

THE AUSTRALIAN ANABAPTIST

God's solid foundation stands firm. 2 Timothy 2-19

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Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel,
but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in
the house.

Matthew 5:15

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For A Conservative Anabaptist Perspective

From The Editor's Desk

Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and He will make straight your paths. Proverbs 3:5-6

As we go through life there are many things that can be a distraction to what we see as the way forward, this can be applied to our carnal desires and intents as well as our relationship with God. Oftentimes we can allow ourselves to become frustrated as we see the goal we have set ourselves slipping away from our grasp, at other times we allow our imagination to take us on path that that takes our focus away from the task at hand, we slip into day dreaming, we project success or failure on what is yet to be, but that is not what Scripture calls the disciple of Jesus to – our text is very blunt in what it calls us to, there are no ‘ifs’ or ‘buts’ or ‘maybes’ in that statement.

During the mid-to late 1800s there was a resurgence of Christian faith in England based on a call to return to a personal faith in Jesus Christ and obedience to His word. A Scottish preacher, George Macdonald, wrote and spoke a great deal regarding this subject. His writings today are still pertinent and he said this in regard to being distracted by what the world has to offer and Christ's requirements for obedience that “The things of the world so crowd our hearts that there is no room in them for the things of God's heart, which would raise our hearts above all fear and make us merry children in our Father's house.

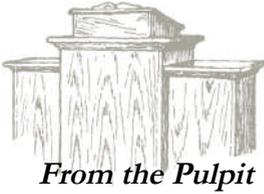
How many whispers of the watching Spirit do we let slip by while we brood over a need not yet come to us! When we should be still sleeping or dreaming we are fretting about an hour that lies half a sun's journey away! Even the care that is filling your mind at this moment or but waiting till you lay the book aside to consume you – that need which is no real need, is a demon sucking at the spring of your life. Do you object, saying: “But no! You do not understand. The thing I am worrying about is a reasonable anxiety – an unavoidable care.”

“Does it involve something you have to do at this very moment? I ask.”

“Well – no.”

“Then you are allowing it to usurp the place of something that is required of you at this moment, the greatest thing that can ever be required of any man or woman and that is to trust in the Living God.

George MacDonald quoted from “Knowing the Heart of God” used by permission



From the Pulpit

*Number 5 of 12 expository messages from:
The Book of Ecclesiastes by:
Brother Linford Berry
Calvary Mennonite Fellowship Virginia*

Worship and Money – It's Not About You

Turn with me if you would to Ecclesiastes chapter 5.

Ecclesiastes is a little book of the Bible that we often don't pay much attention to, it follows the book of Proverbs, is 12 chapters long, today we are ready for chapter 5 so follow along as I read:

Ecclesiastes 5:1-20 Guard your steps when you go to the house of God. To draw near to listen is better than to offer the sacrifice of fools, for they do not know that they are doing evil. ² Be not rash with your mouth, nor let your heart be hasty to utter a word before God, for God is in heaven and you are on earth. Therefore let your words be few. ³ For a dream comes with much business, and a fool's voice with many words. ⁴ When you vow a vow to God, do not delay paying it, for he has no pleasure in fools. Pay what you vow. ⁵ It is better that you should not vow than that you should vow and not pay. ⁶ Let not your mouth lead you into sin, and do not say before the messenger that it was a mistake. Why should God be angry at your voice and destroy the work of your hands? ⁷ For when dreams increase and words grow many, there is vanity; but God is the one you must fear. ⁸ If you see in a province the oppression of the poor and the violation of justice and righteousness, do not be amazed at the matter, for the high official is watched by a higher, and there are yet higher ones over them. ⁹ But this is gain for a land in every way: a king committed to cultivated fields. ¹⁰ He who loves money will not be satisfied with money, nor he who loves wealth with his income; this also is vanity. ¹¹ When goods increase, they increase who eat them, and what advantage has their owner but to see them with his eyes? ¹² Sweet is the sleep of a labourer, whether he eats little or much, but the full stomach of the rich will not let him sleep. ¹³ There is a grievous evil that I have seen under the sun: riches were kept by their owner to his hurt, ¹⁴ and those riches were lost in a bad venture. And he is father of a son, but he has nothing in his hand. ¹⁵ As he came from his moth-

er's womb he shall go again, naked as he came, and shall take nothing for his toil that he may carry away in his hand. ¹⁶ This also is a grievous evil: just as he came, so shall he go, and what gain is there to him who toils for the wind? ¹⁷ Moreover, all his days he eats in darkness in much vexation and sickness and anger. ¹⁸ Behold, what I have seen to be good and fitting is to eat and drink and find enjoyment in all the toil with which one toils under the sun the few days of his life that God has given him, for this is his lot. ¹⁹ Everyone also to whom God has given wealth and possessions and power to enjoy them, and to accept his lot and rejoice in his toil—this is the gift of God. ²⁰ For he will not much remember the days of his life because God keeps him occupied with joy in his heart.

