

THE AUSTRALIAN ANABAPTIST

God's solid foundation stands firm. 2 Tim. 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

Many of us I am sure would know the hymn "Have Thine Own Way Lord" but I do wonder if your experience is one of truly letting the Lord have His own way. I must confess that it has not always been that way in my life and even today, having been granted in excess of 3 score years and ten, there are still times when I have to make a determination to let the Lord have His own way.

It seems that Satan keeps a close eye on our carnal nature, finds the chinks in our armour of faith, fires off one of his fiery darts in an attempt to make a breach in our relationship with our heavenly Father and sadly sometimes those attempts are successful but we must not despair but rather take courage from the Scripture and apply the words of **1 John 1:9** which tell us that if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

What a blessing to know that our Father in heaven is always ready to forgive us and to cleanse us when we stumble in our Christian walk. Of course if we deliberately forsake the way of the Lord then we place our self in the position of Esau who sold his birthright and found no place of repentance though he sought it carefully with tears.

Our birthright is to be called my sons and daughters by the Lord Almighty, I'm sure we all understand that we have to take that first initial step, ye must be born again Jesus says (John 3:3-7) Scripture reinforces this concept of being God's sons and daughters in John 1:12 and as we read 2 Corinthians 6:11-18 you will discover some of the steps that we need to take to take up that birthright of becoming His sons and daughters.

Of course there are many other places in Scripture that show us how we ought to live to take up that birthright and part of that is to have a determination to live the life of a disciple of Jesus Christ and that takes commitment. Throughout Scripture both the Old and New Testament we find examples of those who committed themselves to the ways of God and the call of God on their lives and the resultant blessings that came from that.

Job said he would seek unto God and unto God he would commit his cause, Job 5:8 the psalmist said into thine hand I commit my spirit thou hast redeemed me a Lord God of truth (Psalm 31:5) so with the psalmist let us commit our way unto the Lord and trust also in Him, (Psalm 7:5)

J.v.L



From the Pulpit

The Silver Lining of Adversity
*From a message by Mervin Burkholder
Centerville Mennonite Church – 2006.*

*Consider the work of God: for who can make that straight,
which he hath made crooked?*

*In the day of prosperity be joyful, but in the day of adversity consider: God
also hath set the one over against the other,
to the end that man should find nothing after him.*

[Ecclesiastes 7:13-14](#)

The songwriter expresses that God moves in a mysterious way His wonders to perform. Verse two goes on: Ye fearful Saints fresh courage take, and the clouds are big with mercy and shall break in blessings on your head.

I'm thankful this morning even though we don't understand the mysterious ways of God we have the Word, we have the Bible that we can go to that can help us through the adverse circumstances that may come in life. The songwriter tells us to take fresh courage. It is the tendency of human nature to look at the negatives that come through life but God would want us to see this morning that through the negatives He has positives for us and my thoughts this morning are relating to the positives that God would have us to learn through the adverse circumstances that that He allows to come our way be as it may.

And we again look to God this morning to inspire and to direct us as we face an unknown future, may we rest assured that He knows best.

I would like to introduce my message this morning by reading a sampling of Scripture verses that bring out a similar thought that we would like to look at and that is the adversities of life, I have chosen to use the text verses from Ecclesiastes 7:13-14 as somewhat a basis for a message and yet we will not be drawing a lot of thoughts from these verses but they do help to bring out the thought of what I would like to present this morning.

I have entitled my message "The Silver Lining of Adversity" and as we go through the message I would trust that as the Spirit moves we would understand that the adverse circumstances of life are for our own good and as I said we don't understand why all that is but God does.

The first verse I would like to look at this morning that brings out the thought that I'd like to present is in Job 14, you don't need to turn to these verses if you don't care to, I'd like to just go down through approximately 4 or five verses and just read them.

Job 14:1 "Man *that is* born of a woman *is* of few days, and full of trouble." I see here as he looked at the future, looked at the future from his point of view he sees life as a hopeless condition and very discouraging and that it is human nature. We tend to look at things from our point of view and we look at the discouraging and hopeless conditions that are before us. To Job the future did not look very bright but as Job committed his life to the One that controlled his life there was a bright picture ahead of him.

