



the presbyterian banner

October 2017

*All men are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field;
the grass withers and the flowers fall,
but the word of the Lord stands forever.*

1 Peter 1:24—25

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Editorial

How often doesn't it seem the opportunity to interact with the wider community comes at times when you really don't have time for it? The Jehovah's Witnesses pick the worst times to knock on your door. If only it had been last week when you didn't have to rush off to do something else! It was a pity the one time you actually had your neighbour pass you by was the time you had that bad cold with its wracking cough.

Then there are those other times you get approached almost out of the blue to help someone you don't know. They certainly weren't one of those trying to pull one on you – you checked that out quickly enough. But with everything else on your plate at that moment...you knew then you had to help. Okay, it was a bit of a bother, and it took more time and preparation than you thought, but wasn't it worth it in the end? They know you're a Christian and you certainly showed that in helping them out. You were even able to have a nice chat relating to their situation.

The Lord gives us opportunities to demonstrate who and what he means to us. But do we use them? In amongst this insecure and deeply unhappy world are we those showing an assurance of faith and the joy of the gospel?

While many in our community pull back from interacting with those they don't know, may we be those who do take the time to interact with others. On a nice sunny day mention the great weather God has given. Be thankful for the physical life you have. And in this way show the spiritual life that puts it all in perspective.

*Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone
who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have.
But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience,
so that those who speak maliciously
against your good behaviour in Christ
may be ashamed of their slander.*

1 Peter 3:15-16

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Wisdom of the World—Gentiles

1 Corinthians 1:18—25

The Greeks ruled the ancient world for around three centuries before the rise of the Romans, who conquered Athens in 146BC. The city of Corinth was a bustling hub of worldwide commerce, degraded culture and idolatry in the days of the apostle Paul. The nearby city of Athens was more of a centre for language and literature, science and philosophy. Philosophers like Socrates and Plato made Athens their home. Aristotle made Athens his home, along with Epicurus and Zeno, the men whose philosophies were followed by many in Athens and the ancient world – Epicurus was the founder of Epicureanism and Zeno the founder of Stoicism. Paul came across exponents of these rival philosophies when he went to the 'Agora' or market place in Athens on his second mission (17:18). He was in Athens before going to Corinth.

These philosophers had no background in the Scriptures of the Jews. Their philosophies came out of their own minds, out of their studies of the natural world. Study of the natural world should have pointed them to the God of creation, whose power and majesty are revealed in the creation. But, like many today, they chose to be blind. Professing to be wise they became fools (Rom. 1:22). They worshipped created things rather than the creator, as Paul observed when he was in Athens (Acts 17:16). You might think philosophical and scientific people would have nothing to do with idolatry, but you would be wrong. Philosophers and scientists can be quite superstitious, and in their superstition turn to idols. They have nothing against idols as such, even if they think they are the domain of poor and uneducated people.

The people of Athens 'spent their time in nothing else but either to tell or hear some new thing' (Acts 17:21). They were eager to spruik their philosophies, as well as listen to the ideas of others. They were eager to listen to Paul, until he started talking

1 Corinthians 1:18-25

¹⁸ *For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.* ¹⁹ *For it is written:*

"I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, And bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent."

²⁰ *Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?* ²¹ *For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe.* ²² *For Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom;* ²³ *but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks ^[b] foolishness,* ²⁴ *but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.* ²⁵ *Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.*

about the resurrection and divine judgment. Aristides said of Corinth that on every street corner one met a so-called wise man who had his own solutions to the world's problems. Paul refers to 'the disputer or debater of this age' (1:20). When I was a student in this city, the Domain was a place where people would go on Sunday afternoon to listen to whoever came along with their 'soapbox'. Communists, Maoists,

Dennis Muldoon

Socialists, Atheists, Feminists, Hedonists and Hare Krishnas, as well as Christians, would stand on their soapbox and start talking. Some would listen and some would heckle the speaker on the soapbox. There were philosophies and religions for all.

We do not enjoy such freedoms in today's world of political correctness and rejection of any mention of sin and salvation through the cross and resurrection of Christ. I do not know where the public square is in our city today. Maybe it has been absorbed into the ABC's Q&A program, or social media, although I am not sure that there is the readiness to listen to different philosophies as there once was. Any mention of the name 'Jesus' will get you expelled from such forums. Religion, we are told, has no place in the public square, as if humanism and worshipping created things is not a religious belief system.

All human philosophies are about reaching God or achieving salvation by human effort, either physical or mental or both. Neither moralism nor asceticism, neither body control nor mind control, aid in salvation – eternal salvation. The Greeks attempted to find God and know him by climbing a ladder called 'philosophy' or 'knowledge'. 'But they found no one there but themselves', writes Paul Barnett. 'God knew that human arrogance would be intolerable if people from this corrupt age could reach him with their intellects and say, 'There is God, we have found him'. Such people never find God for he hides himself from them (Matthew 11:25-27, Psalm 89:46). "It is only as God reaches down in 'the word of the cross' and offers forgive-

ness of sins, that his hidden identity is at last revealed”.