Amen, this ends the reading of the word of God, let us bow our heads in prayer: - Father God we come to your word, this text in the book of Ecclesiastes and want to open ourselves to you, to your instruction, we come here today to listen, to hear, to obey. So guide us as we do that. May your Spirit work among us in each of our hearts to bring us to a knowledge of yourself. We pray in Jesus name, amen.

So today we come to the 5th chapter of Ecclesiastes and maybe it would be a good idea for us to review where we have been in our study so far.

This chapter does not stand in isolation by itself, it comes in the middle of the book of Ecclesiastes written by the preacher and is a first person account of the preacher's attempt to find meaning and purpose in life. He sets out on this quest to discover what it is that makes life worth living and right in the beginning of chapter 1 he tells us the conclusion that he has come to, it is all vanity, it is futile, it is striving after wind, and he is talking about life lived with this under the sun perspective an earthly perspective, it is futile there is no hope for meaning and purpose.

He goes on to demonstrate the reason for his conclusions and does this first in chapters 1 and 2 by recounting for us his own personal quest in exploring all of the avenues by which he thought he might find meaning and purpose, he tried every possible way to indulge himself, to better himself, to get personally great, he tried it all.

Following that in chapters 3 and 4 he demonstrates the vanity and futility of life under the sun through his observations of how things work in this

world. He tells us this is what I saw. These observations are often preceded with words such as I saw or I perceived.

So the preacher doesn't just depend on his own experiences, by the way many of his own experiences we do not have the resources to duplicate, we can't do what he did, we have to take his word for it, but in chapters 3 and 4 what he does is that he observes the way life is and he appeals to us to observe the same thing, we can see it too, all of us can observe this life under the sun, and so he appeals to that.

And in all of this even in the early chapters of this book there are these glimmers of hope that shine through, these glimmers of another perspective not just an under the sun perspective but a God perspective.

These chapters are salted with some insights into how God's perspective actually makes life worth living.

However the key to all this, the key to understanding this life that breaks through from time to time is that we must recognise God's rightful place.

And so one of the primary concepts taught in this little book is that God is sovereign, God is in control.

This life that we live under the sun really isn't about us it is about Him and when we try to exert control, when we try to exert sovereignty over our life under the sun as the preacher did in chapters 1 and 2, when we try to do that thinking that perhaps we can find meaning and purpose, all we end up with is emptiness and futility but when we live under the authority of God, when we live under the control of God then we begin to find true life, true meaning and purpose in this existence under the sun and the preacher expresses this throughout the book in phrases like fear God, or consider God. Now in chapter 5 the preacher goes from preaching to meddling because you see before it was "I saw this and this is what it means" but here in chapter 5 he comes with "now you do this, you do that." And so he begins to take this to a different level.

He was giving a commentary on what he observed but now he is making application, he is giving exhortation to his hearers, to us, he is giving us instructions about how we should live our lives in light of the futility that is ours, our experience apart from God. In light of God's sovereignty and His control and his rule and authority how should we live?

So he begins to say things like do this and don't do that, he begins to make application and so he does this from chapter 5 through to at least chapter 10 and then in the last 2 chapters of this book he concludes with exhortation, he sums it all up by telling us what is really important in life and his concluding exhortation is, Fear God, for this is the chief duty of man to fear God and keep his commandments. It's really what it is all about.

So I think it is fitting that he would begin this section of this book with an exhortation to the proper worship of God, proper use of God's blessings to us in the form of material provisions, and both of these, the worship of God and the blessing of God, point us to the fact that this existence, this life, really is not about us.

Meaning and purpose in life will not be found in ourselves, in our own abilities, our own possessions, our own experiences, no, meaning and purpose in life will be found through the fear of God and we will come to enjoy life and everything that God has given us but only if we fear Him.

I find it kind of ironic that the very act of worship, the worship of God, the ascribing of value or worth to God would so easily get entangled with selfish ambitions but it does, we see that all the time, we see it in our own lives.

For many of us worship becomes something we do to get rather than to give, we come to the house of God, to church, for all kinds of devious reasons, selfish reasons, some of us come to church to make ourselves feel better, kind of our weekly shot of "feel good" a little pick me up so I can make it through the rest of the week. Now certainly when we come to the Lord's house to worship with God's people it should be a time of refreshing, encouragement, but if that is our motivation for coming then who is it really about, what is it really for? What are we ascribing value or worth to? Ourselves and how we feel or to God?

Or we might come to church to impress other people or to at least avoid their displeasure, some of us have this little bargain with God, okay God I'll go to church on Sunday, I'll go to church every Sunday so that I can do what I want the rest of the week. Or, God you owe me this because look how faithful I am attending church, so you owe me a break here God!

And furthermore in our kind of consumeristic kind of culture that we live in if we don't get what we want in worship often we just go find another church that offers what we want and we shop around until we find the right fit for our needs.

No brothers and sisters, this is not the way worship should be!

The corrective is found here in Ecclesiastes chapter 5, along with many other places in the Scripture, it is not about you, it's not about me, it is about God! And guess what, God is bigger than you, way bigger!

