



Pillars of Society

PILLARS OF SOCIETY *for prayer*

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Photo on Page 1

An ancient Roman road to Libya
showing a Roman pillar and arch gateway.

From a painting by Marianne Burt,
based on a photo by Ruth Hucklesby.

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PILLARS OF SOCIETY

INTRODUCTION

The Pillars of Society are extremely important because they determine – to a very large extent – how and where our Society goes. Our pillars need to be strong, and for this we need to pray.

The **Structure** of Society is supported by its **Pillars**, and it is essential that these Pillars, in turn, are founded on the **Rock**, and not on shifting sands. In other words, the pillars stand on the rock foundation, and support the superstructure of society above them.

Jesus told the parable of the wise man who built his house on a rock foundation, in contrast to a foolish man who built his house on sand. When the storm came, and the wind blew, the wise man's house stood strong, but the foolish man's house was destroyed. (Matthew 7:24-27).

So even if the pillars are strong, it is essential that they are built on the Rock – and that Rock is Jesus the Messiah, the Son of the living God.

- **The superstructure** is our society – what it is like, how it operates, what it achieves, and what our society is heading towards in the future, for better or for worse.
- **The pillars** are what support that superstructure and are the major areas of society which we must support and maintain, or else our society is in danger of collapse, at least in some areas.
- **The foundation** is what our nation is built upon – our fundamental beliefs and values, how we want our society to progress, and whether we can withstand the storms and testing of time; including things that occur which are beyond our control.

If our foundation is rock solid; if our pillars maintain their strength, then our society will be blessed, and benefit from all our prayers and efforts to maintain a Godly society. If our foundation is weak, or our pillars are neglected, we will end up with a society which

will cause us many woes and will not be for the ultimate good of our people. In the worst case, our society will be heading for collapse.

The questions we must ask are:

- What foundation is our society building on? What are its fundamental principles?
- Do the pillars of our society support the well-being and welfare of our people?
- Will they support our younger generation in years to come?
- Are our pillars strong enough to continue to uphold a good society and resist gradual decay?

In the Bible, God has given us directions and instructions for building a good society – with a Rock foundation and strong Pillars. This is for the good of our society. Any “shoddy workmanship” – a poor or insecure foundation, or weak or missing pillars, will be to the detriment of our society and the harm of many of its people.

The Bible says, “No other foundation can anyone lay, than that which is already laid, Christ Jesus our Lord.” (1 Corinthians 3:10-15)

On Peter’s confession of his faith that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of the living God, Jesus said, “On this rock I will build My Church, and the gates of hell (death) will not prevail against it” (Matthew 16:15-18). The Lord Jesus, the Messiah, is the Rock and our salvation (Psalm 18:46; 62:2). To the extent that our lives, and our society, are built on this foundation, we and our society will be blessed.

An illustration of this is the destruction of the first (Solomon’s) temple, and the second (Herod’s) temple in Jerusalem. Of the second temple, Jesus warned, “Not one stone will be left upon another” (Matthew 23:37 – 24:2). When the people disobeyed God, and rejected Him and His ways, God allowed these temples to be destroyed.

Christians need to pray that our nation will have Jesus Christ and His teachings, as our foundation; strong and Godly principles and laws that we seek to maintain; and that our society will be strong and blessed as a result.

“Unless the LORD builds the house, those who build it, labour in vain. Unless the Lord guards the city, the guard keeps watch in vain” – ultimately the house and city will not survive, but collapse – to the detriment of those who live in them. (Psalm 127:1).

Christians’ prayers and support and encouragement of God’s ways are fundamental essentials to the wellbeing and Godliness of a society. If our society is built on His foundation, supports His ways and virtues, then we will be blessed – both by the Lord and by its good fruitfulness. If we lack these essentials, society will begin to decay and collapse, at least in certain areas – for example, spiritually and morally, as is occurring today.

In the following studies we will look at **12 major Pillars** which underlie a strong, healthy nation. We need to intercede for these areas to become strong pillars in our nation.

Exodus 24:3-4 Moses came and told the people all the words of the Lord and all the ordinances; and all the people answered with one voice and said, “All the words that the Lord has spoken, we will do.” Moses wrote down all the words of the Lord. He rose early in the morning and built an altar at the foot of the mountain, and set up **twelve pillars**, corresponding to the twelve tribes of Israel.

“When the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice; but when the wicked rule, the people groan.” (Proverbs 29:2).

“Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord; the people He has chosen as His heritage!” (Psalm 33:12). May we earnestly seek and pray for our nation to turn to the Lord and follow Him!

QUESTIONS

1. What do the foundation, pillars and superstructure of a building represent?
2. Why did God allow the first and second temples in Jerusalem to be destroyed?
3. In what other ways did God punish the Israelites when they disobeyed Him and refused to obey His commands?
4. What do *you* think are some of the essential pillars to uphold a good society?
5. What are some of Paul’s main thoughts in 1 Corinthians 3:10-15, and what do they teach us?
6. Where do you think our nation stands, regarding our foundation, our pillars, and our society? In what ways is it good, reasonable, or very much in need of rebuilding?
7. How do you think Christians can help rebuild our society? What is God wanting us to do?

PRAYER SUGGESTIONS

Please pray:

- For strong, righteous pillars in our country, upheld by righteous laws, and a willingness of people to live by them.
- For people to recognise that God’s ways are best for us all.
- That weak pillars will be strengthened or replaced.
- That everyone and every group or organisation, especially Christian ones, will encourage people to live by right ways and principles.
- For Godly leadership in all areas of society.

Pillars of Society

THE FOUNDATION: The LORD God

The LORD – Almighty God, King of kings and Lord of lords, Creator and Ruler of the universe – Father, Son and Holy Spirit. “Blessed is the nation whose God is the LORD” (Psalm 33:12) and “There is no authority except from God” (Romans 13:1)

“No one can lay any foundation other than the one that has already been laid – and that foundation is Jesus the Messiah” – the Lord Jesus Christ. (1 Corinthians 3:11)

The Foundation speaks of the Lord Jesus Christ and His sovereignty over all things (see Psalm 2). Also see Daniel 4:2-3; John 18:36-37; 19:19-22; 1 Timothy 1:17; 1 Peter 2:9-10 and Revelation 19:11-16.

The foundation of any society is extremely important. It may be:

- atheistic – ‘There is no God’, *or*
- agnostic – ‘There might be a god but we don’t know, and we’re not interested’, *or*
- humanistic – ‘Even if there is a God, people are more important and we can get along without god’, *or*
- nominally Christian – ‘We acknowledge that God exists, and we hope we will go to Heaven when we die. We live reasonably good lives, so everything is okay’, *or*
- ‘Christian-based’ – ‘Our society is founded on Christian principles, Christians are free to follow the Christian life and faith, and most of society is happy with that. Besides, a good and strong society is one which is built on Christian principles.’

Of course, the above is a generalisation, but the degree to which we turn from the Lord and His ways and desires for us, will determine the way our society goes and how much God will bless or withdraw from us.

Jesus needs to be (not just in theory, but in practice) both the foundation of society and the strength within its pillars, in order for the superstructure of society to be blessed and for it to be a good, healthy, strong and righteous society. Society will suffer to the degree to which its foundation is eroded, and its pillars are weakened. Ultimately, if the ways of God are *rejected*, that society will collapse. For example, many empires in the past, like the Babylonian, Persian, Greek, and Roman empires.

Three times in the first chapter of Romans, Paul writes, “God gave them up to ...” (1:18-32). In other words, they had chosen wicked rather than God’s ways, and God gave them up to their wickedness and its consequences.

When Joshua got somewhat fed up with the children of Israel he said, “Choose today who you will serve – whether the gods of this world [and the results that will bring], or

the ways of the Lord [and the blessings that will bring]. ... As for me and my household, we will serve the Lord!" (See Joshua 24:14-28)

We can ignore the Lord, refuse to believe in Him, disobey Him, blaspheme His name, and worship other gods. But if we do, we will not succeed, either as individuals or as a nation, in the way God wants to bless, uphold, encourage and save our people.

If we sow to the flesh we will, from the flesh, reap the harvest of corruption. If we sow to the Spirit we will, from the Spirit, reap a good harvest. The lusts of the flesh are opposed to God and bring a bad harvest; the fruit of the Holy Spirit bring blessing. See Galatians 5:16-26.

The Lord is the ultimate authority in Heaven and on earth. He is supreme over all things – but not to be blamed for all things – because He has given people choice as to how they will behave; whether they believe in Him, accept His will and follow Him, or reject Him and His will for us all.

"Blessed (and happy) is the nation whose God is the Lord." "When the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice! When the wicked rule, the people groan!" (Psalm 33:12; Proverbs 29:2)

The Prayer that Jesus taught us to pray includes the words: "Your Kingdom come. Your will be done on earth even as it is in Heaven" (Matthew 6:10). When we pray these words, we are praying that God's Kingdom in Heaven will be on earth as well – bringing obedience to His will, praise and glory to His name, blessing to His people, joy to the world and peace on earth! (Luke 2:8-14). May God's will be done – God's way – so that the earth and those upon it may know His blessing!

The LORD God is our Foundation – Father, Son and Holy Spirit – our strong and sure foundation, if we choose to follow Him! He will uphold the pillars by His power and bring blessing to our society if we will follow His ways.

New Zealand's Foundation

We have much to praise God for:

- Our history since Christmas Day, 25 December 1814 when the Gospel was first preached in Aotearoa New Zealand, by Samuel Marsden.
- Our flag and its crosses: one representing Jesus' cross, and the other being the Southern Cross which God created in the heavens.
- Our National Anthem – *God defend New Zealand*

God of nations at Thy feet, in the bonds of love we meet
Hear our voices we entreat, God defend our free land.
Guard Pacific's triple star, from the shafts of strife and war
Make her praises heard afar; God defend New Zealand!

Men of every creed and race, gather here before Thy face
Asking Thee to bless this place; God defend our free land
From dissension, envy, hate, and corruption, guard our State
Make our country good and great; God defend New Zealand!

Peace not war shall be our boast, but should foes assail our coast
Make us then a mighty host; God defend our free land.
Lord of battles in Thy might, put our enemies to flight
Let our cause be just and right; God defend New Zealand!

Let our love for Thee increase; may Thy blessings never cease
Give us plenty, give us peace; God defend our free land
From dishonour and from shame, guard our country's spotless name
Crown her with immortal fame; God defend New Zealand!

May our mountains ever be, freedom's ramparts on the sea
Make us faithful unto Thee, God defend our free land.
Guide her in the nations' van, preaching love and truth to man
Working out Thy glorious plan; God defend New Zealand!