The verse I would like to look at next is where David says: "Many *are* the afflictions of the righteous: but the Lord delivereth him out of them all." **Psalm 34:19.**

The thought that impressed me from this verse is that the child of God, we as God's children are not exempt from troubles and discouragement that can come but even though God allows them to come God is there to enable us to take His hand and to guide us through the trying times that may come in life.

Psalm 119:71 says: "*It is* good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn thy statutes." I see here that the Psalmist sensed that God moves in His mysterious ways His wonders to perform. One of God's purposes in His mysterious ways I believe is to mature us.

God desires that each one of us would become more like Him and that is part of the maturing process that God wants from each one of us. Ecclesiastes 7 brings us to text verses, there could be many verses we could use as a text, I was particularly drawn to the one phrase in verse 14 that stood out to me,

Ecclesiastes 7:13-14 “Consider the work of God: for who can make *that* straight, which he hath made crooked? In the day of prosperity be joyful, but in the day of adversity consider: God also hath set the one over against the other, to the end that man should find nothing after him.”

In the day of prosperity be joyful, but in the day of adversity consider. And one of the thoughts that we find expressed in these verses is that God is in control of all circumstances, God is in control of each of our lives and since our days, our lives we might say, are in the iron grip of God, we see that the days of prosperity and the days of adversity are determined by Him and be as it may we can do very little to change what may come. We are called by God to make the best of whatever life may bring because of what God allows to come into our lives.

The message title says “The Silver Lining of Adversity”

Webster defines adversity as a condition of suffering, destitution or reflection, a misfortune or disaster experienced.

As we think of adversities I think we would all agree that there are various circumstances that vary in life and all adversities are not all the same. We look at the suffering, we can look at the disastrous experiences that may come, there are no two circumstances I believe that compare to each other. We think of the emotional and physical suffering and each incident is normally different, it could be through the instance of death and we wonder why God allows death to touch the lives of the innocent at times as He does.

It can be through natural disasters that God allows these adverse circumstances to take place and again we wonder why did God allow the New Orleans flood as He did, what is God's plan and purpose behind all this?

We also see that adversities can come at any time of life, it does not matter what age we are or at what stage in life we are, God allows various adversities to come and as God allows these adverse circumstances to come I believe that we must remember that God has a purpose in all that He allows to take place.

The phrase "the silver lining" I believe portrays a message of hope for consolation.

This phrase we find in the familiar wedding hymn that is sung particularly at our weddings, "Bless This Pair" You take a look at this song and it illustrates the joining of two hearts and as these two hearts set out to begin a new home together it is very unlikely that these two hearts anticipate adversities in life. Very unlikely that they will expect what may come but adversities can come.

The songwriter goes on and I believe in the third stanzas that as these clouds or adverse circumstances may come that God would be the consolation. And we know that tests and trials will come, the thought that is brought out is representing, it mentions the word clouds and I believe the clouds refer to the circumstances that can come in life, it depicts a beautiful picture.

I think there are a few lessons we can learn from the third stanzas, it says: And on each cloud the Lord put a silver lining.

The natural clouds if you take time to observe, especially varying cloud pictures we think of the dark clouds, the thunderclouds that come and particularly as the thunderstorm begins to move into the area and gradually move away, dark clouds or thunderclouds we try to illustrate as a picture of darkness and gloom, and as you observe particularly after a thunder storm as the clouds begin to move on and begin to disappear as the sun begins to shine through the darkness and the gloom that is overcast, we see that there is a silver lining that shines forth.

And this silver lining I believe portrays a ray of hope and sunshine a ray that there is hope because the cloud is passing.

What is the lesson we can learn from this silver lining?

Why I believe as it portrays a ray of sunshine and hope we find rest knowing that God is controlling the clouds that are passing by. God is controlling the adverse circumstances that may come into our life. As we think of the adverse circumstances sometimes they are very difficult for us to accept and we do not know at times how to accept what comes our way but we must accept because God allows them to take place.

And we must accept them because the will of God is best for me and as we accept that it is God's will I believe that it is then that we find rest. And we could direct a message to accepting God's purposes in life, I have not chosen to do that this morning but David in [Psalm 63:7](#) said: "Because thou hast been my help therefore in the shadow of thy wings will I rejoice."