The Jews were blinded to the revelation of God in Jesus Christ because of their demand for a sign. The Greeks on the other hand were being blinded by intellectual pride and arrogance in their search for wisdom – ‘Greeks seek after wisdom’ (1:22). It was not a search for truth but wisdom, worldly wisdom. Pilate said to Jesus, ‘What is truth?’ (John 18:38). Absolute truth is rejected by philosophers because it means their searching is over.

This philosophy can be found in the study of science, and of theology. I remember a theologian (he was in his 70’s) saying theology was like working on a puzzle, and he still had pieces to put into place in that puzzle.

Epicurean philosophy regarded the world as the result of the random motion and combination of atomic particles – basic materialism. Divine intervention or divine judgment was rejected. Epicureans mocked Paul when he spoke of the resurrection (Acts 17:32). The chief end of life was pleasure or the avoidance of pain. They went after things pleasing to the palate, to the flesh and to the eye – although not exactly hedonists. They said that, ‘whatever gods there may be’ they took no interest in man, so man takes no interest in the gods. Eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow we die. Although such people fear death they can make funerals into parties!

For Stoics, man must know his

place in the natural order; universal Reason is god. The chief end of life is being master of one’s own destiny. The English poet, W.E. Henley, puts it in this way: ‘I am the master of my fate, I am the captain of my soul’, ‘and I thank whatever gods may be, for my unconquerable soul’. The Stoic tries to be indifferent to pain or pleasure. In face of adversity they ‘keep a stiff upper lip’ with a ‘grin and bear it’ attitude. Stoics try to be morally upright and dutiful; they are also very proud men and women.



‘School of Athens’ by Raphael

The Christian life is nothing like that of the Epicurean or the Stoic. For the true Christian, the chief end of man is the glory of God: ‘man’s chief end is to glorify God and enjoy him forever’ (Shorter Catechism Q 1). Epicurean and Stoic philosophies are still studied and indeed followed by people today. They are in essence humanistic philosophies, philosophies that deny the existence or involvement of God in this world. Ignoring the revealed wisdom of God leaves man to search nature and his own mind for wisdom. And so we see people searching into space, into the rocks and into the cell to

find wisdom and meaning in life. We see people wanting to follow the behaviour of animals.

How wonderful that in the Bible we find wisdom from the mind of the infinite, omnipotent and omniscient God. As believers, Jesus is the captain of our soul. As believers our wisdom, our life and our pleasure comes from obeying God’s commands, not satisfying the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life (1 John 2:16).

‘Greeks seek after wisdom’, worldly wisdom (1:22). They want something new – human pride seeks fame by being first, whether it is on the track, in the classroom or in the laboratory. Some scientists resort to altering data in order to get a publication and acceptance by their peers. Politicians do the same. I was taught in science that good results, as in expected, and bad results, as in unexpected results

should be published because science is about knowledge and truth, not about people or philosophies.

The Greeks saw the cross, the cross and resurrection of Christ, as foolishness (1:23). The Epicureans rejected anything supernatural. Materialists will endeavour with all their human wisdom to explain away the resurrection. They must reject God in order to avoid his judgment. But Paul clearly told the philosophers in Athens, the intellectual elite of the day, that God has appointed a day when he will judge the world in righteousness and he will do this by the man he has appointed (Acts 17:31). In speaking to Gentiles

in Athens, and earlier in Lystra, Paul spoke of God as the one who made the world and everything in it (Acts 14:15, 17:24). Some say that this was part and parcel of the wisdom of God that he writes of here in 1 Corinthians, although his focus is on the cross, on Christ crucified.

In his letter to the Romans Paul again speaks of the world, the universe, as revealing the invisible

attributes of God. Those who reject God as the creator and start worshipping created things will become confused and corrupted in their thinking and their behaviour (Romans 1:20-25). The wisdom of this world is 'earthly, sensual and demonic,' writes James – strong words indeed. It leads to confusion and every evil thing (James 3:15-16). The wisdom of this world has been made foolish by God (1:20).

But those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, know Christ as the wisdom and power of God. Without fear or shame we preach such wisdom, and pray that God will open minds and hearts to accept and believe in Jesus Christ.

The Rev Dr Dennis Muldoon is the current Moderator of the PCEA Synod.

The World in the Banner

Righting a Terrible Wrong

Dr. Frank Wright, President & Chief Executive Officer at D. James Kennedy Ministries (DJKM), announced that DJKM filed suit today in the United States District Court against the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC). The lawsuit alleges, among other things, that the SPLC illegally trafficked in false and misleading descriptions of the services offered by DJKM and committed defamation against DJKM arising from the publication and distribution of false information that libels the ministry's reputation and subjects the ministry to disgrace, ridicule, odium, and contempt in the estimation of the public.

In a statement released today, Dr. Wright said: "We embarked today on a journey to right a terrible wrong. Those who knowingly label Christian ministries as 'hate' groups, solely for subscribing to the historic Christian faith, are either woefully uninformed or willfully deceitful. In the case of the Southern Poverty Law Center, our lawsuit alleges the latter."

Wright went on to say: "These false and illegal characterizations have a chilling effect on the free exercise of religion and on religious free speech for all people of faith. After having given the SPLC an opportunity to retract, we have undertaken this legal action, seeking a trial by a jury of our peers, to

preserve our own rights under the law and to defend the religious free speech rights of all Americans."

