



SENSITIVE AUSSIE SUBJECTS

POLITICS | PANDEMICS | PROSPERITY | PARENTING | PSYCHICS | PHONES

Sensitive Aussie Subjects

	Title	Passage	Sermon	Study
1	Politics	Romans 13:1-7; 1 Peter 2:11-17	Oct 10	Oct 11-17
2	Pandemics	John 11:17-26; Romans 8:28-39	Oct 17	Oct 18-24
3	Prosperity	Genesis 2:4-17; Matthew 6:19-21	Oct 24	Oct 25-31
4	Parenting	Deuteronomy 6:1-9; John 1:10-13	Oct 31	Nov 1-7
5	Psychics	Genesis 3:1-7; Acts 16:16-19	Nov 7	Nov 8-14
6	Phones	John 17:13-20; Ephesians 5:1-20	Nov 14	Nov 15-21

Sensitive Aussie Subjects

There are some things we just learn not to talk about. Politics, parenting, prosperity... we allocate them to the 'none of your business what I think about that' category of things. Who you vote for and why, whether or not you think vaccines should be mandatory, whether it is okay for Christians to be wealthy, whether parents can or should smack their children or send them to state schools or private schools, whether you should say something to your friend who sees a psychic, whether we are spending too much time on our phones—these are all sensitive subjects that we might have strong opinions on, but perhaps we are not sure why. Or we are not sure exactly what the Bible has to say about these things. They are the sort of subjects that we might hear people speak about and consequently find ourselves being filled with rage—but because we are aware of social etiquette we do not speak our mind in response. They are the sort of subjects we might see come up on our social media news feed that may trigger us.

It is easy to avoid these subjects as we fellowship with one another. But the truth is, it is good for us to be able to talk about all things in truth and love. Can we speak about these issues in a healthy/godly way? Do we have to agree with one another on all these things?

The answer is yes and no. Yes we can speak about these issues in a healthy/godly way, and no, we do not have to agree with one another on all these things. We want to learn to speak about these sensitive issues in a way that is humble and salt and light for our community. That is our job with all that we do and say as Christians in this world. ***We don't speak on these subjects to win, we speak to witness.*** Hopefully these studies will help us to remember that being salt and light should be at the fore when we talk about all of these things.

As Christians, we need to speak about all subjects and form our opinions on all subjects in a way that is shaped by the Bible. There is no single passage for these subjects that tells us everything we need to know. But there is a consistent picture painted in the unfolding story of the Bible of how we should speak about these things. We want to learn how the Bible consistently approaches these topics in the context of the unfolding story of God's plan to redeem human kind.

Topical studies and risk

These studies are topical. They are not like our usual studies where we are forced to consider each passage in the context of the book that it is taken from. Topical studies look at a topic and then find passages from the Bible that relate to it. This is risky. If we are not careful we can take bits and pieces of the Bible out of context and shape them to say whatever we want to say about a topic. This is why topical talks are not our main diet at Willows.

The best we can do when looking at what the Bible has to say about a topic is look at what it has to say in the context of God's unfolding plan to redeem human kind from their sin. So, we look at what the Bible has to say about our topic in creation, the fall, redemption and our future restoration. This is called looking at the 'biblical theology' of a topic. You will notice in each study we will look at more than one passage, and we will try to understand it in light of the unfolding salvation story. But, we still need to pay careful attention to the context, so that we do not slip!

Because these topics are sensitive can I encourage you to pray that we would all speak the truth in love as we discuss them? I pray they would help us to better live for Jesus as salt and light in his world.

Warm-up

Would you feel comfortable discussing who you voted for last election?

Investigate

The chant around the heavenly throne in the book of Revelation is “You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being.” (Revelation 4:11). From creation to new creation the Lord reigns supreme. The question is, what then do we make of earthly rulers and authorities?

