

"For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified." 1 Corinthians 2:2

# The Presbyterian Banner



February 2024

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From the Editor



I regularly walk our dog on the large property of the Brisbane Entertainment Centre. They have some lovely walkways, and it's very peaceful when there's not an event being held.

They have signs near the entrances advertising upcoming shows. With some of the performers, given how they present themselves on the notice of coming attractions, it's not hard to imagine that they are hostile to biblical Christianity.

It's sad, all those talented performers, using their gifts to promote sin. It's easy to envy their talent.

You imagine how powerful their witness could be, if they would only use their talents to serve the Lord. Imagine all the good they could do, using their gifts to promote a godly lifestyle rather than one of debauchery and rebellion against God.

Given how busy traffic gets in our neighbourhood when a show is on, it's also easy to envy the number of people they draw in, especially compared to the number of people who attend our worship services.

Of course, it doesn't do any good to envy them. In fact, it's foolish. “Let not your heart envy sinners, but continue in the fear of the LORD all the day. Surely there is a future, and your hope will not be cut off.” (Proverbs 23:17-18)

The unbeliever can appear successful, for the moment. But we know the one who has triumphed over sin and death and hell, and whose ultimate victory is already assured.

Jim Klazinga

The Presbyterian Banner [ISSN 0729-3542] is the official magazine of the Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia.

The PCEA was founded in 1846 and adheres to the Westminster Confession of Faith (1647) as a correct summary of the teaching of the Holy Scriptures.

There are congregations in Kalinga in QLD; Maclean, Wauchope, Kindee, Taree, Cardiff, Raymond Terrace, Sydney CBD, and Mt Druitt in NSW; Narre Warren, Carrum Downs, and Geelong in VIC; Ulverstone in TAS.

Subscriptions: \$30 per year in bulk (5 or more) and \$35 for Australian individual subscriptions and \$50 overseas.

Bank details for Direct Credit: Bendigo Bank, BSB 633 000 Ac: 163 581 242 Please add your name in the details panel when making payment.

**The opinions expressed in the articles and news reports are those of the authors and not necessarily those of the editor, his assistants, or of the PCEA itself.**

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The magazine is available as a pdf file for free download on the Church website: [www.pcea.org.au](http://www.pcea.org.au)

Editor: Jim Klazinga, 3 Padua Place, Boondall, QLD 4034

Mobile: 0466 213 763 Email: [editor@pcea.org.au](mailto:editor@pcea.org.au)

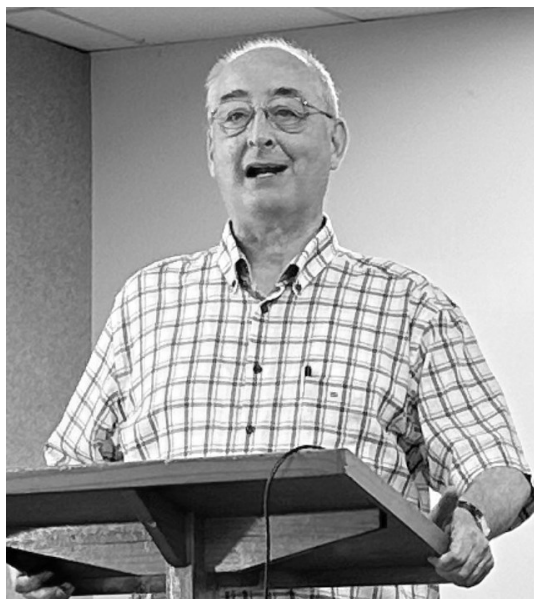
Assistant Editors: Ben Klazinga and Julie Klazinga

The editor is grateful for the assistance of an informal network of Banner liaisons from various PCEA congregations.

## The Value of a Clear Conscience

By Andrew Stewart

*This is the first of five talks that Andrew Stewart, pastor of the Geelong Reformed Presbyterian Church, gave at the Brisbane church camp last December. The theme for the weekend was "The Healthy Conscience."*



Several years back I preached a series of sermons in my congregation in Geelong on the topic of the conscience. I was taken aback by some of the responses. Many told me that they had never before heard a sermon on the conscience. Since then, I have spoken on the topic in other places and the response has been the same.