About DJKM: D. James Kennedy Ministries is a Christian media ministry that seeks to communicate the Gospel of Jesus Christ through every available electronic medium. Its four-fold mission is: 1) to proclaim the good news of the Gospel throughout the Earth; 2) to teach and nurture Christ's followers; 3) to equip and encourage believers to live out their faith; and 4) to defend religious liberty, encouraging believers to lovingly engage the culture with the heart and mind of Jesus Christ.

+ *Christian News Wire, 2020 Pennsylvania Avenue Northwest, Washington DC 20006, 202-546-0054, newsdesk@christiannewswire.com*

The Nashville Statement

This is a declaration put out by the Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood which reaffirms the biblical and biological case for the two sexes, for God's intentions for human sexuality, and for the purpose of marriage.

ARTICLE 1

WE AFFIRM that God has designed marriage to be a covenantal, sexual, procreative, lifelong union of one man and one woman, as husband and wife, and is meant to signify the covenant love be-

tween Christ and his bride the church.

WE DENY that God has designed marriage to be a homosexual, polygamous, or polyamorous relationship. We also deny that marriage is a mere human contract rather than a covenant made before God.

ARTICLE 2

WE AFFIRM that God's revealed will for all people is chastity outside of marriage and fidelity within marriage.

WE DENY that any affections, desires, or commitments ever justify sexual intercourse before or outside marriage; nor do they justify any form of sexual immorality.

ARTICLE 3

WE AFFIRM that God created Adam and Eve, the first human beings, in his own image, equal before God as persons, and distinct as male and female.

WE DENY that the divinely ordained differences between male and female render them unequal in dignity or worth.

ARTICLE 4

WE AFFIRM that divinely ordained differences between male and female reflect God's original creation design and are meant for human good and human flourishing.

WE DENY that such differences are a result of the Fall or are a tragedy to be overcome.

ARTICLE 5

WE AFFIRM that the differences between male and female reproductive structures are integral to God's design for self-conception as male or female.

WE DENY that physical anomalies or psychological conditions nullify the God-appointed link between biological sex and self-conception as male or female.

ARTICLE 6

WE AFFIRM that those born with a physical disorder of sex development are created in the image of God and have dignity and worth equal to all other image-bearers. They are acknowledged by our Lord Jesus in his words about "eunuchs who were born that way from their mother's womb." With all others they are welcome as faithful followers of Jesus Christ and should embrace their biological sex insofar as it may be known.

WE DENY that ambiguities related to a person's biological sex render one incapable of living a fruitful life in joyful obedience to Christ.

ARTICLE 7

WE AFFIRM that self-conception as male or female should be defined by God's holy purposes in creation and redemption as revealed in Scripture.

WE DENY that adopting a homosexual or transgender self-conception is consistent with God's holy purposes in creation and redemption.

ARTICLE 8

WE AFFIRM that people who experience sexual attraction for the same sex may live a rich and fruitful life pleasing to God through faith in Jesus Christ, as

they, like all Christians, walk in purity of life.

WE DENY that sexual attraction for the same sex is part of the natural goodness of God's original creation, or that it puts a person outside the hope of the gospel.

ARTICLE 9

WE AFFIRM that sin distorts sexual desires by directing them away from the marriage covenant and toward sexual immorality — a distortion that includes both heterosexual and homosexual immorality.

WE DENY that an enduring pattern of desire for sexual immorality justifies sexually immoral behavior.



ARTICLE 10

WE AFFIRM that it is sinful to approve of homosexual immorality or transgenderism and that such approval constitutes an essential departure from Christian faithfulness and witness.

WE DENY that the approval of homosexual immorality or transgenderism is a matter of moral indifference about which otherwise faithful Christians should agree to disagree.

ARTICLE 11

WE AFFIRM our duty to speak the truth in love at all times, including when we speak to or about one another as male or female.

WE DENY any obligation to

speak in such ways that dishonor God's design of his image-bearers as male and female.

ARTICLE 12

WE AFFIRM that the grace of God in Christ gives both merciful pardon and transforming power, and that this pardon and power enable a follower of Jesus to put to death sinful desires and to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord.

WE DENY that the grace of God in Christ is insufficient to forgive all sexual sins and to give power for holiness to every believer who feels drawn into sexual sin.

ARTICLE 13

WE AFFIRM that the grace of God in Christ enables sinners to forsake transgender self-conceptions and by divine forbearance to accept the God-ordained link between one's biological sex and one's self-conception as male or female.

WE DENY that the grace of God in Christ sanctions self-conceptions that are at odds with God's revealed will.

ARTICLE 14

WE AFFIRM that Christ Jesus has come into the world to save sinners and that through Christ's death and resurrection, forgiveness of sins and eternal life are available to every person who repents of sin and trusts in Christ alone as Savior, Lord, and supreme treasure.

WE DENY that the Lord's arm is too short to save or that any sinner is beyond his reach.

+ www.cbmw.org/nashville-statement/
+ www.billmuehlenberg.com

Hungary Shows the Way

In a time when much of Europe is in the grip of atheism, there

is a nation where Christianity is thriving. The government is unabashedly Christian, thinks Christian values are worth defending and wants to protect and even nourish the family. Hungary's constitution is explicitly Christian, and says that marriage is between one man and one woman and that life begins at conception.