Read Romans 13:1-7

1. New Testament scholar Douglas Moo says, ‘It is only a slight exaggeration to say that the history of the interpretation of Rom. 13:1-7 is the history of attempts to avoid what seems to be its plain meaning.’ Verse 1 in this passage makes two fairly plain points. How would you explain their meaning?

2. What does this passage tell us about those who rebel against authority?

3. Verse 4 says the worldly ruler is ‘God’s servant to do you good’. This is hard for us to accept, especially when we see so many tyrannical rulers through history (e.g. Nebuchadnezzar in Jeremiah, Hitler). For us, good equals comfort, not discomfort, pain and injustice. How does Romans 8:28, 35-39 help us to better understand and accept the statement that the earthly ruler is ‘God’s servant to do you good’?

4. The Bible calls for all Christians to have a posture of submission. We are to submit one another (Eph 5:21), wives are to submit to their husbands (Eph 5:22), Christians are to submit to their leaders (Hebrews 13:17). When you think about what submission looks like in these relationships, does it help you to picture what it might look like to submit to your government? Explain.

Read John 18:35-37

5. Here Jesus has been brought before the Roman governor and is about to be sentenced to be crucified. He is entirely innocent. He has the power and authority to stop what’s about to happen (see Colossians 1:15-20—he has God’s authority). But, quite shockingly, Jesus submits to the earthly authorities and is crucified. Why would Jesus submit to the worldly rulers here?

6. What does Jesus mean, ‘My kingdom is not of this world [...] my kingdom is from another place?’

7. How does this passage help us to understand why Jesus' followers can and should be submissive?

Read Acts 5:27-29

8. What does Peter say about human authorities here?

9. What is it that Peter thinks is so important that it justifies disobeying the earthly authorities?

Read 1 Peter 2:11-17

10. How will our posture toward governing authorities help us with our mission of making disciples (see verse 12 in particular)?

11. What kind of attitude toward our governments might we have that would make Christianity seem ugly to 'the pagans'?

Read 1 Timothy 2:1-2

12. Rather than thinking and speaking about our governments with clenched fists and anger, what will it look like for us to have a posture of submission to our governments?

Apply

13. Our government in Australia, under God's sovereign rule, has given us the right to vote, speak publicly and even protest in a lawful manner. What would it look like to disagree with our government's policies, or to challenge their policies in a way that is submissive? What would it look like to do it in a way that is not submissive?

14. There are all kinds of controversial political issues (e.g. mandatory vaccination, euthanasia, refugee policy). There are always controversial political issues. How can Christians speak thoughtfully about these issues with others in a way that makes the gospel of the LORD Jesus seem attractive? How can we speak about them in a way that makes the gospel seem unattractive?

15. Christians vote for all kinds of political parties in the name of the gospel. How might we speak about politics with one another in a way that builds each other up and is an attractive witness to our world?

Pray

Warm-up

Can you think of another pandemic in human history?

Investigate**Read Genesis 3:17-19**

1. This passage is God cursing the man for his rebellion earlier on in chapter 3. What will his world and his life be like due to his sin? Where will this fallen world eventually take him?

2. How does this help us to understand why there are sicknesses like pandemics in the world?

3. If this pandemic vanishes, how will it change the condition of the world?

4. The pandemic has caused a lot of uncertainty around plans for the future and a lot of anxiety. As Christians who understand the true condition of our world, what should our attitude be toward planning for the future and unexpected change? See proverbs 16:9 and 19:21, Luke 12:20 and Philippians 4:6-7 to help with your answer.

Read John 11:17-26

5. What hope do people have in this world which is under the reign of sin and death?

6. The life that God made us for was taken by sin. How can we have the life that we were made for again?

7. What does this mean for how we handle sickness/pandemics/death? How should it change the way we speak to our colleagues and neighbours about sickness/pandemics/death?

