

Record of Sermons delivered during the month of October 2016

(added progressively after each Sunday)

Delivered Sunday 2 October 2016

Back to Basics #14
THE FUTURE (a)

When the Bible talks about the future you can see from the sheet that it speaks about six different things. We'll speak on the first three this week and conclude the back to Basics series next week with the remaining 3 points as shown.

1. First of all the Bible speaks about **death**.

When man was made he was made from the elements of the earth – the 'dust' of the earth. Then when the body of Adam was perfectly formed, God breathed into it the 'breath of life'. And he became a living being. Therefore right from the beginning of the Bible we are told that human life has a visible side and an invisible one. You have a body and you have a spirit. It's not until spirit and body are united together by the act of God the Spirit that Adam becomes a human being. Death is exactly the reverse! When the spirit and the body separate that is death. Thus we are told in Scripture that as the body without the spirit is dead so that faith without works is dead. We are told that the body returns to the dust from which it came and the spirit returns to God who gave it.

So death is the separation of the body from the spirit.

It was never intended (as you, Christian, know) that men and women should die.

Now people who aren't Christians always find themselves in a little spot of trouble, because they say, "Well, death is written into the very way the universe operates! There's always been death. Primitive creatures died, but before they did, evolution took place and over the years more and more sophisticated and complex creatures came to life, but death is part and parcel of the whole universe!" So they say. "And there's never been any time really, in existence when there hasn't been death."

But then they have a problem. If death is as natural as they say. As natural as the sun rising and the sun setting. If death is as natural as the wind blowing. ... Why is it that you fear death?

Everybody, in his conscience, knows that death IS unnatural. It's an invasion. But it's something that doesn't really belong in this universe. And that's exactly what the Bible says!

Death is not something natural. You were never intended to die. Adam if he hadn't

sinned would have lived on this earth and eventually he would have been glorified.

But he didn't. He sinned. And the wages of sin is death. Death is the fruit of sin. And the very fact of death in our race is a reminder to us that we are all sinners.

The very fact that young babies, sometimes die, is to remind us that it's not sinning that makes you a sinner. [After that first sin] we now sin because we are [inherited] sinners. It's because sin has invaded the whole human race that even some times babies after a few hours or even a few minutes die. It's never God's will or wish that death should be amongst us.

But for the believer, death has lost its sting. All the people that first brought Christianity from their 'mother' countries to the Australian colonies have died. And everyone here today will die, (unless the Lord comes back before that).

The time is coming when our spirit and our body will separate. Our body will go into the ground, back to the dust from which it came. And our spirit will be answerable to God.

It's a terrible and fearsome thing. God intended that everybody should fear death. But for the believer it's lost its sting!

The Apostle Paul is able to say, "Death where is your sting, grave where is your victory?" Because of course he was able to look to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ and he sees that God's Son who was put to death and raised from the dead, He's taken the sting, He's taken the pain, He's taken the terror, out of death. At last there is hope again for dying men and women, because of Jesus Christ.

But what happens to the unconverted, immediately after they die?

We found our in the NT reading. Lazarus dies and the rich man dies. Lazarus goes immediately to a place of peace and rest. The rich man goes into a place of torture. That's what the Scripture says!

The scripture talks about the dead, the unconverted dead, as 'reserved under punishment for the day of judgement' (2 Peter 2:9 NKJV) The misery of unconverted men and women. Their final misery starts the very split second their final breath is breathed. Punishment starts at once!

Believers, of course, go consciously into the presence of Christ.

"I'm really anxious", says Paul "to be in the presence of Christ". "Which is better? To stay with you Philippians or to part, to be with Christ." "It's more useful that I stay here and be some use to the Christian church. But I love to go to be with Christ which is far better!"

And when he is writing elsewhere he talks about being absent from the body (not sleeping, not unconscious), absent from the body, but present with the Lord.

Which is why of course, Jesus could say to the dying thief, "Today, you will be with me

in paradise.”

So just as the wicked, the unconverted, the non-Christian, the moment he dies goes into conscious torment, so the Christian, the moment he dies, he goes immediately into the presence of Christ. Into conscious enjoyment of the presence of Christ. He hasn't got his body yet, he's 'unclothed' as Paul puts it, and he doesn't want to stay like that, yet he goes immediately into a place of holiness and happiness and godliness, without any delay what ever.

That's why death has lost its sting. Because the split second a Christian dies he's with Christ.

Now those who have lost loved ones – husbands, wives, parents, children – it's a wonderfully comforting thought, to know that those who died in the Lord, as we worship Him here together, that they are in His immediate presence, and they are enjoying Him now.

So the Bible speaks about death.

2. The next thing the Bible speaks about is the second coming of Christ.

Jesus often spoke about it. He told parables about it. Heavenly stories with an earthly meaning; He talked about Himself as a master coming back. He talked about Himself as a bridegroom coming to His wedding. He talked about Himself in many different pictures. Always with a great note of certainty. And He who predicted exactly with so many details the destruction of Jerusalem which took place in AD 70, predicted also (and sometimes in the same moment) His second coming. In the books of God the second coming is a fact.

In our experience it hasn't yet happened. But it is going to happen. He is coming back.

The Apostles too, write about it all the time. Paul says, “Our citizenship is in heaven from which we await the Lord Jesus Christ”. Paul says that he is anxious, he doesn't belong here, he really belongs there. He waits for Christ to come back and transform his vile body into the likeness of Christ's glorious body. Because of Christ's power to subdue all things to Himself.

When Paul writes to Titus (one of the elders of the church on the island of Crete) he writes about the coming of the great God and our Saviour. The appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The writer to the Hebrews says that He is coming a second time. He's not coming this time to deal with (bear) sin; but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for Him. There's that great note of certainty.

Today we have so many TV evangelist with warped messages; so many weird sects with timetables about every last event between here and the end of the world. So our minds have an air of unreality! When we think about the second coming of Christ. But

this doesn't stop the fact that the Bible boldly proclaims it.

Jesus speaks to it; His Apostles proclaim it. History is not just going nowhere. History is going certainly forward and it will be cut short by the coming of the Lord Jesus.