It even includes the phrase, 'God bless the Hungarians.' Hungary's Faith Church, with 300 branches, is one of the largest Pentecostal churches in Europe, with 70,000 attendees.

The Hungarian government has taken on the role of protecting Christianity. It's even set up an office to help persecuted

Christians worldwide. It says, 'Taking in persecuted Christians is our moral and constitutional duty.' Hungarian policy analyst István Pócza says Hungary is a historic bastion of Christianity, dating back over a thousand years.

+ *CBN Christian World News*

Church & Nation Committee

Statement on the Marriage Referendum 2017

If you are on the Australian electoral roll you should receive in the mail a marriage ballot paper asking the question: Should the law be changed to allow same-sex couples to marry? Advocates for the 'Yes' campaign want to limit the debate strictly to the question. They don't want to talk about the impact that change will bring. But the reality is that redefining marriage will have far reaching social, moral, religious and legal consequences that will be damaging to our society. Change threatens freedom of conscience, freedom of speech, freedom of religion and will change what children will be taught in school. We are not scaremongering. One of the advocates for the 'Yes' campaign has said, 'It might be stating the obvious but same sex marriage is far from the final frontier in the battle against homophobia.' (Benjamin Law, Quarterly Essay: Moral Panic 101).

We therefore encourage you to vote 'No'.

We ask you to pray that people might be aware of the consequences of change to the Marriage Act and vote 'No'.

We want you to keep informed on this issue. For up to date information visit the website of *The Australian Christian Lobby* (www.acl.org.au), or *Family Voice Australia* (www.fava.org.au).

For a fuller statement on same sex marriage see the report presented by this committee and published in the Synod Reports May 2017.

We also need to understand that preserving a law will not save a nation. Hearts and lives need to be changed. The Gospel is the power of God that can alone change lives (Romans 1: 16). All need to be saved – the moral and the immoral – the religious and the irreligious – the heterosexual and the homosexual - for there is no one righteous – not even one. But God has shown us a way to be made right with him by placing our faith in Jesus Christ (Romans 3: 21-26).

Thus, we ask you to beg the Lord to have mercy upon our land and be gracious toward us. Pray that He might revive the church, restore our vision, and refresh our souls, to the glory of His name on earth.

'Godliness makes a nation great, but sin is a disgrace to any people' (Proverbs 14: 34).

Society in the Banner

The Six Deadly Sins of Sodom

Ezekiel 16:44-50

Tom Reeve

All sin is deadly in the sense that it condemns us before God. But some sins are 'more heinous', as our catechism tells us. This is because of their 'several aggravations' and the serious consequences for families and communities. Our subject is a solemn one because of the proposal to change marriage laws being under consideration in Australia at the present time.

In 1881, when local newspapers were first printed in Campbelltown, New South Wales, the incumbent of St Peter's Church, Rev. Thomas Alkin, took advantage of the new technology and launched a printed broadsheet for his parishioners. The first item at the top of the page was 'A PRAYER FOR THE PARISH.'

"O LORD, look down in mercy upon this parish and forgive us our grievous sins. Root out from among us the deadly sins of drunkenness and unchastity. May many souls be turned to Thee. Bless those who love Thee, and do Thou keep those who are walking in the way of life steadfast unto the end. Give patience to the sick and afflicted, and make their sufferings a blessing to them. Bless to us all the means of grace. Strengthen the hands of Thy servants the clergyman, the church officers, and the Sunday School teachers. Make us all hold the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen."

There were just two deadly sins noted for the Parish of St Peter – no doubt causing grief for the minister and many others in those times.

Going further back to medieval times, there were the so-called seven deadly sins – Pride was considered the original and most serious of the seven; the others

being Lust, Gluttony, Greed, Sloth, Wrath and Envy [four come into our sermon today]. There were also the Seven Virtues corresponding to the seven deadly sins, given as Humility, Chastity, Temperance, Generosity (or Charity), Diligence, Patience and Kindness (the fruit of the Spirit).

If we turn to the book of Proverbs, chapter 6, the inspired writer listed seven things that God hates – the first on the list is 'A Proud Look.' But there are many forms of evil and particular sins which are all denounced in the Bible. This reminds us that our God is the Holy One. He delights in righteousness. 'Be ye holy, for I am holy' (Leviticus 19:1; 1 Peter 1:15,16).

Our study is centred on the book of Ezekiel Chapter 16, where the prophet lists the sins of Sodom. We will look at the sins listed here and in other places in Holy Scripture. The message is entitled, '**The Six Deadly Sins of Sodom**,' based on Ezekiel chapter 16, verses 44 to 50.

Context: By using a parable of three bad sisters, God is reproving His people in Judah for their sinfulness and tells them that they were worse than their sisters Sodom and Samaria. Almost incidentally, a catalogue of the sins of Sodom is listed in verses 49 & 50. God has made it very clear what He did not like about the cities of the Jordan Plain – way back in 1900 BC.

Now my friends, we must always remember that God is the judge of what is right and what is wrong. You and I might have our opinions on the seriousness of various sins. Our Governments might pass laws in line with what the majority think – and we are now at a very critical time in our

nation of Australia. But ultimately the only voice which carries authority is God's and we hear God's voice when we hear His Word.

