

Issues Facing Christians Today

8 Studies in Topical Issues

Is Christianity the only way?
Immigration & New Australians
Aboriginal Reconciliation
Evangelism & Social Justice
Same Sex Marriages
Poverty
Having a Flutter!
Investing for our Future
Genetically Modified Food
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Introduction

The world around us is changing so very quickly. We are confronted with scientific advances and social issues that were not even dreamed of a few years ago. Who would have imagined that Anglos could be the minority group in our population - but that is now a distinct possibility. Or who could have imagined that there would be people pushing for same sex parents, with laws allowing lesbians to undergo the IVF programme or homosexuals adopt children.

The Bible does not directly address these issues. How can we as Christians be guided as to what a godly response is to many of these confusing issues? I want to look at biblical principles and apply the Bible to a range of current issues. The issues that I have selected are

- Immigration & New Australians
- National Reconciliation
- Evangelism & Social Justice
- Same Sex Parents
- Genetically Modified Food
- Investing for our Future
- Poverty
- Having a Flutter

Most of these issues have been popular in the local press this year. I want to encourage you to watch television and read newspapers and magazines with a biblical filter. As you watch or read, ask "what does the Bible say that applies to this situation?"

As Christians we have two commitments. One is to the Bible as "God's Word written" (39 Articles). The other is to the world in which God has placed us. These two commitments appear to be in conflict. The Bible relates to events which took place at the latest about 2,000 years ago. How can it possibly comment on I.V.F. programmes or information technology? They are centuries apart.

Christians can fall into one of two traps. We can ignore the changes of the modern world and live in the past. Or we can get so caught up in the modern world that we cut out parts of the Bible that don't quite fit into our worldview. I think we need to work hard at being true to our modern world and yet not compromising the Bible. John Stott says "this is our Christian calling: to live under the Word in the world."

The recent Amsterdam 2000 Conference made the following declaration on Social Responsibility and Evangelism:

Although evangelism is not advocacy of any social program, it does entail social responsibility for at least two reasons. First, the gospel proclaims the kingship of the loving Creator who is committed to justice, to human life and the welfare of his creation. So evangelism will need to be accompanied by obedience to God's command to work for the good of all in a way that is fitting for the children of the Father who makes his sun shine on the evil and the good and sends his rain on the righteous and the unrighteous alike. Second, when our evangelism is linked with concern to alleviate poverty, uphold justice, oppose abuses of secular and economic power, stand against racism, and advance responsible stewardship of the global environment, it reflects the compassion of Christ and may gain an acceptance it would not otherwise receive.

We pledge ourselves to follow the way of justice in our family and social life, and to keep personal, social and environmental values in view as we evangelise

Let us evangelise in the world in which we live by seeking to understand the issues that concern people and have a biblical response. In working through the issues raised in these studies, it is good to be able to talk to others. If you are not in a Home Church Group, try one this term. Talk to your minister or one of the leaders - they will be able to suggest a suitable group.

Enjoy thinking and praying these issues through.

Bruce Southwell, 2000

Week 1

THEME: Immigration & New Australians

Day 1 Exodus 22:21

An "alien" is a foreigner or a "stranger". Why are the Jews not to ill-treat aliens?

Day 2 Leviticus 19:33-34

How are the Israelites to treat "aliens" or "strangers"?

Day 3 Deuteronomy 24:19-22

How is the "alien" or "stranger" to fit into the Jewish welfare scheme?

Day 4 Matthew 25:31-40

What does this passage say about our attitude to people who are Christians?

Day 5 Ephesians 2:11-13, 19

What does Paul say our status was as Gentiles? How has that status now changed?

PRAY that we will be Godly in how we share the blessings of living in Australia with people from other countries.

Study Passage: Lev 19:33-34, Deut 24:19-22, Eph 2:11-13, 19

1. List the different attitudes you hear expressed about people from other cultures coming to live in Australia. With which of these attitudes do you agree?

2. In what sense do white Anglo-celtics "own" Australia? What type of conditions do you think are reasonable to place on peoples coming to live here?

3. Read Lev 19:33-34 and Deut 24:19-22. How were the Israelites to treat people who were foreigners?

4. Read Ephesians 2:11-13, 19. How has God treated us? What "rights" do we have to be part of God's kingdom? Why can we be members of His kingdom?

5. Write a group statement which you think reflects a Biblical view of what our attitude should be to people from other cultures coming to live in Australia. Include restrictions that you think should be placed on people wishing to live in Australia.

Week 2

THEME: Aboriginal Reconciliation

Day 1 Psalm 24:1-10

Who does this Psalm say owns the earth?

