

# InterSections

interpret baptist confess confessant  
respond-jesus grace repent

**ChurchScene 1**  
Fingerprints of Faith

**Feature**  
Bible Perspectives  
of Confession 3

**International Letter 4**  
Heritage Christian University, Ghana

**Food for Thought 5**  
Confession in Everyday life

**News 6**  
Saving Light Series, VIC  
Camp Challenge, NSW  
Warringah Youth Day, NSW

**Puzzling Passages 8**  
'Baptism for the dead' 1 Cor. 15:29

## Editorial

Welcome to the February 2025 issue of *InterSections*.

A few issues ago we focused on the concept of forgiveness. In this issue we look at the related idea of confession. We understand the importance for confession in forgiveness, both from God and from each other. But do we really understand what confession as a spiritual practice demands of us?

In our *Feature*, Kok Bin examines what the Bible has to say about confession. And as *Food for Thought*, Craig Holyoak considers what it means to confess our sins in our everyday life. In *Puzzling Passages*, Allan McNicol looks at what is meant by 'baptism for the dead' in 1 Corinthians 15:29.

Our *International Letter* is from Ghana where Frank Essien introduces us to Heritage Christian University in Accra. In our *News*, we hear about the Saving Light lecture series in Melbourne, Camp Challenge in NSW, and the Warringah Youth Day in NSW. But we begin with *ChurchScene* where Dale Hartman tells of his recent tour through parts of Australia, talking about Christian parenting through 'Fingerprints of Faith.'

We pray that this issue will be encouraging and thought-provoking as we each grow closer to the Lord and one another.

The *InterSections* Team

## ChurchScene *Fingerprints of Faith*

### *Fingerprints of Faith*

My wife, Sheila, and I both come from families of multi-generational faith. However, we've always believed in the old preacher's comment that 'God doesn't have any grandchildren.' Each new generation of faith has to make the commitment to walk by faith or to walk in darkness. It's in that context that, since 1971, 'Fingerprints of Faith' is one way Sheila and I have endeavoured to pass the baton of faith on to our physical and spiritual families.

A judgment will be made of the faithfulness of each generation. One generation will be described like the Israelites of Joshua's day: 'Israel served the Lord all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders who outlived Joshua' (Joshua 24:31). Other generations will receive a very different verdict: 'And there arose another generation after them who did not know the Lord' (Judges 2:10).

The challenge of nurturing inter-generational faith should be a priority for all Christian parents and grandparents. It'll also determine the existence or extinction of each local congregation.

So, in our family, Sheila and I created a written plan to help us pass on our baton of faith. We both majored in education in university, so were very familiar with the concept of 'developmental tasks'. Essentially, this means there is a sequence of tasks or responsibilities which must be mastered before a child can progress to the next level of learning. An example is children learning to crawl and walk before they can run. Hence, we sought to focus on one area of faith development during each stage of our children's lives.

We began with an end result or goal in mind. What has to be done today in the faith development of each child to help them worship God in our home, after they leave our home, and after we're gone? Inter-generational participation in worship is often illustrated in Scripture. So the question is, what can we do to help our children to grow in their own faith so that they too will worship God all their lives?



Dale Hartman



We are convinced Scripture is written to 'equip us for every good work' (2 Timothy 3:17). So we prayerfully looked for biblical examples of building faith at each stage of childhood development. These examples became anchor passages to help us pass along fingerprints of faith to our children.

In September and October 2024, I visited Australia again and shared a series of lessons entitled *Fingerprints of Faith*. I was blessed to visit three of the four congregations (Belmore Road, Macquarie, and Holland Park) that my brother, Kent, and I had visited with James Baird in May 1974 – so this visit also marked the 50th anniversary of my first trip 'Down Under'. In addition, the Point Church in Brisbane graciously hosted lessons on a Saturday at Redlands College. I was also blessed to spend a Sunday with brothers and sisters in Canberra.