I would like to think now on what some of God's purposes are in adversity.

We could raise the question: Does God have a purpose in adversity?

And as we go through various circumstances we know that God does because we see the hand of God controlling as He sees best.

In the first place I believe adversity is perhaps one of God's ways of pruning.

And those that are familiar with fruit trees as a natural illustration I believe if you want your fruit trees to be productive what must you do? Well they need to be properly pruned, we also know that unless the fruit trees are properly pruned they will not be as productive as they really can be.

God is looking for productivity out of each one of us this morning and God is pruning through adverse circumstances in life. This morning there are things that come into our lives that we have no answer for and the question that we need to respond to and challenge ourselves with is: How do we respond to these circumstances?

My thoughts went to the example of Job, Job is an interesting character, a faithful example and yet many lessons we can learn through him.

We have the Scripture in Job 2 that stood out to me.

[Job 2:3](#) says: "And the Lord said unto Satan, Hast thou considered my servant Job, that *there is* none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil?"

This word "escheweth" is the thought of avoiding evil. We have one that might say was unworthy of the adverse circumstances that came his way, it was in a short time that God allowed Job to face some very severe circum-

stances and these severe circumstances were to the point that his wife told him to curse God and die. (Job 2:9).

I was impressed with Job's response to the adverse circumstances that came his way in verse 10, this was Job's response to his wife:

Job 2:10 "But he said unto her, Thou speakest as one of the foolish women speaketh. What? shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil? In all this did not Job sin with his lips." Shall we receive good at the hand of God and shall we not receive evil?

Job committed his will to the One who knew best in spite of what God allowed to come his way.

We mentioned earlier that there are things that come into our life that we have no answers for and humanly speaking we do not have an answer but praise God there is an answer and God is the answer to those difficult times and God answers in ways that we do not always understand or know, God is holding us and pruning us, God wants you and I, God wants me to see how the blessings we will receive will far exceed the adverse circumstances that we are facing.

And at the present moment when we may be facing some of the difficulties of life we do not understand why this is taking place but God does.

I believe another of God's purposes in adversity is to break us.

And this thought is brought out in Psalm 51, our brother had alluded to this in last Sunday's message, there are two verses that allude to this thought, Psalm 51 verse 17 and Psalm 34 verse 18

Psalm 51:17 "The sacrifices of God *are* a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise."

Psalm 34:18 The LORD *is* nigh unto them that are of a broken heart; and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit.

We look at the example of David, I believe David experienced some very crushing and difficult times as well in his life and we can go through scriptures and look at various examples where this is expressed but the thought that impressed me about the adverse circumstances that David faced is that

David did not indulge himself in self-pity. But in [Psalm 23:1](#) he declared: The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.

I think as we look at the faithful example that David has set in the Scripture for us I believe it sets a worthy example for us and I mentioned that when adverse circumstances come we do not always know how to respond at times to the difficulties and instead maybe dwelling on these adverse circumstances and thinking about what our problems are.

In first Samuel 30 it tells us what David did on this occasion when he was truly distressed because of adversity and David it tells us encouraged himself in the Lord.

[1 Samuel 30:6](#): “And David was greatly distressed; for the people spake of stoning him, because the soul of all the people was grieved, every man for his sons and for his daughters: but David encouraged himself in the LORD his God.”

Do we go to the source that can enable us? I think that is a worthy example for us to follow today.

The story is told of an architect who ordered a gigantic mirror to grace the walls of the Royal Palace and when this shipment arrived he was disappointed, the mirrors were cracked and the engineer, who was frustrated, ordered this order trashed and disposed off. When the architect received the report that the shipment was to be disposed of he had other plans and he commanded that the broken fragments be recovered and the story goes on to say that he requested that the pieces of this cracked mirror be crushed into tiny bits of glass and that these tiny bits of glass be glued to the walls and to the ceiling and by doing so they glistened like diamonds.

I believe there is a lesson we can learn from this story as we think of God's interest of crushing or breaking us so that we can be useful for Him.

God's purpose in adversity is to break us and perhaps there are many times in life that we feel what we are doing and believe that God's blessing is upon us, and there are many times when instead of goodwill and physical successes we experience trials and afflictions and we wonder why, is God

fair?