Read Romans 8:28-39

8. What security do those with faith in Jesus have in the face of sickness?

9. Rather than grumbling to others about the frustrations of covid restrictions, or feeding fear about the impact of the pandemic, or watering down the impact of the pandemic, we have words of hope, comfort and unwavering security to offer our world. What would it look like for you to speak these words into conversations with your family/friends/neighbours and colleagues?

Read 1 John 4:10-12

10. Since we have been loved by God through Christ, John says we ought to love one another. This will be the way the world sees God's love—they will see it in us. It is easy in the midst of a pandemic or natural disaster or sickness to stop thinking about one another. How can we love one another in the midst of a pandemic?

- With the way we use our time?

- With the way we use our money?

- In the way we speak about covid restrictions/vaccines?

- In the way we pray?

- In the way we have discussions about the pandemic?

11. Spend some time praying for each other and our world that we would find our security in Christ and offer God's love to one another.

Pray

Warm-up

Do you personally know many poor Christians? Why do you think this is the case?

Investigate**Read Genesis 2:4-17**

1. This is the account of God's creation of the first human. Would you say that he was made for prosperity or not? Explain your answer?

2. What would stand in the way of human prosperity?

Read Genesis 12:1-3 and Deuteronomy 28:1-14

3. After the first humans turned their backs on God's prosperous provision and fell under the curse, the LORD didn't just abandon humanity. What does this passage tell us God had planned for humanity in the future?

4. Were there any conditions to this promised prosperity?

Read Jeremiah 5:7-17 and Amos 6:1-7

5. What stood in the way of God's plan to prosper Israel?

6. Explain in your own words how greed and prosperity are different?

Read Isaiah 53:1-12 (and 2 Corinthians 8:9 if you need a bit of help)

7. What hope is there for the future prosperity of sinful people in this passage? Who is the LORD going to bring prosperity to the people through?

Read Luke 6:20-21

8. What kind of prosperity does this passage offer to the poor? How do they access it and when will they access it?

Read Matthew 6:19-21

9. While we wait for the kingdom of God to come in its fullness, what should we be investing our time and money in?

10. What is the problem with Christians pursuing worldly prosperity now?

11. What difference will it make to the way we spend our time and money if we are investing in prosperity here on earth as opposed to prosperity in heaven?

12. How can the way Christians use their time and money be a good witness? How can it be a bad witness?

13. How are you investing in the kingdom of God? How are you storing up treasures on earth?

Pray

Warm-up

Share a story of a positive or negative parenting example you have seen (it can't be your own).

Investigate**Read Genesis 1:27-28**

1. What part does parenting play in God's plan for human kind?

Read Genesis 3:16-19

2. What will parenting be like now that sin has entered the world and it is under God's curse?

3. Bringing forth children was at the heart of God's created intention for humankind, but now bringing forth children will begin with pain and end with grief. This tells us that parenting will simply NOT be easy for anyone in this world. What are some of the difficulties parents face as they bear and raise children in the world?

Read Deuteronomy 6:1-9

4. The Lord called Israel out of the fallen world to be his special people—a light to the nations. As he gives them instructions on life in the land here, what is meant to be at the heart of parenting?

5. What will be the fruit of the Israelites teaching their children the Lord's way?

Read Jeremiah 17:1-3

6. How does this passage describe the parenting of the Israelites?

Read John 1:10-13

7. Given the evidence against humankind's parenting skills so far in the scriptures (and from our experience of the world), what hope is there for our children?

8. What should be at the heart of our parenting as Christians today?

9. What does it look like to help our children to follow Jesus? What are some practical differences to raising children to follow the ways of the world?

Read Ephesians 6:4 and Colossians 3:21

10. What does it look like to embitter, discourage or exasperate children? How can we not do this?

Read Proverbs 13:24

11. Proverbs 23:2 says "put a knife to your throat if you are given to gluttony" and Proverbs 26:3 says "A whip for the horse, a bridle for the donkey, and a rod for the backs of fools!" We know this doesn't mean we are to put knives to our gluttonous throats or to whip our fools with rods. Proverbs use hyperbole to teach an underlying principle (21:19— "better to live on a corner of the roof than share a house with a quarrelsome wife" is a classic). Christians often use Proverbs 13:24 to justify physically punishing their children. When we read proverbs correctly we know that understood properly this verse isn't commanding parents to smack their children with a rod or they will be ruined. How should we apply this verse today—and is it really saying anything different to the Ephesians passage above?