This is a neglected topic. That is reflected in the titles of several Christian books on the topic. John MacArthur has written about *The Vanishing Conscience*. Christopher Ash's book *Pure Joy* has the subtitle "How to Rediscover Your Conscience."

Perhaps the problem is that we are not quite sure what conscience is. Many people confuse conscience with opinion and use it as an excuse for clinging to their prejudices. Or, perhaps, we associate the conscience with negative feelings about ourselves. We fear that the preacher who addresses our conscience is going to send us off on a guilt trip.

That is why I want to focus on Paul's pursuit of a clear conscience. He describes it in Acts 24:16, "So I always take pains to have a clear conscience toward both God and

man." Such a conscience is one which does not smite us.

First, however, in Acts 23:1 he made a bold claim before the Sanhedrin in Jerusalem. "Brothers, I have lived my life before God in all good conscience up to this day."

A good conscience is one which gives accurate feedback. Just as a functioning fuel gauge tells us how much fuel is left in the fuel tank of our cars, so a good conscience tells us about the content of our character.

Paul did not get an opportunity to explain his claim as he was rudely interrupted by the High Priest. However, he does get to explain his claim in Acts 24:16. Not only does he claim to have a good conscience, he pursues a clear conscience.

We need to consider how a good conscience differs from a clear conscience, yet is related to it.

First, however, it is important to explain what conscience is.

Conscience is a gift from God. It is an inner voice, which speaks to our hearts. It tells us that there is a difference between right and wrong. It warns us when we are tempted. It convicts us when we have sinned.

But conscience is not the voice of God, nor is it a channel of revelation from God. It recalls what we have already learned from God – or think we have learned from God. That is why conscience is important but not infallible.

In Romans 2:15 Paul describes how unreliable the Gentiles' consciences could be. They had learned valuable lessons from general revelation, but they struggled to put them into practice.

Sometimes their consciences challenged them. At other times they flattered them.

Those who have the benefit of special revelation in the Bible may also find that their consciences are unpredictable and unreliable. Our consciences may be unreliable because they are weak (that is, untrained and inexperienced in making decisions); defiled (that is, wounded by repeatedly doing things we know to be wrong); or seared (that is, deadened by persistently ignoring them).

Paul sought to avoid these problems by training his conscience. His aim was a good conscience (Acts 23:1) which was also a clear conscience (Acts 24:16).

Note the difference. A good conscience is not always clear – it

may rightly trouble us. A clear conscience is not always good – it is possible we may have smothered and silenced it.

Paul aims for a conscience which is both reliable and at peace. He does this by training his conscience. Let's see how he did that.

1. Training the conscience is a conscious activity.

This is important because a good conscience doesn't just happen. Unless we are intentional about cultivating a good conscience, other influences will distort our conscience without our even realising it.

A charismatic schoolteacher or the ever-present pressure of social media are powerful influences on us which can easily calibrate our consciences. We simply assume that some things are right and others are wrong because people who influence us say so. We may not even realise that they are influencing us.

By contrast, Paul had a motive, a plan, and a goal. Paul describes these in v.14-15. Paul's motive was love for the God of Israel. Paul's plan was to draw near to God through Jesus. Paul's goal was to stand before God in the Resurrection Day.

This is what Paul had in mind when he said, “So I always take pains ...” His walk with God influenced the way he thought. What he believed about God shaped how he lived, because he was transformed by the renewing of his mind. That transformation calibrated his conscience.

So, conscience is not just a feeling or an opinion. It is the voice

in our hearts which recalls what God has revealed in his word.

2. Training the conscience is a constant activity.

Note the word “always” in this verse. “So I always take pains to have a clear conscience toward both God and man.” Here “always” can mean “at all times.” It can also mean “in every situation.”

Training his conscience was a priority for Paul, not only when he meditated on God's word, or agonised over life's big decisions, but in the routine of everyday activities.

When he prayed for Timothy, Paul was able to say, “I thank God whom I serve, as did my ancestors, with a clear conscience, as I remember you constantly in my prayers night and day.” (2 Timothy 1:3).

Paul urged the Corinthians to “give no offence” by what they ate or drank (see 1 Corinthians 10:31-33). Not only did he urge them, he set his example before them, v.33: “...just as I try to please everyone in everything I do, not seeking my own advantage, but that of many, that they may be saved.”