And this should affect our attitude even before we come to worship to the house of God to the gathered assembly of God's people, this should affect all of life, it should affect how we behave during the week and what we do when we gather together and it should affect how we live after we have left the assembly of God's people.

So there are 3 parts to this matter of worship that we will find in verses 1 through 7.

Firstly we find what happens before we gather together in public worship, secondly we find what happens or what we're supposed to do during or not do during worship and thirdly we see what we are supposed to do after worship.

And then we move into the next section which talks about money and there we will have 2 parts.

Firstly he describes for us the problems with money and why it is so difficult for us and then in the last couple of verses he will give us what seems to be good and fitting as we think about money and worship.

So before you worship, verse 1, it says guard your steps when you go to worship.

In other words be careful, take stock of how you are walking, this is a euphemism for conducting yourself, Ephesians talks about walking according to the course of this world, the pattern of behaviour, take stock, guard your steps, be careful.

Worship begins with a referential attitude of respect towards God.

We live in a day where people have no respect, they don't respect each other, they don't respect authority, they don't respect parents, teachers, don't respect elected officials but the Bible says that we should honour our

father and our mother, we should respect those who are in authority over us, but because we live in a culture that is so democratic and everyone is equal and nobody is in charge and no need to respect anyone we kind of get this same attitude about God it creeps into our subconscious understanding, it affects how we live and how we relate to God.

So we have this attitude that Jesus is my buddy and Jesus is my co-pilot, I do whatever I can do and Jesus picks up the rest.

No, it is not that way at all!

We might think I do all the important things and then God just does the stuff that I'm not capable of. But this is a diminishment of God, it is a reduction of God, it is basically creating a new god in our image, a god like us, and God is diminished and we're elevated and we don't really come to worship God with any kind of respect and this doesn't just happen when we come together on Sunday mornings this is also the attitude of our life during the week many times.

That reverence for God, that watching our steps, really includes the entirety of our Christian walk, where we go, what we say, what we do, how our life is conducted even apart from this place from this gathered assembly.

It is the same message that the Apostle Paul had for Timothy, in first Timothy chapter 2 we see some instructions about worship, the same message, Paul talks about how that men should come to church and they should raise holy hands in prayer, they should not come with anger or quarrelling. You see for men a good part of our worship during the week is what we do with our hands, it's how we work, by our work we are ascribing value, worth, to something or someone, all of life is to be worship to God.

We also ascribe value by our attitudes.

If we are angry and quarrelling if we are yelling at people or casting down our wife or threatening our kids then our hands are dirty they are not fit to be raised in worship to God.

Furthermore in the same passage in first Timothy 2 he says preparation for worshipful women includes their wardrobe, it says I want women to dress modestly and appropriately if they profess to be godly. What this means is it is not just coming to church and then being real serious for an hour and

then going home and doing whatever you want, it includes during the week.

Men what you do with your hands how do you treat people in your life in your relationships?

And women how do you dress?

Is it a reverential type of living, respect for God, respect for others, it is guarding your steps throughout the day so that when you come to this time of corporate worship you are not a hypocrite, you are not the person who curses or abuses people, maybe even your wife, all week and then comes to church and use your mouth to praise the Lord.

You are not a woman who dresses, who under-dresses because you like attention all week and then you get dressed up to come to church so that you look a little more appropriate.

No that's not real worship.

Acceptable worship begins before worship begins in the public sense; acceptable worship begins in our heart it begins in our daily walk.

The preacher here is talking about reverencing God, guarding our steps, respecting God; it has more to do with what you do outside of church than what you do inside of church.

We could talk about Jesus every Sunday but if we just sin all week and then we come together and have a beautiful church service it is nothing but hypocrisy.

Fools, he calls these kind of people fools, they are foolish, fools don't watch the way they live, they don't watch the way they walk, they stumble any which way, they don't live their life in obedience to God's commands throughout the week but then they want to come to some church event and feel good because they gave God an hour of their time *and* somehow the rest of it is all okay. It's not okay!

God says He would rather have obedience than sacrifice, [1 Samuel 15:22](#) And Samuel said, "Has the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to listen than the fat of rams.

Preparing for worship is not about you and what you want but rather it is about what God wants, about who God is as Lord, as Sovereign.

And so we come to worship with an attitude of respect for God and obedience to him.

It says here when we come to worship we draw near to listen, we draw near to listen, to listen is better than to offer the sacrifice of fools. We come to worship, to listen to what God wants to tell us, we want to know how we can better order our lives according to God's commands.

So are you worshipping right now, are you worshipping right now? Well you say I'm not doing anything I'm just sitting here. Are you listening? If you are listening then you are worshipping.

The preacher here tells us to guard our steps to live our life with God, to listen to God, to listen to God's word, to listen to what God has to say. The assumption here is that we can't just live anyway we want, we can't just worship anyway we want; we live and worship in the way that God has prescribed for us.

We must listen to the Lord we must listen to his word.