“Just as, in the days of Noah, they were planning marriages and they were doing social visiting and making business arrangements, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man.” Just as the flood came and took people off to judgement, there'll be two men in the same field and Christ will come and sweep one away to judgement and the other will be left. There will be two women grinding in the mill. The Lord Jesus Christ will come and take one away to judgement and one will be left. There'll be two people in the same bed, the Saviour will come back and He will take one to judgement and the other one will be left. Jesus says so! (Luke 17:20-37)

But **when** is He coming?

Of that day or of that hour no man knows!

“Not even the angels of heaven”, says Jesus, “not even the Son of Man, but the Father only”.

History is filled with people who have tried to predict the hour. When you hear the hour predicted, you can be certain that that isn't the hour! Because nobody knows the day and nobody knows the hour.

But we do know the **how**!

“*Men of Galilee,*” said the angels, as Jesus was taken up towards the heavens before their very eyes at the Ascension, “*why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.*”

When our Lord was taken away after 6 weeks, after the resurrection He went bodily. So He will come back bodily!

What nonsense the so called Jehovah witnesses, speak: when they say that Jesus came back invisibly and spiritually in 1914. The Bible says when He comes back He will come back bodily. Jesus Himself said, “On the clouds, with all the holy angels.” Paul repeated it with flaming fire taking vengeance on all those who don't know God or obey the Gospel.

He will come back bodily and He will come back personally. He will come back gloriously and He will come back visibly. “Just as the lightning flashes across the sky”, says Jesus, “so also will the coming of the Son of Man be.” There will be no missing it!

And **why** is He coming?

Let Jesus Himself speak: “Do not marvel at this, for the hour is coming when all who are in the grave, will Hear His voice and come forth. Those who have done good to the resurrection of life and to those who have done evil to the resurrection of condemnation.” There Jesus is speaking of Himself as the Son of Man, claiming that He is coming back to raise the dead. All the dead!

The judgement will take place; the world will end.

Isn't that comforting, Christians friends to know that Jesus Christ will come to end the

world. Isn't it comforting to know that although we are a minority – and most people think we are cranks – the One whose name we name, whose word we follow, whose presence we know, in whom we have salvation and life, He will end the world. He will do it! Who will have the last word? Atheism, the big entertainer, the famous star? Jesus Christ.

3. The third thing the Bible talks about is the resurrection.

At the return of Christ the dead will be raised up. Even those buried at sea.

The sea gave up the dead that were in it. (Rev 20:13a) Even people buried in unknown places. Even the martyrs who were burned to cinders! Where ever the dead are they are all known to God. Every one of them will be raised from the dead. There will be a resurrection of the just and the unjust. The Bible says so.

A great deal of detail has been given about how believers will be resurrected. Not a great deal about unbelievers. But a great deal – it's one of our privileges as Christians, to stand at the graveside and remember from that very spot there will be a resurrection. The body, says the Bible, is sown in corruption it is raised in incorruption. It is sown in dishonour – what could be more dishonourable, than a dead body – it is raised in glory, It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. It is sown a 'natural' body – only ever capable of living in this world – it is raised a spiritual body. It's a body, but it's capable of living in the spiritual dimension. There is a natural and there is a spiritual body. And so the Bible goes on with many more details.

There will be a resurrection. We don't need marked graves for there to be a resurrection. Every grave will give up its dead. We shall all live again. And at that moment there will be the end of the universe as we now know it.

And the final judgement!

Are you ready for death? That could be today!

Are you ready for the 'second coming'? That could be today – although we haven't yet seen the anti-Christ, as long as we know.

Are you ready for the resurrection? It may be sooner than you think.

[2298]

May this understanding of the certainties of God's Word be with all the saints gathered here today.

Delivered Sunday 9 October 2016

Back to Basics:

THE FUTURE (b)

Review of last week.

(We continue with the final 3 points)

4. The fourth of the six things that the Bible says about the future is the Last

Judgement.

Now the Bible speaks very clearly about this.

The Old Testament doesn't say a great deal about the resurrection though it does speak about it. It doesn't say much about the coming of Christ although it does speak about it in quite wonderful terms in Isaiah and in one or two other books. But even the Old Testament speaks in very plain language about the last judgement. And so does your conscience! Let's take just one verse from the Old Testament: "God will bring every deed into judgement, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or it is evil." Eccl 12:14

The judge will be the Lord Jesus Christ. He described Himself once as one who would separate the sheep from the goats. When Paul is preaching to unbelieving philosophers and pagans, he says that God will judge the world. "Do you want the proof? The proof is that God has appointed the judge. How can you know who the judge is? God has testified to who the judge is by raising Him from the dead. Jesus Christ!"

The judge of all men and angels is the Lord Jesus Christ. What a terrible thing it is to use (abuse) His name cheaply. Remember He's the one to whom we must answer for every idle word. We will actually stand before Him for that.

What a terrible thing to be on the other side. A terrible thing to be a non-Christian. What a terrible thing to be one of those men or women who's pushing values and ideas which are anti-Christian – anti-Christ, Remember that all those men and women will stand before Jesus Christ, at last, because just as God saves men and women, through Jesus Christ, God judges men and women, also through Jesus Christ.

Every human will be there. Paul says to Timothy, *'I charge you to preach the word. I charge you in the Name of Jesus Christ who by His appearing will judge the living and the dead.'* Couldn't be more inclusive than that, could it?

All the dead are raised all the living that are still alive when the Lord comes back: all gathered together, with only one Person to answer to. And that Person Jesus Christ. It will be no use saying on that day, 'I didn't know. I didn't know what the standard would be. I had no contact (knowledge) of the Law. The Bible will answer back to you as it already has in Romans 2: for some of you, it says, "you haven't got the Law written down, but if you have got the Law written down, that's the Law that will judge you. That applies to all who have heard the Gospel. For the rest : they have the law in their hearts. Woe to those who haven't even obeyed that law. It's not a different law! The law written on the human heart and the Law in the Bible is the same Law. That's why when the Bible is preached it has a certain authority, because your conscience agrees with what you're hearing from the book. It's the same Law and it's God's Law.

