



Lawyers' Christian Fellowship Newsletter

www.lawyerschristianfellowship.org

March 2004



City Bible Forum LEGAL

A new bible study is commencing on

9th March 2004
at

Buena Vista Cafe Bar

Level 14, Supreme Court Building
at
7.30am

featuring great bible teachers including Dean Phillip Jensen



our regular website is back up and running again

Opening of Law Term Address St James King Street

Now to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift but as his due. And to the one who does not work but trusts him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness

Romans 4:4-5

I ought to explain, I guess, that as a preacher I do not have a free hand to say whatever I want. A sermon is not like a speech day address where we may pass on bits of advice to the young from whatever stock of advice we please, 'the casting of false pearls before true swine', as we might cynically say.

No, I am quite constricted. My task is to serve you by studying the Bible and then explaining it and applying it to the best of my ability. I have no information independent of the Bible as to the character and will of God. Furthermore, since the Bible is readily available in the vernacular, my task is a quite transparent one. Any listener can check for him or her self whether what I have to say is true.

Two biblical passages were read today. In the first, we heard a brief section of the Torah, or law of God in which he sets out his will to the people of Israel at Mt Sinai. It assumes that they will live together as a nation; it assumes that they are going to swear fealty to the Lord as their true sovereign; it assumes that a record of these laws will be available for consultation and application; it assumes an ancient rural economy in which the you may come across the straying ox or donkey of your enemy.

Part of it is clearly addressed to those who will be involved in the administration of justice. Nothing here to teach us, I suppose - elementary instruction on the basics: do not accept a bribe, for example; do not deny justice to poor people; more surprisingly, do not show favouritism even to the poor man in his suit - presumably justice must be blind to that which is strictly irrelevant. But even this material seems to our ears more like ethics than law, more a pattern of life for all than a legal system as such: 'do not spread false reports', it says; 'Do not oppress an alien; you yourselves know how it feels to be aliens, because you were aliens in Egypt.' And, be sure to take the donkey back your enemy.

What interests me here is not so much what it may tell us about law and justice, as what it tells us about God: 'Have nothing to do with a false charge and do not put an innocent or honest person to death, *for I will not acquit the guilty*'. Here is a principle of divine action which seems both necessary and incontrovertible. If we are going to have a God who not only made all that is but also rules it with righteousness and justice, we would expect, even demand, that he act in accordance with this principle. He will not acquit the guilty.

Amongst the favourite biblical images of God, that of God the Judge figures extensively. Of course the biblical judge was a person who combined some of the roles that we separate. He, or she, not only tried cases, they performed military feats and they governed the people as well. They sought to create situations of righteousness. But the bringing in of justice was part of their role, and this was clearly thought of as part of

the Lord's role as well. In the end it was revealed that he had a great day on which he would wind up the affairs of this decayed old world and bring it to its crisis point. On that day, he will judge all the nations on earth, and bring in his kingdom of truth and righteousness.

I take it that as moral beings we welcome this news. The knowledge that so much evil goes unchecked, unreported and unpunished; the knowledge that so much wickedness is actually enjoyed and that the wicked 'get away with it' cannot leave us satisfied with the total state of affairs. If the exercise of human justice gives us some small satisfaction, how *dissatisfied* we should feel at so much injustice. When we read about the sufferings of the African slave trade of the 18th and 19th centuries and the unspeakable barbarities which were committed in its name by professing Christian men this 'year of the slave trade', do we not even now become angry? Indeed are we not angry to hear that even in today's world there is a flourishing market in human beings? Lack of passion, lack of anger from us is a moral deficit.

I have read some of the writings of Frederick Douglass, the emancipated slave and leader of his people, and am ashamed and angered to hear how professedly Christian men, evangelical Christian men treated him and other slaves. He tells the unforgettable story of a young girl whose injured hands meant that she was relatively useless to her master. She was regularly tied up for hours at a time and whipped for her uselessness. We do not now know her name; in the whole flow of history she is an insignificant and unimportant person; she received no vindication in this life, and we cannot now reach out and punish her tormentor for his brutal cowardice. For these crimes there has been no adequate redress: no, not in this world, not from men. If this is at all a moral universe, it can only be God himself who will put it to rights.