In our gathering together here the only thing that can overcome your folly and mine is to listen to God otherwise we're full of it, we're full of ourselves. Unfortunately today we live in a day when preaching and teaching the word of God has taken a nosedive, people don't want to hear, they don't want to listen to what God has to say, they would rather have somebody tickle their ears with something that feels good or sounds good, sometimes what God has to say doesn't feel good, sometimes we don't like it.

People today come in, they want to be entertained, they want to be encouraged, and then sent out to do exactly as they please.

That is not listening, that is not obeying, and that's not worship.

And this is the reason why we here at Calvary place such a high emphasis on the expository ministry of the word of God, the teaching and preaching in the life of our congregation, we want to come to listen to obey and ultimately God's word is the only word worth listening to.

The fool on the other hand doesn't know what he's doing.

It says here he doesn't know what he's doing, why doesn't he know what he's doing?

Well it tells us why, because he has not listened and obeyed, that is why he doesn't know what he's doing, he does what he thinks is right in his own

mind and for his own good, he rashly pledges all kinds of things in an attempt to manipulate God to do what he wants God to do for him. Maybe he says long prayers, maybe he speaks verbosely in an attempt maybe to impress God or other people or twist God's arm and the point is the fool wants to use God to achieve his own purposes, he wants to use God to get something instead of giving service and obedience and sacrifice to God he wants to get.

And the preacher here says wait a minute, not so fast, don't be so hasty here, don't be in such a hurry! Remember, remember who God is, He is the one in charge not you! God is in heaven and guess where you are? On earth. You are not God. God is God therefore let your words be few. The fool is full of himself and that is evidenced by his grand dreams and his many words that he is preoccupied with.

This is not how we should worship instead we are to be concerned with God's business and God's word, it is not about your dreams and your words it is about Him.

So what happens then after worship of the gathered assembly in worship? The responsibilities of worship don't stop when we leave the house of God; verse 4 says when you make a vow to God do not delay in paying it. If you don't pay it shows that you are a fool and you are more concerned with yourself then you are with God, it would be better not to promise or vow then to do so and not come through or not pay. And furthermore don't make excuses for yourself, let not your mouth lead you into sin, don't say well it wasn't really that big a deal it was kind of a mistake I shouldn't really have done that God will overlook it! No, it is a deal, a big deal. God sees right through all those excuses, God sees right through that.

You see a part of our worship involves a response of commitment to God, part of our worship involves a saying, yes Lord, yes I agree with you, I want to do what you say. We repent of our sin, we pray to God we make covenants, we take vows, we make promises to God. How are we doing with fulfilling those vows, those promises, those commitments?

How many of us, how many of you, and you don't have to raise your hands, but how many of you in a moment of pressure in a moment of crisis in a moment of weakness have tried to make a bargain with God? And you have said okay God if you will just give me this one thing if you will do this one thing for me then I will do*you name it...*

I think most of us have probably been there one time or another but what do we tend to do with that?

Well here is how it might go: God please give me a wife, I'm single, I'm getting older, I'm getting more peculiar, more set in my ways, please give me a wife, I'm getting bald, the hair is going underground and coming out my ears, things are not looking good, I have a short shelf life for attracting a wife. So God you've got to help me, you've got to do something and please I promise God if you give me a wife I promise I will love her, I will just love her with everything I've got.

And God says okay here is a woman, she will love you.

Oh thank you God, thank you thank you.

And 2 weeks into your marriage you're yelling at your wife and God says, Remember you promised, I gave you a wife you would love, remember you stood up in front of the church and you looked into each other's eyes and you promised all these things (we observed it yesterday some of us) I will love you in sickness and in health, in good times and bad, for richer for poorer, for better for worse, till death do us part. Now here you are 2 weeks later and you are not loving!

When God answers our prayer we often say phew, thank you Lord, praise you Lord! But then we don't follow through, what about all those promises, what about that bargain you made with God?

Oh well it's not really that serious I mean God answered my prayer didn't He, it must be okay, He kept his end of the deal that's all I really wanted anyway.

That's how we tend to be, it tends to be all about us and what's in it for us even in worship, even in the worship of God if we are self-centred if we're focused on what's in it for us then you will find nothing but vanity and striving after wind, he says that right here when dreams increase and words grow many there is vanity, even in the worship supposed worship of God, even if you pray long prayers, even if you speak lots of eloquent words un-

less you fear God there will be nothing but vanity nothing but emptiness and ultimately death.

It is after all all about Him and this is a big deal.

So big a deal in fact that God has been known to strike people dead for not fulfilling their vows, for not taking Him seriously, and this isn't something that just happened in the Old Testament, you remember the story I'm sure in Acts chapter 5 the story of Ananias and Sapphira they said we are going to sell this piece of property and we are going to give the money to the church, that was their promise their vow, everybody else was doing it, God was blessing them.

I don't know what happened next it does not say maybe they got more for the property than they thought they were going to get, maybe they looked and said, you know what this is a lot of money, pity we couldn't keep a little bit for ourselves and we will give the rest to God and no one is really going to know.

So they walked into where the apostles were one after the other and they died, God struck them dead right there, why, why did they die?