Are we ready to come to the judgement seat and know that the standard of judgement isn't your ideals, or anyone else's, but God's Law.

There will be a last judgement!

5. The fifth thing that the Bible speaks about is the final state of the wicked.

Because the judgement is the moment of separation. Death is a moment of separation, because the converted go one way and the unconverted another. The converted start their glory (without their bodies) while the unconverted start their torment. But they will be resurrected and come before the judgement, and the judgement will pronounce that what already happened was just. Justice will be seen to have been done. So this is a final separation.

There are people today who don't believe in hell. They are the enemies of Jesus Christ! Because Jesus Christ taught clearly that there is a place of punishment. In fact our Lord Jesus Christ spoke more often about hell than heaven. It's no good these people calling themselves by some name which appears appealing: enlightened-evangelicals or neo-evangelicals, because in fact they are contradicting Jesus Christ. At the end of the parable of the tares, as He explains its meaning to the disciples, He says, ⁴⁰ *'As the weeds are pulled up and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of the age.'* ⁴¹ *The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil.* ⁴² *They will throw them into the blazing furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.* ⁴³ *Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Whoever has ears, let them hear.*

In our reading we heard about all the dead, small and great, standing before God. And a book being opened and another book being opened, which is the book of life. We read, anyone whose name is not found in the book of life, was cast into the lake of fire. Moreover, the cowardly, unbelieving (is that you or I?), abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone. Which is the second death.

How many times do you have to steal to be a thief? How many times do you have to lie to be a liar? Yet the Bible says all of them will be in the lake of fire that burns with brimstone (sulphur). Which is the second death.

Can we even begin to imagine what hell is like? Are unconverted people good to each other? Yes, many are. Especially since they wish to be well regarded. Are people pleasant in the shops and on trains and buses? By and large yes. Are there well intentioned school teachers, and other professions that you have met. Yes there are.

But all that kindness, which is in unconverted people, is what we call 'common grace'. And when that's all taken away, there will be nothing good. Nothing restraining. Nothing pure. Nothing Godly (created in God's image remember) any more. There will only be their sinful polluted nature. They will be demonic. (Remember the three glasses – pure water; ink; and one-drop polluted water.) They will be cast into the outer darkness and will be so ugly and so wicked, so hateful. That God must put them to the 'outer darkness'. Because there can be nothing impure to spoil His new creation – the new heaven and the new earth. Heaven is where God is 'all-in-all' for all the men and women who are there.

All the wicked go to hell and that includes us all and does include us all, but through the mercy and kindness of God so many, many of us have been saved. Not because

we deserve it or even knew to look for it, but because God is merciful and He sought us out; found us; and visited us with a sense of shame. Brought us to see that we deserved hell since we're as wicked as that. Brought us to see that only Jesus Christ is pure. We fled from that sinfulness and its consequences. Learning to hate the sin, even if only a little, as we began to realise how God sees it. We were saved not only from what we had done but from the people we were. We fled from the old life. Realised we could not make amends, And so fled to Jesus Christ, to grasp hold of Him, since there was no hope for any of us apart from Him who lived and died and rose again for sinners. We fled to Him as sinners but not as those with excuses. We had and have no excuse!

But for those who are in the 'outer darkness, there is nothing good, and the 'worm' will never die. Said Jesus. And the fire is not quenched.

There will be degrees of punishment: The servant who knew the master's will and didn't do it will receive many stripes. The servant who didn't know the master's will - since some have more light than others - and didn't do it will receive a few stripes. There will still be punishment, but those who know the most, but still don't come to the only Saviour that there is, will have the severest punishment of all. It will be endless. When Jesus talks about the sheep and the goats, He uses exactly the same word to describe the punishment of the wicked as to describe the life of the righteous. Exactly the same word. (endless, eternal) He said their 'worm' does not die. Their fire is not quenched. Hell is endless, everlasting.

So the Bible talks about the final state of the wicked.

6. But thank God it also talks about the final state of the righteous.

There will be a great noise, says the Word of God. The heavens will be on fire. The elements will melt with a fervent heat. What that means is that the present universe as we now know it is going to be completely melted down and put into the crucible. It's so filled with sin, all the dross must be taken out. The whole thing must be purified and purged and therefore God will melt the whole universe down. He will shake it, it says in another passage. And then He will re-make it! Which is why we read in the revelation what John saw: He said, "*I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no more sea.*" There's a new heaven and a new earth! It's not just a fancy spirit world. It's a real creation. There's a real earth again. But it's new!

Our poor Jehovah Witnesses feel that some will go to heaven and all the rest of them will be on the earth.

But the Bible goes on: "*I (John) saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband.*" It was so beautiful he said. The heavenly Jerusalem coming down to earth, It was so beautiful. And he heard a loud voice coming from heaven saying, '*Look! God's dwelling-place is now among the people, and He will dwell with them. They will be His people, and God Himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death, or mourning or crying or pain, for the old*

order of things has passed away.'

"He who was seated on the throne said, 'I am making everything new!' Then He said, 'Write this down, for the words are trustworthy and true.'

So the great distinction between heaven and earth. The visible and the invisible, and all those distinctions which we have in the present universe ... they are gone! And God who lives in heaven is with men on the earth and men who are on earth are living with God who is in heaven. We're inheriting a whole new universe, though we are still walking on the earth. The whole universe is ours and we can't find any pain in it. Or any unhappiness, or sorrow. And we certainly can't find any curse, so we can't find any death.

We can't find any sea, since this is the OT symbol of separation. There's no separation from God any more. We can't find any Sun, because we don't need it any more because Jesus Christ is all the 'light' we need. It's all holy and happy and wonderful. AND everlasting!

And the greatest thing of all is this: *"He will dwell with them. They will be His people, and God Himself will be with them and be their God."* **That's everlasting life!** Perfect communion with God. Knowing God as much as a human creature can know God. Being with God. Enjoying God. (The hope – expectation – of the first Catechism answer!)