The *Fingerprints of Faith* lessons focused on three developmental principles for children:

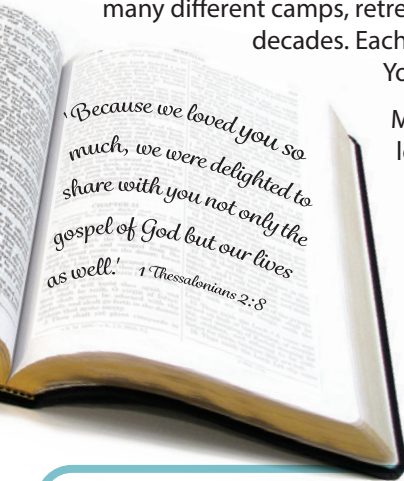
- Ages 1–6: Winning their heart for God (attitudes, affective domain)
- Ages 7–12: Focusing on their head (thinking, learning Scripture)
- Ages 13–18: Engaging their hands (learning to serve, walking with God)

I also discussed four spiritual processes that are essential for faith development in children:

- P – Pray We began praying seven years before our first child was born.
- I – Intentional We need specific goals for this lifetime challenge.
- C – Consistent We wanted worship to become a way of life.
- K – Knowing God This is a challenge for every stage of our lives.



It's always a sacred privilege to visit lifetime friends and family in Australia – our second home. We so appreciate the many different camps, retreats, classes, service projects, and worship services we've shared together through the decades. Each member of our family has been blessed by the friendship and fellowship of Christians in Australia. You're often in our thoughts, conversations, and prayers.



My favourite verse about ministry applies as much to each of you as it did to the first readers of Paul's letter: 'Because we loved you so much, we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well.' (1 Thessalonians 2:8).

So may we keep pressing on, while passing on the baton! ◇

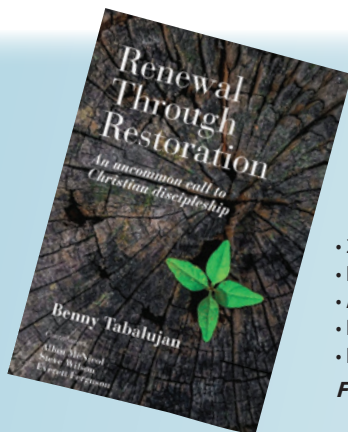
A former missionary in Sydney, Dale Hartman, and his wife, Sheila, are members of North McArthur Church of Christ in Oklahoma City. [dale.hartman@gmail.com](mailto:dale.hartman@gmail.com)



**InterSections** is a quarterly journal designed to inform, encourage, and unite Christians in Australia seeking to restore New Testament faith and practice. The editors are responsible for selecting material for publication, but each article reflects the views of its author(s). Advertisements in *InterSections* are broadly consistent with the ethos and goals of the journal; however, they do not necessarily constitute endorsement by the journal. *InterSections* is published by Klesis Institute (© Klesis Institute, 2025). Copyright permission is given to anyone wishing to reproduce an individual article for non-commercial purposes, as long as due attribution is given to the author and *InterSections*. Klesis Institute is a division of CommAsia Australia Pty Ltd (ACN 097136171 ABN 53702023602).

Founding Editor: Warren Holyoak (2009-2011)  
 Editor: Benny Tabalujan  
 Managing Editor: Nathan Holyoak  
 Associate Editor: Theo Gyau  
 Board of Advisors: Dale Hartman, Allan McNicol, David Mowday  
 Editorial Assistants: Pauline Holyoak, Stephanie Klempfner  
 Enquiries: Klesis Institute, PO Box 700, Glen Waverley, Victoria 3150, Australia.  
 Art & Design: Gekko Graphics / Heather M. Cox  
 Publisher: Klesis Institute [intersections.com.au](http://intersections.com.au)  
 Email: [info@intersections.com.au](mailto:info@intersections.com.au)

**To subscribe:** • PDF format: email to [info@intersections.com.au](mailto:info@intersections.com.au) & request to be placed on the *InterSections* mailing list. Provide us with your name, mailing address, phone & email.  
 • Printed format: write to *InterSections*, PO Box 700, Glen Waverley, Victoria 3150, Australia, providing your name and address and cheque payment to Klesis Institute for AUD\$31.90 (per year for 4 issues). You may also use the on-line *InterSections* subscription form, available from [intersections.com.au](http://intersections.com.au)



## Renewal Through Restoration: An Uncommon Call to Christian Discipleship

Perspectives from 4 current and former church elders in Australia and America:  
 Benny Tabalujan, Allan McNicol, Steve Wilson, and Everett Ferguson.

