

Minister's Message – April 2006

What Profit in Swearing

Australia is widely known for its convict heritage. We have struggled for over a century to divest ourselves of this image, and establish a more cultured image for our nation. Some of our scientists, academics, artists and church leaders have achieved international acclaim. Yet with one ill-conceived, but officially sanctioned, advertising campaign this reputation has been jeopardised. We have been burdened afresh with the label of a 'backward, coarse and uncultured' people.

Europe (those who understand the language of this advertisement as English) and North America judged our Government's tourism advertisement to be unsuitable for children to see or hear. Yet our Government regarded such a terrible indictment as a joke and hailed the free publicity! Maybe more tourists will come to laugh at these weird and wild people 'down-under'.

The language used in this Government sponsored advertisement is not just offensive to people in Europe and North America; it is offensive to God-fearing people in Australia and to God himself. Our Prime Minister is to be condemned for using the word 'hell' in jest – trying to please men rather than please God. What does the Word of God, the Bible, say on this matter? Jesus said *let your 'yes' be 'yes' and your 'no', 'no'. For whatever is more than these is from the devil* (Matthew 5:33-37). He said *do not swear by heaven for it is God's throne*. Hell on the other hand is the home of the devil and we should not swear by this place either.

Some people may not accept the reality of heaven and hell, but Jesus did. He said that anyone calling his brother a fool will be in danger of the fire of hell (Matthew 5:22) – to tell someone to 'go to hell' is to curse them just as much as calling them a fool. Was Jesus just trying to scare us with fairy tale talk? Certainly not! Hell is a place that men and women should fear. Jesus spoke of the fires of hell, of the torment of hell (Luke 16:23), and of weeping and gnashing of teeth (Matthew 25:30). Hell ('Gehenna' in the Greek) is the place of eternal punishment for sinners.

But above all brethren do not swear either by heaven or by earth or with any oath. But let your 'yes' be 'yes', and your 'no', 'no' lest you fall into judgment. This was the teaching of James, a leader in the early church (James 5:12). Are we going to abandon this teaching in the church and in our nation today? Does money come before morality? Are all our morals up for sale to the highest bidder? Let us pray that this descent into language offensive to God's people and to God himself will be halted by our Government and in our media.

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