Not only has the Lord listed the sins of Sodom but He has acted judicially and made the cities of the plain an example of His wrath. He destroyed the inhabitants and turned a very fruitful place into a barren wilderness. The famed subtropical plain, likened to the very Garden of Eden (Genesis 13:10), became a desert and remains a barren waste until this very day. It still has the smell of sulphur upon it. But the study of this particular judgment must wait for another time.

Here in Ezekiel we are looking at the lead-up to the destruction of Sodom and the other three cities of the lower Jordan valley. Let us see what we can learn from the Bible about the lifestyle of the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah and what made them so abhorrent to God.

What were the six deadly sins of Sodom?

There are five sins listed from our reading in Ezekiel 16:44-63 and I have added a sixth from Jewish tradition – the sin of not being thankful.

Vs 49,50: '**Behold, this was the iniquity of thy sister Sodom, pride, fulness of bread, and abundance of idleness was in her and in her daughters, neither did she strengthen the hand of the poor and needy.**

And they were haughty, and committed abomination before me: therefore I took them away as I saw good.'

1. Pride

Many people think of sodomy as the leading sin of the ancient city and perhaps secretly congratulate themselves that they are 'straight' in this matter. But they forget that the chief sin of Sodom is the one which afflicts us all, PRIDE – 'filthy, rotten, stinking pride' – as I heard one preacher describe it. That is how God sees it. It is the source of much evil as it takes us away from God and leads us into all kinds of other sins. It is the father sin of all evil. (Luther labelled it as the *mother of all sins*.) The sin called 'abomination' is the end of the road and is listed last in our reading. But, as Proverbs tells us, pride is first on the list of things which God hates. In fact it is repeated in the Ezekiel text (v.50) where the people are described as being 'haughty' ('Insufferably arrogant in their deportment towards good men' – Matthew Poole).

Now we like to dress pride up in many ways – projecting a smart image, looking good, standing up for our rights, etc. It can be a very subtle sin. But any form of disobedience is Pride. Hear the rebuke of the prophet Samuel to a disobeying King Saul at Gilgal (I Samuel 15:22,23). **"Has the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry."** Pride and arrogance descend into rejecting lawful authority in all its forms – disobeying parents, speaking evil of our teachers, police, and secular authorities. The little book of Jude gives a catalogue of sins under the heading of pride. It is said there that the men of Sodom and Gomorrah despised authority and

spoke evil of them. (Jude 8-10,15)

The Bible makes it clear – we are all born in sin and have a rebellious heart by nature. We are too apt to put ourselves on the throne as god and selfishly travel along the 'ME Way' through life, spurning the law of God and His right to rule us. Those given to pride are termed 'the wicked'; they love to indulge in boasting and oppression (see Psalms 10 & 37 for example).

This, my friends, was the chief sin of Sodom.

2. Gluttony

There is an island in Sydney Harbour named Fort Denison. You go past it on the ferry to Manly. In the early days of the colony, serious offenders were kept on the tiny island as it was a convenient location for a high security prison. The inmates were on a slender ration and it earned the nickname of 'Pinchgut.' [That nickname was also applied to the High School which I attended – as the teenage country boys who boarded there never seemed to have enough to eat!]

This was not the case with the inhabitants of Sodom. They lived in a warm subtropical climate, and all kinds of lovely fruits and produce readily grew there in the expansive valley. It was 'well watered everywhere' and described as being like Eden, 'the garden of the Lord' in Genesis 13:10. Today some might call it, 'God's own country.' It has been said that its rich agricultural productivity was on a par with that of the Nile delta in Egypt.

Now young Lot up on the Judean hills was attracted to the agricultural prosperity of the Jordan valley, but he neglected to consider its spiritual barrenness. Abraham wisely kept his distance. Our text says that there was an abundance – 'fullness of bread' and soon Lot was down

there enjoying the good life of "food, glorious food." Short-ages were a thing of the past. Now gluttony and drunkenness (over-indulging in food and drink) are both condemned in Scripture (Proverbs 23:20,21), though rejoicing at the occasional feast is held up as a legitimate thing (eg, the wedding at Cana, John 2).

'Eat, drink and be merry' was the motto of the Sodomites (Lot's sons-in-law treated his warnings as a joke) and then, no doubt, it became 'wine, women and song.' Comedy festivals might have been the go in Sodom and so things continued on the downward path, going from bad to worse, and final destruction. Maybe Mrs Lot enjoyed these things too much, for she looked back and perished with the others in the cities of the plain (Genesis 19:26, Luke 17:28-32).

3. Idleness (Sloth)

When life was easy and food plentiful, less time was required to make a comfortable living. Instead of working all day, six days a week, as God commanded, the people of Sodom probably had a 40-hour week or maybe a 35-hour week. They had to do a bit in their gardens, it is true, and had to tend to their flocks and herds, but even then they 'lived for the week-ends' and holidays when they could devote their time to leisure. Instead of rightly looking forward to a Sabbath day of rest and worship, it was the 'good week-end' that was on people's minds. It became the leisure capital of the region. Sounds like the write-up on a modern travel brochure!