- 230 pages, including discussion questions
- Bulk discounts for 2 or more print copies: [Klesis.com.au](http://Klesis.com.au) and [Christian-studies.org](http://Christian-studies.org) (Ebook: Amazon.com)
- Allen Black, Harding School of Theology: "Extraordinary book - thoughtful, well-informed, irenic."
- Harold Shank, Oklahoma church elder: "This call has great personal appeal."
- Nathan Wilson, youth leader: "Read it if you grew up among Churches of Christ and are seeking to understand why you should stay."

**For discounted bulk orders of 2 or more print copies, please order online at Klesis ([klesis.com.au](http://klesis.com.au)).**

# Feature *Biblical Perspectives of Confession*

Kok Bin

*If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.  
If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins  
and purify us from all unrighteousness.  
If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar  
and his word has no place in our lives. 1 John 1:8–10 (NIV)*



In the New Testament, confession (Greek, *homologeō*) is the admission of having sinned. This admission is, first of all, to God (private confession). However, it can also be towards individuals and/or the church community (public confession). Its objective is to seek restoration and forgiveness.

Unlike members of the Roman Catholic Church, Orthodox churches, and some Protestant churches, many among Churches of Christ do not have a strong practice of confessing sins. The closest thing some older Christians may have experienced is the post-sermon invitation on a Sunday morning, when the preacher would call upon the congregation to respond to the Gospel in baptism if they were non-Christians; or, if they were already Christians, to seek the prayers of the church, perhaps for some wrongdoing. There is typically little or no confession of any specific sin. Over time, many churches have discarded this invitation, and with it the opportunity to 'confess' in this way.

And yet confession of sins is a biblical command.

John, as quoted above, calls on his 'dear children' to acknowledge their sins and to confess such because confession leads to forgiveness – the removal of all unrighteousness which stands between the sinner and God (1 John 1:8–10). To ignore the importance of confession is both self-deceiving and contrary to God's Word.

In his epistle, James speaks about the power of prayer and confession. Are you in trouble? Pray! Are you sick? Go to the elders for prayer, James writes. Then he adds 'If he has sinned, he will be forgiven. Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.' (James 5:15–16)

It isn't clear whether James is associating sickness with sin. The proximity of the two, written in the same breath, prompts our mind to think it is so. Sin, unconfessed, is distressing and can at times render a person unwell (1 Corinthians 11:27–32).

Helpfully, Scripture provides us with three narratives of confession.

In Genesis 3, Adam and Eve both sinned against God when they ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. When confronted by God, both admitted 'I ate' but each pointed the finger to someone else (Genesis 3:12–13). 'The woman gave it to me,' Adam said. 'The serpent deceived me,' Eve said. In pushing the blame to someone else, neither was truly contrite in their confession.

But as we see in 2 Samuel 11 and 12, with King David it was different. When the prophet Nathan confronted David and said to him, 'You are the man,' David's facade of self-righteousness came crashing down. His double sin of adultery with Bathsheba and causing the death of her husband, Uriah, came before him. David immediately confessed, 'I have sinned against the Lord' (2 Samuel 12:13).

This confession is expanded upon in David's prayer to the Lord in Psalm 51. There David once again admits his guilt of having sinned against God. In a trinity of trinities, he casts himself before the 'mercy,' the 'unfailing love,' and the 'great

compassion' of God and implores God to 'blot out,' 'wash away,' and 'cleanse' him of all his 'transgressions,' 'iniquity,' and 'sin' (Psalm 51:1–2).

The awfulness of David's adultery and murderous act stands as a crippling accusation against him. Unclean! Devoid of joy! Crushed! Lost! Banished from God! Each is a lead weight that pulls David down and down.