Why did God strike them dead? Because they didn't keep their vow.

So you see it is better not to say anything then it is to say something and not do it.

And that brings us to money.

You see there is an intricate detailed thorough connection between worship and money and the connection is this, how we use our money, well first of all how we earn our money, how we use our money, the motivations for spending it, for saving it, for giving it, all of those things are intimately tied with worship because money our use of it reveals who or what we really value, who or what we really think is important.

So money is an indicator.

And money is pretty powerful, money has a lot of things about it that remind us of God, if you have enough money you can do almost anything at least under the sun for a while, temporarily, money can give you buy you happiness for a bit, money can buy you influence, money can even buy you health for a time sometimes. Money fills this place, this godlike kind of place in our hearts.

So money and worship are closely intertwined in our experience and here the preacher brings them together right here in this chapter and once again we will see that one of the most personal and powerful parts of our life that is our finances our money, is really not about us and the preacher begins this section as I said with some observations about money and money problems.

I often tell young couples as we are giving them premarital counselling that money causes problems whether you have a little bit or a lot you are going to have money problems, you are going to have with money problems or without money problems.

Now me personally I would rather have the money problems okay, that suits me a little better, but it is a problem either way, money is a problem or can be a problem and we see this right here in this chapter.

In the first place we see economic oppression and he says don't be surprised about it, don't marvel at it, you should not be surprised about this and here is why, because everybody in charge is just like you and me, we all want what we can get for ourselves.

There is a whole string of officials, there is a whole string of people that want a little piece of the pie they are all looking out for number one, so it shouldn't surprise you when you find economic oppression in the province or the state or the county, everybody takes advantage of somebody else.

In fact in verse 9 some translations read that the profit from the field of the land is taken by all, even the King, even the King who is far away and not even remotely connected to the field in terms of what happens there he still gets a piece of it in the end.

We know how that works don't we? Yeah happens all the time.

We are reminded of Jesus and the parable of the unjust steward who was forgiven a huge debt that he couldn't pay and then he promptly turns around and tries to extract from his brother a small debt.

It sure is a dog eat dog world isn't it? Everybody out to see what they can get for themselves.

It seems we can hardly escape this vicious cycle and the saddest thing is that it tells us in verse 10 and following that this will never amount to anything, he who loves money will never have enough to be satisfied, he who

loves making money will never make enough to be happy and when the amount of wealth increases it seems that there are just more hands reaching out for a piece of it.

I saw a motto one time, believe it was in Walmart of all places, and the motto said “Success is relative – the more success the more relatives.” That’s what he is saying right here that’s the motto right here, there is an increase, there is success, goods increase but guess what they increase who eat them, there is more people with their hands out try to get a piece of the action.

There is nothing of lasting value here in fact as he says all you can do is watch the stuff disappear, all you can do is see it and it’s gone and that reminds me of Proverbs 23 where it says, Do not toil to acquire wealth be discerning enough to desist, [Proverbs 23:4](#), or quit when you have enough. For wealth when your eyes light on it it’s gone for suddenly it sprouts wings and flies like an eagle to heaven, [Proverbs 23:5](#).

Isn’t that the picture what happens with money? You think you have it you see it there in your bank account and next week there is a \$2000 bill for some repairs to your house or car or something else! It sprouts wings and it’s gone!

And so it is with wealth and money.

And then he says there’s another grievous evil that he has seen, he sees a man who through much hardship, through much hurt to himself and maybe others, he works hard and accumulates a huge sum and thinks wow! But then guess what?

He loses it all in a bad business venture and he ends up with nothing to help his son get started in life.

What a waste, what a tragedy. What good is it?

Well in fact even if we get what we think we want maybe we do manage to kind of grab that eagle as it flying away and hang onto it maybe we can take a little bit and keep it for a while but guess what? It still doesn’t satisfy it causes us no end of trouble.

It says here the person who gorges himself with good food he can’t even sleep at night and all his days it says in verse 17 all his days he is going to eat in the dark because he is afraid somebody is going to see what he has got and come and get it or steal it and take it away, so he eats in the dark

and furthermore he is anxious and he is sick and is worrying about his money and his stuff and tries to protect it and hold onto it, much vexation and sickness and he gets angry with people when they cross him when they take a little too much.

That's what money does to you, to me, it causes us no end of trouble and the sad fact of life is that we will leave this world with the same amount that we came into this world with, nothing more, nothing less.

I asked the children downstairs how many of them came into this world with \$100. Nobody did, nobody came with \$1000 either or even a penny, most of them cost us a couple of thousand, right, but they came with nothing and we are going to leave with nothing and so the answer is not in how much or even how little we have the answer is in whether or not we honour and fear God.

That is what we must be concerned about!

Now there are some people today, even in the church, who argue that rich people are rich because they are smart and because they work hard and that poor people are poor because they are dumb and they spend all their money on lottery tickets and video games and fast food, and so there is this debate between the rich and the poor and some people are thinking actually the rich are evil, the rich and the bad guys they steal everybody's money and the poor they are the virtuous people, they are godly, they are wonderful. And so the debate between the rich and the poor who is the good guy, who's the bad guy.