In Romans 13:5 Paul applies this principle to our interactions with those in authority. “Therefore, one must be in subjection, not only to avoid God's wrath but also for the sake of conscience.”

Peter urged his readers to train their conscience so that it shaped their daily conversations. See 1 Peter 3:16, “but in your hearts honour Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defence to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with

gentleness and respect, having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behaviour in Christ may be put to shame.”

Every activity, however ordinary, provides us an opportunity for us to train our consciences to discern and do the right thing.

3. Training the conscience is a costly activity.

There are times when training our consciences to do the right thing will be costly.

Paul said, “I always take pains...” We get the English word ascetic from the verb Paul uses here. That word – ascetic – recalls weird and unpleasant practices, such as wearing a hair shirt or taking an ice-cold bath. Some Christians have done these things because they think their bodies are sinful and inflicting pain on them will purge the evil. That is not what Paul had in mind when he describes how he cultivated his conscience.

Rather, he had in mind the Psalmist in Psalm 15, who asked: “O Lord, who shall sojourn in your tent? Who shall dwell on your holy hill?” In v.4 he responds that the one who draws near to God is the one “who swears to his own hurt and does not change.” In other words, he keeps his promises even when they turn out to be more costly than he had imagined.

When others would cut corners, he takes the straight path. When others would ask, “why bother?” he takes the trouble to do the right thing. Why? Because he has trained his conscience to recognise and do what pleases God.

4. Training the conscience is a communal activity.

A clear conscience is not an inner peace which we enjoy in isolation from others. Paul took his pains “before God and men.” He was aware of the impact his actions had on others. He listened to God’s word; he sought God’s guidance; he submitted to his Lordship; and he obeyed in gratitude.

Paul also considered other people. We see this most clearly in Paul’s extended discussion of the question raised in Corinth as to whether Christians could eat meat which had been offered to idols. The principle seemed clear enough. An idol is nothing and food offered to an idol is just food, nothing more (see 1 Corinthians 8:4, 8). When people understood this principle, they could eat meat with a clear conscience (see 1 Corinthians 10:25, 27).

Nevertheless, not everyone understood this principle. Some were disturbed by the thought that other believers might eat such food (see 1 Corinthians 8:7, 10-13).

Paul urged those who were strong in their freedom, to consider the consequences of their actions on the consciences of others. Their freedom was not a license to offend. For conscience’ sake, he urged them to allow their freedom to be limited (see 1 Corinthians 10:28-29).

The point to note is that Paul faced difficult situations where sincerely held opinions clashed. Both were grounded on biblical principle. However, a clear conscience was not the conscience that said, “I am right, and I will do as I think best.” A clear conscience

is the one that can say, “I have considered others and have put their interests ahead of my own. I have done what is best in the interests of us all.”

So, how do we train our consciences so that they are good? Or, to put it another way, how do we calibrate our consciences so that they give an accurate reading?

These are important questions because only when our consciences are good can they be reliably clear.

One of the first steps we take is to feed our minds with God’s word. Our only infallible guide is Scripture. Proverbs 30:5 tells us that “Every word of God is true.” Moreover, it is inspired by God and is “profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness” (2 Timothy 3:16).

We also acknowledge our dependence of the Holy Spirit, the divine author of Scripture, to help us take in and digest the Scriptures. Like the Psalmist in Psalm 143:10, we pray, “Teach me to do your will, for you are my God! Let your good Spirit lead me on level ground!” The Holy Spirit aligns our consciences to the mind of God as he reveals in the Bible.

All this takes place in community of those who seek the Spirit’s leading and submit to the teaching of Scripture. Note that Paul took pains “before God and man.” He cared about what others thought about him and his ministry. See 2 Cor 1:12, “For our boast is this, the testimony of our conscience, that we behaved in the world with simplicity and godly sincerity, not by earthly wisdom but by the grace of God, and

supremely so toward you.” Also 2 Corinthians 4:2, “But we have renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways. We refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with God’s word, but by the open statement of the truth we would commend ourselves to everyone’s conscience in the sight of God.”

So too with us. We train our consciences by living in fellowship with others who also strive to obey God’s word and work out the implications of their salvation.