The only recourse for David is to prostrate himself before God and beg for his mercy. Sacrifices and burnt offerings will not undo his sin and bring him restitution. Only 'a broken and contrite heart' will please and move God to forgive (Psalm 51:17). Here, David approaches God to cleanse him of his filthiness, create in him a pure heart, and restore the joy of his salvation.

The third narrative comes from the teaching of the Lord Jesus himself. In a parable that signifies how believers can stray from God the Father, Jesus tells of a son who leaves his father for a foreign land, and squanders his inheritance in wanton living. The son soon finds himself destitute and desperate to eat food thrown to pigs. However, this dire state brings the son to his senses, showing him just how blessed he was in his father's house. He knows he has sinned and decides to return to his father – not as a son, but as a humbled hired hand.

When the son meets his father, he confesses, 'I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' But the father has other ideas. He calls for a feast to celebrate. 'For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found' (Luke 15:11–24).

To confess we have sinned in our lives isn't a shameful thing. On the contrary, it is God-mandated. It draws us closer to him as we acknowledge we need God and his forgiveness. But Scripture shows us only a contrite confession will bring us back to God. ◇

*Kok Bin and his wife, Esther, are originally from Malaysia. They are members of the Heidelberg West Church of Christ in suburban Melbourne, where he serves as a full-time church minister. kokbin@gmail.com*

## Heritage Christian University, Ghana: Transforming Lives Through Christ-Centered Education

Heritage Christian University (Heritage), located in the vibrant city of Accra, Ghana, is a higher educational institution sponsored by members of Churches of Christ with a vision 'to be a leading Christian university promoting excellence in the advancement of science, technology, and entrepreneurship to transform lives and society.' Since its establishment in 2015, Heritage has pursued the objective of promoting liberal arts education with core outcomes in entrepreneurship philanthropy, ethics, and global exposure in science, technology, engineering, and liberal arts programs. Currently, Heritage has a student population of 1055, including all centres and institutes.



Heritage's mission reflects its holistic approach to education, aiming to 'provide education that cultivates conviction, character, creativity, compassion, and community to serve God and neighbour.' These Core Values are intentionally integrated into the curriculum to inform teaching and learning, ensuring that Heritage is not just a place of learning but a hub for shaping ethical, innovative, and servant-hearted leaders who can meet the needs of a rapidly changing world.

The institution offers a diverse range of undergraduate programs in business, theology, computing, nursing, and midwifery. Beginning 2025, Heritage will roll out a Master of Art in Christian Studies. The aim of the program is to offer opportunity for further training and development of ministry leaders in Ghana and beyond to meet the demands of ministry in the 21st century. To advance the mission of the church, the Heritage Bible Institute (HBI) plays a pivotal role in equipping individuals for ministry, making Heritage a unique blend of academia and faith.

Heritage distinguishes itself by integrating academic rigour with a deep commitment to Christian values. Students are not only prepared for professional success but are also empowered to live a life of service within the kingdom of God and their communities. Through HBI and various church partnership initiatives, the university has trained countless church leaders, many of whom now serve congregations in Ghana and 11 other countries in Africa.

**Impact Week** trains students in design thinking, a creative problem-solving approach. Through team projects addressing real-world challenges, students gain practical skills and develop innovative solutions, enhancing their entrepreneurial and leadership abilities.

Heritage's **Startup Challenge** encourages students to pitch innovative business ideas, offering mentorship and funding opportunities. Students also compete in the *Fowler Global Social Innovation Contest*, gaining global exposure and showcasing their entrepreneurial talent.

The **Day of Philanthropy** emphasises service, with students and staff contributing to support disadvantaged students in the university and supporting community projects like orphanages, disaster relief, and medical outreach. This event fosters compassion and social responsibility, integral to Heritage's mission of holistic education.

Heritage provides scholarships and financial aid, ensuring that quality education is accessible to many who might not otherwise have the means to pursue higher learning. This commitment helps bridge financial gaps and supports students in achieving their academic and professional aspirations. Heritage also offers free tuition for its students pursuing academic degrees to pursue professional programs in accounting, HR, banking, marketing, and IT. This initiative reduces financial barriers, empowering students to access education that combines technical proficiency with Christian principles, ensuring they are well-prepared for the workforce.