Well being poor can be good, it can be godly, it can be righteous, but sometimes being poor is just the result of laziness. People say well I am poor just like Jesus! No you're not, you're just lazy! And there is nothing righteous about that.

But the Bible is not so concerned about the amount of money, the Bible is not so concerned whether you are rich or whether you're poor, being poor can be good, being rich can be good, the Bible speaks primarily of righteous and unrighteous and we want to be careful when we get into this issue of money that we don't fall into this trap of trying to pull ourselves up and say well I'm better than you because I've got more left than you.

It is good to be rich or is it good to be poor?

Well sometimes it's good to be rich, sometimes it's good to be poor but it is always good to be righteous.

And God makes you rich or poor by the way.

Look what it says here, God is the one that has given the wealth, you came with nothing, you're going to leave with nothing, everything that you have is because God has given it to you. It is not about rich and poor it is about being righteous or unrighteous. And no matter how much or how little you have, is your money is your stuff going to be about you or is it going to be about God? [Ecclesiastes 5:19](#)

And you see today there are those who preach a prosperity gospel, those who say that if you fear God then He will bless you and make you wealthy, healthy, wealthy and wise just donate \$1000 to this ministry.

There are others who say, no, no we need a gospel of poverty, you must enter this place of voluntary poverty and then you will find true peace and satisfaction and joy.

And I say no, neither of those is right, both of those approaches, both the prosperity gospel and the poverty gospel are still about us and about how much or how little we have and God is about righteousness. If you have anything it is because God has given it to you, it is certain you can carry nothing out so what are we supposed to do with this stuff then?

And now we come to verse 18, whether you have little or whether you have much the preacher says the best thing to do is to worship God with it, accept these things he says as a gift from God because that's what they really are. Remember it is God who decides how much you will have or not have, rejoice in the blessings of God, rejoice in the blessings of food and drink and enjoy the work that God has given you to do but don't see these things as an end in themselves.

Remember do not toil to acquire wealth, toil to enjoy God.

[1 Corinthians 10:31](#) has an echo of this a similar refrain: So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the honour and glory of God. Everything. The apostle Paul follows that in verse 33 by saying that he does not seek his own advantage but rather the advantage of others that many may be saved, [1 Corinthians 10:33](#).

So part of this learning how to deal with our stuff and our money properly just remember it is not about us, it is not about what we can get out of it, it is about what we can do for others and honour God.

This life under the sun is such a temporary existence, our days are numbered and even God knows those numbers, it is not about us, we cannot even know when enough is enough, we cannot even number our days, God is the one who numbers our days, He is the one who knows, He is the one who will provide, He knows what is good for us and He even provides the ability to enjoy these good things. Without his grace and his providence we can't even enjoy the stuff instead it will cause us all manner of grief. Without God and God's perspective we are of all men most miserable.

And so if you live in this God honouring way, if you live in the fear of God, as it says here in Ecclesiastes chapter 5, then the reality is that you won't be worried sick, you won't get anxious and angry because your stuff is being misused in fact you won't even worry about the days of your life or remember much about them because you will be too busy enjoying God and what He is doing in your life.

God keeps him occupied with joy in his heart, this is the righteous life.

And you can have this kind of life whether you are rich or whether you're poor. This life is a life of careful devotion to God, a life of guarding, watching our steps.

Jesus says in [Matthew 6:33](#) Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, not our righteousness, not our stuff, not our kingdom, seek first His kingdom and all of these things will be added to you.

This is how the Gospel works.

We are to die to self and are raised in a new life in Christ.

Jesus says he who seeks his life will lose it, he who loses his life for my sake will find it, ([Matthew 16:25](#))

He who will be first must be last and the last first ([Matthew 19:30](#))

This is the way of the Kingdom of God, it is all about Him, God is bigger than we are.

So in conclusion watch your steps, watch the way you live, watch the way you promise and vow and be sure to pay, watch the way you use your money, the way you value your money. Don't be self-centred or self-serving in your worship or with your money.

Remember God is the one in control He is in heaven and we are on earth, it is He that has made us, (Psalm 100:3).

Meaning and purpose in life will not be found in ourselves, in our abilities, in our wealth and our possessions, meaning and purpose in life will only be found by the righteous fear of God and then we can come to enjoy everything even the hard things in life because God has given to us and God is the one we must fear.

Let's pray.

Father God we come to you trembling, not in terror but in fear, for we realise you are a big God, you are in heaven, we on earth, we do not even know what is good for us, you do.

So we want to trust ourselves into your care, we want to trust our stuff, our relationships, our dreams, our words, we want to trust them all to you for it is you who gave them and it is you that can take them away and so we recognise and we honour your sovereignty, your control, your dominion.

We thank you that we can also call you Father that you are a good Father and that you love your children and we see that most clearly demonstrated in the person of Jesus Christ as he came from the glories of heaven to this earth and so we know that you love us and that you care for us and that you desire that which is ultimately and truly good for us. So help us to trust you.