12. Share with one another your experience of parental discipline and the pros and cons of what you have experienced.

13. Why do you think it is important that Christian children have a positive experience of authority?

Pray for children and parents in our church

Warm-up Share any experience you have had of psychics.

Investigate Read Genesis 3:1-7

1. Who is speaking to the woman here and how (see Revelation 12:9)?

2. What is true about the serpent's words and what is not true about them?

3. How/who does Satan work through in the passages below?

- Matthew 16:21-23

- Luke 22:1-6

- Luke 8:26-33

4. How would you describe the purpose of the work of Satan here? Has it changed since Genesis 3?

Read Acts 16:16-19

5. Here Paul and Silas are going around sharing the good news about Jesus when they come across a female slave who had a 'spirit'. What does the 'spirit' that she had do?

6. How does the woman earn a great deal of money for her owners?

7. In the Luke passage above (8:26-33), the impure spirit in the man referred to Jesus as the 'Son of the Most High God'. Luke is the prequel to the book of Acts. Notice that in verse 17 here in Acts, the fortune teller's spirit refers to God as 'the Most High God'. This is the only other time God is referred to by this exact title in Luke's writing. What is Luke trying to tell us about the 'spirit' the fortune teller had?

8. How do Paul and Silas treat this spirit the woman had? What does this tell us about this spirit that the woman had?

9. As people tell fortunes today what kind of spirit is at work in them?

10. From what we have seen in this study so far, what might be the objective of a fortune teller's message given to us?

Read Leviticus 20:6-7

11. What do we learn here about the Lord's attitude toward mediums/spiritists?

1 Samuel 28:3-25

12. Even though this woman is a medium contacting the dead, it seems like the Lord has taken control of this situation. The woman effectively condemns Saul by telling him exactly what he has already heard from the mouth of the prophet. Why do you think Saul, or any of us for that matter, would want to turn to a medium or fortune teller when the LORD has already been very clear with us in the scriptures?

Read 2 Timothy 3:10-17

13. If we are looking for guidance for life, where ought we look as followers of Jesus to find the truth?

14. Explain practical ways the Bible can guide our future decisions.

15. How can we have helpful conversations with our friends and family who regularly seek out psychics/ mediums?

Pray

Warm-up How many minutes/hours a day would you spend on your phone?

Investigate Read John 17: 13-20

1. In this part of his prayer Jesus is praying for his followers. Why has the world hated Jesus' followers?
2. What is Jesus' specific prayer for his followers according to verse 15?
3. How does Jesus tell us in his prayer that his followers will be sanctified/protected by God from the evil one?
4. Why are we still 'in the world' according to verse 18 (see also 2 Peter 3:9 and Matt 28:19)?
5. How could the way we use our phones help us to achieve the purpose for which we have been left in the world?
6. How could the way we use our phones leave us vulnerable to the evil one?

Read Ephesians 5:1-20

7. How should these verses influence the content we're prepared to engage with, and the content we're prepared to produce on our phones?

8. How can our phone enable us to get involved with 'fruitless deeds of darkness'?

9. Verses 15 and 20 present two different ways of living our lives. What are some practical things we can do to ensure that we are careful to live wisely with our phone usage?

Read Exodus 20:4-6

7. An idol is something we put in a place only God should go. We give it the first and last of our day, we turn to it at every moment. Do you see your phone becoming an idol in your life? How? How can you divert your mind's eye back to God?

Read 1 Thessalonians 1:9-10

8. What hope is on offer for those of us who have made idols of our phones?

Pray