However, like many private institutions, Heritage faces challenges. Financial constraints can hinder the expansion of programs, infrastructure, and facilities needed to accommodate its growing ambitions. Additionally, maintaining a balance between academic rigour and the demands of spiritual training require ongoing innovation, resource mobilisation, and strategic planning to sustain its mission and vision effectively.

My journey in biblical studies has been deeply intertwined with my calling to serve the church. Growing up in Ghana, I witnessed the transformative power of the Gospel in my community, which inspired me to pursue theological training. My academic path led me to Abilene Christian University (ACU) and Sunset International Bible Institute (SIBI) in the United States. Both places deepened my understanding of Scripture and ministry.

At ACU, I was privileged to learn under distinguished scholars and engage in a multicultural academic environment. The experience broadened my perspective on biblical interpretation and equipped me with tools to address the unique challenges of ministry in Africa. I also pursued a Doctor of Ministry in Spiritual Formation and Ministry Leadership at Lipscomb University to acquire further knowledge and insights into dealing with complex ministry challenges, especially dealing with campus churches.

Returning to Ghana, I found in Heritage a platform to channel my passion for teaching and mentoring future leaders. Heritage represents the intersection of my academic pursuits and my commitment to the spiritual growth of my people. It is a privilege to contribute to an institution that is shaping the future of Ghana and the global church.

Reflecting on Heritage's journey, I am optimistic about its future. By God's grace, the institution will continue to grow, overcoming challenges and expanding its transformative influence. It is my prayer that more individuals and organisations will join in supporting Heritage's mission to transform lives through Christ-centered education. ◇

*Frank Essien is on the faculty of Heritage Christian University in the Department of Theology and Ministry and has been the preacher of University of Cape Coast Church of Christ for about 15 years. He and his wife, Millicent, have four sons (Perez, Brady-Jon, Nana Yaw and Randy-Jay). fo018a@hcuc.edu.gh*

## Food for Thought Confession in everyday life

# Food for Thought

I'm sure we can all imagine this typical Hollywood scene: the darkened church, the shadowy stall, the priest obscured behind a screen. 'Bless me father, for I have sinned.'

Is this the image we have in our mind when we think about confession? A ritual and transactional exchange of words to absolve us of our misdeeds? Or is there more – or less – to confession in the Biblical picture?

The New Testament word for confession (*homologeō*) conveys the idea of a declaration or acknowledgment. It's in this broadest understanding that we 'confess [Christ] before men' (Matthew 10:32). It's also, literally, a shared word, or agreement. An example of this is the Westminster Confession, a collection of statements about God that one might confess or proclaim individually as true, but which also binds people together through that shared confession.

Even though these may not be how we typically conceive of confession, they serve to highlight a key aspect of all forms of confession: that a confession is ultimately a statement, an agreement, of truth. Sometimes that might mean saying that 'Yes, Jesus is Lord!' Other times that means saying that 'Yes, I am a sinner,' or perhaps more pointedly, 'Yes, I was speeding when I crashed into the parked car.'

So when James instructs us to 'confess [our] sins to each other' (James 5:16) what he is saying is: be honest and open about your sins with each other.

But what does this look like? What might a church look like when we're open and honest about our sin? What might we need to be wary of?

Firstly, Jesus, while sinless himself, openly acknowledged the sinfulness of his followers. This led him to clash with the Pharisees who were under the misapprehension that they had no sin to confess themselves, and were scandalised that Jesus fraternised with prostitutes and tax collectors. But as Jesus said, the healthy don't need a doctor; he came to heal and forgive sinners. That means us – which is good news! We should never be afraid to declare this openly, as it's the heart of the Gospel. We should not lose sight of the fact that the Church is a collection of sinners. Yes, sinners saved and washed – but we remain 'recovering sinners' (to steal the parlance of Alcoholics Anonymous).