Our Parliament's Speaker's prayer, which is prayed every day before Parliament sits (since 1962):

“Almighty God, humbly acknowledging our need for Thy guidance in all things, and laying aside all private and personal interests, we beseech Thee to grant that we may conduct the affairs of this House and of our country to the glory of Thy holy name, the maintenance of true religion and justice, the honour of the Queen, and the public welfare, peace, and tranquillity of New Zealand, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.”

Adopted by Resolution of the House, 1962.

QUESTIONS

1. Why is it so important that, for a good society, it must be built on the one true Lord God and His ways?
2. Jesus taught God's ways by what He said and how He lived. How can we encourage people in our society to follow God's ways?
3. The Lord gave the 10 Commandments to the Israelites. What happened when they disobeyed? What happened when they repented? What happened when they obeyed?
4. What did Jesus teach us in Matthew 5:13-16? How does this apply to Christians living in a non-Christian (or antichristian) society today?
5. What did Jesus say were the two 'Greatest Commandments', and His 'New Commandment'?
6. What did Jesus say about building on the rock, and building on the sand? (Matthew 7:24-27)

PRAYER SUGGESTIONS

Pray through our national anthem, and the Speaker's prayer for our government
– that these will always be upheld and maintained, for the good of our nation.

Praise God for the coming of the Gospel to Aotearoa; our nation's flag; our National Anthem; the Parliamentary Speaker's prayer.

- Please pray that the Name of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, the King of kings and Lord of lords, will be honoured in our land. His Name is above every name – may it be so in practice too!
- Pray that Christians will exalt the Lord and lift His Name high.
- Pray that people will realise the sacredness of His Name and will learn to honour and follow Him – for “there is no other name under Heaven by which we must be saved”.
- Pray that Kings and Queens, Presidents and Prime Ministers will come to recognise Jesus' supreme authority, His ultimate rule over all the kingdoms of the earth, and King of the Kingdom of Heaven.
- Pray that people will come to see that all true authority and sovereignty are derived from the Lord, and that the further we depart from Him and His ways, the greater the detriment to our society.

Pillars of Society

1. PILLAR 1: The Family

Why is the Family, the first pillar? Because of the strategic importance of the family in the life of every baby, child, teenager and young adult. We were born to live in families.

Right from the beginning God created a man and a woman, and they had children. The parents and the children were a family.

Tragically, many families do not live in the way God intended, namely a husband and wife, usually with children.

The main reason for families is that they provide mutual love and respect of one another, support, provision, encouragement, teaching and learning, protection and so on. The more families “break down”, the more this is going to be reflected in society and how it functions. This is why good, strong, healthy families are such an important pillar for good, strong, healthy societies.

See Ephesians 5:21 – 6:4; Colossians 3:18-21; 1 Timothy 5:1-8; 1 Peter 3:1-7.

Parents

The role of father and mother are crucial to the family. The principal functions of love, provision, teaching, protection, discipline and upbringing in general, lie with the father and mother.

In Christian families, an upbringing in the knowledge and ways of God – the Father, Jesus His Son, and the Holy Spirit – should be fundamental to the way the family coordinates and functions together, as well as being an example and witness to the community.

Parents have an extremely important influence on the way children are brought up, for better or for worse. This is especially true when children are young. As they grow up into maturity they will inevitably begin to make major decisions themselves about how they choose to live. This is why it is critical for parents to give a good, moral, responsible teaching and example to their children, so that they have a good foundation on which to build their lives. Of course, they may reject these ways, but then the responsibility is on them, if they have had a good and Biblical example in their childhood.

On the negative side, parents' influence and behaviour can also have a negative effect on their children – in some cases, even before they are born. Unhealthy practices,

addictions (drugs, excessive alcohol, smoking, gambling), abuse, immorality and so on, can even affect the unborn child.

Sadly, in many homes, children are raised without their natural father and/or mother, for a variety of reasons, but this is not ideal. Many solo parents struggle to maintain their children in ways which are best for their welfare; besides the absence of their father and/or mother.

Children

Children should be seen as a blessing and privilege for parents, not a burden or hindrance to the parents' desires. Psalm 127:3-5 says that "Children are a heritage from the Lord ..." Jesus said, "Let the children come to Me ..." (see Mark 10:13-16). He also said, "If any of you put a stumbling block before one of these little ones who believe in Me, ..." (see Matthew 18:1-7).

Children are the future generation, after their grandparents and parents pass away. The future of the world ultimately depends on them and the ways they choose to follow. Will we set them a good and Godly example, or leave them to their own devices to get on as best they can in a world that is far from Godly? There is so much in the world today to lead them astray – addictions, immorality, violence, Godlessness, and so on.

There are also Christian parents and churches who should be showing them the way to be a blessing and Godly example of how we should live; plus the knowledge that this world is not the end – we are called to choose eternal life with the Lord God who created us.

Adults and elders

We have much to learn from older people – their knowledge, wisdom and experience (if we will listen to them and follow them) can be of great help to guiding younger people in their lives.

Sadly, there is often a great deal of disrespect or disdain for "oldies" and many younger people have to "learn the hard way" (if they learn at all). Also, the longer we develop and live the wrong ways, the harder it becomes to change.

However, there is a way to change! Not by human means, struggling and striving to be better, but by coming to Jesus and being filled with His Spirit in order that we may have the power to overcome the lusts of the flesh and the attacks of satan, and learn to be followers of Jesus, His teachings, and the way He lived. Jesus said, "Come to Me, all you who struggle and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest." (Read Matthew 11:28-30).

Education

While education is not directly involved with the family, it becomes especially important as children grow up through school, college, and perhaps university. All of these have a strong effect on what young people believe and how they live their lives. And not

only in formal education, but the vast amount of information – both good and bad – which influence our thinking and actions. We are bombarded daily by influences which “educate” us, for better or for worse, depending on whether we choose to follow what is good or go the way of the world. Good education and influences are those which encourage us to follow God’s ways – and these will bless us and our society!

Proverbs 22:6 says, “Train up children in the way they should go and when they are old they will not depart from it.” “Training” is the key word – it involves both education or knowledge, good examples, and the determination to follow what is right, with God’s help. Philippians 4:8-9 encourages us to think about, learn and practice those things which are true, honourable, just, pure, pleasing [to God], commendable, excellent and worthy of praise. How far we have fallen from these virtues!

FOR FURTHER THOUGHT

Gordon Copeland, a former United Future MP in New Zealand, listed six important principles concerning the Family (*Copeland’s Chronicle*, 29 Jan. 2004).

Principle 1: The family is the foundational unit that provides stability, well-being and continuity to our society.

Principle 2: Marriage between a man and a woman is the most deliberate approach to the establishment of a family and therefore society should promote and support it.

Principle 3: Commitment, stability and resilience are essential in marriages and all family relationships.

Principle 4: The family’s essential function is that of loving, caring for and nurturing all its members, recognising the need for an equality of well-being among them.

Principle 5: The interests of children are best served when they grow up in a happy, understanding, and safe home created by a loving mother and father supported by the extended inter-generational family/whanau.

Principle 6: Family membership requires a balancing of the rights, duties and responsibilities of each member.

QUESTIONS

1. What do you think about each of the above Principles?
2. Do you have any suggestions as to what other Principles could be added to this list?
3. Using the following verses, summarise what Paul and Peter said about families and family relationships, and why they are so important to our society. Ephesians 5:21 to 6:4; Colossians 3:18-21; 1 Timothy 5:1-8; 1 Peter 3:1-7.
4. More and more we are seeing society move away from Biblical teaching about the family. What are some of the ‘fruit’ from going against God’s principles for the family?
5. What can we do, and what is being done, to restore God’s values for families, and the need to follow His ways?
6. Sadly, many people live in situations which are far from the ideals mentioned above. How can we pray for them, and help them?

PRAYER SUGGESTIONS

- Please pray for families throughout our country – that the very best role models for good families will be upheld and encouraged.
- Pray for all those people who suffer in various ways from ungodly relationships and dysfunctional families.
- Pray that all forms of immorality, addiction, illicit drug use and violence, all of which are so destructive to the family, will decline and people will turn away from these evils.
- Pray that Government, and society as a whole, will do everything possible to encourage and support good, healthy marriages and families.
- Pray against the many destructive influences on families, which are in our land today.

Pillars of Society

2. PILLAR 2: The Church

The Church should be one of the strongest influences on society that there is, after the Lord Himself, and the influence of parents on their children – an influence which should teach their children right from wrong; encourage good character, honesty, and so on.

Because the Church is the Body of Christ and has been given the Word of God to instruct its members, and the power of God's Holy Spirit to live lives that are pleasing to God, based on His Word, there should be a strong influence in society to see it changed for the better by the lives, example and witness of God's people.

Sadly, this is often not the case. In many cases the lives of Christians are very similar to those of the world around them; in fact so similar that the world doesn't see much or any difference, and so they have little or no desire to change for the better.

The government can make laws (or allow behaviour) which are not in the best interests of society. But almost the only way a government enforces its laws is by punishing those who break the law, if they can catch them and succeed in getting a conviction. The powers of government have no ability to change character or provide the means by which a person can be reformed to be the person God wants them to be. Only God can do that, through a person's repentance, forgiveness and the power of God's Spirit at work in the lives of a born again person who follows the Lord and His ways.

This is why the Church, through the teaching, encouragement and support of its members, can be a strong pillar in society for truth and Godly living – provided this is taught both by word and by example, in the churches.

The Bible says a number of important things about those who are willing to follow the Lord, and the blessings such people bring to a nation.

For example:

"Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord." (Psalm 33:12). We may pray, "God defend New Zealand", but our nation has many gods, and, in practice, many people don't believe in any god.

"Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach (shameful) to any people." (Proverbs 14:34).

"If My people, who are called by My name, will humble themselves, and pray, and seek My face, and turn from their wicked way, then I will hear from Heaven, and forgive their

sins, and *heal their land.*" (2 Chronicles 7:14). God's people need to live in the above ways, if we are to see our land healed.

"First of all, then, I urge that supplication, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone – for kings and all who are in high positions, so that we may lead a quiet and peaceful life, in all godliness and dignity. This is right and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour, Who desires everyone to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth." (1 Timothy 2:1-4).

"Seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you ... and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare." (Jeremiah 29:7).

The LORD and His Church

After Peter had confessed that Jesus is 'the Messiah, the Son of the living God', Jesus said, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father in Heaven. You are Peter [which means, a stone] and on this rock [the confession that 'Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of the living God'] I will build My Church and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it." (Matthew 16:15-18)

The Church is built on the Rock foundation (not on sand), and it is built with strong pillars. Therefore it should have a Godly influence on, and in, society.