But God describes their lifestyle as one of iniquity – **'abundance of idleness.'** We used to be told that 'the devil finds work for idle hands.' Hon-

est hard labour keeps a man out of mischief and is therapeutic for the soul. Work is a wonderful thing for us to provide for our families and to support those who are young, old, weak or cannot work due to sickness and injury. If we are able-bodied, we should not be idle and should beware of the leisure mindset as God denounces it. **'Go to the**

The Lord enjoins liberality upon all who profess His name and the NT takes up the theme in 2 Corinthians – **'being enriched in every thing to all bountifulness'** (vs 9:11). A stingy Christian is a contradiction in terms.

But what do we see happening with the abundant produce of the cities of the Jordan Plain? Did they share it with the poor

for the lives of others.

Our compassion for others is a point where Christ shall judge us on the last day (Matthew chapter 25). Christians in their communities are to be those who **'strengthen the hand of the poor and needy,' and those who 'comfort the fainthearted' and 'support the weak'** (1



'The Destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah', by John Martin, 1852

ant, you sluggard! Consider her ways and be wise.' (Proverbs 6:6). See also 2 Thessalonians 3: 6-12.

4. Lack of Compassion

In Leviticus chapter 19:9,10 we read these words which the Lord gave to the Israelites: **'You shall not ... gather the gleanings of your harvest... you shall leave them for the poor and the stranger.'** The purpose of the gleanings statute was to share the harvest with the needy.

and the needy? The Lord speaking to Ezekiel says of 'sister' Sodom, **'...neither did she strengthen the hand of the poor and needy'** (v.49). They did not look around to help the weak, the sick, the downtrodden – those who had fallen by the wayside for whatever the reason. These sins of omission are classified by God here as 'iniquity.' Sadly, there was a hardness in the hearts of the people of Sodom which degenerated into a fierceness and callous disregard

Thessalonians 5:14).

5. Unthankfulness

The result of all this selfish behaviour was that there were no feelings of thankfulness, no psalms of praise to the Creator for His bountiful gifts and no recalling of his wonderful works to the children of men.

This point is not specifically mentioned in Ezekiel and Genesis but can be inferred. It is noted in the similar downward path described in Ro-

mans chapter 1: 21. **'...when they knew God, they glorified Him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened.'** Ingratitude is one of those traits of a people markedly forgetting and departing from God.' (2 Timothy 3: 1-4).

Josephus, the Jewish historian (who was commissioned by the Emperor Titus), says this of the situation in Sodom: "The Sodomites grew proud, on account of their riches and great wealth: they became unjust towards men, and impious toward God, insomuch that they did not call to mind the advantages they received from Him." The king of Sodom and his people had been providentially rescued from oblivion by Abraham and his men and with the help of God – see Genesis chapter 14. This was only 15 years previous to the visit by the angels. Yet they seem to have forgotten that great deliverance and did not have a heart of gratitude to obey God and be thankful.

They were sinning against light. What about those who sin against the greater Light? Matthew 11:23,24. **"And you, Capernaum, who are exalted to heaven, will be brought down to Hades: for if the mighty works, which were done in you had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. But I say unto you, That it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment, than for you."**

This sin of ingratitude, alas, is all too common and we must constantly be watching our own hearts. Let us be those who have grateful hearts, expressing thanks to our neighbours and others but especially to our God. **'Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits:'** (Psalm 103:2).

6. Homosexual Lust ('Abomination' v. 50)

Like it or not, our God calls this sin (and some others) **abomination**, which means something to be loathed and detested as disgusting.

This is the end of the road of gross selfishness as outlined above. The progression is clearly shown by the apostle Paul in Romans chapter 1. It is not a pretty picture but that of a chaotic society where God has withdrawn his common grace in restraining much evil and promoting good order. Abandoned promiscuity was the state of Sodom when God acted to liquidate them after first sending his two angels to rescue Lot and his family. The men were fierce and governed by their unlawful lusts.

Under the Mosaic laws, this sin among others (including adultery and incest) was punishable by death (Leviticus 20: 10-13). In the New Testament we read that eternal death still applies, but there is mercy for the individual person who repents and turns away from this sin.

1 Corinthians 6: 9-10 – **'Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God.'**

But praise be to God for verse 11: **'And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God.'** There is mercy, even for this sin, to those who repent and humbly come to Christ for forgiveness and help. See also Christ's words to the woman taken in adultery (John 8).

However there are very serious implications when whole societies

and nations (even churches) approve of homosexuality. The Bible is very clear on this and we too should have God's view on the subject clear in our minds. The LORD has stated in His Word that when a society, either pagan or so-called 'Christian,' is given over to these sins, the land becomes defiled, and He will spew the inhabitants out of the land (Leviticus 18:24,25,28).

Today in Australia we are at a tipping point. The most unpatriotic thing we can do is to support the proposed 'same-sex marriage' laws. This will be a vote for God to spew us out of this land. It may take time but it will surely come if we go down that ungodly path. God has shown us what He does judicially in the example of Sodom (Genesis 19), in the removal of the Canaanites (Leviticus 18:24-28) and in the slaughter of the tribe of Benjamin and others in the time of the Judges (Chapter 20). The prophecy of Hosea indicates that such sins also contributed to the demise of the ten tribes of Israel in the northern kingdom. They were carried away by the Assyrians into oblivion, never to return again (Hosea 9:9; 10:9).