Secondly, while we ought to be open about our sinfulness, we should never wear the label proudly or boastfully. This can especially be a temptation in today's therapeutic and narcissistic culture where we focus on our 'brokenness' and our flaws can be worn as a badge of honour, defining our identity. I'm thinking here of 'confessional' style interviews or public testimonies that can seem to relish in the recounting of past misdeeds. Sin, while confessed, is not necessarily regretted or actually repented of, instead conferring on the sinner a form of status through hard-won wisdom. But sin is always a shameful thing, and nothing to be pleased about, even in hindsight. The glory in our forgiveness belongs to God, for his grace, not in the size of the debt we have accumulated.

Thirdly, we need to emphasise the way confession applies to our relationships with each another. The image of a penitent parishioner in a private confession stall emphasises our sin before God. Of course this is true, but if that's all we imagine confession to be, we can lose sight of the fact that we sin against other people as much as we sin against God. I think this is why James encourages us to bring our sin not only to the elders but to one another. It isn't just that we need our brother to be an 'accountability partner' to keep us honest and help us deal with our sin. Our brother often isn't just a neutral third party, but is the one we have sinned against, and we need to seek their forgiveness! Consider how programs like Alcoholics Anonymous not only encourage sharing sins and struggles among fellow addicts (co-travellers, yet third parties to the sin) but also confession and reconciliation with those who have actually been wronged and hurt. Both aspects of confession are important. James 5 can be seen as a mirror to Jesus' teaching in Matthew 18. Where James focuses on the sinner and calls them to take responsibility and acknowledge their sin, Jesus focuses on the one who is sinned against and calls on them to seek reconciliation by drawing attention to the other's sin. In both these instances the purpose isn't just airing grievances or empty words. There is a concrete goal in mind: restoring and building relationships.

The New Testament call to confess our sin isn't simply a call to ritualistic transactions. It is a call for us to be honest about our sin, and our capacity to sin, with God and with one another. This honesty then works to build relationships, both with God and each other. I think this can be best illustrated by the parable of the Pharisee and tax collector (Luke 18:9–14). The Pharisee had nothing to confess, and so was boastful and proud – nothing was changed by his prayer. But the tax collector was broken and humble. His only prayer was, 'God, have mercy on me, a sinner. Yes, I am a sinner. Yes, I have hurt you. I am sorry, and I will do better. Will you forgive me? Let us be reconciled. That, Jesus said, was a prayer that changed things – his standing before God; but also, one suspects, the hearts of any who heard him. ◇



*Craig Holyoak works in I.T. and is a member of The Point Church in Brisbane, QLD.  
craig@helmsdeep.org*

# News *Saving Light Series, VIC*

The 31st annual Saving Light Series was held by the Heidelberg West Church of Christ in Melbourne from 10–13 October 2024. This year's theme was 'Finding a Better Way'.

Peter Tickner from the Macquarie church in Sydney presented excellent lessons based around this theme on each of the Thursday, Friday, and Saturday nights as well as two lessons on the Sunday morning. Topics included the relevance of the Bible, and the necessity of the church in today's world. The Sunday sessions focused on what Jesus can offer people and how he can impact their lives.

The support of brothers and sisters from other congregations in the Melbourne area was very encouraging. Sunday attendance was over 70 with most staying to enjoy a luncheon after the final session. It was a great opportunity for us to spend time and to enjoy fellowship with everyone, including the Tickner family before they started driving back to Sydney later that day.

We now look forward to planning for the 32nd Saving Light Series in 2025! ◇

*Geoff Thomas, Heidelberg West Church of Christ, Melbourne.*



# *Camp Challenge, NSW*



From 28 December 2024 to 3 January 2025, about 100 Christians gathered in the Blue Mountains for another year of Camp Challenge. It was a fun, encouraging, and faith building time once more! Brett Christensen from Victoria (South East congregation) taught a powerful series of lessons on 'Mind Faith not Blind Faith' – looking at all the reasons behind our belief in God.

Highlights of the camp were singing around the bonfire, the always hilarious Treasure Bags night, and a huge New Year's Eve celebration with a Storybook dress up theme and lots of epic challenges. Many new connections were made and old ones strengthened, with brothers and sisters gathering from all over Australia for a blessed time together! ◇

*Kate Jennings, Canberra Church of Christ, ACT*

*"Mind Faith,  
Not Blind Faith"*



## Warringah Youth Day, NSW

Over 80 people attended the recent Warringah Youth Day on 19 January 2025. The usual BBQ was followed by fun at the beach (although the ocean was not cooperating as conditions were quite rough). Back at the building, snacks and drinks were served prior to the evening worship.