God is building His Church, here on earth and in every society, and the gates of Hades (death) will never destroy it. However, sometimes people try to build churches their way, not the Lord's way.

The New Testament tells us not only how we can be saved, but also how we, as Christians, should gather together for worship, fellowship, teaching, encouragement, and reaching out to people by witnessing to the Lord; and with the evidence of our changed lives, through what we say and do.

The Church is a body of people, not a building! In the Church and in Christian's lives, the power and presence of God should be evident.

This is summed up in Colossians 1:28, "It is He (Christ) Who we proclaim, warning everyone, and teaching everyone in all wisdom, so that we may present everyone mature in Christ."

And from all this, the Church is to go out into the community, sharing the Good News, encouraging what is good and Godly; living our lives as 'salt' and 'light' to the world (Matthew 5:13-16)

On one occasion, when Jesus saw what was going on amongst the people in the temple as they gathered together (money changers, the buying and selling of animals,

etc), He said, “Is it not written, ‘My house shall be called a House of Prayer for all the nations’? But you have made it a den of robbers.” (Mark 11:17).

A House of Prayer

The first century Church were a praying people; they also saw many miracles and the power of God at work amongst them. The Church – the Body of Christ on earth – is to be a praying people. See 2 Chronicles 7:12-18; Jeremiah 29:7; 1 Timothy 2:1-6; James 5:13-18. Prayer is mentioned 158 times in the New Testament! Prayer draws its power from the Lord, the Head of the Church.

God’s People

In the Beatitudes (Matthew 5:3-12), Jesus mentions nine particular groups of people who are blessed:

- The poor in spirit – theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.
- Those who mourn – they will be comforted.
- The meek – they will inherit the earth.
- Those who hunger and thirst after righteousness – they will be filled.
- The merciful – they will receive mercy.
- The pure in heart – they will see God.
- The peacemakers – they will be called the children of God.
- Those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake – theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.
- Those who are reviled, persecuted and lied about on Jesus’ account – their reward in Heaven is great.

Church – Arise! “Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to Your Father in Heaven!” (Matthew 5:16).

QUESTIONS

1. In what ways is the Church an *influence for good* in today’s society? (Proverbs 29:2)
2. In what ways is the Church a *benefit* to society? (Proverbs 11:10-11)
3. In what ways is, or should, the Church be a *light and salt* in the world? (Matthew 5:13-16)
4. Is the Church really *relevant* in society today?
5. To what extent is the Church truly a “*House of Prayer*”?
6. Do people today see or believe that the Church is a *pillar in society* for the benefit of our people? Why or why not?

PRAYER SUGGESTIONS

- Pray that the Church will be the power and influence in society that God desires it to be.
- Pray for the power of the Holy Spirit to be manifest through God’s leading of the Church, and our obedience to the Lord.

- Pray that our lives will reflect the teaching of the Scriptures so that we demonstrate what we believe, and therefore have a profound influence on the people and society around us.
- Pray that people will see the blessings which the Church brings to society, and will more and more embrace Christ and His ways.
- Pray that God will raise up an army of intercessors in our country.
- Pray that intercessors will keep their eyes on the Lord; pray as the Holy Spirit leads; stand strong in His strength and wisdom; and not try to stand or pray in their own strength.
- Pray that our prayers will be fervent, effective and will prevail, supporting and uplifting all that which is good.

Pillars of Society

3. AUTHORITY

All authority is ultimately in God's hands, as He rules over all. "The Lord has established His throne in the heavens, and His Kingdom rules over all" (Psalm 103:19). This is wonderful to know! However, it doesn't exempt us from praying for the world around us (including our own nation) and doing what we can, to see it changed for the better!

As far as leaders are concerned, "The king's heart is a stream of water in the hand of the Lord, and He turns it wherever He will." (Proverbs 21:1). Again, this does not mean that we aren't part of what God may be doing.

After king Nebuchadnezzar's dream about the great statue, the Lord reveal to Daniel what it meant. Then Daniel prayed and said, "Blessed be the name of God from age to age, for wisdom and power are His. He changes times and seasons, deposes kings and sets up kings. He gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to those who have understanding. He reveals deep and hidden things. He knows what is in the darkness, and light dwells with Him. To You, O God of my ancestors, I give thanks and praise, for You have given me wisdom and power, and have now revealed to me what we asked of You; for You have revealed to us what the king ordered." (Daniel 2:20-23). The vision Nebuchadnezzar had, involved his kingdom, the Medo-Persian empire which would follow, then the Greek and Roman empires, and then the end of these empires and the coming of the Kingdom of God on earth when Jesus came into the world to transform people's lives forever.

What an encouragement to know that as we seek God and are willing to be used by Him, there is a divine-human relationship that can affect changes in our lives, society, and the world.

Jesus said, "All authority in Heaven and on Earth has been given to Me" (Matthew 28:18). Isaiah 9:6-7 also says, "Authority rests on His (Jesus') shoulders ... His authority shall grow continually ..."

Proverbs 29:2 says, "When the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice; but when the wicked rule, the people groan."

We need to pray and work towards seeing righteous people in authority and not the wicked. We can all see, and have all seen, what wickedness can do in our world, and what a blessing Godliness is.

As well as the Lord being in supreme authority, there are also human authorities in various areas of our society. These include authorities in the: **Family, Church,**

Government and its subsidiary departments, **Law and Justice**, **Employers**, and other institutions we choose to be a part of.

Family: In the family, children are to respect and honour their parents. The parents are also to love, teach, discipline and raise them in a God-honouring family. (See Ephesians 5:21 to 6:4).

Church: In the church we should honour one another and have respect for those who are in leadership in the church. See, for example, 1 Corinthians 12:12-31 and Hebrews 13:17.

Government: Specific references regarding secular Government in a country include Romans 13:1-7; 1 Timothy 2:1-4; Titus 3:1-2 and 1 Peter 2:13-17. There are also references to paying taxes (!) in Luke 20:21-25 and Romans 13:6-7. These verses imply good government, as distinct from ungodly laws, a corrupt government, or one which suppresses or is opposed to Christians living God's way. There may come a time when Christians will have to say, "We must obey God rather than man", when God's laws conflict with the laws of the land (Acts 4:19-20, 27-31; 5:29). Praise God that many countries live under governments which are democratic and have basically good laws.

Ultimately, the best government is founded on God's government and principles, but because we live in a fallen human world, and most of our people and leaders are not Christians, our government is imperfect. Christians should always encourage what is good and the ways of God, but there will always be laws which permit or forbid certain ways of living. Christians are free to do what is right in God's eyes; in a sense non-Christians can "do what they like" but may suffer the consequences, even if they are not caught breaking the laws of the land. We, Christians, as disciples or followers of Jesus, seek to obey the Lord and His ways – and receive His blessings as a result.

An interesting parallel between ways Christians are called to live, and the ways of a secular country is as follows. Note that in the Old Testament, Israel had both Priests and Kings, and their roles were quite separate.

Church	State
Christian	Secular
The Lord	Rulers
Spiritual law	Moral law

Christians live in a **State**, with **Secular** laws; under **Rulers** (whoever is the highest authority – King, Queen, President, etc); and with the **Moral** law. But Christians also live under the ultimate authority of the Lord – the King of kings – and under His spiritual laws, as well as living under the secular and moral laws of their country.

We therefore need to be subject to those in authority over us, except where this conflicts with God's rule, in which case "we must obey God" rather than a secular rule which prohibits this.

Christians also need to be salt and light in the world and society in which we live, and, as Jesus said, "Let your light so shine before people that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in Heaven." (Matthew 5:16)

Law and Justice: Because of the separation of Justice from Government (that is, Justice as the implementation of the Law as set by the Government, and punishment for those who break the Law), Justice should not be interfered with, by whatever Government is in power. Justice has the role of enforcing *the Law as it stands* (which may, of course, be altered by the Government from time to time). The Justice system (the Law Courts and judges) therefore have a very important role in enforcing the authority of the country's Laws. Good laws should encourage people to do what is right and discourage (punish), those who do what is wrong.

Employers and other organisations: Finally, other areas of authority include the authority of the leaders of whatever business we work for, and any other organisation we belong to which has rules of membership.

In Ephesians 6:5-9, today, the "slaves—masters" relationship can be seen as the equivalent of the "employees—employers" relationship!

QUESTIONS

1. To what extent does God rule over the affairs of nations, and to what extent does He allow them to do what they choose? (God's dealing with nations, including Israel, in Old Testament times, may help answer this question).
2. What do we mean when we refer to a good (or bad) government?
3. What influence does the Church have in society today? What influence *should* it have?
4. In what ways can parents have a good influence over their children in areas of authority and punishment?
5. How do the Church, Christians, the Lord and spiritual laws relate to the State, secular society, rulers and moral laws?
6. What are some ways in which good authority operates, and what are some ways in which bad authority operates?

PRAYER SUGGESTIONS

Please pray regarding **Authority in general:**

- For Godly leadership in our nation, who will have God's authority and blessing on them.
- That people will recognise the need to obey God rather than people, when these are in conflict.

- That Christians will be exemplary in upholding and obeying that which is good and right.
- That people will encourage their leaders to uphold what is righteous (Proverbs 29:2).
- That people will recognise that God's ways are right, and that obedience to them will bring the greatest blessing to any country.
- "First of all, I urge that ... intercessions ... be made for ... all who are in authority, *so that we may lead quiet and peaceful lives with all Godliness and dignity*" (1 Timothy 2:1-2). Pray for this to occur!

Please pray regarding **Authority of Government**:

- Those who are over us, in positions of leadership and Government: Prime Minister, Deputy Prime Minister, Party Leaders, Cabinet Ministers, all other Members of Parliament – and the advice they are given by Government Departments.
- That God will raise up good and righteous leaders who will fulfil His purposes for our country.
- That bad leadership will be changed or removed.
- That Christians will pray for, and support, their leaders in everything good that they seek to do.
- That Christians will be given wisdom and authority in speaking against those things which are wrong.
- That Christians will be good, law-abiding citizens who do not resist the right use of authority.

Pillars of Society

4. RIGHTEOUSNESS

The Bible has a lot to say about righteousness. In fact, the words “righteous”, “righteousness” and “upright” occur about 540 times in the Bible, so they are obviously very important words, and very important with regard to our behaviour!

Righteousness is a quality of the life of a righteous person. It involves right living – “right”, not by human standards, but by **God’s** standards. It is God Who determines what is right and what is wrong; what is righteous and what is unrighteous. On the whole, the laws of many nations roughly reflect what is good and right as God defines these words.