How better to conclude our study of such a serious subject than to resolve to pray earnestly and regularly for mercy, for revival in our churches and nation, and for godly faithfulness and perseverance for His people. By the grace of God may we stand fast, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

Tom Reeve is an elder in the Hawkesbury-Nepean congregation in Mt. Druitt, West Sydney.

Children under the Banner — Jonah 2-3

<h2>A Second Chance for Jonah.</h2>	 <p>For three days.....</p>	<p>and three nights....</p> 
<p>Jonah was inside the fish.</p> 	 <p>Inside the fish Jonah prayed.</p>	<p>The fish vomited Jonah out on dry land.</p> 
<p>Jonah then obeyed God. He went to Nineveh with God's message, "In 40 days God will destroy this city because you are so wicked."</p>		<p>The king took off his royal robes and covered himself with dust.</p>
		 <p>He told everyone to pray. Perhaps God would listen.</p>

Prescribed Search Work

OCTOBER 2017

Senior Section 12 years and over; Intermediate 10—11 years; Junior 9 years and under

SENIOR AND INTERMEDIATE (Intermediate omit questions 5 and 6)

1 SAMUEL chapter 24

1. How did David feel after he had cut off the corner of Saul's robe? What did he say about it to his men? (2 verses)
2. For what reason did Saul acknowledge that David was more righteous than he? (2 verses only)

Chapter 25

3. How did Nabal answer when David asked him for food? (2 verses)
4. What did Abigail do when she heard of what had happened?
5. What did David say after Abigail had spoken to him? (2 verses only)
6. What happened to Nabal when his wife told him these things that had happened? (2 verses)

Chapter 26

7. How did David answer when Abishai urged him to kill Saul? (3 verses)
8. Why was David able to take the spear and jug of water from Saul while he slept?

JUNIOR

MARK chapter 13

1. What did Jesus say would happen to the great buildings of the temple?
2. Why were the disciples not to worry beforehand what they would say when delivered up to the councils?
3. When the Son of man comes in clouds, what will he send his angels to do?
4. Why are disciples to watch for the coming of the master of the house? (2 verses)

Please send the answers to:
Mrs I Steel
PO Box 942
Epping NSW 1710
The questions for the whole year
are available from the above postal
address or by email at:
iesteel@gmail.com

Missions in the Banner

Taleem Centre, India

Alex Steel

Having had the opportunity at Synod 2017 to briefly speak with Mariam Hussain who runs the Taleem Centre (Education Centre) in India and in regular communications with her when transferring financial support on behalf of the Synod Missions Committee, I asked her if she could provide some further information regarding her role and work of the Taleem Centre for the interest of the wider PCEA. She responded by sending some photos and writes:

"I live in the northern part of the country which is close to the Himalayan Mountains.

I have a younger sister and a younger brother and we live together in the same house. This is how 90% of Indians live and is very common and culturally accepted. Many families live together for instance with their grandparents, uncles, aunts etc.

We have no contact with any of our parents' family. They don't want to be in contact with us. If they want to be, they want us to be Muslims and marry into Muslim families and this is the reason we have maintained a distance from all relatives. When our parents were alive they tried real hard to share the gospel with their families but all in vain.

We don't have parents. My Dad passed away on May 17th 2013 (4years ago). My mum died on 16th January 2009 (8 years ago).

The name of the state I come from is called Utrakhand. Dehradun is the capital city of the state. It also has many other cities in it, many are in the hilly areas. We have a lot of Nepalese and Tibetans living in our town. The

population of Dehradun is 714,223 (Male 377,174, Female 337,049) The numbers are according to the census taken in 2011.

My parents moved to Dehradun 21 years ago, we grew up in this town. My Dad went to the Presbyterian Theological Seminary for his Bachelors in Theol-

he committed my life to God for serving him. This topic would come up in conversations time and again. Dad telling how he wanted his children to serve Christ but he also said there is no pressure until the Lord puts in your heart to do this. When I shared my desire to go into the village my Dad was happy and proud. He actually went with me into the village during different occasions. He motivated and encouraged me for stepping in for serving His kingdom.

We live in the house which our Dad got built for us. We are so thankful that we have this house. It is a great blessing to have a house and not pay rent. It is miraculous how Dad had completed the house the year before his death.

Three years ago we moved into it, before this we lived in the city near the Seminary campus where many Christians reside. It was much safer from where we reside at the moment. We do have few neighbours from Christian

families, I mean they may not be saved per say but they go to church, we don't know our neighbours personally. It is only the three of us living in our house.

Mr Mijan is a baptised believer from a Muslim family. We have given him a spare room to live in the house. He is 56years of age and worked along with Dad for many years. He is not educated so he can't read/write but he does know a lot from the bible and can share to the men in the village.

Mr Mijan and I go to a village on Sundays, we leave around 10.00am and return at about



ogy. We were on the seminary campus for 3 years, later Dad became an assistant pastor at a church in New Delhi. Having a great desire to work among Muslims my parents, after 2 years of assistant pastorage in New Delhi, moved back to Dehradun and worked among the Muslims.

People from a nearby village would come to attend worship services which my Dad would preach at. This is how I came in contact with the village people from here. 5 or 6 years ago I shared my desire to go into the village with my Dad. He was so happy about my decision as for many years he would tell me how



many want to send their children but we can't take more kids. As we can't provide food for all. With much fund cuts, we had to cut down giving food which was provided daily to the children, but now we can only give food on weekends. On other days when

few people so they can read the Bible in their language.