It was a treat to see Noah and Joel Drennan both lead a song for the first time. The guest speaker this year was Joel Johnson from the Holland Park congregation in Brisbane. He gave some great advice for dealing with daily decision-making. Joel also encouraged young and old to consider what would bring most glory to God when confronted with a tough decision – or, for that matter, any decision.

The Warringah congregation, together with Bob and Lynne Marks, have hosted the annual Youth Day for almost 35 years now. They are to be commended for their enduring commitment to our young people. The third Sunday in January is a highlight on the youth calendar each year, and rightly so! ◇

David Mowday, Gosford Church of Christ, NSW.



### Sign up now for one of our next online Zoom Courses for 2025

#### Preparing a Bible Lesson

How to prepare and teach a meaningful Bible lesson for adults

**APRIL 2025 Jim Bury \$33**

April – Tuesday evenings,  
7.00 – 9.00 pm (AEST)  
8, 15, 22, 29 April '25  
\$33 (incl GST) Instructor: Jim Bury

#### Growing Old in Christ:

A Biblical Theology of Ageing

**MAY – JUNE 2025 Stephen Wilson \$44**

May – June Tuesday evenings,  
7.00 – 9.00 pm (AEST)  
13, 20, 27, May & 10, 17, 24 June '25  
\$44 (incl GST) Instructor: Steve Wilson

#### Unpacking the Hebrew Prophets:

Exploring the Nevi'im (OT Prophetic Books)

**AUGUST – SEPTEMBER 2025 Daniel Stockstill \$44**

August – Sept Saturday mornings,  
9.00 – 11.00 am (AEST)  
2, 9, 16, 23 Aug & 6, 13, 20, 27 Sept '25  
\$44 (incl GST) Instructor: D. Stockstill

#### The Book of Romans

An introductory study of the epistle to the Romans

**OCT/NOV 2024 Paul Pollard \$44**

Oct – Nov Saturday mornings,  
9.00 – 11.00 am (AEST)  
4, 11, 18, 25 Oct & 8, 15, 22, 29 Nov '25  
\$44 (incl GST) Instructor: Paul Pollard

**Inquiries: Contact Helen [info@klesis.com.au](mailto:info@klesis.com.au) [klesis.com.au](http://klesis.com.au)**

**Journal of  
Christian  
Studies**  
*Scholarship for the Church*

- ❖ JCS features biblical scholars writing for thoughtful Christians
- ❖ Each issue unpacks a topic important to the church in our current culture
- ❖ \$60 AUD per year for three issues (~90 pages each)
- ❖ Subsidies available for those in ministry

For more information contact Dale Christensen  
[dale.christensen.a@gmail.com](mailto:dale.christensen.a@gmail.com) • 0403 793 353



A donation is a gift that keeps on giving!

**ACCET provides grants  
to churches of Christ  
in Australia for evangelism**

P: 0468 719 025 or 03 9890 4494 • [enquiries@accet.org.au](mailto:enquiries@accet.org.au) [www.accet.org.au](http://www.accet.org.au)  
PO Box 552, GOSFORD, NSW 2250, Australia.

©Australian church of Christ Evangelistic Trust ABN 18 064 594 371

## 'Baptism for the dead' 1 Corinthians 15:29

Few would question that one of the most challenging New Testament chapters to interpret is 1 Corinthians 15. It also happens to be a passage that's used and quoted with great regularity in the church to this day. Thus, it's important for believers to have a clear grasp on what is being discussed and advocated by Paul in this lengthy chapter.

The text begins with Paul's rousing defence of belief in the importance of Jesus' death for our sins and his resurrection on the third day (15:3–11). Then, after lengthy discussion on various issues involving resurrection, the chapter ends with another rousing word centring on Paul's advocacy for belief in a coming resurrection of dead believers at the *parousia* (second coming) of Christ. This is significant not only when 1 Corinthians 15:51–57 is being read and contemplated in a liturgical setting, but for every moment of Christian life.