Make us your humble servants for your glory and our good we pray in Jesus name, Amen.



GOD THE RIGHTEOUS

... that I may win Christ, and be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith. Philippians 3: 8-9

Neither Doing nor Knowing but Being

What is the righteousness which is of God by faith? It is simply the thing that God wants every man to be, wrought out in him by constant obedient contact with God himself. It is not an attribute either of God or man, but a fact of character in God and in man. It is God's righteousness wrought out in us, so that as He is righteous, we too are righteous.

It does not consist in obeying this or that law, not even the keeping of every law, so that no hairsbreadth did we run counter to one of them. To be righteous is to be of such a heart, soul, mind, and will, as would recoil with horror from the lightest possible breach of any law of God. It is to be so in love with what is fair and right as to make it impossible for a person to do anything that is less than absolutely righteous. It is not the love of righteousness in the abstract that makes anyone righteous, but such a love of fair play toward everyone with whom we come into contact, that anything less than fulfilling, with a clear joy, our divine relation to him or her, is impossible.'

More powerful than all powers is being. To be is more powerful than even to do. Action may be hypocrisy, but being is the thing itself and the parent of action.

If by neglect of its wings an eagle should sink to become a sparrow, it would then recognize only the laws of sparrow life. For the sparrows of humanity do not generally believe in a consuming fire and an outer darkness, where all that will be left is an ever renewed "alas!" The "alas" is that they neglected their wings, neglected to try to see beyond their own horizons, neglected to do the words of Him who alone is life. It is truth and not serenity that a man's nature requires of Him. It is help, not the leaving of cards at doors, that will be recognized as the test. It is love, and no amount of flattery, that will prosper. Differences wide as that between a gentleman and a cad will contract to a hairsbreadth in that day. The customs of the trade—and the picking of pockets will go together, with the greater excuse for the greater need and the less knowledge. Liars the most gentlemanlike and the most rowdy will go as liars just the same. The first shall be last, and the last first.

Loving Rightness not Doctrines

The righteousness of God goes far beyond mere deeds, and requires of us love and helping mercy as our highest obligation and justice to our fellowman.

Our relations with others—God first, and then our neighbor in order and degree—must one day become, as in true nature they are, the gladness of our being. Nothing will then ever appear good for us that is not in harmony with those blessed relations. Every thought will not merely be just, but will be just because it is something more, because it is live and true. The light of our life, our sole, eternal, and infinite joy, is simply God—God—God—

nothing but God, and all his creatures in Him. He is all and in all, and all the children of the kingdom know it. God is truth, is Life. To be in God is to know Him and need no law. Existence will be eternal Godness.

Some will think they would not like such a way of it. But the more we truly know God, the more we will desire Him, until at length we live in and for Him with all our conscious heart. Before you can judge this, however, you must know at least a little of God as He is, not as you imagine Him.

The righteousness which is of God by faith in the source, the prime of that righteousness, is just the same kind of thing as God's righteousness. The righteousness of him who does the will of his Father in heaven is the righteousness of Jesus Christ, is God's own righteousness. The man who has this righteousness, thinks about things as God thinks about them, loves the things that God loves, cares for nothing that God does not care about. The man with God's righteousness does not love a thing merely because it is right, but loves the very rightness in it. He not only loves a thought, but he loves the man in his thinking that thought; he loves the thought alive in the man. He does not take his joy from himself. He feels joy in himself, but it comes to him from others—from God first, and from somebody, anybody, everybody next.

The man who really knows God is, and always will be, content with what God, who is the very self of his self, shall choose for Him. He is entirely God's, and not at all his own. His consciousness of himself is the reflex from those about him, not the result of his own turning in of his regard upon himself. It is not the contemplation of what God has made him; it is the being what God has made him and the contemplation of what God himself is, and what he has made his fellows that gives him his joy. He wants nothing, and feels that he has all things, for he is in the bosom of the Father, and the thoughts of his Father come to him. He knows that if he needs anything, it is his before he asks it; for his Father has willed him, in the might and truth of his fatherhood, to be one with himself.

This then—or something like this, for words are poor to tell the best things—is the righteousness which is of God by faith. What a far and wonderful cry this is from the prevailing theology that is built on a sort of legal fiction, in which Jesus was treated as He was not, in order that we might be treated as what we are not. This doctrine of so-called imputed righteousness would have us remain unrighteous and yet be treated as if we were righteous. For myself, it warms my heart not a bit to be told that God will

pretend that I am righteous, when I know I am not. The longing of my heart is to one day, through the work of the spirit of Jesus Christ within me, be righteous, as He is righteous.

O Lord, give me a childlike mind and the heart of a child that I might approach Thee and that Thou might accomplish righteousness within me!

Righteousness not Wrought Through the Intellect

The wise and prudent interprets God by himself and does not understand Him. The child interprets God by himself and does understand Him. The wise and the prudent must make a system and arrange things in his mind before he can say, "I believe." The child sees, believes, obeys—and knows he must be perfect as his Father in heaven is perfect.

