experience, it was something my family experienced, it was something we as churches have experienced. God not only gave me something to treasure but also you! God uses sickness etc. to strengthen those within His church, to bring His church together. My family and I have been blessed by being surrounded by the church. To help us where it was needed and to give support when needed, whether it was by making meals, or picking up the kids from school, or even having someone to sit with while waiting in the hospital. People wanted to help where ever we went. By seeing how God has protected our family and given us what we needed, you yourself

can be strengthened that whatever life has in store for you, you can put your trust and faith in God. Whatever struggles you are facing God is and will be with you, He is watching over you and He will give you the strength you need to overcome these struggles.

I have not let my disability stop me from achieving what I would like to do. I have had to find different ways of going about the things I love, but I have not given up. Some of you may know that I love music and played various instruments. Without my hands I am unable to play those particular instruments. However, we found a way around that. My Auntie and Uncle went and bought me a keyboard. You may think ok, so you can play one note at a time so what, what's the big deal? Well, with this keyboard I

am able to record various parts of music, put it together and play the song as if I had hands. And this is

only one of many things that I was able to achieve, I have started to learn to drive again, just 5 days ago I learned to run, I can walk, I'm hoping to go to uni next year, I can dress myself. These are just a few. I have learnt to treasure things that I once took for granted. God has given me the strength and ability to achieve these things and to be thankful for it. Praise God for what you have, living a life according to God's Will to show your thankfulness.

We will become whole again in body and soul

God uses sickness to strengthen those within His church, to bring His church together.

SPYSC REVIEW

CHRISTIANS IN THE ARMED FORCES

Our last SPYSC meeting was held on 21st of May 2007, and had as topic 'the Christian in the Armed Forces'. Two brothers who have served in the armed forces came to share their experiences, have a debate style discussion on whether as Christians we should serve in the army, and answer any questions that those present may have had. Mr Wayne Visser shared some of his experiences as a member of the 13th Field Squadron in the Army Reserve, and Mr George Brinks of his time in the Australian Army.

When one speaks of the Australian Army generally the Anzac Spirit gets a mention somewhere, and it was this common theme that emerged from the evening as both brothers shared their experiences focusing especially on the comradeship within the Army and Reserve. When serving within the armed forces, you spend a lot of time with the other people in your regiment, even more time than people who have other jobs would generally spend with their workmates. In some ways it is like a school camp, where you spend every hour you are awake with your mates. However, in the army, there are larger things at stake. Mates have to depend on and trust each other, in order to just survive. If you or someone else hesitates, or doesn't do their job, someone could end up dead. But how far does this camaraderie extend? What happens when the regiment gets a holiday, and the rest of the guys go out to use the brothels, get drunk or go gambling?

Like many things in life, a Christian in the Armed Forces has to make conscientious decisions about certain things. Camaraderie is generally built especially in the field itself, and once back at base could be avoided. According to our speakers, you just have to make sure you do not get involved with the more worldly goings on. Further, if you choose your friends carefully, one can also avoid the things we as Christians identify as things/places that should be avoided. For example, there are other people in the army, who although they may not share the same Christian beliefs as us, still uphold similar morals. Finally, the attitude of fellow Armed Forces Personnel makes a Christian soldier realize how much they do have, spiritually, in that they do not have to turn to temporary worldly pleasures for gratification.

There are varying displays of respect towards Christianity and religion in general within the Armed Forces. Mr Visser expressed his feeling that within the Army Reserve in which he served, there was not much respect for religion. When you signed up and got your dog tags, you had to choose a religion. Either you had to fit into a religion listed or you were listed as 'no religion'. There wasn't any respect for

prayer, similar to most workplaces, and hence it was easy to let it slide. There were church services, and they were compulsory to attend if the padre was present, but normally the 'sermons' were just moral speeches. Mass was celebrated, and then there were lots of 'Christians', who were only in it for the port. If courses ran over a weekend, sometimes it was necessary to miss Church in order to train. Obviously, in this case it is very challenging to remain strong in faith.

On the other hand, Mr Brinks expressed that there was much respect for Christianity within the Army while he served. One of the first items he received when signing up was the standard issue Bible, which was carried everywhere. Before meals, there was time set aside where the table was quiet so that people could pray before their meal. He was taught to honor, respect and defend God first, the Queen second, and his country third.

Evidently, serving in the Armed Forces is not always ideal for worship services and experiencing and contributing towards the communion of saints. In a way, the communion of saints can work over a distance, as explained by Mr Brinks, as he received tapes of sermons and letters from his elder. However, not being able to experience the communion of saints first hand can cause much loneliness, especially when one is training interstate or serving overseas. In this way too, both brothers encouraged us to send letters to those of our own who are in the Armed Forces. Through this we too can share the communion of saints long distance with those who choose to serve our country.

Not being able to experience the communion of saints first hand can cause much loneliness

According to both Mr Visser and Mr Brinks, within the Armed Forces there is ample opportunity to show faith, and to witness to those around you. If in everything you do, it is done to God's glory, you are in fact already witnessing your faith. Further, serving in the military has many physical benefits. Here is practical training, in which you learn more about yourself, your limits, pushing the extreme, and how to conquer the extreme by teamwork and mateship. There are many opportunities to expand your boundaries, to travel and have many other experiences. It is a tough life but, in the case of the two brothers who shared their experiences with us, was very enjoyable and a worthwhile experience.

Aim:

Romans 12:2 teaches all of God's people:

“Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.”

This magazine will encourage its readers to earnestly contend for the faith, and to think and act biblically, in the good traditions of the Church of all ages. Its basis is God's word, as the Church confesses in the Three Forms of Unity. It is intended for the younger members of the Free Reformed Churches of Australia, and is produced in co-operation with the Una Sancta. Subscription to the Contender is automatic with subscription to the Una Sancta.

It is not meant to be exclusively for unmarried members who still attend the Youth Bible Study Clubs, but for all those who fit within the loose parameters of 16 to 30 years of age.

Editorial Board:	Eric Terpstra (EIC)
Colette Groenewold	Adrian Hordyk
Hugo Hordyk	Jeanette Janssen
Ben Schoof	Rita VanderWal

Layout: Rosanne Torenvliet

Editorial Address:
eherpstra@westnet.com.au

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