Righteousness should be very evident in both the Church as a whole, and in individual Christians’ lives. Of course, we do not always do what is right – because we all sin at times, but churches should be unique communities of people who seek to live by God’s righteous standards and seek to deal with sin quickly when it does occur. While the Bible says that “There is no-one that is righteous, no, not one” (Psalm 14:1-3; Romans 3:10), nevertheless this is the life which every Christian should be seeking to live, as disciples (followers) of Jesus Christ. Our righteousness is in Christ (Philipp-ians 3:9) and as we live His way, and repent of all unrighteousness, we can stand before God as righteous through Christ’s sacrificial death on the cross – our Substitute and our example!

The book of Romans

Paul, in Romans, talks a lot about righteousness and unrighteousness:

- Righteousness comes from God (1:1-17)
- Unrighteousness in all humanity (1:18 – 3:20)
- Righteousness is imputed to us – justification (3:21 – 5:21)
- Righteousness is imparted to us – our sanctification (6:1 – 8:39)
- Righteousness vindicated (9:1 – 11:36)
- Righteousness practiced (12:1 – 15:13)

Righteousness, and its blessings, not only apply to individuals, but can also affect communities, cities and nations.

Proverbs 14:34 says, *“Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach [shameful] to any people.”* Just as a person will be blessed by obedience to God, so too a nation will know blessing to the degree to which its people seek to live rightly, and the laws of the land uphold righteous ways. God knows what is best for us; righteous ways are both good for us and also pleasing to Him. God’s blessing and favour are upon those who live righteously.

Proverbs 11:10-11 says, *“When it goes well with the righteous, the city rejoices; and when the wicked perish, there is jubilation. A city is exalted by the blessing of the upright, but it is overthrown by the mouth of the wicked.”*

Proverbs 28:12, 28 say, *“When the righteous triumph, there is great glory; but when the wicked prevail, people go into hiding; ... when the wicked perish, the righteous increase.”*

Proverbs 29:2, 16 say, *“When the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice; but when the wicked rule, the people groan. ... When the wicked are in authority, transgression increases, but the righteous will look upon their downfall.”*

The above verses all show the importance of righteousness in a city or land. This is why prayer, and Godly example, are so important for our nation.

What is right and righteous?

The whole Bible is about what is right (righteous) and what is wrong (unrighteous). God created Adam and Eve as perfect in His eyes. But they disobeyed Him and were cast out of the Garden of Eden. Their first child, Cain, killed his brother Abel. And so, through the rest of the Bible, we read of good and evil – the blessings of God coming on those who were righteous (like Abraham), and judgement coming on people, cities and nations which rebelled against God (like Sodom and Gomorrah).

Again, throughout the whole Bible God makes His ways known to people. Some of these passages include:

Galatians 5:16-26 which compares the works of the flesh (ungodliness) with the fruit of the Spirit.

Matthew chapters 5-7. The Sermon on the Mount, including the nine Beatitudes and their blessings (5:3-12).

Philippians 4:8-9, “Whatever is true, honourable, just, pure, pleasing [to God], and commendable – if there is any excellence and anything worthy of praise – think about these things!”

Jesus summed up the whole Law and the prophets in these words: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your mind, with all your soul, and with all your strength; and you shall love your neighbour [other people] as you love yourself.” (Mark 12:30-31)

Righteousness is doing these things, and it brings blessing to the righteous.

Unrighteousness is rebelling against these things, and it brings judgement.

But, praise God, there is forgiveness to a person or a nation which repents, asks God’s forgiveness, and turns from its wicked ways. (2 Chronicles 7:14)

What does upright mean?

Upright is another word for righteous, usually used in modern translations of the Bible. An upright person lives their life the right way up! That is, they live as God would have them live – looking up to Him and obeying what He says.

What does holiness mean?

God said, “Be holy, for I am holy” (1 Peter 1:15-16). Holiness is being set apart from unrighteousness and being declared “holy” by a holy God. This comes by means of the cleansing of Jesus’ blood, the determination to follow Him and His ways, and by the power of His Spirit.

Purity is the life we seek to live in obedience to the Lord – a life which is pure, Godly and blessed!

QUESTIONS

1. Who defines what is “right” and “righteous”?
2. What results can we expect if we seek to always live as God wants us to live?
3. Can cities or nations be “righteous”? Why or why not?
4. What blessings come to a city or nation which has righteous leaders and rulers?
5. What are some examples in the Bible of God’s judgement on wickedness in society, and God’s blessing when people are obedient to Him?
6. What does **Psalm 15** say about righteousness?
7. What do the following verses say about righteousness:
Psalms 85:10-13; 89:14; 97:2
Jeremiah 23:5-6
Hebrews 1:9
1 Peter 3:12
2 Peter 3:11-13

PRAYER SUGGESTIONS

Please pray:

- That Christians will see the importance of living righteous lives – not “self-righteous” but living by the power of God and exhibiting Godly Christian character and witness.
- That churches will see the importance of teaching and upholding righteousness before their people as the way which is pleasing to God, which brings blessing to the people, and is a powerful witness in the community.
- That the laws of our country will be righteous laws, in accordance with God’s principles, not man’s. That people will reject unrighteousness, and that unrighteous laws will be overturned.
- That those things which are good and right and proper in God’s eyes will be upheld as the standards in our communities and that unrighteousness will be dealt with.

Pillars of Society

5. WELFARE

Often, when we hear the word “Gospel” (Good News) we think of our salvation and what Jesus has done in order that we might be saved. Of course, this is the primary meaning of the word. However, the Bible (including the New Testament) has much to say, not only about our spiritual needs, but also our welfare as a whole – body, soul and spirit.

God is concerned about our material needs, and the needs of other people, as well as our spiritual needs. The welfare of all its people is an important pillar in any nation.

The word “welfare” means to “fare well”. In the old days when people said Goodbye they would say, “Fare ye well” – that is, may you be well, and do well, in every way. Paul wrote, “May the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely; and may your *spirit* and *soul* and *body* be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.” (1 Thessalonians 5:23). Jesus also said, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your *heart, soul, mind* and *strength* ... You shall love your neighbour as yourself” (Mark 12:30-31). Everyone needs to be loved by words and by actions!

So, using our *bodies* to serve the Lord, and to bless others, is also important; not just our prayers, church attendance and reading the Bible – good and essential though they are.

Jesus demonstrated the need to seek after people’s welfare physically, as well as spiritually, when He fed the hungry, raised the dead, healed the sick, restored rejected people and outcasts, and so on. He cared about their welfare in *body*, as well as in *spirit* and *soul*.

The parables of the Good Samaritan, and the Prodigal Son, also showed His care for the physical needs and welfare of people, as well as spiritual needs.

God used Joseph, in Old Testament times, to help Egypt and Israel in the time of famine; He also provided for Israel’s physical needs as they journeyed for 40 years through the desert, to the Promised Land.

In the New Testament, the words welfare, poor, needy, outcast, hungry, widows and orphans, etc., are used many times to show love and concern for the welfare of people. For example, see Matthew 25:35-45 where Jesus says, “I was hungry and you gave Me food; thirsty and you gave Me something to drink ...” When? “Just as you did it for one of the least of these, My people, you did it to Me.”

Acts 2:44-47; 4:32-37; 6:1-4 all speak of how the early Church operated in terms of people sharing with the poor, needy and widows – that is, they cared for their physical welfare as well as their spiritual welfare.

In fact, Paul says that “anyone who does not provide for their relatives, and especially for family members, has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever” (1 Timothy 5:8)

Welfare needs

Some of the areas in which welfare is commonly needed are: financial (poverty); unemployment; homelessness; poor health; disability; needing safety, care and protection; abuse; loneliness, and so on.

At another level, there are the welfare needs for people facing: drug and other addictions; work and home pressures; depression; hopelessness; neglect or rejection; boredom, and so on. See Isaiah 1:17 and James 1:27, for example.

The role of government

The purpose of good government is the welfare of the people. Government does not exist to serve itself or to rule over people for the sake of ruling – it is there to serve the people, to look after their welfare, and to help bring about a good, ordered, decent society: “... so that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life, in all Godliness and dignity” (1 Timothy 2:1-3). The two pillars of **good government** and **social welfare**, are very important. An interesting thought comes out of the story of Samson and the two pillars (Judges 16:23-30) – when this strong man destroyed the two pillars, the whole house collapsed, and it destroyed those people who were under its covering!

Jeremiah 29:7 says, “Seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for *in its welfare you will find your welfare.*”

Nehemiah 1:2-4 says, “I asked them about the Jews that survived, those who had escaped the captivity, and about Jerusalem. They replied, ‘The survivors there in the province who escaped captivity are in great trouble and shame; the wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates have been destroyed by fire.’ When I heard these words, I sat down and wept, and mourned for days, fasting and praying before the God of Heaven.”

Of course, government represents the people, but government has little influence unless the people respond in the right way. We cannot leave everything for the government to do; we must do our part in seeking the welfare of our people too.

- We need to seek the welfare of people in their physical needs, as well as mental, social and spiritual needs.
- We need to seek to help people financially; and those who are lonely, unemployed, abused, neglected or who have special needs.

- We need to pray for those people who assist our society in many different ways, such as police, social welfare, medics, fire brigade, ambulance, search and rescue, and so on.

The Church also has a special role to play in helping people socially as well as spiritually. Christians and Christian organisations can do a lot to help the welfare of our communities and society as a whole.

The **welfare** and **wholeness** of society and our country has untold benefit to us all. We need to pray for these areas and do whatever we can to help in these ways.

QUESTIONS

1. What is the difference between good health and wholeness?
2. What can the Church do, and what is it already doing, by way of people's welfare? What is my church doing? What am I doing?
3. What are some of the *causes* of people needing welfare support?
4. How can we help to minimise these causes and their effects?
5. What is my church doing to help in the welfare of its needy members?
6. Who do I know that I could help?

PRAYER SUGGESTIONS

- Pray for the welfare of the town, city or district in which you live.
- Pray for the welfare of all New Zealand's citizens and visitors.
- Pray especially for those who are disadvantaged by poverty, sickness, disability, poor upbringing, unemployment, etc.
- Our welfare includes body, soul and spirit. Pray for the spiritual welfare, through salvation, of those people who do not yet know the Lord.
- Pray for God's protection over us, morally, spiritually, from "natural" disasters, and attacks of the enemy (both spiritually and physically).
- Let us also remember to give thanks for, and pray for, all those people who risk their lives for the welfare of people in need: for those people associated with the Fire, Ambulance and Police services, Civil Defence and other rescue workers such as lifeguards, search and rescue, etc.

Pillars of Society

6. JUSTICE

“I swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. So help me God.”

The above used to be the oath that a person would swear in court before giving evidence in a court case. It relies on the assumptions that:

- I know the truth.
- I know the whole truth.
- I will not say anything which is untrue.