Surrounded, upheld, indwelt by God. Everything is Godly. Everywhere we turn is communion with Him. Everywhere we look we see His Son. Everything we do is all worship for Him.

Are you prepared for that day? [The Bible says some of you will get there by the skin of your teeth. You can't lay any other foundation than Jesus Christ. You can't lay your Christian life, or anything else other than on Him. Thus speaks Paul to the Corinthians, and he speaks very straight to us all.

On that foundation some people build and their work is shoddy. They've got a really shoddy Christian life. Wood, hay, stubble. When the universe melts down what will happen to wood, hay, stubble? When the great crunch comes, the final day of God. They themselves will be saved says Paul, but their work will come to nothing. They spent their efforts and energies, their initiative and their money. Spent their life on things that actually are of no eternal value and can't last in the eternal world.

What must it be, to come to the end of your life, and find that when you come to the judgement all that you have done counts for nothing in God's sight. You yourself are saved, but nothing you've done has proved to be of any value at all. Whereas others, says Paul: gold, silver, precious stones. And every man shall have his reward from God.

It's a wonderful thing to go to heaven. Wouldn't it be a wonderful thing also, to know that before we've gone there, and when we've got there, the days we have live before we get to heaven, have been of value. That we have done something enduring and

lasting for God.

We're still saved only by the blood of Christ, but wouldn't that make your heaven a little more heaven? To paraphrase what another person has said: to realise you lived for God before you went to live with Him.]

The future isn't in man's hands, not in any minister's. Nor is the future in the Devil's hands. It's in God's. Death is certain. So is the second coming of Christ. Thank God so is the resurrection. But so is the last judgement. And so is hell for you if you are unconverted. What will you do?

Won't you turn to God now! There is still time!

[2464]

May this understanding of the certainties of God's Word be with all the saints gathered here today.

THIS IS THE END OF THE 'BACK TO BASICS' SERIES

Delivered Sunday 16 October 2016

Personal Reflections – OmniSCIENCE

[Before I prepared this sermon. I did a keyword search on Bible Gateway for 'science'. Neither NIV nor NKJV found any – except they brought up 1 Tim 6:20 where they instanced 'knowledge'.]

Two things come to mind as I share some thoughts with you:

- When I was a young science teacher – let's say the early sixties – I was looking through a book that had belonged to my deceased grandfather, he was born in the 1860's. This book was a science encyclopaedia. All the commonly believed science of the time. Not one thing I read matched what we taught in the 1960's!! I wondered what might people in 2060 think of what I was teaching. Would the human race have learnt so much more between 1860 – 1960 than say 1960 – 2060.
- I was being trained to present a weekly radio programme that presented 5 Hymns each week. I had sent my CV when I applied to be allowed to do this programme. My trainer's first words to me were. "I didn't think you could be a scientist and a Christian"!

Well you can be.

I enjoyed studying Physics; teaching it and supervising the teachers teaching Physics in all State schools during the mid seventies. Later I taught it at the Perth Jewish school until 2002. I can claim to be a scientist (a Physicist) since I was accepted into

membership of the professional association, the Australian Institute of Physics.

I first attended a Presbyterian Church in 1946; was baptised into membership in 1952; ordained an Elder in 1975; and am now a lay preacher.

I rest (rely) on the promises of God that through the life; sacrificial death; and resurrection of Christ Jesus, I, though a sinner, are saved to eternal life, solely through the merit of Christ. Yes I am a believer and follower of Jesus Christ. I am a Christian.

Science is not a religion – or shouldn't be treated as though it is. Science does not provide Truth. You can't believe in science. Or look to it to save you from Hell!

What is Science?

It's a human pastime. Quite useful and satisfying to some.

Applied Science (or experimental Science) has had much to do with this technological age. It has often moulded our perception of the world (our philosophies).¹

What does the human pastime of Applied Science involve?

We start with certain senses. We see, feel, hear etc. And we make observations of *what* occurs. Later we devise appliances which extend our ability to make even further observations. Radio receivers, light analysers, telescopes, microscopes, and so on and on.

As individuals we concentrate on finer and finer specialities. Learning more and more about less and less until we know everything about nothing? But our intellect is limited. As we focus ever down and down to the finest detail of the 'trees' we lose touch with the 'forest'.

So many observations.

And so we then contrive a self satisfying explanations of *how* these observations seem to come about.

In other words, we are inquisitive, wanting to know *what* and *how*.

With so many observations it is necessary that they are classified. Like with like etc. We might do the same with stamps. [Ernest Rutherford – discoverer of the nuclear

¹ The widespread application of Newton's Laws of Mechanics since the mid 1650's (with a reliance on mathematically determined prediction of cause and effect) has led to a fatalistic and deterministic philosophy, that has played down the unexpected, the 'miracle'. Undermining God's truth as He has revealed it in His Word, the Bible and the life and Ministry of God the Son, whilst with us on earth 2000 years ago. More recently quantum mechanics, has changed this mechanistic view to one of more random notions with 'typical' but not 'unique' consequences of causes. The former description of the position and movement of electrons in atoms has given way to probability functions which describe the 'likelihood' of finding an electron in a certain spatial distribution-pattern, only. Nothing more specific than this. Perhaps if Einstein had come before Newton, the religious climate of the previous few centuries may have been very different.

atom – once said, “In science there is only Physics everything else is mere stamp collecting!]

So we catalogue and classify, as good stamp collectors. But the Rutherford's and Newton's and Kepler's do more!

They look for patterns. When they find them they seek convenient explanations (perhaps as memory aids) that satisfy their curiosity.

They try to answer, “*Why* is it so”.

But they never do answer this question! Many will stubbornly try, deliberately avoiding the obvious:

God made it so. For His glory.

But their explanations of the patterns they observe are useful. For the time being, until further observations make it necessary for the explanation to change. Not one thing from 1860 survived to 1960. These convenient explanations, while they satisfy us for now and allow us to learn more are not **truth**.