They too are learning from God’s word. They may have seen truths that we have missed. They may well ask questions which we never thought to ask. They may have faced challenging life situations that haven’t confronted us yet, such as raising teenage children, facing the challenges of old age or terminal illness. Their words and actions have the potential to activate parts of our conscience that we haven’t had to exercise very much.

Even times of disagreement between believers can challenge us to examine what we believe - and why. Proverbs 27:17 tells us that “iron sharpens iron, and one man sharpens another.” In the process of iron strikes iron, and there may be sparks. Nevertheless, we are to love those who sharpen us. We are to love them for conscience’ sake.

Paul’s example challenges us to engage with the people of God, so that within the body of Christ our consciences might be trained to respond to the word of God. When they are well trained, they are good. When they are good we can be at peace when they do not smite us.

\* \* \* \* \*

### Carrum Downs

[Report by Jim Klazinga]

George and Rhoda Ball hope to head down to Carrum Downs, where George will begin ministering on an interim basis, beginning with leading the services on 18 February. They will be back in Raymond Terrace in May, but may possibly return to Melbourne after a couple of months. Pray that their initial time with Carrum Downs may be a blessing for them and for the congregation.

\* \* \* \* \*

### Geelong

[Report by Donald Ramsay]

We give thanks to God for His love and mercy and His sustaining of the Geelong congregation for the last ten years without a full-time minister, and for the faithful commitment of all the members. Pray for the physical and spiritual strength of our small and elderly congregation as they persevere against the ungodly who surround the Church.

\* \* \* \* \*

### Hastings

[Report by John Forbes]

We praise the Lord for his faithfulness as we move into a new year. Attendance at worship remained steady through the long summer holidays with some folks away but others visiting. Sunday school and midweek meetings are now resuming again.

\* \* \* \* \*

### Hawkesbury Nepean

[Report by Elizabeth Muldoon]

2024 has started. In our

congregation, our Tongan brothers and sisters have a tradition of a New Years Eve fellowship evening. We all meet together at about 9.00pm for a service and then everyone stays together for prayers and fellowship and singing and sharing. This continues until midnight. It is a wonderful way to say goodbye to the old year and welcome the New Year in.

Elijah, the son of Ashlee and Tom, was baptised on Sunday, 31st December. We welcomed him and we all committed to encouraging him, and all the other children in our church, to grow up to know and love the Lord.

School has resumed, and along with the beginning of the school term our Sunday School and Bible classes will begin again. On Saturday 3rd February, we will have a morning of prayer to commit all our activities to the Lord, and to thank Him for his help and goodness in the past.

We wish all the other congregations a Happy New Year full of love and joy and peace.

\* \* \* \* \*

### Manning

[Report by Peter Smith]

On the 31st of December 2023, Rev. George Ball preached his last sermon in his series on Luke 24. George had also been preaching a series in the afternoons on Psalm 119, finishing the previous week with the last section to go. Both have been exceptional series for the congregation and for the glory of God.

At his request, the congregation farewelled George

and Rhoda over an extended morning tea with cake and other scrumptious delights. The Clerk of Session, Rev. Trevor Leggott, commenced the formalities with the following words.

"We come to a parting today as George concludes his ministry here. George was inducted to this charge on 9th May 2008, so he has served us for some 15 years and 8 months. George's ministry has been a focus on a bible teaching pulpit ministry. He has said a number of times at our Annual Congregational Meetings that he gives his report each week.

"There's a picture frame of past ministers in the elder's room with the dates of their service. George's photo is there but there was no concluding date. We can now insert that date.

"Almost 16 years is a long commitment to faithfully prepare and present the word of God to a congregation, and I think I can say on behalf of everyone, that we are extremely thankful for your service in our midst.

"This congregation has been blessed with a number of long serving ministers. In 145 years we've only had 7 ministers. SP Stewart: 42 years, Neil Macleod: 6 years, MC Ramsay: 29 years, JC Andrews: 5 years, Edwin Lee: 20 years, Peter Gadsby: 16 years.

"The other thing about that photo frame in the back room is that the next space is blank, so we'll be looking to the Lord to show the way ahead as we seek out a new minister.

"George, with sincerest thanks for your preaching ministry in our midst over the last 16 years, we

wish you and Rhoda God's blessing into the future as you conclude your ministry here and enter retirement, in whatever form that might take!"