I take it that as moral beings we welcome the news that there is to be a reckoning. I take it though that as moral beings it also leaves us uncomfortable. Self-knowledge is a difficult art; it is possible to maintain a good opinion of ourselves, even though experience tells us that are in fact the subject of the myriad just criticisms of those who know us best. And such critics cannot see into our hearts, where the real moral lapses are likely to be found. One of the virtues of the Bible is that it constitutes a mirror in which we may diagnose ourselves with some degree of accuracy, and form a true estimate of our moral and spiritual standing. As it says, 'Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account'.

God will not acquit the guilty. We do not want him to do so, and yet what if he should act on this principle towards us? Most of us have enough self-knowledge to

be willing to pray the Lord's Prayer: 'forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us'. What if his uncompromising answer is this: 'I will not acquit the guilty'?

One of the most common mistakes of those who are ignorant of the Bible is to draw a dramatic contrast between the Old and the New Testaments, as though the God revealed in the one is not the God revealed in the other. I sometimes wonder whether there is not an anti-Semitism in this as though we denigrate the Jews by denigrating their God. Of course there is a contrast between the Testaments, and the painful division between Jews and Christians to a large extent arises from our differing understandings of the two. And yet, if the Old Testament is not true and its God is to be rejected, then Christianity is untrue and its God is likewise an idol. There is no Christian gospel apart from Israel, and whatever revolution in our understanding of God and his will which has followed the coming of Jesus, it still presupposes a continuity between the two Testaments of the Christian Bible.

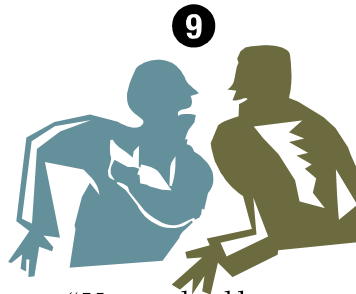
Listen now, however, to the astonishing message of the second, the New Testament reading: 'Now when a man works, his wages are not credited to him as a gift, but as an obligation. However, to the man who does not work, but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness'.

Astonishing? I should think that was too mild a word. Think of this: the major text of western civilisation, the one which has so strongly shaped our views of what is right and wrong, the one which lays down as a fundamental axiom that God is just and that the universe is a moral place, describes God as the one who 'justifies the wicked'. You would, I trust, be insulted if this was said of you. Nor is it possible to squeeze out by massaging the words; 'justifying' in the ancient language of the Bible was an indisputably forensic word. It is the language of acquittal and of condemnation, the language of judgement, and here, the language of the Last Judgement. He says that he does what he will never do.

It is easy enough to read this as a mere contradiction. Moses and Paul, the two human authors are 1500 years apart. But Paul knew his Moses and had the highest respect for his authority. For Paul, this was indeed the word of God; and in fact his whole argument at this point is grounded on an appeal to the Torah, or the Mosaic writings. In any case, this hardly explains why Paul himself is willing to say the unthinkable.

Indeed, see where he begins. He is talking about our chances of passing through the Last Judgement. He makes the simple and utterly fair point that in the human economy wages are not a gift but a due. In a moral universe, that will always be true. But this placid conclusion hardly suits our case. Our problem is this: What

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“You shall not
give false
testimony
against your
neighbor.”

Exodus 20:16

are we to do, if we are immoral people in a moral universe? What if it is the true and whole truth that, 'though the mills of God grind slowly, yet they grind exceeding small'? (Longfellow). We will need something more and more effective than the knowledge that pay deserved is pay deserved.