But, we fool ourselves, as well as society at large, if we claim that explanations (theories, even so called laws) are true in any absolute sense. They are, as I said, contrived & satisfying explanations that serve, for the time being, to satisfy our curiosity and lead us on to further observations. Inevitably all such explanations are modified, and often completely discarded in favour of new ones, that take account of ever increasing observations (knowledge, if you will).²

Applied (or experimental) Science does not discover absolute truth. It says nothing about right and wrong. And above all it is absolutely unable to answer the question, “*Why* is it so?” Despite the title of the TV programme by a so called “professor” Sumner Miller in the 1960s.

A Christian answers the question “*Why* is it so?”, by: God created all. For His purposes alone. So that His glory may be displayed.

Consider the very first item of the shorter catechism from the Westminster Confession of Faith: This catechism, by the way, is composed of a series of questions and answers that explain the faith, especially to children.

2 Cause of change in motion: *Believed by all* for 2000 + years, that when things moved it was because a force was acting on them. (This appeared to be the case, since the unnoticed, resisting force of friction was generally always present. The force that one felt they had to apply to keep something moving, even at constant speed, was only necessary to overcome friction, and in so doing resulted in no net force being required for constant speed – in a straight line.)

In the mid seventeenth Century, Isaac Newton identified 3 ways of describing motion which were an improvement on the notion of the Greeks (and everyone else in between!):

Unbalanced (resultant) force acting on an object cause such a mass to accelerate (change its original state of motion, either from being at rest or travelling at a constant speed in a straight line). Newton claimed that science did not have a useful theory unless we could measure the predicted outcomes. The formula: $F = ma$, made this possible for his 'Laws'.

However Newton's so-called Laws only apply in special circumstances. They have been replaced! (by Wave Mechanics)

Number 1 is this:

Q. What is the chief purpose of man(kind)

A. To glorify God and enjoy Him forever.

God's purpose in creation was to demonstrate His glory, and the pinnacle of that creation was the creation of us. Again for His glory!

The answer to the question “why”. Why does the wind blow? Why does a flow of air have properties beyond the obvious, that makes it possible for yachts to sail, planes to fly, cricket balls to curve in flight and so on?

Why did God create everything? And why did He create me?

Because it was His will to do so. To His glory. AMEN.

So I find no conflict between science's convenient, curiosity-saving, temporary explanations (hypotheses, theories, principles and even so called laws) and God's truth and purpose for mankind.

For me there is no conflict between being a scientist, who can marvel at *what* and *how* God has done things, and being a Christian whose chief purpose is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever.

But there's more. ...

How **do** we come to know about God?

The apostle Paul put it this way: He was explaining the Christian faith to new Christians in Rome, some 2000 years ago in a letter. This is in the first chapter of his letter to those Romans.

God's Wrath Against Sinful Humanity

¹⁸ The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of people, who suppress the truth by their wickedness, ¹⁹ since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. ²⁰ For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse.

²¹ For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. ²² Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools. (NIV)

This is a judgement on all humanity. You know, as I know, that things are in a mess! The world we live in, then as now, is not as God created it. Read on in Romans and you'll find details of the depravity of the human race.

Paul begins as he does, to show that humans have fallen from the way in which they were first created. They now reject God; fail to give Him the glory He deserves and insists on; and do not give Him thanks. This being the case, God as the ultimate creator of Justice, the absolute, infallible judge, passes sentence on all disobedient mankind and delivers His wrath. Not the least of which is that we all are cut off from His presence and inevitably die. Despite the fact that God is known by all, from observation of His creation, all around us. Despite the fact that God has given humans the intellect and perception (unlike the lower animals) so that His qualities of power and divinity are plain and clearly understood.

All are guilty, none has an excuse!

Is this then the pitiful end of humanity? God's justice must prevail and that's the end of it? We live out a futile life and just die, still under the wrath, the curse, of God. Well yes, ... except:

The Christian is a Christian because he has heard and received and been acted on by the "Good News". Also called, by many Bible writers, the 'Gospel of Jesus Christ'. We may abbreviate this to the 'Gospel of John, or Luke, or Matthew, or Mark' or the Gospel to the Gentiles as Paul describes. But the 'good news' is always, and only, Christ's good news. He brings it and He IS it.

God has not allowed His creation to fail to glorify Him. Right from the failure of the first humans to bring this about (and planned even before time began) He carries out His salvation of His creation.

The Old and New Testaments of the Bible chronicle this salvation progress as it is being revealed.

God comes to lost and guilty humanity – guilty without excuse remember – and consumes the penalty of this guilt in Himself. God with us – the incarnation – occurs in Bethlehem, first as a baby, then growing to the man, Jesus. Demonstrating the perfect life meant for obedient humans but rejected by fallen humanity. And then extinguishes God's justified wrath and sentence on us, by taking the agonising, very real penalty, of separation and death upon Himself. He does this freely for all who believe on Him and repent of their sin and who receive His Spirit as guide and helper for the rest of their life on earth and on to their resurrection with Him in eternity.

This is the true knowledge the true science. It reflects one of God's eternal and absolutely complete qualities: Omniscience – OmniSCIENCE

[1706]

May this understanding of the certainties of God's Word be with all the saints gathered here today.

Galatians – introduction (a)

Four hundred and ninety nine years ago next Monday week, October 31st, 1517, a Roman Catholic monk walked with great determination across the square of the university town of Whitenburg, in Germany, looking toward the great church. It was Dr Martin Luther, who had been until a few years before the Professor of Philosophy at the University and had then become Professor of Biblical Theology. His lectures were creating great attention: in 1514 he had lectured on the book of Psalms – students crowded in to hear him expound the Scriptures; in 1515/16 he had expounded the Book of Romans – the lectures becoming fuller and more exciting. Then, at the end of 1516 and into 1517 he had expounded the Epistle of Paul to the Galatians!

He had recently finished this exposition.

From this he had become convinced of 4 great truths, from the pages of the Bible alone:

1. He was convinced that a man is saved by the free grace of God.
2. He was convinced a man cannot chose Christ unless He first chooses him, because a man is (spiritually) impotent.
3. He was convinced that he could make no contribution to his salvation, and
4. He was convinced that God brings salvation to a man's heart by faith alone.