The other elders and congregational members also spoke in loving terms. Such as: in all this time we have sat under godly ministry, where the Word of God has been diligently and truthfully preached, week after week. You have been extremely industrious in preparing your sermons and we have been challenged and fed, gaining wisdom and prospering spiritually because of it. Also, your preparation of bible studies was well received and greatly appreciated. Our love for you both has never wavered, even when there have been differences in opinions. So, it is with some real sadness that we bid you farewell. We pray that you might have the rest you deserve as you retire from this congregation and enjoy many wonderful days with your children and grandchildren.

Following this, a beautiful floral arrangement of native flowers was presented by the ladies to Rhoda thanking her for her vital role in the overall ministry.

The church car was also gifted to the family, along with a lovely card signed by the members. In response, George quipped that if he had known he was to be gifted the car, he would have taken much greater care of it!

On a more serious note, he said that after 42 years, he had become physically tired in the work, but not tired of the work. In his ministry he had conducted 34

funerals and would have liked many more baptisms. He gave tribute to his wife, Rhoda, thanking her for being by his side in ministry, saying he couldn't have done it without her. He thanked all who were present for the kind words, the beautiful card and the very generous gifts on such a memorable occasion. "The Manning will have a special place in our hearts."

\* \* \* \* \*

### Narre Warren

[Report by Andres Miranda]

We are very pleased to report that we have entered 2024 with a small but encouraging increase in visits to our public worship. A family from New Zealand and a newly married couple from China have shown spiritual interest in staying in touch with the church.

We also thank God that the physical limitations of several of our adult members have not weakened them to the point of hindering their involvement in the life of the Church. Two of them in their nineties still show vitality, and the congregation benefits greatly from their example of love, patience and perseverance in Christian discipleship. The Scripture of Isaiah 46.4 is very true of them: "Even to your old age I am he, and to grey hairs I will carry you. I have made, and I will bear; I will carry and will save."

\* \* \* \* \*

### St Georges

[Report by Alex Steel]

The congregation is appreciative of the ministry of Rev William Macleod, retired minister

of the Free Church of Scotland (Continuing), for eight weeks during December and January. He and his wife live in Glasgow.

They were welcomed by the congregation early in December at a picnic at Meadowbank on the Parramatta River and farewelled at an afternoon tea at the congregation's units in Lindfield.

The congregation continues in good spirits and is thankful for the pulpit supply given it from within our own denomination and elsewhere during our time of vacancy.

Church attendance remains stable. Local and overseas visitors join us on most Lord's Days.

Stage 2 of the church restoration works are shortly to commence, renovation works have started in the manse and the Deacons' Court is also busy preparing for the settlement of the sale of the units at Lindfield due during May/June. There are only six residents remaining at the complex.

\* \* \* \* \*

### Ulverstone

[Report by Ian Hamilton]

Recently Zach has been preaching through the book of Ruth and that has been a blessing for us.

The monthly luncheon which has an earlier afternoon service has been appreciated by many, particularly those that travel greater distances to attend.

We hope to resume other regular ministries soon including the fellowship programme, Sunday School, mid week meeting and ladies' meetings.

## MERF Report – Visit to Indonesia

By Dennis and Elizabeth Muldoon

We had the privilege of attending MERF International Council in Jakarta, Indonesia, on 17-19 November, 2023. We flew to Bali and on to Makassar on 13 November, where we were met by Armin Sukri and taken to Dalton Hotel.

The next morning Armin took us to the MERF training centre, where we briefly joined a training session in ethno music, men and women producing gospel songs in local languages. About 30 were present, representing some ten local languages.

A missionary from the USA was helping them in writing songs and music for gospel ministry in their local region.

I was invited to say a few words. I suggested they look at translating the Psalms before trying to write their own songs.

We met the six staff from the centre. The centre was established by MERF in 2008 and is now managed by Armin. It is called Yayasan Pelayanan Reformed Indonesia (YPRI).

There was dormitory accommodation for trainees, as well as staff rooms and offices, a kitchen, and an open air meeting room.

They conduct training for church workers, including elders and youth workers. They also produce radio programs in various languages and assist with diaconal aid and agricultural development, mainly on this island of Sulawesi. They also go to Kalimantan and other islands.