Perhaps there are times in life when we feel like that shattered glass.

As the order was that this glass be shattered into tiny bits of glass and we wonder if good can develop from my broken and crushed life, what is God asking of me?

You know sometimes we make plans and we anticipate future events, there may be some circumstances that change our plans. Do we wonder why, do we wonder is God fair, does God understand?

God does.

The words of the hymn writer go: "Does Jesus care when my heart is pained too deeply for mirth and song, As the burdens press and the cares distress and the way grows weary and long."

The chorus goes: "Oh yes He cares, I know the cares, His heart is touched with my grief, when the days are weary and the long nights dreary, I know my Saviour cares!"

And we find consolation as the sun shines forth from the silver lining there is consolation and hope.

I also thought of the example of the life story of Joseph, in Genesis 36 to 47, we could think of the many afflictions and rejections that Joseph experienced and his response to the experiences that came his way. How did Joseph respond? I think there are many lessons we can learn from his faith for example.

As we look at his example there was never one time that Joseph despaired. His brothers hated him, they sold him as a slave, and we think of the account there where Joseph was arrayed before Potiphar's wife and he was wrongly accused of misconduct and there could be various examples.

This morning the question is: What enabled Joseph to go through these adverse circumstances and be faithful?

What allows us, what helps us to go through the tests and trials that come their way to the faithful?

Well I believe it is because Joseph's confidence was in God and that should be our focus is well this morning. It was through those difficult times that Joseph maintained his relationship with God and God bless him because he did so. And this morning we need to have an open and daily communication with God so we can, if those times come look to Him for strength to go on, .I believe another one of God's purposes in adversity is to preserve us for Him.

James 1:12 says: "Blessed is the man that endureth temptation, for when he is tried he shall receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to them which love Him."

It is only by faithfulness that we can receive the crown of life.

God is preserving us for Himself and it is sometimes through adversities that God is helping to preserve us for Himself.

Job, in **Job 23:10** says: "He knoweth the way that I take; when He hath tried me I shall come forth as gold."

And as I understand the process of gold there is only one way that gold is brought to a purified state and this is by putting it through a refining process.

Does God have a lesson for us through the refining process of gold?

I believe Job here is saying that in order for God preserve you and I for Him we need to go through the refining process as that gold needs to go through.

There is also another question thought about this morning:

Are there blessings we can receive through adversity?

As I mentioned the songwriter says: "Ye fearful Saints fresh courage take, the clouds ye so much dread are big with mercy and shall break in blessings on your head."

Yes God has blessings through the adverse circumstances that come our way.

How do we find these blessings?

Well I believe we find these blessings when we see that God has a purpose in adversity. Do we understand that God has a purpose to the adverse circumstances that are coming our way? I believe this morning we can only find what God has for us as we see God's purpose and even though we do not understand God's purposes what do we need to do? We need to resign our will to His will as He sees best.

As I mentioned earlier the example of Job has been a blessing to my life, there are many lessons we can learn from his example.

I would like to just turn to chapter 42 of Job.

Chapter 42 concludes the history book of this faithful example, we have a catalogue of the blessings that God again blessed Job with at the concluding of this history book and in verse 12 we find that the Lord blessed the latter end of Job more than his beginning.

It goes on to tell us of the many things that God blessed Job with, he had 14,000 sheep, he had 6000 camels, 1000 yoke of oxen and 1000 she assess, he also had seven sons and three daughters and in all the land were found no women so fair as the daughters of Job, verse 15, and their father gave them in inheritance among their brethren.

After this Job lived 140 years and saw his sons and his son's sons even unto four generations. So Job died, being full of days. [Job 42:12-17](#).

What is the lesson we can learn from the blessings that God gave Job here?

Job God blessed with many material physical blessings, more than he had from the very beginning, he regained his health, he regained material wealth, he regained his family, he regained his circle of friends but was this the greatest blessing that Job really gained?

I would like to leave this challenge with us this morning as we think of Job's greatest blessing.

Job gained much in life that Job gained even more in life by learning to know God better and understanding His workings in a deeper way.

As we look at the story of the life of Job and how his three friends came to bring comfort to him however in a sense they brought more distress to his life, I think that is a lesson as we face adverse circumstances that as others face adverse circumstances that we'd be the inspiration and help that we can be to them.