Day 2 Matthew 21:33-41

"The crucifixion of Jesus is the centre-piece of history and an historical fact." How can we be likened to the wicked tenants?

Day 3 Acts 17:24-28

Who decides the boundaries of the nations (v 26)?

Day 4 Numbers 33:51-53

Why did God dispossess the nations in the Old Testament?

Day 5 Matthew 28:18-20

What is the solution to paganism, to disobeying God?

PRAY for the spiritual issues involved in Aboriginal reconciliation, asking that Aborigines and non-Aborigines may be reconciled to God and each other.

Study Passage:

1. List the principle areas which cause discontent within the Aboriginal community. What distinctive needs does the Aboriginal community have that are not common to Anglos or immigrants from other cultures?
2. From the passages for each day of the week, compile from a Biblical perspective the legitimate grievances of our Aboriginal community.
3. Read Luke 10:29-37. How should Anglo-Christians view the Aboriginal community? What steps can we take to work with the grievances above?
4. Is reconciliation at a human level an important aspect of Christian living? Read Matthew 5:23-24 and Acts 3:26.
5. Read 2 Corinthians 5:16-21. What is the ultimate problem in the issue of Aboriginal reconciliation? What is the task that both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Christians have?

Week 3

THEME: Evangelism & Social Justice

Day 1 Psalm 146:1-10

What kind of God do we worship (see verses 7-9)? How is He a God of justice as well as a God of justification?

Day 2 Genesis 9:4-7

How does God evaluate humans, even after the Fall in the garden of Eden?

Day 3 Philippians 2:5-11

Jesus left heaven and allowed Himself to become a victim of gross injustice. How can the Christians' mission be modelled on Christ's mission?

Day 4 Isaiah 52:7

How does this verse define salvation?

Day 5 1 Peter 2:11-17

What is the tension between being "strangers in the world" and being conscientious citizens?

PRAY that we might learn how to be both a witness to Jesus and a servant to others.

Study Passage: John 8:1-11

1. A hungry non-Christian comes to you for help. Discuss the different ways you can meet his needs.

2. Read John 8:1-11.

(a) What were the requirements of the law? How have the Pharisees kept the law and how have they altered it (see Deuteronomy 22:22-24 and Leviticus 20:10)?

(b) What does the passage say the Pharisees are attempting to do?

(c) Who is in the wrong in this incident? How?

(d) How does Jesus response show justice?

3. Read the declaration on Social Responsibility and Evangelism printed on page 3 of these notes in italics. Summarise briefly the two reasons that declaration for evangelism involving social responsibility.

4. What social responsibility and justice areas should we as a parish be more involved in as we evangelise?

Week 4

THEME: Same Sex Marriages?

Day 1 Leviticus 18:22; 20:13

What do these two verses say is wrong? Is it the act or the motive which is significant?

Day 2 1 Corinthians 6:9-11

What standard did the early church adopt concerning homosexual acts?

Day 3 Mark 10:2-9

What was God's intention in human sexuality?

Day 4 1 Corinthians 7:1-9

What do these verses say about being marriage?

Day 5 Romans 6:20-23

What assurance do all sinners have?

PRAY for all those in our community who are struggling with homosexuality.

Study Passage: Romans 1:18-32

1. Indicate why the following statements are all consistent with the teaching of the Bible:

- the church should support civil rights for homosexuals.
- homosexual people should be allowed to be members of the church
- Christians should not participate in same-sex erotic activity
- the church should not bless same-sex marriages
- practising homosexuals should not be ordained ministers

2. Read Romans 1:18-23. What picture do these verses give of God, and of His creation?

3. Read Romans 1:24-27. What do these verses say results from rebellion against God, their Creator?

4. Read Romans 1:28-32. Do these verses set homosexuality as worse than any of the other sins listed? Then read Romans 2:1. What sting does this verse have?

5. Write a group statement as to what attitudes you would have if a known homosexual wanted to join your small group.

Week 5

THEME: Genetically Modified Food

Day 1 Genesis 1:26-31

From where does our food come?

Day 2 Psalm 104:14-27

Reflect on God's creation, and His provision.

Day 3 Luke 3:7-14

What should one who has plenty of food do?

Day 4 Isaiah 58:6-9

What is true fasting?

Day 5 1 Kings 17:7-16

How does God modify this food?

PRAY that genetically modified foods will be used to bring relief to the poor and hungry.