And there were some 200 others who had come to believe the same truths in the same way! But up to this point not one of them had attracted any significant public attention.

Then, on the scene came Friar Tetzal, who with the Pope's authority was teaching that forgiveness of sins was possible by purchasing Church authorised 'indulgences'. And Friar Tetzal, with the Pope's authority, was teaching that as the Roman Catholic Church, had discretion to forgive sins, 'indulgences' could be purchased with money, and forgiveness of sin could be that person's experience **even without repentance!**

Dr Martin Luther, saw red! That's why he was walking across that square (all but one year, one week, and one day, short of five hundred years ago). Because he knew that the forgiveness of sins could never be purchased with money; never be dispensed by an institution. Rather the forgiveness of sins comes about by the free grace of God, reveal at the Cross and by faith in that sacrifice alone.

Luther knew that if this Tetzal were believed, then tens of thousands of people would be even more misled than that were at present about how they could have peace with God. Therefore he knew that the matter must be discussed: the question of how a man gets right with his Maker must be brought out into the open.

So, he tabled 95 theses for discussion. He did what was always done to get anything discussed, he went over to the Church door and nailed them to it. From this event almost one year short of 500 years ago he set in motion the event which became known as the 'Reformation'.

The great Biblical Doctrine of how a man is put right with God was recovered!

Millions of people, in every European Country, came into peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ. On no other basis than the teaching of the Scriptures. The tyranny, which Roman Catholicism had exercised over the minds of a Continent, during the 'dark ages', was at last broken.

Not only did people come to a true understanding of how to have peace with God, but there was a new intellectual freedom released which allowed the rise of modern science and our modern freedoms, this being traced back to October 31st, 1517.

And the event of that day can be traced to the book of Galatians.

It was the book of Galatians which moved Martin Luther to go across the square. This rather small letter is Spiritual dynamite!

It was this same dynamite that 'turned round' John Wesley in May 1738, when his heart was strangely warmed in Aldersgate Street London, after which he became a great preacher of the Gospel. It was exposure to Galatians which did that to him.

You're coming to the bluntest letter written in the first Century. You're coming to a letter, which whenever it's been preached or explained has aroused controversy. You're coming to a letter which, when properly understood, divides Congregations. Some who hear will be offended by Galatians and not see the series out.

It's a straight talking letter. When written in about AD 48, and even today, so many years later. When people read it, it arrests their minds and they can never be the same again.

God willing this week and through the ensuing weeks we're going to study Galatians.

So we turn to the first 10 verses which will answer our introductory questions:

1. who wrote it;
2. to whom did he write;
3. in what spirit did he write; and
4. for what reason?

Look at the first two verses to answer the first question. Who was the author of this spiritual dynamite? Which changed the face of the world.

One simple word – *Paul*.

When we write a letter today (if the email is off) we sign off at the end. Perhaps then

we then may need to get to this ending to discover who is writing. In new testament times the writer is revealed immediately – very sensible! *Paul*.

(also known by the name Saul, but he was in most of his letters writing as God's appointed messenger to the 'gentiles' so he uses the Greek equivalent – Paul – of the Hebrew version – Saul – of his name.)

He goes on ... *Paul, an apostle*. This was well understood in the first Century. An apostle was someone who enjoyed a special status, and a special authority, because he had been sent by someone higher than himself. Before he became a Christian Saul had been an apostle of a sort because he had received authority from the Jewish Sanhedrin, the supreme Jewish Council, to go to Damascus, to arrest Christians, and to take them back in chains for punishment, imprisonment or death. He had gone to Damascus with special authority, and special status bestowed on him by a body greater than himself – that's what an apostle is.

But who is the Person greater than himself when Paul writes this letter? We are told that he doesn't have a human commissioning: *Paul, an apostle – sent not from men*. No Sanhedrin or any other committee sending him this time!

Then he says something else which is rather an embarrassment to certain beliefs today: *Paul an apostle – sent not from men nor by man*. For instance a bishop in the Church of England or the Church at Rome, believes that he gets his authority from God, but that that authority is mediated to him by the laying on of hands of a bishop, in what's called the Apostolic succession.

Although he believes that his authority comes from God, he believes it comes by men. But not the apostle, Paul. "I'm an apostle not sent by men or by a man". Well then, Paul where is the authority, greater than yourself, who is sending you with a message, with special status and a special dignity? *An apostle – sent not from men nor by man, but by Jesus Christ*. Sent to his work by Jesus Christ directly. – *and God the Father, who raised Him from the dead*. "I've been sent to this work personally, directly commissioned by God the Father."

As you may know, as you read Paul, he has a lovely habit, that whenever he speaks of God he never just speaks of God 'full stop', but always speaks of God who did something or who is doing something. On this occasion he chooses to remember that God the Father who sends him, is the same God the Father who raised Jesus Christ from the dead.

So think of this. As we open this letter, we are reading the words of a man who was personally and directly commissioned by God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Commissioned by the living God to be an authoritative teacher and interpreter of the Christian Gospel.

Why does Paul refer to himself in this way? Why does he take pains in verse 1, to say what sort of apostle he is? The answer to that is that there were 'false teachers' about. We shall hear a great deal about 'false teachers' in the next few weeks as we continue to study this letter.

The false teachers had been saying amongst themselves, and to others. “You don't need to listen to Paul. Don't pay any serious attention to Paul. After all he is merely an apostle of his own making.” That is why Paul opens the letter as he does. By stating the claim that he's not an apostle of his own making, he's been directly commissioned by the Father and the Son.

The first two chapters of this 'dynamite' letter are going to be a defence of his apostleship.

These false teachers were saying, “He's only a self made apostle.” They were using that as an excuse to alter the Gospel that he preached. To change the 'message' that he had announced. So right at the beginning of the letter he states it baldly to us, that he has been commissioned to be a divinely appointed messenger. A divinely appointed teacher and interpreter of the truth.

