

SUNDAY ARTICLE

ST DAVID'S PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH ♦ 10 DECEMBER 2017



Our Magnificent Opportunity

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¹⁴ Do all things without grumbling or disputing, ¹⁵ that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, ¹⁶ holding fast to the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I may be proud that I did not run in vain or labour in vain. ¹⁷ Even if I am to be poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrificial offering of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all. ¹⁸ Likewise you also should be glad and rejoice with me.

(Philippians 2:14-18)

There's never been a better time than now to be a Christian, and to offer to our world the way of hope.

God encourages us to shine like stars in the universe as we hold out the word of life.

And it's never more timely than now.

It's official: the trifecta is in.

1. **The unborn child has no protection** - it's legal to take his or her life up to 24 weeks gestation and beyond that if two doctors agree (in Victoria). Though fearfully and wonderfully created in the image of God (Psalm 139), the unborn child is not safe even in the womb.
2. The national **same-sex marriage** poll will soon deliver a fundamentally different view of what a marriage can be. In rebellion against God's

creational design and purpose for man and woman, sinful desires and unnatural relationships between persons of the same sex (Romans 1) are now given dignity through the redefinition of marriage.

3. With Victoria leading the way, it will become legal to allow and assist people facing the prospect of a painful end, to **take their own life**. No longer content to rest in providence that God gives life and God takes away (Job 1), the state has become God.

It's sad that the unborn are vulnerable to a parent's decision, that God's beautiful design for marriage is trampled on, that even the frail elderly are not safe from pressure to go for a do-it-yourself end.

It's tragic we've come to this, and it grieves God.

In this sadness it's possible to feel overcome, as if it's never been as dark as these times, and the world has never been in such rebellion to the light of Christ.

But that's simply not true...there never has been a time when the world hasn't rejected the claims of Christ.

I believe that we're feeling it more now because our culture has swung right past us and is swinging to places we've not necessarily been expecting. Whether we've expected it, or been caught by surprise, we Christians belong to a distinctly minority group and our beliefs are increasingly marginal.

Which brings me to my theme: there's never been a better time to be a Christian, to delight in the truths of God and to hold out a better way and a clearer light and a surer hope to a lost world.

We are not dismayed or downcast.

Consider Paul and the fierce opposition he faced as did the whole generation of the earliest Christians.

As he wrote these words he was already hated, ridiculed and also imprisoned,

and he speaks of being Christians in a 'crooked and depraved generation'.

It's from the context of moral blackness that Paul expects the Philippian Christians to shine like stars in the universe and hold out the word of life.

Consider Athanasius (4th century) who wrote: "It isn't right to fear mobs who fight against Christ and conspire against godliness. Indeed, we should please God all the more through these things. We should consider such matters to be the test and exercise of a righteous life."

Athanasius lived in a crooked and depraved generation.

In his day, the rulers of the empire stood against him as a preacher of Christ – he was exiled and threatened five times by four different rulers.

...it's possible to feel overcome, as if it's never been as dark as these times...

Christians living righteously and lovingly have a magnificent opportunity to be fountains of love, beacons of light and vessels of gospel truth in this confused and deceived generation.

We belong to a good church – a church that consistently represents the truths of Christ and the power of the gospel to change lives.

It's my privilege to represent you at different forums around the country and it's encouraging to converse with those from other churches and to hear what people think of the Presbyterian Church of Australia (PCA).

Representing the PCA at the annual conference of the Australian Christian Lobby, I was so warmly thanked and embraced because we are one of very few Australian churches that spoke with a united and consistent biblical witness to the creational position of marriage as being: one man with one woman.

We were thanked profusely for a clear witness to God's voice.

Representing the PCA at one of our school functions, a Christian teacher (not Presbyterian) thanked me for the last 15 years of our Australian Presbyterian magazine.

His thanks was directed to the PCA because "it alone gave consistent biblical teaching on the issues of life."

Finally, at the World Reformed Fellowship meeting in Wittenberg, the former, current and incoming International Directors were all warmly thankful to me for the Presbyterian Church of Australia for contributing to biblical witness on current social issues – beyond expectation considering our size.

Re-affirming where the PCA stands:

- We affirm the biblical teaching of the right to life (especially as this applies to the unborn child) that all life is sacred to God, and that human life is a gift of God from conception (2007 GAA).
- God condemns homosexual behaviour along with all other forms of sin and provides forgiveness of and redemption from all sin through Christ and commissions his church to proclaim this message to all people (2013 GAA).
- We affirm that marriage is a covenant between a woman and a man, and that the Presbyterian Church of Australia cannot allow its ministers to conduct celebrations of same sex marriage (2016 GAA).

Yes, we know where we stand as a church, but let grace be the hallmark of our conversation.

Let our words and debate be seasoned with love, so that in the way we engage and through the lives we live, the truths of God and the power of the gospel will shine.

It matters how we engage.

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May we be seen first as people who love Christ Jesus as Lord, not as moral police wanting to enforce Christ's standards on the world.

May our engagement be understood as pointing to the power of a crucified saviour to change lives, rather than just upholding values-driven conservatism.

Yes, everything has changed – unborn children are taken, marriage is re-defined, the frail can be assisted to die, gender is spoken of as fluid. Yet nothing has changed – read Philippians 2:14-18 again.

Which is why we're not overcome or downcast – there's never been a better time to shine.

To the praise of his glory, God the great creator of all things upholds, directs, disposes and governs all creatures, actions and things, from the greatest to the least (WCF chapter 5).

Which means God has brought us to this.

The trinita didn't catch God by surprise.

By his wise and inscrutable providence, he's brought the church to where we are today and, as a marginalised voice, he wants us to live righteously and testify truly.

I suspect the church will be stronger and brighter and even more powerful when we accept our weakened and less-privileged position in society, embrace our place on the margins and with integrity testify to a loving and perfect saviour – the Lord Jesus Christ.

And I suspect, through the sovereign persuasion of God, there's bound to be a neighbour of yours, a friend or a family member, who's going to be disturbed by what's happening in their culture and look to you for help.

Are you ready to shine?



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