But tucked away unobtrusively in the middle of the chapter is verse 29. This verse has caused endless puzzle for interpreters. However, before discussing this verse, we ought to consider its wider context.

After presenting a vigorous case affirming belief in Jesus' resurrection in 15:2–11, Paul moves quickly to an issue that had come to his attention. It was probably brought by a delegation of believers in Corinth who were visiting him in Asia at the time of his writing (cf. 1 Corinthians 16:15–18). Apparently, some in the Corinthian church were no longer believing in the resurrection of believers who had died. The issue was so important that Paul ends his letter emphasising the importance of the resurrection of the dead.

Paul details the Corinthian (mis)understanding in 15:12–19, that there is no resurrection of the dead. He concludes that, if that is all they believe, then 'we of all men are most to be pitied.' Subsequently in 15:20–23 he launches into a strong defence of the belief that, after Jesus' resurrection, the church will continue until the future *parousia* of Christ ushers in the resurrection of all God's people from past eras, including deceased Christians.

Paul argues in a positive tone in 15:20–28. The reality of the present messianic era can be likened to a harvest. The resurrection of Christ, already taken place, is the first-fruits. The full bounty of the crop comes only on the last day, when God's people from all ages will be resurrected. Those who are faithful and alive on that day will be changed from mortal existence to a 'spiritual immortal body' (15:44–46, 52–55; cf. 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18). Clearly for Paul the ultimate resurrection of our bodies is at the core of salvation.

This brings us to 15:29. The Greek verse is reckoned by commentators to be notoriously difficult to comprehend. Consequently, it's been subject to many interpretations. There's no doubt that the verse marks the transition from 15:20–28 to 15:29–34. The former verses affirm that the faithful believer inherits the benefits of God's new world at the *parousia*. The latter verses bring this discussion to a close. It affirms that if there's no resurrection of the dead, then the whole enterprise in which the church community is engaged is a failure. Thus, 15:20 is the key affirmation on which this whole unit turns. But 15:29–34 is the icing on the cake to Paul's whole argument.

Despite the awkwardness of the Greek sentence structure of verse 29, Paul's clearly extending his response to those Corinthians who doubt the resurrection of deceased Christians. This discussion actually continues to its climax in 15:50–53 when, at the last trumpet call, the resurrection of the faithful will be concurrent with the *parousia* of Christ. That will mark the end of our age.

Verse 15:29 begins the section of 15:29–34, where Paul argues that denial of the resurrection leads to absurdity. In 15:30–34, Paul remonstrates that, if not for the resurrection of the dead, his perilous missionary work would be futile, because his own Gospel proclamation would be nonsensical.

Two observations about verse 29 are salient. First, it is as if Paul is telling his detractors, 'Your position is that baptisms may take place on behalf of the deceased, even while you deny that the deceased will ever be raised. That is self-contradictory! Where's the new life for such people? If, as you believe, the dead aren't raised, how is the Gospel a word of hope? Of what value is this baptism?'

Second, for those who accept that Paul was writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, it remains problematic if he accepts any other understanding of the prime purpose of baptism than to prepare the believer to live a faithful Christian life in our age. In contrast, for chapter 15 the central focus is the future – the age yet to come. Paul's expectation is that at the *parousia* and the resurrection of the dead the believer will receive a transformed body to live in God's new world. Outside of that, I suggest that we shouldn't draw any more substantive conclusions on baptism from this verse.

I've spent my whole adult life in Christian ministry. I've quoted 1 Corinthians 15 at numerous funerals, during the final commitment when the body of a beloved fellow believer is laid to rest. I've also heard countless prayers in which survivors voiced varied opinions on the promises in this chapter. We may not fully understand what Paul meant in verse 29, but my trust lies in the fact that God will judge justly! ◇

*Born in Queensland, Allan McNicol was a professor of Bible and theology in Austin, Texas, before his retirement. He and his wife, Patricia, are members of Brentwood Oaks Church of Christ in Austin. [mcnicol.austingrad@gmail.com](mailto:mcnicol.austingrad@gmail.com)*