That is a challenge for each one of us.

Have you ever wondered how a beautiful rose can come forth from a thorn bush? In the midst of the thorns there is beauty that is expressed in the beauty of the rose, was this coincidence that this took place? I think there are also many lessons we can learn from this detail as well.

Well the challenge that lies before us this morning is that we know not what our future holds but we do know that each day that God gives to us is another challenge.

We know not what tomorrow may bring forth.

We reflect back over the past as we have seen God moving in mysterious ways. We want to continue to look to Him as we face and unknown future, as we face the adverse circumstances that may come, no matter what they may be, may we see them as stepping stones and not stumbling blocks in our spiritual lives.

Let's kneel for a word of prayer.



[**Following** is the second article in a series on the evolutionist teaching by Bro. Sumner Loomis. —EDITOR]

2. THE DESTRUCTIVENESS OF EVOLUTION ON GOD CONSCIOUSNESS AND MORAL VALUES

In 1859, an Englishman named Charles Darwin published a book entitled *The Origin of the Species*. Although rather poorly written in an erratic and sometimes illogical style, the publication seemed to inspire other scientists

(people who expend significant effort to investigate and document the workings of nature) to also write on the subject. Today, Mr. Darwin is called "The father of evolution."

The main theme of evolutionary writings was, and still is, the idea that all living things have evolved from one tiny, basic particle (or possibly a very small and rudimentary one-celled bacterium). Although an extreme amount of effort is spent trying to validate this concept, it includes much speculation. There has never been any scientific proof that evolving from one species to another has ever taken place. In the many geological digs and the fossils that are collected (the fossil record), no transition species (a fossil halfway between two species) has ever been found. Today, we have expressions in our language, such as "The Missing Link," that illustrate the lack of such evidence or proof.

A key point in the evolutionary theories is a doctrine called "survival of the fittest." This is supposed to be the mechanism that strengthens the development of a new species that is evolving into a superior plant or being. But it can be disproved by many examples. A typical example would be our forests. If evolution was functioning, only the superior species would be surviving, and all of our forests would be populated by only a single species of tree. Simple observation shows us a different law is functioning, as we see evergreens, oaks, dogwoods, birch trees, etc., all existing simultaneously in a common area.

Survival of the fittest is a very cruel doctrine. It has often been applied to the justification of abandoning the poor and the sickly. It has also been used as an excuse for supporting war. Both of these actions are exactly opposite to the proper attitude of Christians. We have been directed (by example and teaching) to a compassionate and helpful response to all those in need or of inferior capabilities. This doctrine was employed by Hitler to drive the mass destruction of unwanted segments of the human race.

It should be obvious to anyone that evolution denies God's part in the creation. It even attempts to disclaim God's very existence. We can easily state that evolution separates man from his Creator. It also attempts to remove the requirement of following God's commandments. It is then plain that this fits the Biblical definition of a false god. Embracing evolution is one of the ways in which some individuals worship the god of science (so-called). In past times, the definition of science was taken to be the study of God's handiwork. But in today's climate, it is difficult to apply this defini-

tion.

In summary we itemize the effects of evolution (religion) as follows:

1. Those believing in evolution do not believe in a Creator. This, in essence, means that mankind is an accident and men's actions have no eternal consequences.
2. Without any hope beyond this life, men might as well maximize the pursuit of self-interests.
3. Since they are not subject to a Creator or a higher power, men are now free to run over others to improve their own lot and pleasure.
4. Respect, compassion, responsibility, and care for children now become worthless values. There are too many people here anyway. The family unit is now a fable of no significant value.
5. War is now reasoned to be a useful method of eliminating under-valued people and excess population.
6. Many evolutionists consider themselves one of humanity's most valuable members. This is due to their worship of science and education, plus "liberation" from the "religious strait jacket."

~ Sumner S. Loomis ~



God Pleads With Us – We Choose to Accept or Reject

Incline your ear, and come unto me: hear, and your soul shall live;
and I will make an everlasting covenant with you,
even the sure mercies of David.