Essentially, justice depends on the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth – plus a fair, discerning jury, and a wise and just judge.

Jesus said, “Do not judge by *appearances*, but judge with right judgement.” (John 7:24). Discernment is required.

Other important factors, in order for justice to be done, are that the decision made is fair to the victim; and that the punishment is reasonable and fair, and seeks to encourage the offender to not commit such an offence again.

Justice and penalties for wrong-doing are not just to appease the victim and punish the guilty but to protect the innocent and help reform the guilty (dissuade them from repeating the offence). What can we do to help the person who has been wronged? What can we do to help the offender see the error of their ways and not repeat the offence?

These, then, are foundations of a just (righteous) society.

God is a just Judge. He, and He alone, knows the Truth, and the whole Truth, and speaks nothing but the Truth. He also knows what is error. Hence, His judgements are just.

He also understands the suffering of those who are victims, and He knows the best way for the guilty offender to be restored – through repentance, confession of wrong-doing, and a determination (with God’s help) not to repeat what was done wrong.

Jesus came into the world for these very things. He came to show us what is right and true. He came to pay the penalty for our offences. The Holy Spirit came to “convict us of sin, righteousness and judgement” (John 16:8). Jesus also sent the Holy Spirit to give us the power to live a Godly and righteous life, and so bear witness to the fruitfulness of faith in Him.

Jesus didn't come into the world to condemn the world, but to bring salvation from condemnation. We all deserve condemnation because we have all sinned and come short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23). The judgement for our sins is separation from a holy and just God. But Jesus came to pay the penalty for our sins so that we are reconciled to God and can spend eternity with God, rather than eternal separation from Him.

Justice in society

So, justice and truth in our society are very closely linked, both in general and also in Law.

Justice in society means doing what is right (in God's eyes), being fair, impartial (not biased or prejudiced), and supportive of all that is good and beneficial. 'Prejudice' means 'pre-justice' – that is, making a decision before we know all the facts – assuming a person or group of people are wrong, without knowing the whole truth.

Justice also implies that **we are just**, for how can we judge someone for the "speck in their eye" when we have a "log in our own eye"? (Matthew 7:1-5). We all make judgements every day, but do we "examine our own hearts" before we make such judgements and decisions based on those judgements?

Paul, writing to the Christians in Ephesus, writes of the 'Armour of God' and the 'Weapons of our Warfare' against the attacks of the evil one (Ephesians 6:10-18). One of the pieces of our armour – part of our defence against the deceptions and temptations of Satan – is for us to wear the 'belt (girdle) of truth'. The belt stops us from being tripped up and falling because of the clothing we wear.

For further study

The words *justice*, *judge* or *judgement*, occur in 253 verses of the Bible, especially in the books of Psalms and Proverbs. Note that the words "just" and "justice" are often translated "righteous" (right living or upright), and "righteousness", respectively.

Some of the Scriptures relating to these topics, for further reference and study are:

Psalms 72:1-2; 89:14; Proverbs 2:8-9; 16:10; 18:5; 19:28; 29:4, 14; Isaiah 58:6; Micah 6:8.

QUESTIONS

1. In what ways are justice and truth related?
2. How do we discern between what is true and what is false?
3. What things can hinder justice from being done?
4. How does, or should, justice relate to the victim, and also to the offender?
5. What are some common prejudices in our society today?

6. Are there injustices in the Church today? If so, what are some of them?
7. What are the key points in the verses given in the section '**For further study**'?

PRAYER SUGGESTIONS

Please pray for:

- **Justice in our land.** This begins with our Members of Parliament and those who draft and write our laws (the “lawmakers”) – please pray for them and for laws which are just and right.
- **Justice in the courts.** Pray for judges and juries who must make decisions based on what they hear. Pray that justice will be done – that the innocent will be found to be innocent and the guilty will be found to be guilty. Pray for just and wise decisions to be made in the sentencing of those who are guilty.
- **Justice for the poor** and those who are wrongfully discriminated against in our society.
- **Justice in the workplace,** for both employers and employees.
- **Justice in society,** that there will not be unfair discrimination and prejudice, for example, prejudice based on race. *Note:* This does not mean that we don't discriminate between good and evil! Some people who persistently do what is wrong may well feel discriminated against!
- **Justice in the home and family.**

Pillars of Society

7. EDUCATION

Education is a very powerful influence on people's lives, especially young people. Proverbs 22:6 says, "Train up a child in the way he should go and when he is old he will not depart from it."

Today, our secular world is quite often at variance with godly principles. For example, Philippians 4:8-9 encourages us to think about, learn and practice those things which are true, honourable, just, pure, pleasing [to God], commendable, excellent and worthy of praise – things which build up society and are pleasing to God. How far we have fallen from these principles for living!

WAYS OF LEARNING

There are a number of ways in which people learn. Some of these are subtle ways that we are not particularly conscious of; others are obvious and/or chosen ways. For example:

Home and family: The earliest, and possibly the most powerful, ways are through the home (or homes) and family (or families) that we are raised in. There are families in which children are raised by their two parents in a loving home in which they are taught good ways of living. There are sole-parent families, adopted families, families in which there is abuse between parents or between parents and children, and many other ways of family living – some desirable, some less desirable, and others that are far from desirable.

Schooling: Similarly, schooling can have a major influence on the lives of children. What children are taught; the examples given by teachers; and the influence of other children, have life-forming influences on how children are raised and on their ways of living.

Society as a whole: Apart from family and schools, another major way in which people learn or live is by what they see, and the influences and pressures of the society in which they live – whether good or bad. The pressures to conform with the norms of society (good or bad), the influences of friends, and so on, have a major impact on the choices we make and how we live.

The media: People spend a huge amount of time learning from the media they see. Online media, television, films, videos, radio, as well as books and magazines, have an influence on our thinking and consequently the lifestyle we choose (or which develops as a result of what we see and hear).

Experience: Experience can be a great blessing or a hard teacher. Some experiences have a life-changing impact on us, for better or for worse. Child abuse, violence, extreme hatred, terror, malicious slander, deception, etc., on the one hand; and sacrificial support and love, great examples of how we should live, generosity, and so on, on the other hand, are all things which we may experience at any age. These can profoundly affect the way we think and behave, or cause life-long hurts and changes to the way we feel about ourselves, think about and treat others, etc.

The ideal

“Train up young people (say, below 20 years of age) in the ways they should go ...” Probably the most important stage in a person’s life, in terms of lifestyle, character changes and the setting of lifestyle behaviours, is in their first 20 or so years. Their upbringing as infants and children, and the strong influences on them in their teenage years, tend to set lifelong patterns of behaviour.

The Bible teaches us that the ideal is for:

- Born again, Godly, loving and caring Christian parents who will lead their children by example and by teaching. Teaching must be backed up by Godly example, otherwise it becomes hypocritical – and children will recognise this! Children need to be taught the Word of God and its wisdom and teachings – especially (but not only) the New Testament. Spiritual, moral and social teaching and example, need to be given. They also need to be taught and shown the importance of Christian fellowship – church.
- As they grow up to be adolescents, the importance of not only family, but also friends, becomes extremely important. Children need to learn to discern what is good and what is evil; and to choose what is good, and resist and turn from evil. Major areas of growth will include spiritually (relationship with God), morally (including sexually), social behaviour, mentally (attitudes, which lead to actions).
- Is all this too late? The above may be ‘ideal’ but it is impossible to practice it as it should! God knows this, and He has provided the ‘way of escape’ from its consequences. Faith in Jesus Christ, the salvation He brings, and the power of His Holy Spirit, can help people grow in the love, knowledge and ways of God, and how to walk in them. Parents of children who are not following the Lord and His ways, can still pray for them, love them, care for them, show interest in them and do what they can possibly do to seek their salvation and regeneration.

Teach, by word and by example. **Educate**, in the ways of God. **Pray**, for their salvation. **Love**, in the grace, wisdom and ways of God. **Commit** them into God’s hands.

QUESTIONS

1. What is meant by “teaching by precept and example”?
2. Why is this so important?
3. How can we learn to discern between good and evil?
4. What can we do about evil influences?
5. Why is salvation (regeneration) so important?
6. What can I do if my teaching has been rejected?

PRAYER SUGGESTIONS

Please pray for:

- Christian education: Christian-based schools, Colleges, Bible Schools and Bible training places.
- A strong Christian influence in education, at all levels.
- Organisations which encourage high quality education.
- Godly parents, school teachers, Boards of Trustees members, people in the Ministry of Education.
- Teaching that is true, pure, and consistent with God’s ways.
- Against all evil influences: all those things which undermine truth, good morals, unselfishness, etc.
- Children to discern right from wrong, good from evil, truth from error; and that they will, by God’s grace, reject what is wrong and follow after what is right.
- A Godly Christian influence in schools through Christian teachers, students and Christian groups.
- People who can clearly present the Christian worldview and Christian ethics in a way which will speak into many people’s lives and persuade them of the importance of following God’s ways.
- Strong Christian leadership at all levels of society, including strong Christian leaders who will speak into their own racial groups.

Pillars of Society

8. MEDIA

How can [young] people keep their way pure? By guarding themselves according to God's Word. "With my whole heart I seek You Lord; don't let me stray from Your commands. I treasure your Word in my heart so that I will not sin against You." See Psalm 119:9-11.

These days, people are "bombed" by the media – by an ever-increasing amount of exposure to the media, for example, through advertising and many other ways where we are confronted by it even when we aren't interested in what it is telling us.

We are constantly absorbing information from many sources – most of which have an influence on our thinking, ideas and beliefs. The power of these "influences" is probably much greater than we are generally aware of. "Where did I get that idea?" "What makes me think this way, either consciously or unconsciously?" "What biases am I absorbing from the media?" "How is my thinking being 'controlled' by what I see, hear and read?"

Probably the major sources of ideas and influences are through media such as:

- **Written media** – especially newspapers, magazines and books.
- **Verbal media** – such as radio, public speakers, forums, etc.
- **Visual media** – television, films.
- **Internet** – numerous sources of media information (or misinformation!)
- **Social media** – where anyone and everyone can express their ideas and communicate with the world.
- **Digital media** – in this digital age, through which all of the above occur.

"Media" itself is neutral

Of course, the media is neutral, in the sense that it is not good or bad in itself. But it has the potential to be something that is extremely useful (we "couldn't live without it" these days) *and* it also has the potential to be easily misused, in undesirable and very unhealthy ways.

Like the tree of the **knowledge** of **GOOD** and **EVIL** (Genesis 2:15-17 and 3:1-6), so the media, like many other things, can bring good as well as bad to the world.

God created all things good, but we have corrupted many things, just as Adam and Eve disobeyed God and ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, hence bringing into the world the potential for things which are good but can also be used for evil.