Armin took us to a Christian radio station in Makassar, 'Radio Cristy', for which he and others produce material in their particular language. Armin is from the Bugis tribe.

We went on to visit Jaffray Theological College, which was established in 1932 by a Canadian missionary coming down from China via Borneo. We were given a history of Dr Jaffray and the college, but in Indonesian.

We met the principal and other staff, including an American.

Hengi Wijaya, the editor of 'Jurnal Jaffray,' looks for papers to put in this English language theological journal. One paper I read was quite good.

We were taken through the library. There were not many Reformed books. Armin is a visiting lecturer at this college and said he tried to bring a Reformed perspective to the college.

A new women's dormitory was being built.

In the evening we dined with Armin and his family (Fina and Josephine).

The next day, 15 November, we flew to Jakarta with Armin, going

to the hotel booked by MERF for the International Council.

We were welcomed by Tommy and his wife Elisa, MERF leaders in Jakarta who organised the conference. We had a couple of days meeting the delegates as they arrived from different places.

I was glad to meet Tim Burden from the UK who runs the Augustinian program conducted at Loki in Kenya. He was going on to Kupang after the conference.

Yonson, whom I knew from ICRC meetings, had come from Kupang. He shared of opportunities to preach the gospel, even in the Muslim dominated Madura Island.

It was great meeting men and women in Reformed ministry from around the globe.

Two men from Ethiopia and one from Kenya (Loki) were very interesting, as was Mohammed from Morocco, who shared about aid being given to victims of a recent earthquake.

He also spoke of making 'comedy videos' which raised some questions, but he said they were very well received. I think they were cartoon versions of Bible stories.

The two men from Egypt spoke limited English but still we enjoyed their report and fellowship.

Rev Gill came from Pakistan.

Delegates from Lebanon were not able to attend because of conflict in the ME.

Delegates from the USA and

## The Broader Body

"All the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God." Psalm 98:3



Canada showed great support for the work of MERF.

It was great to have Basil from our Australian board also.

The visual presentations from the field reps were most interesting. They shared the challenges which they faced but were most encouraging. They shared of the need for Bible

teachers to go to Loki, and for a resident teacher in the MERF centre in Jakarta.

Victor and Lisa filled in any gaps of course; they know all the fields. But it was good to see the broad leadership within MERF.

We had a time of worship led by Tim Burden on the Lord's Day.

The next day Elizabeth and I had to leave but not before a brief visit to the work in Jakarta itself. Tommy and Elisa took us to the MERF training centre they run, and then to Pinus Christian School, where their children go.

This is a ministry started by a

rich Christian lady who humbly explained the work. They have set up a branch school for poor children nearby; with a poverty rate of 25%, only 8% of children go on to the high school.

Despite not knowing the language, we had a wonderful insight into the work of MERF in Indonesia. The Indonesian population is 278 million, with over 700 spoken languages. The majority are Muslim- more Muslims than any other nation. But the Christian population is significant, and for now they enjoy freedom to worship and preach the gospel. Maybe we could develop closer ties with these brothers and sisters on our doorstep.

## February Search Work

"May all who seek you rejoice and be glad in you!" Psalm 70:4

[Note: The January search work is last December's Banner]

Senior and Intermediate  
(Intermediate omit questions 7 and 8)

### Ezra Chapter 1

1. What proclamation did the Lord stir up the spirit of Cyrus to make? (2 verses only)
2. Who [a]rose to go up to build the house of the Lord in Jerusalem?

### Chapter 3

3. When did the work on the house of the Lord begin?
4. What words did the people sing when the foundation was laid?
5. Why did many of the old men weep? Find a verse in Haggai 2 that refers to those who saw the temple in its former glory.

### Chapter 4

6. What was the answer of Zerubbabel and Jeshua to the enemies' request to take part in the building?
7. In the letter sent to King Artaxerxes what did the enemies predict would happen if the city was built and the walls set up [completed]?

8. What was the consequence when the king's letter was read before Rehum, Shimshai and their companions?

### Junior

#### 1 Samuel Chapter 3

1. What did Samuel do the first time the Lord called him? (2 verses)
2. After the Lord called the third time, what words did Eli tell Samuel to say the next time?
3. What did Eli say after Samuel had told him the vision, and hid nothing from him?
4. What did all Israel from Dan to Beer-sheba come to know about Samuel?