And the alternative is at hand. God does not deal with us as we deserve; he *acquits* the wicked. Why? Because trust in God is enough - his faith is credited as righteousness.

It is not as though faith is a new form of work for which we get rewarded. On the contrary, faith is one of the most common or ordinary of human experiences; it is nothing to write home about, nothing for us to be proud of. It has no merit. That is why God chooses it as the saving attitude; you cannot boast of faith. You can only boast of the person you put your trust in.

On the other hand, Paul is not speaking of any faith. The quality of faith is always determined by what it is we are trusting. When you trust a liar, you get misery. God says, you may trust me with your forensic future, because I have done something so revolutionary that I have made forgiveness possible; has made it possible for me to forgive, for me to acquit the guilty and still remain just.

What every reader of the Bible knows is that between the great axiom of Exodus, 'I will never acquit the guilty', and the astonishing and risk-laden words of Romans, that God is the one who acquits the wicked, there is the story of a love so amazing that it has been the cynosure of love ever since. It is the story of the death by execution of Jesus Christ the Son of God. Forgiveness always costs something to the one who forgives; it is always the giving up of a rightful claim, the chance to deliver a true verdict, to gain a lawful revenge. Where forgiveness occurs there is always pain and cost born by the person who does not insist on justice; the cost of justice is borne by them.

When God chose to forgive and yet to retain his own righteousness, he did so by entering the world in the Son, Jesus Christ. The Bible says that in Christ and through his innocent death on the cross of execution, 'God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting our sins against us'. And then in mysterious and yet powerful words it tells us, 'God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.' Here is 'love divine all loves excelling.' Here is the reason why, even in a highly secularised age, the death of this man still fascinates us, is still so clearly part of our basic thinking about the world: it is because it is all about us. In this death, law is satisfied, but grace triumphs.

In short, even we moral failures are redeemable, are forgivable. The contradictory statements are reconciled in the death of Jesus. It becomes the point of reconciliation between God and humanity. But, to our embarrassment, it is never because we have achieved spiritual and moral greatness; it is because we trust the God who bore our sins for our sakes, so that we may be

credited with righteousness. I do not want to deny the intellectual problems of faith, but in the final analysis, our problem with God is not intellectual, it is spiritual. Do we wish to be reconciled to him on terms so favourable to ourselves that they make him appear very good indeed? Not, then, do we believe in God. Rather, do we trust him?



Rev Dr Peter Jensen is the Archbishop of the Sydney Diocese of the Anglican Church of Australia. Delivered 4 February 2004



Discriminating the Times

As Principal of a Bible College one does not expect to have to do battle with government tribunals over the moral suitability of students and faculty. This is already happening. Two recent cases I am sure will be of interest. In the first case a student was excluded from study because he acknowledged he was living in a homosexual relationship. A number of calls were received trying to exert pressure on us to back down. The College would not and we cited our protection under the state Anti-Discrimination Act. Under the Act Christian organisations are exempted from the discrimination provisions with respect to homosexuals. (However this could all change if the amendments proposed by the Greens are passed. More on this shortly).

The other case involved our not accepting a student who is living in an immoral relationship. Now in this case we are dealing with the Federal Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission. They are assessing if they have jurisdiction to hear the complaint and that depends on our college being a trading corporation. We are refuting that and at the moment our financial accounts are being considered by the tribunal to determine if we are a trading organisation. If we are found to be a trading corporation I am sure that finding will also apply to schools and other Bible Colleges.

It is time for Christian churches, schools and tertiary institutions to come together to ensure the protection of our freedom of speech and freedom to operate according to Biblical morality. Pressure groups are starting to 'eat away'. I have no doubt of that, and more Christian organisations may well be 'targeted'. There are a number of proposals I suggest.

First, we should all support the C.D.P. in its opposition to the Green's Anti-Discrimination Amendment (Removal of Exemptions) Bill 2004. It's impact would be to prohibit private educational authorities (Christian Schools, Bible Colleges etc) from excluding students in same sex relationships, as well as stopping these institutions from demanding that all their teachers live according to Biblical principles.