This is basically what work is going on in the village. I hope this is helpful information.

It is not a huge work, but people knowing Christ, but perhaps it is a start to something bigger in future.

Appreciate all prayers, love, concern, support."

6.00 pm. During the week he goes by himself to see and supervise how the food is being cooked at the Taleem Centre and the children are given what is sent for them.

It takes me a day to prepare what I will be doing with the children during the Sunday. I take a story from the Bible relating to the sermon which I hear on Sundays. We do colouring relating to the story which I tell them. I also do Sunday school songs with them. It's the safest way to share the gospel with these children. I don't just stop at this, I teach the chil-

the children come, they are given fruits and cookies instead of food. This is alright for now, God willing



This work was commenced by Mariam's father in 2008 and funded by the PCEA Synod Missions Committee from the Malcolm McSwan Bequest Missions Relief Fund. However, with the run down of these funds in recent years Synod has found it necessary to significantly reduce support as mentioned by Mariam necessitating a cut in the work of the Centre.

Nevertheless, the Lord has blessed the efforts of her father prior to his sudden passing in 2013 and Mariam's since. Your prayerful and practicable support is encouraged.

we will be able to provide daily again.

The Taleem Centre is open from Monday to Friday for teaching the children English, language, maths and Urdu. We have two teachers who come in the evenings to teach the children. This is an after school program. The children go to their schools during the day which are not good schools but okay for

Alex Steel is the Synod Treasurer of the Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia.

Footnote: Since receiving this information from Mariam we have learned of the sudden passing of Mr Mijan on 17th August who she refers to and who was very helpful with the Taleem ministry and her siblings. Prayer is needed for them as they adjust to his passing.



dren about hygiene how to brush, comb, to bathe and stay clean as possible. Later we play games with the children for them to have some time enjoying running around. Over the years we have provided the Taleem Centre with sports material like a basketball, badminton rackets, football, cricket bats etc. for the children. These are the simplest ways in which I try to share the word in a safe way as possible.

them to attend as that what is affordable and close to home. We have included their traditional language in our curriculum as it will attract more students to come. It is easier to connect with the people while respecting their culture and tradition. We also have many Urdu bibles at home which I sometimes give to a

People are ready to listen and



Dumisani Christian Leaders' Workshops [2017]

J.C. Whytock

Over the past eighteen months, Dumisani has been offering a series of Christian Leaders' Workshops both at the campus in King



William's Town and at various locations throughout the Eastern Cape. These training workshops are geared at being both refresher opportunities for Christian leaders and also times for learning and developing new skills. Workshop training is a good method for ongoing catechesis training of leaders who will, we pray, in turn intentionally instruct others.

Workshop topics are varied according to the needs perceived or expressed through local pastors, former and present Dumisani students and Dumisani faculty. One on "Biblical Principles for Strategic Planning for the Local Church" has been well received and has generated helpful on-going discussion. Since this year is the 500th anniversary of the Reformation, another one of the workshops is on "Why we need to remember the Reformation". In this workshop we teach about the key teachings of the reformation, deal with the recovery of the teaching on covenant theology in the Reformation period, and study specifically covenant infant baptism. In this last point we touch such topics as:

"What if only one parent is a believer?"; teaching one's covenant children through conversations and actions; teaching about Christian marriage; and love and commitment for the local church. Many of our workshops in 2017 will chiefly be focusing on further equipping preachers and teachers in their study labours. Using our workshops as a way to distribute two resources to all in attendance, the Global Study Bible and the book Prosperity? Seeking the True Gospel, we are then making use of these two resources as a platform for instructing workshop participants in sermon preparation. Our key focus has been on explaining the various types of Psalms and how to preach and teach these; next we have been looking at how to properly read and understand the Bible. Here we concentrate upon the best ways to interpret scripture. To allow some variety for the day, we also do a section on some aspects of Bible Geography. Recent workshops have been concentrating upon aspects of where Paul went on his Missionary Journeys and then relating this back to a particular letter of Paul. Finally, we have included a book review on a "hot topic", namely on the whole subject of the prosperity gospel or what is sometimes also called the "health and wealth gospel". This sounds like a lot of topics for one workshop but already we have seen the Lord using this particular flow of topics in a wonderful way.

In June we are planning to conduct another Preachers' and

Teachers' Workshop in Queenstown about two hours away from the Dumisani campus here in the Eastern Cape Province. Then in August we will be holding a similar workshop in Port Elizabeth about three hours away from the Dumisani Campus, also in the Eastern Cape Province.

Beyond the contents of the workshops themselves and the helpful resources received, there are other potential benefits to these workshop days. Those in attendance become acquainted with other Christian leaders in their area and we pray this will increase fellowship amongst the brethren. Also, the workshops are already proving



to be a means of recruiting new students for the college. We are grateful to partners in the United States and Canada who provided 1500 Global Study Bible for distribution. Please pray that this major distribution through the training workshops in 2017 may have very positive implications for the strengthening of Christian preaching and teaching in many local churches.

Dr Jack Whytock is the Acting Principal of Dumisani Theological Institute.