Find the verse(s) in the Bible that answer the questions, write/type them out, and send to:

Mrs Irene Steel

18/1-55 West Parade, West Ryde NSW 2114  
or Email: [iesteel@gmail.com](mailto:iesteel@gmail.com)

A book voucher is awarded at the end of each year to children who send in the answers.

## Life of Rev. William Nathaniel Wilson, 1857-1922 (Part 2)

by Tom Reeve and John Audet

William N. Wilson was one of six students training for the PCEA ministry mentioned in the Synod minutes in late 1879. Of that group he was the only one to make it through to become a PCEA minister.

His first appointment as student catechist was to the Barrington congregation where he ministered from 1879 until early 1882. He remained close to the people there for the rest of his life.

Wilson undertook prescribed studies 'on the job,' but we do not have details, except that they lasted (perhaps with some interruptions) until 1884, the year he was licensed in the Hunter.

Barrington at this time was the southernmost station in the 'Presbytery of the Manning.' This Presbytery extended as far north as the Bellinger and Nambucca stations, and included the current charges of Manning and Hastings.

On 5th April 1882, the Presbytery agreed: "to appoint Mr. Wilson to labour for six months on the Bellinger and Nambucca Rivers; his labours in these districts to begin at the beginning of June next." He remained there until March 1883.

On the 6th day of March 1873, the Manning Presbytery met on the Hastings. The minutes recorded that: "The Moderator [Davis] stated that Mr. Wilson, student catechist at present labouring on the Bellinger and Nambucca Rivers, had written to say that he had accepted an offer of employment from the Presbytery

of Maitland, and he requested this Presbytery to furnish him with a certificate. The Presbytery agreed to furnish the certificate to Mr. Wilson."

The background to this "offer of employment" was that Hugh Buntine, who had been serving as a student catechist at Aberdeen in the Upper Hunter, had received a call from the newly-formed charge on the Namoi.<sup>1</sup> That had left the Upper Hunter in need of a labourer, and no doubt William Wilson saw the opportunity as the call of God to this remote and needy area.

Shortly before this time there had developed an unedifying ministerial dispute, mainly between George Sutherland and the two MacPhersons, Peter and John, which troubled the church for two decades from about 1880.<sup>2</sup>

It had begun over the training of students, but it was handled badly, Peter MacPherson employing undue publicity outside the courts of the church, which escalated and hardened both sides.

Wilson as a new younger man managed to keep out of most of the troubles as he faithfully ministered to the people in his charges. However, shortly after he was ordained, Wilson became part of the short-lived "Reconstituted Synod of Eastern Australia," which had its base in the Hunter. He was to become highly respected by the Free Church families on both sides of the dispute.

Wilson was licensed by the Presbytery of Maitland on 24th

December 1884 after serving for almost two years in the Upper Hunter, also known as the Aberdeen and Singleton charge.

He laboured for another year, received a call, and was ordained and inducted as minister on 4th February 1886.<sup>3</sup> He was based in the Rouchel valley, to the east of Aberdeen, where there were many Scottish settlers; some of them like Wilson were of the Northern Irish diaspora.

At the first it seems likely that he lived on the Bingeberry property of the McMullin family who had also come from County Fermanagh.<sup>4</sup>

### Notes:

<sup>1</sup> Daryl Lightfoot (2020) *Mayfield Messenger* 8 pp. 9-10 gives more detail on the loyalties and difficulties of Free Church families in the Upper Hunter at this time of sad division in the PCEA. This contributed to the departure of student H.S. Buntine.

<sup>2</sup> Both the histories of JC Robinson (1947) and RS Ward (1989) cover this dispute in some detail.

<sup>3</sup> The *Free Churchman*, January 1886 reported that Wilson "has now received a call to the pastorate of the congregation in which he has laboured with much acceptance for three years. So far as we can learn, the settlement will be thoroughly harmonious" (p.8). The comment was "the more we have seen of Mr. Wilson, the more we are convinced that he will be a useful and faithful pastor. We wish him God speed" (p.9).

<sup>4</sup> His address is taken from Wilson's 1886 gazettal to perform marriages, cited by Lightfoot (2020) and Spencer, H. C. (1973) in *Scone and Upper Hunter Historical Society Journal* 4(1): Early Rouchel Settlement pp. 15-17.