Isaiah 55:3

Since the fall of man in the Garden of Eden, God has continually called, admonished, chastised, and pled with men to persuade them to do His will and is another revelation of God's love for man. He wanted all people to enjoy the provisions He had prepared for them. Yet as we look at history, and also view current trends, we realize it has not been man's practice to respond to God's pleading. Even though this has not been the response He desires, God continues to call, if, peradventure, some will heed.

We are not different from our forefathers. We are also inclined to take our own way. We use our own reasoning for the things we do. Our short-sighted vision is not able to see the whole picture as God sees it, and our natures will never be aligned with God, so He often pleads and reasons with us. What great love God has for us that He calls each and every time we stray from the path, and even before we stray. May this message help us realize that His pleadings on our behalf are always and only for our good. He wants us with Him in heaven, and He does what He can to get us there.

God used the prophet Isaiah to plead with His people as they were far from Him,

Isaiah 1:10 Hear the word of the Lord, ye rulers of Sodom; give ear unto the law of our God, ye people of Gomorrah.

And after describing God's view of their sacrifices he goes on to with this call to the people from God:

Isaiah 1:17: Learn to do well; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow. ¹⁸ Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool. ¹⁹ If ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land: ²⁰ But if ye refuse and rebel, ye shall be devoured with the sword: for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it.

And then in the New Testament we have the words of Jesus in **Matthew 11:15:** "He that hath ears to hear let him hear"

This instruction is given numerous times in the Word. Yet men do not always hear those things said to them. God has spoken, giving direction for every area of life, but has mankind heard? In reality, man has no excuse for sin.

Sodom and Gomorrah were cities that were very wicked. Today, these instructions would apply to the evils in the world around us. There are many God-professing people who speak loftily of their love for God and their service to others in God's name yet live in sins against which the Scripture clearly teaches. Could it be that today's verbal sacrifices and the oblations of man are not acceptable to God? Surely He has strong distaste for those hypocritical words coming from man when His all-seeing eyes see the disregard for the clear direction He has given.

In His displeasure for the vain pretense of service, God is not desirous to

destroy. He desires that men would be cleansed of sin and turn to Him with their whole heart. He desires that sin be washed and cleansed from all people over the face of the earth. He has a plan and direction for each person whoever he is or wherever he is. Since God has a plan for everyone, man can be confident that He will lead so that His will may be accomplished. If anyone lacks wisdom to know how to follow, he shall ask and God will give liberally ([James 1:5](#)).

God does not dictate to a man; rather He wants to reason with him so the way of God becomes the way of choice. Too often man refuses to allow God's reasoning to influence his decisions. He reasons with his own will and often comes to a conclusion contrary to God's plan. Even though that has been the practice, God would still have men reason together with Him. He will wash the sins from His children, and the blessings He has prepared for man will be realized. But if man continues to rebel and take his own way, unrest, trouble, and destruction await him.

Scripture has some words of warning for us today which echo the words of God spoken to His people Israel all these years ago and they are still valid for us now: "To day if ye will hear his voice, Harden not your hearts, as in the provocation" [Hebrews 3:7-8](#). Surely God desires of us a soft and pure heart. He cannot work with a heart that is not pliable, hard, brittle, or unresponsive. Yet even when our hearts are not as responsive as God would have them be, we are inclined to give ourselves more credit than we should. We tend to make provisions for our ways and are not as keen to the simple urgings of the Holy Spirit, who would lead us in God's ways. What is seen on the outside is important, but that is not always what makes the shadows. Often we are able to present a flawless form, but God is the great revealer of spirits, and we cannot hide those deeper revelations. It is a common practice of man, because of his pride, to present himself in a light better than reality. When we habitually view ourselves and present ourselves this way, we open the door for deception. Sad will be the outcome if we will not take the deeper look and grasp the fact that we cannot see ourselves as clearly as someone else. Satan is far too successful in convincing people that all is well when all is not well.

As we go about our duties in life, we are constantly confronted with decisions that affect our spiritual condition. Offenses come that cause us to stumble. Trials and temptations sometimes overwhelm us, and we find ourselves away from God. At these times God comes to us and says, "Come

now, and let us reason together." He sees the need in our heart and sees also the remedy for that need. His way to "reason" with us is not the harsh hand of punishment we often fear, but the soft hand of love that will guide us back to Him. God is not a dictator. He wants to show us how to make a good choice, and then as we grasp that fact, we choose His way for our lives. God can only tenderly lead us to this conclusion as we are willing to take the humble way. Our pride has always been what stands in the way of seeing our needs. It is also our pride that places that need on someone else in an attempt to relieve ourselves of the need to search our own hearts.

