



A Pastoral Theological Reflection



Churches of Christ nationwide are appalled at the loss of life and the destruction of property, livelihoods and irreplaceable mementos in the Victorian Bushfires. At the same time we are heartened to hear of support coming from as far afield as the other side of the continent, and offers of support from overseas. The community spirit of Australians is coming to the fore and providing emotional, monetary and spiritual support to those who are suffering devastating and irreplaceable losses. As a Movement we are committed to doing what we can for the victims, which has prompted us to launch our CareWorks 2009 Bushfire Appeal. We will also commit to long-term and ongoing support and holistic care of those directly affected.

It is in times such as these that many will wonder about such things as fate, destiny and God. Why were some communities spared and others obliterated? Why was this property's shed still standing while the house was burned to the ground? Why did the wind shift come so swiftly and without warning? Why did this tragedy occur in the first place?

These are hard questions to answer. For followers of Jesus, we need to turn from our own opinions and political viewpoints and read the Bible with fresh eyes. In Luke 13, a local atrocity is reported to Jesus. His response? *Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans because they suffered this way? I tell you, no!...Or those eighteen who died when the tower in Siloam fell on them - do you think they were more guilty than all the others living in Jerusalem? I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish (Luke 13:1-6).*

As usual, God's Word is timely and relevant. Perhaps it could almost be paraphrased this way: *Do you think that these Victorians were worse sinners than all other Victorians because they suffered this way? I tell you, no! ...Or those 181 who died when the firestorm overtook them - do you think they were more guilty than all the others living in Victoria? I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish.*

For some to suggest that this is God's wrath for the passing of legislation by a non-Christian body is politicised, self-serving, untimely and insensitive. As a Movement we do not dismiss wrath as part of God's character. As one reads the Bible, however, one finds that God's wrath is usually directed against his own people who are practicing idolatry and breaking covenant, including a lack of lived out concern for their covenant partners, which always includes (for example) the poor and marginalised, the widows and orphans.

Regardless of whether God is displeased with the legislative amendments in the Victorian Parliament (with regards to abortion or any other issue), it seems alien to His nature that He would vent this displeasure on the towns of Marysville, Kinglake, Flowerdale and other decimated communities. Were these wooded hamlets somehow responsible for the passing of the abortion bill? It seems perverse to suggest that the deaths of many children in these fires seems is a just reaction to a law that 'allows' for the unborn to be terminated.

These issues need to be wrestled with, but in a proper time and place. What the Body of Christ needs to do now (whether we be Church of Christ, Anglican, or Catch The Fire Ministries or whatever) is to reflect the love and compassion of God in a desperate time of need. The Apostle Paul highlights a characteristic of God that should be our primary expression in these tragic days:

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we have received from God. (2 Corinthians 1:3-4)

We would encourage and seek to act out anything that displays the compassion and comfort of God at this time. Our genuine and lasting condolences go out to all who have been impacted by these fires.

Craig Brown

Federal Coordinator, Churches of Christ in Australia

Merryl Blair

President, Conference of Churches of Christ in Victoria and Tasmania

Paul Cameron

Executive Officer, Conference of Churches of Christ in Victoria and Tasmania

Churches of Christ Vic/Tas Conference

Phone: 03 9488 8800, Fax: 03 9481 8543

Email: cofcvictas@churchesofchrist.org.au

www.cofcvictas.org

1st Floor, 582 Heidelberg Rd

Fairfield VIC 3078