But now look at verse 2. Paul doesn't write alone. He adds: and all the brothers with me. Where ever Paul preached he had a missionary team. If he were to preach in area A, he would have, if at all possible, a Christian from area A, then as he moves on to area, B, in his team the person from A continues and he adds someone from area B. So that the Gospel never was to come across as something 'foreign'. He always had such a missionary team. The Galatians had previously met Paul and his missionary team. (The Church there had been planted by them relatively recently.)

Paul is setting himself up as an opponent of these false teachers, who are decrying him, so Paul points out that it's not him alone but this previously know team of brethren, with him. Every member of the missionary team that they had met, joins with Paul to oppose the false teaching. So he is not only speaking on his authority as an apostle but he is also speaking on behalf of all true Christians.

That answers our first question. Who is writing this letter? Paul and all the brethren with him.

Now the second question: To whom did the apostle Paul and these brethren address this letter?

(We've now advanced to the end of verse 2!)

To the churches of Galatia. The letter was written to churches. As you may know, in the first Century, when someone became a Christian he was baptised, and immediately joined a Church. He associated himself at once with a group of believers who could be identified and seen. That's what a Church is. Not the building, but it is a body of believers, who live and work in the same locality. The letter is written to churches. This is important since some parts of Galatians are a little difficult. Some may be tempted to say, “That's too hard for me!” “I don't understand this allegory about Sarah and Hagar.” “I'll leave it to the elders perhaps they understand it. Of course there's the Pastor – he'll know.”

But that sort of thinking isn't permitted by the New Testament. This letter isn't written

for experts. It's written for you. You're a Christian and you gather in a local church. This letter is written to local churches. To you! It's no good saying that you don't understand it and that you'll leave it to somebody who can. It's written for you to understand, and therefore it's your Christian responsibility to understand it.

Still you might say. "I don't understand what Paul means when He talks about the 'blessing of Abraham coming upon the gentiles'." But you should. That's what the letter is written for. It's your Christian duty to understand every word and line, doctrine and teaching found in this great epistle. It's because ordinary people did begin to understand it, that the Reformation did take place.

Notice that it was written for the churches of Galatia. But it is preserved, by God's Providence, for us. But then for the Galatians.

Let's reconstruct a little of the history, so we can understand what was happening:

Christians, first gathered in Jerusalem. Persecution caused them to scatter and a significant group of them came together at Antioch (capital of the Roman province of Syria). There they preached the Gospel to the local gentiles and a new church had become established. From Jerusalem had come Barnabas, to teach in this new Christian church. And because the task was terrific he sent for Paul to come from Tarsus to help him. Paul and Barnabas then taught for a full year there. Then the new church at Antioch heard that the people in Jerusalem were suffering a drought, so they made a collection and Paul and Barnabas were to deliver it to the remaining Christian church in Jerusalem. (This is mentioned in Chapter 2)

While Paul and Barnabas are in Jerusalem the Apostles there recognise that Paul and Barnabas have a special mission from God to preach the Gospel to the gentiles.

Shortly after they return to Antioch. The Church there, under the Spirit's direction, send them off to preach the Gospel in areas where the Gospel has never been preached. They go into modern day Turkey and they preach in many places and lively Christian churches spring up. Iconium, Lystra and Derbe. In the area roughly called Galatia. The first Missionary journey as it became to be called.

Eventually Paul and Barnabas come back to Antioch where they spend a considerable time with the Church. But there's trouble! People come up from Jerusalem. The church becomes divided into Jews and Gentiles.

The Jewish Christians say that they can't eat with gentiles. "We can't sit down at table with gentiles. They've not been circumcised." "They don't submit to the ceremonial law. They're unclean. We can't eat with them!" There's trouble. Paul sees that the Gospel is at stake. He tackles that trouble head on. (also in chapter 2)

While this is happening Paul and Barnabas hear that this trouble has spread to the new churches which they had founded in Galatia. False teachers have gone among the new converts. They are being told that if they are not circumcised they're not

saved. Faith in Christ is good, but it's not enough!
One needs Faith in Christ PLUS.

They were being taught 'PLUS Christianity'. This false Christianity is still with us. This is the curse we must avoid. This is the curse that became apparent, almost 500 years ago to some 200 scholars, epitomised by Dr Martin Luther when studying and understanding Paul's urgent letter to the Galatians. We need a Reformation just as much today. Here in Bunbury.

[2482]

May this understanding of the certainties of God's Word be with all the saints gathered here today.

[rather too long – consider doing the history at children's address]

Delivered Sunday 30 October 2016

Galatians – 1:1-10 Introduction (b)

Review of last week:

Tomorrow, 31st October, 2016 marks the 499th anniversary of Dr Martin Luther's historic stand against 'Christianity PLUS' theology. He nailed 95 'questions for discussion' on the door of his local church. This marks then, the beginning of the documented Reformation. A Reformation which is urgently needing to be re-established almost 500 later in our present 'evil age'.

We continue our weekly study of Paul's stern letter to the churches in Galatia (and to us): where he admonishes churches who have been led astray by 'false teachers', who ADD human actions to 'faith in Christ ALONE'.

We continue the lesson by Dr Stuart Olyott, started last week:

The 'false teachers' in the region of Galatia preached that Christ's sacrifice is part of

the picture, but you need something else. So Paul writes to those young churches, because they are being 'carried away' by those false teachers. They are being mesmerised by that 'new teaching'. They're turning their back on what the Apostles had preached and are beginning to soak up that new message. The Gospel's at stake! So Paul writes to the Galatians. That's what this letter is.

Note that this letter is to churches composed of young converts. (of any age in life, but young – recent – in the faith). This is stressed, because today, when people are new converts people feed them on the most light 'spiritual diet' imaginable. Few today would teach Galatians to a new convert. Then there's moaning that young converts don't grow! They were young converts and Paul writes specifically to them. (There was no one else there.) Telling them not to be carried away with false teachings. And what we in our anaemic 21st Century churches call 'meat', he considered was suitable teaching for young converts.

Let no one in a true Christian church, today say that Paul's teaching from the letter to the Galatians is too hard for them!