Study Passage: Genesis 1:26-31

1. List as many reasons as possible for people eating food. Which are legitimate reasons for eating.
2. From the daily Bible readings, write a Biblical attitude to food and how we use it.
3. "Genetically modified food (GMF) has met fierce opposition among well-fed Europeans, but it's the poor and hungry who need it most" (Bill Gates). GMF is reported to raise crop production in developing countries by 25%. 1 billion people around the globe live on less than \$1 per day. What can we do to help reduce hunger in the world?
4. Many of the scientific advances are being made by private-sector companies, with profit motives which mean that many products won't reach the regions where they are needed most. What action can we take as individuals, as a church, and as a country?
5. What does the Bible say about the poor and the hungry, and what responsibility do we have to these poverty-stricken people?

Week 6

THEME: Investing for our Future

Day 1 2 Kings 4:1-7

How are the financial needs of this woman met?

Day 2 Mark 10:17-31

How did this man's investments let him down?

Day 3 Luke 12:13-21

Why does a man's life not consist in the abundance of his possessions?

Day 4 Matthew 6:19-24

How does verse 24 say that we store up treasure in heaven?

Day 5 Isaiah 3:13-15

Why does God's judgement fall in these verses?

PRAY that we will invest for eternity and not for short-term gain on this earth.

Study Passage: 2 Kings 4:1-7; Mark 10:17-31

1. List the types of investments people have today to try to guarantee their future financially.
2. Read 2 Kings 4:1-7. Give reasons why you think it is reasonable or unreasonable to expect God to help you in the way He helped this woman.
3. Read Mark 10:17-23. What does Jesus want the young man to do and why? Why is it hard for the rich to enter the kingdom of heaven? Are we rich?
4. Read Mark 10:29-31. This is one of the amazing promises in the Bible. How does it say that we invest for our future?
5. The prophet Isaiah warns against "plundering the poor". How is it possible to do this in the way we invest our money?
6. List three ways you need to invest for your future.

Week 7

THEME: Poverty

Day 1 Romans 12:9-16

How are Christians to relate to the needy and the lowly?

Day 2 Mark 12:41-44

How did Jesus measure the amount put into the temple "plate"?

Day 3 Acts 2:42-47

What was the early church's attitude to poverty?

Day 4 Galatians 6:9-10

Who should Christians reach out to and help?

Day 5 Luke 12:32-34

What does Jesus promise in these verses?

PRAY that we will be burdened for those living in poverty and will give generously from our riches.

Study Passage: Romans 12:9-21

1. List what you see as the greatest areas of poverty (a) in the world, (b) in our community.

2. Read Romans 12:9-13. How does Paul say that we should relate to (a) our fellow Christians generally, and (b) those in poverty?

3. Read Romans 12:14-16. In what ways might it be difficult to relate to "people of low position"?

4. Read Romans 12:17-21. Some people have the attitude "they brought their poverty on themselves, they deserve what they are getting." How would Paul respond to this statement.

5. List ways the our parish should be more sensitive and more helpful to those who are in poverty.

Week 8

THEME: Having a Flutter!

Day 1 2 Thessalonians 3:10-12

What do these verses say about work? How is this contrary to the practice of gambling?

Day 2 Ephesians 4:28

How does this verse say that we should get our money to provide for our needs?

Day 3 1 Corinthians 10:23-24

Whose good should we be seeking in all that we do? Whose good are we seeking when we gamble?

Day 4 Galatians 5:13-14

What does Christian freedom make us free to do?

Day 5 Matthew 22:37

How can gambling conflict with love for God?

PRAY that our governments will acknowledge the problem of gambling in Australia, and that we will reach out with compassion to those who are the victims.

Study Passage: 2 Thessalonians 3:6-13

1. List the three most popular ways of gambling in Australia. Why are each of these popular?

2. "A Productivity Commission report discovered that 42.3% of every dollar that goes through a poker machine comes from a problem gambler. These are people who by definition have no free choice and whose addiction destroys their family's well-being" (SMH 20/9/00). Biblically, what is wrong with people putting their money through a poker machine?

3. Australia has the greatest number of problem gamblers per head of population and possesses 21% of the world's poker machines. Why do we have so many poker machines? Who really gains from this emphasis on gambling?

4. Read 2 Thessalonians 3:6-13. What principle does Paul teach? How is this relevant to gambling?

5. What can we as a parish do to help those who are compulsive gamblers?

HOW TO USE THESE NOTES

1. Read the daily Bible readings on the left hand side of the double page, and think about the question for the day. Make a note of the answer, and any difficulties you have.

2. The questions on the right hand side of the double page are designed for group discussion. Think about these questions before you go to your discussion group.

3. The study passages are linked with the morning and evening sermon series. You may find it helpful to take notes of the sermons.

4. Please don't be frustrated if you can't understand or answer the questions: the important thing is that you read God's word.

5. Use this guide for family or personal Bible reading, and if you would like to join a discussion group, please see one of the ministers.

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