The media can be used for good *and* evil – godly things or ungodly ones; to spread truth, deception, lies or bias; good and helpful things as well as bad influences. For example: morality and immorality; love and hatred; peace and violence; unity and disunity; plus extremism, censorship of right opinions, and biased influences.

News media and Advertising

Selective reporting by the **media** (what they *want* to report, but not necessarily the rest or “the other side” of the story) strongly influences what we believe and therefore how we feel and react. After all, almost everything we know (good, bad or indifferent) comes through what we see or hear. Most of our opinions are based on this. The importance of this fact is often overlooked, especially when we feel we have a “balanced view” of the true situation.

Much of what we believe, and how we think about other people or situations, is based on what we see and hear. Morality, for example, is strongly influenced by all types of media.

Advertising also usually selects the things that may influence us to buy something, or what we ‘should’ do, versus not buying a competitor’s product, or doing something else.

So what we desire, or want, or “must have” is strongly influenced by advertising, and some of this advertising may use very subtle or misleading psychology.

Christian use of the media

On the positive side, the media is open to the Christian community to use and to share the Gospel, to have Christian content on all aspects of the Christian life, plus the teaching of the Scriptures, the life of Christ, and what it means to be His follower.

Secular media may also be used for Christian purposes. Christian comment on world affairs, and what other people believe, can also be broadcast through the media.

As Christians we should do all we can to encourage Christian use of the media. We also need to be very careful, as Christians, that what we broadcast is true, true to the Scriptures and honouring to the Lord. In no way do we want to bring disrepute to the Christian faith – even though Christians things will be opposed and attacked by many who are in the world, and by the powers of darkness which seek to silence the Christian message and find ways to discredit them, Christians and the Church.

Some relevant Scriptures

Matthew 7:17-18; Luke 6:45; Romans 12:9, 21; Philippians 4:8-9; 1 John 4:5-6.

QUESTIONS

1. In what ways is the media used to the benefit of people, and in what ways can it be harmful?
2. How can we be more discerning about what we believe from the media? How can people be kept from deception and lies?
3. Is the media really “neutral”? In what ways are they, and in what ways are they not?
4. How can we avoid becoming “brainwashed” by what we hear and read in the media?
5. How can media advertising be used for good purposes, and used in a harmful way?
6. In what ways do you think the Christian world is using the media well? In what ways do you think it lacks, and what can be done about this?
7. What can we do about direct and indirect attacks on the Christian faith, that come through the media?
8. What can we do about the strong and insidious effects on morality which come through the media?

PRAYER SUGGESTIONS

- That Christians will make full use of the media to share the Gospel in spite of possible opposition. Pray for all Christians who are involved in media production and broadcasts.
- That the Christian use of the media will be pleasing to the Lord, and proclaim the truth.
- That people will come to the Lord and be taught His Word and His ways through the media.
- That the world's use of the media will be such that truth is always more important than scandal, gossip, suggestive accusations, or things which are immoral or degrading.
- That high standards will be set for the media, to protect against things which are harmful to people, families and society as a whole.
- That people will not be deceived by things they hear or see but will come to know the truth.

Pillars of Society

9. BUSINESS

The subjects of 'Business' and 'the Workplace' are extremely broad and complex, but we need to pray about them from time to time, whether we are directly involved or because they cover our national economy and our personal working life, finances, and so on.

"Business" probably plays a more important role in our lives and society than many of us think. It plays an important role timewise, in our income and expenditure, our desires, skills, interests and hopes!

The pillar of "Business", referred to below, includes our employment, work, economics, financial matters, industry, farming, science and technology, and so on. It involves money, which we can't live without! It has input into our feeling of self-worth and satisfaction.

While "Business" may not sound a very "spiritual" matter to be concerned with, or pray about, it plays a very important part in society – and one in which everyone is involved, for better or for worse, depending on how this area of our society is run.

The following topics include some of the broad issues related to business – issues concerning which we need to pray. Most of these issues are good in themselves, but may be used for undesirable, wrong or criminal purposes. We can use many things for both good and evil; we need to make sure that good prevails, and that we do what we can to minimise the inevitable wrongdoing.

"Business", in the broad sense of the word, is far more extensive and complex than what is mentioned below, but these are some important areas about which we can pray.

Most of the following issues are not easy to measure or to resolve, but some of the principles of good business are mentioned below. We should pray for what is good and fair, and pray concerning major areas in society where these values are not being upheld.

Employers and employees

Our world today is very different from that in Biblical days, but the nearest equivalent today to the Biblical 'masters and servants' would be employers, managers and employees. (Today, we still talk about "public servants", although not about our "masters"!)

The Bible has much to say about money, working, relationships within employment and, of course, the principles of Godly ethics and behaviour, which should

apply to the Business world, and especially to Christians and their behaviour in the world of business and employment.

See Ephesians 6:5-9; Colossians 3:22 – 4:1; Titus 2:9-10

Apart from people who are self-employed and have no employees, broadly speaking there are three “groups” of people involved in business. These are:

- owners and shareholders of the business.
- employers (if the business is not managed by the owners).
- employees.

Ideally, all three groups should work together in ethical and fair ways, in the interests and for the welfare of all three groups. However, if there are owners, directors, or employers, or employees who work in undesirable or wrong ways, this will inevitably have its impact on the business and will not be in the best interests of either the business, those who work in it, or customers.

Some of the areas which need to be considered, and prayed about, include:

1. Ethical practices

A business may well prosper, but it may involve unethical practices by owners, employers and/or employees. Some major ethical values that relate especially to business (but are also general ethical issues in all areas of society) include the following points.

See Proverbs 11:1; Ephesians 4:28

2. Fairness

There needs to be fairness at all levels of the business – fairness between what the owners, employers and employees do and what benefits they receive; how they are respected and treated by others in the business, and so on. It is obviously not good if some people are cheated or unfairly treated in other ways. Each person should be paid “fairly” for what they do – though this is always difficult to determine! “Slave labour” – people paid grossly under what they should be – is not ethical. Also, the balance between profit and wages is important.

See 1 Corinthians 3:8; 2 Corinthians 8:13-15

3. Financial expectations

Owners, shareholders, employers, those in leading roles, and other employees, all have their expectations and “right” to expect to receive what is fair and just – including fair pay and reasonable profit. The whole area of Finance is a major area in which there are many points of view, for many reasons, but the areas of fairness for all concerned, honesty and good work at all levels, should be a major component.

See Romans 4:4; James 5:4-5

4. Honesty

Honesty, both within the business, between people involved in the business, and in dealing with the public, is obviously one ethical issue which should occur; tragically it

often does not, and sometimes there is very serious dishonesty – which can occur at any of the levels of responsibility in the business.

See Luke 16:1-6

5. Work well done

Every person in the business is (and should be) expected to work well – not do careless or shoddy work, avoid work, waste time unnecessarily, and so on. Those who purchase goods and services expect (and should expect) things to be well done.

See Proverbs 24:30-34; Ecclesiastes 9:10a; 2 Thessalonians 3:6-13

6. Working conditions

Sometimes these may be far from desirable, but may be unavoidable. However, as far as possible, workers' work conditions should be reasonable. Poor conditions, in order to make more profit, is usually unfair on workers.

7. Generosity and genuine care for other people are major principles in a fair, just and caring society, where people help one another for the benefit of all its people. The same is also true of good businesses.

See 2 Corinthians 8:13-15

8. Other situations

There are, of course, many other areas of business that are important. The following are some of them:

- Employment contracts.
- Management and mismanagement of staff.
- Laying off, or sacking, staff.
- Industrial relations and Unions.
- Strikes.
- Relationships between businesses, the public and the Government.
- Exploitation.
- Unemployment.

Interestingly, many of these issues are mentioned in the Bible – both Old and New Testaments! The Bible is a *very practical* guideline for all areas of life, not just “spiritual” issues. Ethical issues are discussed in many places, and most of the above are areas where ethical practices are taught. The best practices, the best society, and the best businesses will all follow principles which are consistent with God’s Word – because God knows what is best for us all, our society and our world!

Obviously, what has been said above is very generalised and does not apply to all situations. For example, small businesses and large ones will differ greatly in what can and should be done. But obviously we need to optimise the running of businesses in an honest and fair way.

Biblical teaching

The Bible has a lot to say about: masters and servants, money, labourers, toil, work, laziness, wages, cheating, wealth, poverty, fairness, etc. Especially for Christians in business, or the workforce, see Philippians 4:8-9 and 2 Peter 1:5-8. These topics can be studied further by using a concordance or electronic word-search. Proverbs is also a good book to read, concerning these matters.

QUESTIONS

1. Why should Christians pray for political, business or workplace issues?
2. What other verses in the Bible can you think of which have a bearing on Business and Workplace issues?
3. What are some other Christian ethical issues which need to be applied to Business and Workplace areas?
4. Discuss what you think about the statement: "Good ethical practices in Business and in Government are of vital importance to the welfare of society."
5. If you are in paid employment, what areas of your work do you consider to be well organized and run? About what areas do you have major concerns? What could you do about these concerns (as well as praying about them)?
6. What are some ethical principles that should be applied to the "**Other situations**" mentioned above (number 8)?

PRAYER SUGGESTIONS

- Many situations and ethical values are mentioned in this study. Please pray about these, especially as they apply to your workplace, to business in general and to our Government.
- Pray concerning the issues of greed (excessive profit), deception (how products and services are advertised, and the claims made), the manner in which a business is run, and how its employees are treated, etc.
- Pray for good, productive businesses, which are essential in any society.
- Pray for people and government to support businesses which are run under ethical practices, for the benefit of the country and people's welfare.
- Pray over the issues of unemployment; unhealthy or unsafe work practices; and businesses forced to close because of lack of finance, staff or other pressures.

Pillars of Society

10. CULTURE

Culture is a blend of customs in our society, or in our home, neighbourhood or even in our own personal lives. *It is the way we live.* Our **customs** are what people are **accustomed** to (or expect) because they are **customary**. How we usually **act** or **react** – our **actions** and usual ways of behaving – are how we **actually** live; not just what we *should* do, but what we *do* do!

Our “personal culture”

Our personal culture is shown by how we behave. It is a blend of our upbringing, social factors, people we interact with, spiritual beliefs, what we like and enjoy, and so on. Many of these may be affected by our age, gender or race; plus things that happen to us (life events and influences). We have little or no choice over these, but our personal choices will have a major influence on how we live. Our personal choices involve our philosophy of life, beliefs, values, principles, actions and aspirations. When we become Christians (born again), our lives will change dramatically, especially if we have come from a non-Christian background. Some customs are bad or undesirable, some are neutral, others are good.