Second, we should investigate the equivalent federal legislation as the HREO tribunal is also looking at Christian groups. Our Christian federal politicians must take a lead here.

Third, we need to establish an organisation like the American Centre for Law and Justice. Such a centre of committed Christian lawyers is desperately needed to advise and act for Christians and Christian organisations. I suggest our Christian lawyers need to tithe their time to help the Christian community through the legislative and legal maze that is likely to be upon us over the next few years.

The Greens amendment to the Anti-Discrimination Act is a test case. It will show how seriously the Church takes its Christian freedoms and is prepared to take a stand. A lack of concerted action here will give the secularists all the motivation they need to seek to implement their agenda.



Rev Dr Ross Clifford is the Principal of Morling Bible and Theological College, Sydney and a past speaker at LCF functions. He hosts the 2CH (11.70) Sunday night program (9pm – 12am). His latest book is *Jesus and the Gods of the New Age* (Lion).

Veteran Bible Teacher to Visit

The Rev Dr Desmond Ford who led the morning bible studies at the last Australasian Christian Legal Convention will be speaking in Sydney on 6 March 2004 from 10am to 4pm. His topics will include:

- The Gospel, Our Only Hope
- Immortality, Mirage or Fact?
- Beyond Our Wildest Dreams.
- The Invincible Surmise. (The Development of the Biblical faith in Immortality.)
- An Eternal Weight of Glory. (How the Blessed Hope addresses the Disappointments and Injustices of this Life.)

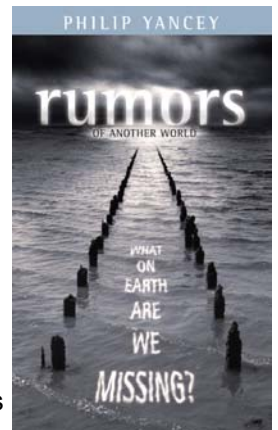
The venue is the Thornleigh Community Centre opposite Bunnings Warehouse corner Phyllis Rd and Central Ave.

Dr Ford will be speaking again at the Thornleigh Community Centre on 5 June 2004 from 2.30-4pm on the topic "In View of Tragedy, Evil and Pain, Why Believe?"

Dr Ford regularly speaks to the Christian Lawyers Association in Queensland.

RUMORS of another world

By Philip Yancey Zondervan 2003
hardback \$20.00-\$30.00.



Most people remember author Philip Yancey best for his "What's so Amazing about Grace?". His subsequent books "Reaching for The Invisible God" and "Soul Survivor" were books which were quite different from his best selling book on grace. *Rumours of another world* returns to the style of *What's so Amazing about Grace?* It is an easy read and resplendent in stories, anecdotes and quotes. The target audience of the book is supposed to be "those who occupy the borderlands". They are defined as:

"Some give church and Christians a wide berth yet still linger in the borderlands because they cannot set aside the feeling that there must be a spiritual reality out there. Maybe an epiphany of beauty or a sense of longing gives a nudge toward something that must exist beyond the everyday routine of life—but what? Big issues—career change, the birth of a child, the death of a loved one, raise questions with no easy answers. Is there a God? A life after death? Is religious faith only a crutch, or a path to something authentic?"

I have reservations about how accessible this book will be to non-Christians and whether, like many "apologetic" books, it will appeal more to those who seek re-assurance and tools to explain their own faith. There are however many pointers to a world beyond our own drawn from the author's own experience and those of others like C.S.Lewis.

The range of subjects addressed by Yancey is broad. He looks at the mess the world is in, sin (a word unsaid), the gift of guilt, technology and sex. His chapter on sex is one of his best as it deals with society's reductionism of sex to solely a physical act isolated from the reality of relationships.

Like many of Yancey's books it is best read with a pencil so that you can find the quotable quotes at a later date.



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