It's not too hard! Pray to God that you will understand it. Read it through several times in preparation. Come prepared praying that God will speak to you through the sermons. Then, as the message of Galatians becomes clear in your mind, the majority of the problems of 'false teaching' that Christians face in THIS evil age will be understood and begin to be resolved.

You'll have assurance. A clear doctrine of what it means to have peace with God. Your emotional life won't be ruling your Christian life, although it will be fully expressed. And a whole host of other dangers, you'll be free from, if you will only understand Galatians.

So, who wrote it? Paul.

To whom? Local churches, then and now. To us!

In what spirit did Paul write? Verses 3 – 5:

Letters can vary tremendously. The tone of a letter from a debt collector will be very different from a 'love letter'!

In what spirit did Paul write his letter? A letter in which he writes to young (new) Christians who are being carried away by a false Gospel. Verse 3 – 5 tells us.

³ *Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ,*
This is a common benediction and greeting Paul uses in his letters.

In general society at that time people would greet each other in the street: if a Greek speaker then with *charis* (grace – that which affords joy, pleasure, delight, sweetness, charm, loveliness), if a Jew – with *shalom* (peace – peace, harmony, wholeness, completeness, prosperity, welfare and tranquillity). A normal friendly greeting.

Paul takes up these two words: grace and peace. But he doesn't announce this grace and peace in his own name. When you might say grace or peace to someone, as a Greek or a Jew, what you mean is that you desire their well being and their all round prosperity. Paul knows full well that he can't bring that on anybody. So when he writes his letters he adds: *from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ*, because he knows that everything that is good; everything that will do you good, must come from God through Christ.

This displays the spirit in which Paul writes. He wishes the Galatians well. He writes not to 'knock them down'. Not to score points. He writes as a friend, who is seeking their welfare. It's important that we remember this because the letter is blunt! Sometimes friends have to be like that. They are even more so, friends.

Now verse 4: (*⁴ who gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father,*)

He doesn't only write this letter wishing to do them good, but right from the beginning he writes with his mind filled with thoughts of the 'cross'. As soon as he thinks of Christ in verse 3 he thinks of the cross.

The centre of Paul's Gospel was not Bethlehem. (Remember that when Christmas comes.) The centre of Paul's Gospel was Golgotha (an Aramaic word meaning "the skull." – Calvary is the Latin form of that word) the site of the cross. When writing to the Galatians, how can he be thinking of anything else but the cross? Because the whole purpose of the letter is to show to those new Christians, that at the cross was accomplished everything, which is necessary for a sinner to be saved. So his mind is filled with thoughts of the cross, right from the beginning. He reminds us in verse 4 that the Lord Jesus Christ, *gave himself*: it was a voluntary cross, it was a self sacrifice; *for our sins*: my sins, your sins, it was a substitution; *to deliver us from the present evil age*: reminding us that the present age is under the dominion of Satan, but even then (and now) we can enjoy the life of the 'age to come', which is called 'everlasting life', or 'eternal life'.

Even in this 'present age', this present evil world, we can enjoy communion with heaven and the life of God in our souls. And at last this present evil world will be past and Christian believers will be in the 'new heaven and new earth', wherein dwells perfect righteousness. Jesus Christ came to His cross to rescue us from this evil age and introduce us progressively to the age to come, when the Kingdom will be fully accomplished.³

And Christ does this, *according to the will of our God and Father*:

So, that's the spirit in which Paul writes to those churches and all churches. He writes wishing to do them good. He writes with his mind, right from the beginning, filled with

³ See article in Spirit of the Reformation Study Bible (NIV): "**The Plan of the Ages: Are we in the Last Days?**" Near Hebrew 7 – page 1988/9. Here we are reminded that while the Traditional Jewish View was that the current (present) Age would end at the (only) coming of the Messiah when the Age to Come would begin: the New Testament view is that the Age to Come (the Kingdom) is inaugurated with the first coming of the Messiah through the victory of the Cross, & Resurrection but the current age does not end then. Not until the second coming when the Age to Come is fully manifest, perfectly and eternally.

thoughts of the cross. And he writes (verse 5) with his whole being yearning for the glory of God: Because as soon as he mentions the Name of 'The Father' he adds verse 5: ⁵ *to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.*

His whole spirit is filled with the blaze of the Glory of God, and he longs to see the advance of God's Glory on earth, even in that apostatising Galatia.

To God belongs all worth. To God belongs all credit. To God belongs all praise and honour and glory. Amen. And he's hoping that one Galatian, at least, will echo, "Amen".

When you say, "To God be Glory for ever and ever, Amen". Someone else often will also say, "Amen". (You're intended to do this! Sometimes preachers have to open their eyes quickly at the end of public prayer to make sure the congregation hasn't left.)

Can you see why Paul says, "Amen"? The Galatians had been taught by the false teachers that salvation is mostly the work of God, and partly the work of men. Christ does most of what needs doing ... we must do the rest. The Cross brings us most of the way ... circumcision and the ceremonial law brings us the rest of the way. Galatian teaching by these false teachers was, "To Him be the glory ... and to us." And the moment Paul can bring the Galatians to say, "To Him be the glory for ever and ever", and bring them further, to say, "Amen". The moment he can bring them that far, the Galatian heresy is ended.

That's what the Gospel of the grace of God is all about. It's recognising that salvation is the work of the Triune God: God the Father saves; God the Son saves; and God the Holy Spirit saves and there is no salvation in any other, That is the Gospel. That's what he is trying to bring the Galatians back to.

That's who wrote the letter; to whom he wrote it and the spirit in which he wrote. Wishing to do them good. His mind filled with thoughts of the cross and his whole being yearning for the glory of God.

This is stressed to confirm that there is nothing to fear from this letter. An Apostle is writing to you, so be solemn. He's writing to you, so be serious. And he's writing to you, wishing to do you good, with his mind filled with Christ's Cross as he yearns for God's glory. So although he will write to you very bluntly indeed, you've nothing to be afraid of.

Look forward then to next week when we shall look further into this letter with verses 6 – 10 of chapter one, when we shall see Paul's answer to the question: for what reason did he write?

[1590]

May this understanding of the certainties of God's Word be with all the saints gathered here today.