Society’s cultures

A racial group usually incorporates a fairly common culture, and different cultures normally have a fairly strong degree of unity within them but may have much less association with people of other cultures. In multicultural societies, people of many races and cultures live together and people will, to varying degrees, choose to practice a mixture of cultural features. The culture we belong to is based on who we are **and** our customs or habits, and what we really believe. It involves the group or groups of people in society with whom we identify and associate.

Our culture reflects how our society behaves, and so culture is one of the major pillars of any society. In fact, all the other pillars are, at least to some extent, part of society’s culture. This includes religious cultures, and social, moral, political, family and other values.

Cultures may be based on self-sufficiency (independence) or community (social interdependence); strong or weak family ties; strong, weak or no spiritual beliefs; emphasis on “my rights” or “my responsibilities” to other people. The overall well-being of a community, city or nation depends on its culture – physically, materially, socially, morally and spiritually.

Christian culture in New Testament times

Customs involve both attitudes and actions towards: people of different ages, races and beliefs; towards orphans, widows and the fatherless; the poor, needy, sick,

oppressed, hungry; and people needing other support and help. They involve morality, relationships, loyalty, respect, and so on. Religion, faith and beliefs (what we truly believe and practice) will also be part of our customs and habits. This is very practical – “Be *doers* of the Word, not just *hearers*.” (James 1:22)

In the early Church, what changed when the Church moved into different societies? Some people accepted Christ and His teachings, but some people strongly opposed His teachings and the Gospel as a whole. It divided people between “believers” and “unbelievers”. The concepts of being born again, and adopting a greatly different lifestyle, were radical!

Compare this with New Zealand’s cultures, and our churches’ cultures, today. What effects has multiculturalism had on Christians, and what effects have Christians had on our culture? What major things do Christians have to offer to our country’s culture? What are some of the potential strengths and weaknesses of a multicultural society?

While the word “culture” does not occur in the Bible, the words “custom” and “customary” occur about 17 times in the New Testament. The early Church, like us, also had to live in culturally diverse societies, and some of these were very opposed to Christianity. From the point of view of religions, there were Jewish people, Gentiles (any non-Jew), people with pagan beliefs, and with philosophies which might be quite godless, atheistic or agnostic. Often there was a clash of Greek, Roman, Jewish, Gentile and Christian cultures.

The Church believed in and followed the Lordship of Jesus Christ. But they lived in a land where Emperor worship and obedience to him was expected and often enforced. Hence Jesus was taken by His parents to Egypt because of Herod’s decree, and even when they returned from Egypt, they went back to Nazareth rather than live in Jerusalem (Matthew 2:13-23).

The Bible says a lot about children, young people, parents and those who are older; about different races and their customs; about men and women; rich and poor; different social status and so on. **Acts 2** mentions different races and languages (v. 6-11); men and women; different ages and social status (v. 17-18). The outpouring of God’s Spirit was for “everyone” who called on the name of the Lord (v.21) – Jews, Gentiles, Romans, pagans – anyone who chose to become a follower of Jesus.

In other parts of the New Testament we see some other ways in which the Church functioned. For example, looking after women and orphans, distributing to the needy, helping people in whose area there was famine, taking up a collection for the poor, praying for each other when they were in difficult times (e.g., in prison or being persecuted).

John 3:16 says that God loves the whole world so much that *whoever* comes to Him (for forgiveness, salvation and being born again by the Holy Spirit), will have eternal life. The Gospel is for *all* nations (Matthew 28:19). “Whoever wants to, let them come

...” (Revelation 22:17). Joshua said, “Choose today who you will serve ...” (Joshua 24:15).

Christian culture differs from other cultures by what Christians believe and practice. This may lead to some clashes with the culture of society around us. Christians should challenge or disagree or stand against what is wrong – what is untrue, immoral (in the broad sense of morality), harmful, displeasing to God, etc., and strongly support what is good and right and beneficial for society.

Some fundamentals of Christian culture

Love needs to undergird everything we do – including our habits and behaviour towards other people, no matter what their culture may be.

Some key Scriptures about Culture include **how Jesus related to people of different cultures and what Jesus said:**

- “I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me something to drink. I was a stranger and you welcomed Me. I was naked and you gave Me clothing. I was sick and you took care of Me. I was in prison and you visited Me. ... Just as you did it to one of the least of these who are My family, you did it to Me.” (Matthew 25:35-36, 40)
- “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and soul and mind and strength; and you shall love your neighbour as you love yourself.” (Luke 10:27)
- “A new commandment I give to you, that you shall love one another as I have loved you.” (John 13:34)
- “No one has greater love than this – than a person who lays down their life for their friends.” (John 15:13)
- “Do to others what you would like them to do to you.” (Luke 6:31)
- “Love your enemies; pray for those who persecute you; do good to those who hate you.” (Matthew 5:44; Luke 6:27)
- “Who is greater, the one who sits at the table or the one who serves? Isn’t it the one who sits at the table? But I am among you as one who serves!” (Luke 22:24-27).
Jesus humbled Himself, came down from glory, served others and gave His life for us. What *incredible* love and humility!

“As far as possible, live in peace with all men” (Romans 12:18)

Produce the fruit of the Spirit, not the works of the flesh (Galatians 5:19-25)

“Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Ephesians 4:3)

Pray for, and obey, those in authority (1 Timothy 2:1-4; Romans 13:1-7; 1 Peter 2:13-17)

The Christian culture should be gracious, kind, loving, generous, compassionate and forgiving. There are a lot more characteristics of Christian culture, but you’ll have to read the whole New Testament to find them all!

QUESTIONS

1. How should Christians live, and interact with, a society which has very diverse religions, cultures and customs, some of which are not righteous?
2. What customs in secular society should Christians not adopt – and why?
3. What are some of our churches' cultures, and how do they differ from our country's cultures?
4. Because cultures may be very different, how do we work together so that everyone benefits from these differences? Can we achieve unity in all our diversity?
5. Who or what causes major changes to our society's culture? Who or what determines what is changed, and what they are changed to?
6. What aspects of *my* culture need to change, and what am I doing about it?
7. What else do the following Scriptures say about culture? Acts 17:26; Revelation 7:9-10; Galatians 3:28-29; Ephesians 3:14-15; Colossians 3:11.

PRAYER SUGGESTIONS

- Pray that Christians will be given discernment to know what is good in a culture, and embrace that, and not participate in things which are displeasing to God.
- Pray that we will not be prejudice against people based on their race, age or customs, but will be loving and caring towards all people, without compromising Christian standards.
- Pray that we will discern what is not good in our own society, and turn from that. (We often don't see what is wrong in our own culture because we are so familiar with it!)
- Pray that practices which are evil and detrimental to our society, will lose their hold and power over the minds and hearts of our people.
- Pray that the Church will embrace people of other cultures, especially immigrants and refugees.
- Pray for unity and harmony in our country, and a strong move towards the Lord and His ways, and for the salvation of many more people in our country.
- Pray against all attempts at violence or terrorism. Pray for our Police, and all who work in our intelligence services, that all planned attempts to destroy and kill will be thwarted before they occur.

Pillars of Society

11. LOVE

THE FIRST THREE COMMANDMENTS

There are hundreds of 'commandments' in the Bible but what are the first three? We need to know them and live by them, because Jesus said that "On these commandments hang *all* the Law and the prophets" (Matthew 22:40). The Prophets were those people whose messages were frequently calls to people to return to God's ways – His Law and His commandments.

Matthew 22:36-38

"You shall love the LORD your God with *all* your heart, and with *all* your soul, and with *all* your might." (Quoted from Deuteronomy 6:5). Jesus added, "This is the greatest and first commandment."

One major problem most people face today (including Christians) is that we are so busy that God gets "squeezed into a corner"; it is so hard to put Him *first* in all things.

Matthew 22:39-40

"You shall love your neighbour as yourself." (Leviticus 19:18)

How do we love ourselves? Most of us, most of the time, don't find it too hard to love ourselves – but to love other people the same way might seem a bit much!

Besides this, who is our neighbour? The rich, happy, well-to-do family next door? Or the neighbour on the other side – a solo parent, struggling to make ends meet, with a teenager-gone-wild and a couple of little children?

Wanting to justify himself, a lawyer said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbour?" Jesus replied with the parable of the 'Good Samaritan' (Luke 10:29-37).

- A man had been robbed, beaten and left half dead.
- A priest saw him and passed down the road on the other side – he was in a hurry to get to the Temple on time!
- A Levite did the same thing – he also was in a hurry to get to 'church'.
- Then a Samaritan, despised by the Jews as being 'the wrong race' and an inferior sort of person, stopped, bandaged his wounds, took him to a hotel and took care of him. When the Samaritan left, he paid the bill for the wounded man until he could come back again and pay any further expenses.

Who was the neighbour to the man in need? The Samaritan, a foreigner who looked after someone in need and paid for his expenses – at a cost to himself of time, money and effort, but because of his love for his 'neighbour'.

When Jesus asked the lawyer, who was the neighbour to the wounded man – the priest, the Levite or the Samaritan, he answered, “The one who showed him mercy.” Then Jesus said, “**Go and do likewise.**” “You shall love your ‘neighbour’ as you love yourself.”

Paul, in Romans 13:8-10 says, “Don’t owe anything to anyone, except to love one another; for the one who loves another has fulfilled the Law. The commandments – You shall not commit adultery; you shall not murder; you shall not steal; you shall not covet; and any other commandment, are summed up in these words – ‘Love your neighbour *as yourself*’. Love doesn’t wrong a neighbour; therefore love is the fulfilling of the Law.”

So “Love God, and Love your neighbours *as you love yourself*” are the two greatest commandments, Jesus said – and both of these commandments are found in the Old Testament, as well as the New.

What if I have great difficulty loving myself? – perhaps because of what I have done, or because of my early home life, or how I have been treated by other people.

Cornelius, a centurion of the Italian (Roman) cohort, was called by God to go and see Peter, who was no friend of Roman centurions. But the Lord said to Peter, “Don’t call ‘Unclean’ what I have made clean”! (Acts 10:13-16). If God has cleansed us, saved us and called us His own, how can we despise ourselves and not love what God has both created and redeemed? How can we call ourselves ‘Unclean’ when **God** says we have been cleansed in Jesus’ blood? We need to learn to accept and love ourselves as *Jesus does* – despite anything or everything to the contrary. An old hymn begins with the words, “*Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so!*” How true!

So these are the **First and Greatest** Commandment, and the **Second Greatest** Commandment; but there is a third great commandment!