If an angel, seeming to come from heaven, told such a child that God had let him off, that He did not require so much of him as complete righteousness, that He could not indeed allow him to be wicked but would let a great deal go by, modifying his demands because it was so hard for him to be altogether good, the true child of God would at once recognize the angel for what it was, woven with its starry brilliancy—a demon from hell.

How God can bring about this righteousness in you, or me, I cannot tell you. Let Him do it, and perhaps you will know. If you never know how, He will do it nonetheless. He originates the possibility of your being His son, His daughter. He makes you able to will it, but you must will it.

If He is not doing it in you—that is, if you have as yet prevented Him from beginning—why should I tell you, even if I knew the process, how He would do what you will not let Him do? And indeed, how should you be able to know? For it must deal with deeper and higher things than you can know anything of until the work is at least begun.

Perhaps if you approved of the plans of the glad Creator, you would allow Him to make of you something divine. But to teach your intellect what has to be learned by your whole being, what cannot be understood without your whole being, it would do you no good to understand except you understood in your whole being—if this be the province of any man, it is not mine. Let the dead bury their dead, and the dead teach their dead. For me, I will try to wake them.

Awake and Cry to Him!

To those who are awake, I cry: For the sake of your Father and the firstborn among many brethren to whom we belong, for the sake of those He has given us to love the most dearly, let patience have her perfect work.

Statue under the chisel of the Sculptor, stand steady to the blows of his mallet. Clay on the wheel, let the fingers of the Divine Potter model you at their will. Obey the Father's lightest word. Hear the Brother who knows you and died for you. Beat down your sin, and trample it to death.

God is righteous, and He is our righteousness. Let His very being fill you with itself! When you sit at home in your house, which is the temple of the Lord, open all your windows to breathe the air of His approach. Set the watcher on your turret, that he may listen out into the dark for the sound of His coming, and your hand be on the latch to open the door at His first knock. Should you open the door and not see Him, do not say He did not knock, but understand that He is there, and wants you to go out to Him. It may be He has something for you to do for Him. Go and do it. And perhaps you will return with a new prayer, to find a new window in your soul. Never wait for fitter time or place to talk to Him. To wait till you go to church, or to your closet, is to make Him wait. He will listen as you walk in the lane or the crowded street, in a field or in a place of meeting.

Remember that the service He requires is not done in any church. He will say to no one, "You never went to church: depart from me, I do not know you." But He will say, "Inasmuch as you never helped one of my Father's children, you have done nothing for me."

Church is not the place for divine service. It is a place of prayer, a place of praise, a place to feed upon good things, a place to learn of God, as is every place. It is a place to look in the eyes of your neighbour and love God along with him, as is every place. But the world in which you move, the place of your living and loving and labor, not the church you go to on your day off, is the place of divine service, the place where God works righteousness into your being. Serve your neighbour and you serve God. Thus will God be able to do His work in your heart.

Cry unto him, "O God!" and it will be enough.

For what are the prayers of the whole universe more than expansions of that one cry? It is not what God can give us, but God that we want. The only comfort is that God is, and I am His, otherwise I should not be at all. The very life of God by which we live is an everlasting eternal giving of himself away. He asserts himself, only, solely, altogether, in an infinite sacrifice of devotion.

THE HOPE OF BECOMING BETTER

(A Fictional Selection from The Marquis' Secret, by George MacDonald)

There is no wrong man can do but against the living Right. Surely you believe, my lady, that there is a living Power of right, who will have right done?"

"In plain language, I suppose you mean, do I believe in a god?"

"That is what I mean, if by a god you mean a being who cares about us and loves justice—that is, fair play—one whom, therefore, we wrong to the very heart when we do a thing that is not just."

"I would gladly believe in such a being if things were so that I could. As they are, I confess it seems to be the best thing to doubt it. How can I help doubting it when I see so much suffering, oppression, and cruelty in the world?"

"I used to find that a difficulty. Indeed it troubled me sorely until Mr. Graham helped me see that ease and prosperity and comfort—indeed, the absence of those things you mentioned—are far from what God intends us to have. What if these things, or the lack of them, should be but the means of our gaining something in its very nature so much better that-?"

"But why should a being have to suffer for that 'something better' you speak of? What kind of a God would make that 'the means' for our betterment? Your theory is so frightful!"

"But suppose he knows that the barest beginnings of the good he intends would reconcile us to those difficult means and even cause us to choose his will at any expense of suffering?"

Clementina said nothing for a moment. Religious people, she found, could think as boldly as she.

"I tell you, Lady Clementina," said Malcolm, rising and approaching her a step or two, "if I had not the hope of one day being good like God himself, if I thought there was no escape out of the wrong and badness I feel within me, not all the wealth and honours of the world could reconcile me to life."

N.B. The foregoing articles "God the Righteous" and the selection from "The Marquis' Secret" used by permission from the works of George MacDonald, 1824-1905, as edited by Michael Phillip. www.FatherOfTheInklings.co

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