## February Prayer Points

“Without ceasing I mention you always in my prayers.” Romans 1:9-10

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**Thursday, 1st:** Give thanks for the time that Dennis and Elizabeth Muldoon could spend with Christian brothers and sisters in their recent trip to Indonesia and India.

**Friday, 2nd:** Give thanks that camp attendees at last December's Brisbane family camp could benefit from the teaching of Rev Andrew Stewart.

**Saturday, 3rd:** Pray for the retired ministers in our denomination.

**Sunday, 4th:** Give thanks that today we are privileged to worship the immutable God whose purposes and love are unchanging.

**Monday, 5th:** Pray for the ministry of the Narre Warren congregation in Melbourne.

**Tuesday, 6th:** Pray for the Narre Warren office-bearers: for Rev Andres Miranda, and for elders Terry Buck and John Disney.

**Wednesday, 7th:** At this year's meeting, it was resolved: “The Synod gives thanks to the Lord for the opportunity and privilege to be involved in the work of missions at home and abroad, both in giving, in praying and being directly involved during this past year.” Please continue to pray for Miriam from India during her studies in Canada.

**Thursday, 8th:** Pray for churches in the ICRC with us, including the Reformed Churches of Brazil, the Independent Reformed church of Korea, and the Presbyterian Church in Korea.

**Friday, 9th:** Give thanks that Elijah, son of Ashlee and Tom of the Hawkesbury Nepean congregation, could be baptized last December.

**Saturday, 10th:** Pray for the elderly members in our congregations dealing with health struggles.

**Sunday, 11th:** Pray that the ministers preaching from our pulpits today may come with a deep sense of humility, and that they may find their confidence and strength in God alone.

**Monday, 12th:** Pray for the Knox church in Melbourne.

**Tuesday, 13th:** Pray for the Knox session: George Ball as interim moderator and assessor elders Donald Ramsay and Tom Reeve.

**Wednesday, 14th:** Pray for the work of Mukti in India. Give thanks that we can support a number of young ladies through this organization.

**Thursday, 15th:** Give thanks for the ministry at St Georges of Rev William Macleod, retired minister of the FCC, for eight weeks during December and January.

**Friday, 16th:** At last year's meeting, it was resolved that “Synod approves the [Inter-Church Relations] Committee's ongoing discussions with the Australian Free Church in seeking a closer relationship between our denominations.” Please pray for these ongoing discussions.

**Saturday, 17th:** Pray for George and Rhoda Ball. Tomorrow George begins ministering to the Carrum Downs congregation.

**Sunday, 18th:** Give thanks for the privilege of being able to assemble with our congregations today and set our eyes toward the Jerusalem that is above.

**Monday, 19th:** Pray for the ministry of the Hawkesbury-Nepean congregation in West Sydney.

**Tuesday, 20th:** Pray for the Hawkesbury-Nepean office-bearers: for Rev Dennis Muldoon; for elder Tom Reeve; and for deacons Tevita Fihaki and Lopeti Latu.

**Wednesday, 21st:** Pray for the work of the Annie Soper school in Peru.

**Thursday, 22nd:** Pray for the committee work being done in anticipation of the synod meeting coming up in May.

**Friday, 23rd:** At last year's meeting, it was resolved that “Synod gives thanks and prays for those involved in the work of teaching Sunday-school and youth classes.”

**Saturday, 24th:** Pray for the Northern Presbytery, scheduled to meet today in Maclean.

**Sunday, 25th:** Give thanks for the Spirit working through the preaching of the Word and the administration of the sacraments in our congregations.

**Monday, 26th:** Pray for the ongoing ministry of the St Georges congregation in Sydney.

**Tuesday, 27th:** Pray for the St Georges office-bearers: for elders Donald McIntosh, and Alex Steel; and for deacons Chris Oakley, Ken Shaw, and Allan Steel.

**Wednesday, 28th:** Pray for the work of Mark and Rahel Landrum of the International Mission for Jewish People.

**Thursday, 29th:** Please pray for the ministry of the Reformed Churches of New Zealand, and the Christian Reformed Churches of Australia. Pray for our relationship and contact with them.