A New Commandment

Jesus also said, “A **new commandment** I give to you, that you love one another as *I have loved you.*” (John 13:34-35 and 15:12-13)

So, we not only need to love our neighbour as we love *ourselves*; we need to love one another in the same way as *Jesus* loves us! And think what He has done for us because He loves us – all He has given us, even His life, for our salvation and for eternal life with the Lord in Glory, forever!

Finally, Jesus *also* said, “If you love Me, you will keep My commandments” (John 14:15). Faith without works is dead (James 2:17).

- The **First** Commandment parallels the first three of the Ten Commandments: no other gods; no idols; no blasphemy.
- The **Second** Commandment parallels the other seven commandments.

- The **New** Commandment also tells us, in practical terms, how to love one another – think about how *He* loves us and how *He* loves other people – and seek to do likewise!

Three kinds of love

thelo (to wish). E.g., “I would love to ...”

phileo (to be a friend). E.g., *philadelphia* (brotherly love); *philanthropy* (love for people); *philandros* (love between a man and woman).

agape (sacrificial love). E.g., missionaries; martyrs (Christians killed for their Faith); people who give their lives (time, wealth, work, fame, home, friends, health, etc.) for others.

“God so loved [*agape*] the world that He gave His only Son”. And Jesus so loved the world He gave His life for us.

A further example in Matthew 25:31-46 is when the King (Jesus) said, “I was hungry and you gave me food; I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink; I was a stranger and you welcomed me; I was naked and you gave me clothing; I was sick and you took care of me; I was in prison and you visited me.” The righteous said, “Lord, when was it that we ...?” And Jesus will answer, “Just as you have done it for one of the least of these ... you have done it for Me”.

We need to:

- Give love, and receive love (sometimes it is harder to receive than give!)
- Love even our enemies, and those who despise us.

Love is ...

A sincere, genuine desire for what is best; action where possible; compassion, kindness and care.

Love and loyalty

Love is expressed in loyalty and support to those God has given to us. Jesus exemplifies this in Psalm 23, as the Good Shepherd:

The **Lord** is my Shepherd (v1) – He provides (v1), feeds (v2), guides (v3), encourages (v3), protects (v4), comforts (v4) and loves (v5,6). What loyalty! What love!

No wonder **Love** (love for people and sacrificial love) should be a major Pillar in Society!

QUESTIONS

1. Who or what comes first in my life? Do I love God with *all* my heart, soul, mind and strength?
2. Am I too busy with other things instead of spending time with the Lord? See Luke 10:38-42.

3. What does it mean to “love my neighbour as I love myself” and “love other people as Jesus loves me”?
4. In what ways do I express my love for the Lord and for other people?
5. What was the main point of Jesus’ story in Matthew 25:31-46?
6. What are some of the ways in which we can express our loyalty to a person?
7. In what ways is true love, costly?

PRAYER SUGGESTIONS

- Pray that we will love all people, no matter who they are, what they believe or how they differ from us – just as God does (John 3:16)
- Pray for all individuals, organisations, and our government as they seek to help people in need.

Please pray for people who are:

- **Home-less** – desperately needing a decent place to live.
- **Help-less** – needing help because of age, illness, or other disabilities.
- **Hope-less** – those who have no hope; those who are depressed and can find no answers to their struggles.
- **Health-less** – those who have severe health needs and may have been struggling for years with health issues.
- **Lost-ness** – people who are lost in the sense that they continually do not know where they are going in life; they see no future; and also those people who have not yet come to the Lord and have no saving knowledge or faith for the life to come.
- **Lonely-ness** – Those people who have few, if any, loving, caring and reliable friends.

Pillars of Society

12. THE WORD OF GOD

The Bible speaks of the ways of God for the society in which His people live. All the *Pillars of Society* mentioned in the previous studies describe His ways – the best ways – for us to live. If we choose not to live in these ways, we will suffer the consequences because God’s ways are always right and best for us. Of course, Christians live in a world that is frequently contrary to the ways God has directed, so there will be conflict between how Christians should live and how worldly society lives.

Because Jesus the Messiah came to earth and taught the ways of the Kingdom of God (the Kingdom of Heaven), and the Holy Spirit has spoken to us through the Word of God, we have God’s directions for us as Christians.

The New Testament is the revelation of God to Christians. In it, God has revealed to us how we are to live. He is our Good Shepherd, and we are His sheep. Sheep follow their Shepherd. John 10:1-18 reveals a lot about how our relationship with Jesus, the Good Shepherd, is to be.

1. Anyone who tries to enter the sheepfold in a way other than by the gate, is a thief and bandit, but the one who enters by the gate is the Shepherd of the sheep.
2. The sheep hear the Shepherd’s voice, He calls them by name [He knows them] and He leads them out.
3. He goes ahead of them and the sheep follow Him because they know His voice. They won’t follow a stranger, but they will run from him because they do not know the voice of strangers.

This is a wonderful illustration of Jesus’ relationship with us as Christians, in contrast to those who are not yet Christians. Jesus teaches us His ways, and as sheep who hear and know His voice, we follow Him.

A wise society will also follow His ways and principles! In our own lives, and in our prayers for our society, we need to apply what the Word of God says to us.

In previous studies we have looked at the following *Pillars of Society*

1. **The LORD.** Almighty God is not only our Creator but also the Ruler over our world and its nations. Psalm 33:12 says, “Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord.” For a nation to acknowledge Him as Lord, it needs to follow His ways, as taught in His Word.
2. **The Family.** If families are to be blessed, they also need to follow God’s ways. The New Testament teaches us a lot about how we should live, both individually and as families; we do well to follow His ways! Obviously this necessitates us reading God’s Word, the Bible, as well as living by its teaching.

3. **The Church.** One of the purposes of the Church is to teach the ways of the Lord. He has given us the Scriptures to teach us how we should live, not only to obey Him as His people, but also for wisdom and the blessing of following Him.
4. **Authority.** Jesus is King of kings and Lord of lords. He has authority over us, and the teaching of His Word is the way we know how to live under His authority, as His followers and servants.
5. **Righteousness.** To live the right way – God’s way – is to be righteous, and this is pleasing to God. In fact, it is foolish not to live by His Word and His ways, because God knows what is best!
6. **Welfare.** As people, we tend to look after ourselves first, but the Bible says we are to “love other people [our ‘neighbours’] in the same way as we love ourselves” – and “as I have loved you”, Jesus said. (Matthew 22:36-40; John 13:34-35). Social welfare is just like that – caring for others, in the ways we would like to be cared for.
7. **Justice.** Justice is exercising the laws and moral laws of society. Again, the Bible tells us the ways in which God exercises His justice when we disobey (or obey) His laws. Ideally, our society should follow God’s laws, and justice regarding wrongdoing.
8. **Education.** Education is not just teaching people knowledge and skills; it should also include wisdom in how to handle life as a whole. Proverbs, especially, has a lot to say about this, as does a lot of the Bible.
9. **The media.** A lot of what is broadcast through the ‘media’ (in the broadest sense of the word) is not compatible with what God teaches us through His Word. A lot of it teaches us, by word, picture or example, wrong things; wrong ideas; wrong ways of living, and so on. God’s Word shows us what is true, honourable, just, pure, pleasing, commendable, excellent and worthy of praise (Philippians 4:8-9)
10. **Business and Culture.** Many business practices, and what we call “our culture”, may conflict with what the Lord teaches us. Again, wisdom and obedience to the Word of God show us what things are wrong and will not bring blessing to us or our society.
11. **Love.** Love for God, for His Word and His ways, and love for one another, are fundamental to a great and good society.
12. **The Word of God.** It is through the Scriptures that we learn God’s will and His ways. Many different nations and cultures are mentioned in the Bible, some good and others bad. An interesting study of the Bible is to see how God taught people His ways – the ways to blessing; and the wrong ways which bring trouble and pain. For example, read 2 Chronicles 6:12-42 and 7:11-22. God’s principles in these verses are, “If you ... [do what is right], then I will bless you. If you do not, then you will suffer the consequences. If you repent and turn back to Me, I will forgive you and bless you once more.” These principles apply to all societies, not just Israel!

These are foundational principles for a good, healthy society, and these are the ways God says we should live!

Mary, the mother of Jesus, at the wedding in Cana, said to the servants, “Whatever He says to you, do it!” (John 2:5). This is a profound statement, which we should always remember – whatever God tells us to do, we are to do it!

How does the Lord speak to us?

Very simply, the primary way God speaks to us is through the Scriptures, the Bible, the Word of God which He has given us for all time. All things are to be tested by what God has said in His Word.

As Christians, we are to learn and obey the will and ways of God. The Lord may speak to us directly by His Holy Spirit. He may speak to us through other people, but because we can all mistake what we hear or think, we need to “test all things” by God’s Word. (1 Corinthians 14:29; 1 Thessalonians 5:19-22; 1 John 4:1)

In society, some things we are encouraged to do are those things which are “Politically Correct”, including things which may be contrary to God’s Word. Some people excuse this by saying “This is the twenty-first century” or “These days we ...” as if to say that we no longer have to do what “was” right because we have moved on from those days. In other words, they might say that what is right varies from time to time; it is relative to society’s desires, wants or what is “acceptable” to the majority.

For Christians, this is not so. We should be living by God’s standards of righteousness, holiness and Godliness, not by the wrong or evil ways of the world.

Ultimately, in praying for our society, we need to pray that the strongholds of evil, sin, the flesh, etc., are broken; that people will come to repentance, and faith in Jesus Christ, for forgiveness, salvation and God’s blessings on our lives.

May God transform our society and help us to conform to His will by following His Word. ***“Whatever He says to you, do it!”***

QUESTIONS

1. Why is the Bible still so important to us, almost 2000 years since it was written?
2. Is it worth praying for a Godless society which largely rejects God and the Bible?
3. How does God see our society and how should we be praying for it?
4. Can God transform a nation? How? What is our part in this?
5. Jesus spent about as much time speaking about physical and social matters, as He did about spiritual matters. Why? What does this teach us?
6. Which areas of society do you particularly feel you should pray for? Are you praying?

PRAYER SUGGESTIONS

God warns cities and nations to turn from their wicked ways. God calls us to choose who we will serve – with the warning that worship of false gods and idols will ultimately bring us judgement and troubles.

- **Pray** for the “pillars” mentioned on page 2.
- **Pray** that our nation will turn back to God and His ways.
- **Pray** that we will become a society which is blessed by God and by obedience, and not suffer because of our wicked, Godless ways.
- **Pray** that people will increasingly choose to serve the Lord and follow His ways, rather than worldliness and the ways of the flesh and the devil. (Joshua 24:14-15).
- **Pray** that Christians will lead by example – that we will read God’s Word and follow His teachings in every aspect of our lives – spiritual, social and physical.
- **Pray** that our nation will be strong and blessed by strong *Pillars in our Society*.