

# News from Bible Society

**Transmission** is provided free by Bible Society. On this page we update you on other parts of our mission to make the Bible heard within our culture.

## James Catford

Chief Executive



### Taste and decency start here

You don't have to do much travelling to notice our surveillance society. As vice-chair of the Amity Printing Company in Nanjing, I visit China twice a year. When I leave my flat in London, I pass under cameras that check the hallway. The 436 bus records my movements and whether I have swiped my Oyster card. Much the same happens at Paddington station and on the Heathrow Express.

I don't actually speak to anyone until I present my passport at check-in and I'm largely unaware of how many cameras film my passage out of the country. My boarding pass is scanned three times, liquids are placed in a clear plastic bag and my computer is segregated into a separate tray for screening. In Nanjing the sequence is repeated but in reverse.

Jesus knew about surveillance of a different kind, the kind of religious 'thought police' who checked if you were on the straight and narrow. If they could have taken your moral temperature then they surely would have done so. However, Jesus viewed people differently. His focus was on the inside of a person, the tree that bore the fruit, the inside of the cup. Get that cleaned and the outside pretty much takes care of itself.

That's why, since the launch of Ofcom, the communications regulator, at the end of 2003, I have been interested in a running debate over two competing forms of surveillance.

For years the test for broadcasting has been 'taste and decency' with standards set by objective moral criteria. But what is in good taste these days? Surely one man's meat is another man's poison and decency for Tom may be different to decency for Dick or Harry.

Wishing to avoid making moral choices, the test has shifted to harm and offence. This, some believe, is more easily tested and more morally neutral. We can ask Tom, Dick or Harry if he is offended and we can see if he has been harmed by a broadcast.

This shift might appear to be more objective, but it also has unforeseen consequences. One of these is the move from what's known as character ethics to impact ethics. Character ethics are about cleaning the inside of the cup,

or getting the tree right so that it bears good fruit. Impact ethics are to do with what comes out of our mouths or the sort of behaviour with which our surveillance society is concerned.

Although taste and decency are expressions of a person's character, the Jesus way is for the outside to be a reflection of the inside. Decent behaviour comes from decent people. Sort out the inside of the cup and the exterior takes care of itself.

On the other hand, the test of harm and offence is much more akin to a surveillance society. Reluctant to focus on character and who we are on the inside, the only alternative is to try to control the outside.

Many think what a person does in their private life has no bearing on what they do in public. You may be rotten on the inside but still not cause harm to anyone – so the argument goes.

The only alternative to more surveillance is more character. A Bible society would be one that takes character seriously. So seriously that surveillance becomes unnecessary and irrelevant.

### Bible Sunday 2010: A springboard for the Bible in your church

This year's Bible Sunday is a unique opportunity to fan the flames of enthusiasm for Scripture – both in the lives of our congregation and our communities. We want to remind people of the many ways the Bible has enriched our society and culture.

Entitled *Free to Go*, Bible Sunday 2010 focuses on the power of Scripture to set people and communities free to be all God made us for. Rather than holding people captive and stunting our growth, as the 'new atheists' would have us think, the Bible floodlights life as a source of freedom, justice and vitality for all.

The focus of Bible Sunday is Luke 4.16–24. Bible teacher Ian Coffey, the author of our material, explains, 'Jesus is announcing the arrival of the Kingdom of God with the good news of freedom that is both personal and social in its impact.' It's a big and exciting theme.

*Free To Go* video footage from Tanzania shows how Bible translation into people's first language is still setting millions free to grow in Christian maturity. And it offers churches here the opportunity to release many more communities into fullness of life by giving to our Bible translations appeal.

### Make the most of the 400th anniversary of the King James Bible

The countdown is on for 2011 and Bible Society is taking the lead in celebrating 400 years of the KJB next year. We are the main sponsor of Biblefresh in association with the Evangelical Alliance, providing considerable staff resources and funding to help churches release the power of Scripture.

We have also set up The 2011 Trust chaired by Frank Field MP, with HRH the Prince of Wales as our patron, to reach a wider constituency. It's all part of the mandate given to us by our Royal Charter to promote the 'circulation and use' of the Bible today.

Both Biblefresh and the 2011 Trust have fabulous websites and there is no better time to see how far the Bible can go in 2011. Go to [biblefresh.com](http://biblefresh.com) and [2011trust.org](http://2011trust.org). We believe Bible Sunday 2010 will act as a springboard to launch your church and people into a year of biblical inspiration. All the materials are ready to download or order in a CDRom/DVD pack at [biblesunday.org](http://biblesunday.org)

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