Man's ways are not always God's ways, and man often approaches his life and the decisions he makes by his own evaluation of his choices and actions. God's plan is, first of all, a spiritual plan. Jesus pleads with us "But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness" [Matthew 6:33](#). His first interest is our salvation and the spiritual well-being of our lives. A child of God should also view spiritual things as being most important. If spiritual things lose their importance to us, we begin to live by intellect. God does not reason with man's intellect; rather, he reasons with man's spirit and heart. His reasoning is always with light. It does not bring darkness or confusion. Whatever decision one may be facing, His direction will be light to the humble, submitted heart.

Young people face important decisions in their lives. What occupation should I choose? Where should I live? Where and when should I give time in service to God and the church? Whom shall I marry? How will I know? God is ready to give the direction we need for our choices today. He does not always reveal His long-term plans for us; rather He gives us direction for current needs. It is like the headlights on our automobiles. They do not shine all the way to our destination, but they do illuminate the road sufficiently that we may reach our destination safely. He speaks to our heart in His wisdom and reasons the way of righteousness. This way will have results in our lives that are satisfying and secure. When we allow God to present His will to us and we accept that His way is best, we can go forward, never needing to look back and wishing things were different.

All the foregoing point out that each of us need to make choices and remember there is no such thing as not making a choice and putting it off till another day, a more convenient time as Felix said in response to God's call through the Apostle Paul, [Acts 24:25](#), because putting it off is in itself a choice!

Choice is being offered through God's pleading with the people alive today and those who were in every age, all of us are like those mentioned in [Joel 3:14](#), Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision: for the day of the Lord is near in the valley of decision.

God has set an absolute and unchangeable standard of morality. Man was created a free moral agent and can, of his free will, accept or reject these divine principles. The power of choice is his to use, and what power it is! "I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live" [Deuteronomy 30:19](#)

Our own choices largely determine the path we take in life, and while we come under many influences along the way, we are not a mere victim of circumstance. In the end, we will be responsible for our own souls.

The well-known account in Luke 15 of the prodigal son is a touching story, displaying the weaknesses of human nature. It also reveals the richness of God's grace to mankind. As a compassionate and forgiving Father, He desires that all mankind would be saved.

In the younger son we see impetuosity, willfulness, and rebellion, which to some degree we have all been guilty of. In the elder son we see self-righteousness as well as a callousness of spirit which judges harshly; at some time in our lives we, too, have been defiled with this.

Through the whole account, it is evident that the father did not impose his will upon the sons. The conduct of each son and the relationship of each with his father, ultimately, came through carrying out the decisions of his own will, in other words they made choices!

No doubt, the younger son did not realize the consequence of his decision when he asked for his portion; undoubtedly, the father knew. Knowing the nature of a good father, surely there would have been much warning and pleading. Oh, the effect of seemingly innocent choices in one's life, for either good or bad!

The prodigal son recklessly spent all his substance. Being in want, he surely thought about home and the foolish decision he had made. But pride deceives and blinds, and this probably kept him from humbling himself. By choice, again, he joined himself to a citizen of that country, and consequently the journey into sin was much longer than it would have had to be. However, until he chose to turn from his own folly, his ensuing choices only led him into more misery. Considering the framework of his mind and heart, it could not be otherwise. "They that observe lying vanities forsake

their own mercy" [Jonah 2:8](#).

"And when he came to himself . . . (the younger son)" Oh, what grace! His return is beautiful to behold, as well as the response of his father. The genuineness of his repentance is so stirring and positive, and the renunciation of his old life is complete. This power of complete restoration was accomplished by God, as the young man chose to surrender his will and let God have full control. It has been said, "If we supply the willingness, God will supply the power." "If ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land: But if ye refuse and rebel, ye shall be devoured with the sword" [Isaiah 1:19-20](#).

Although the elder brother remained in the father's house, he was estranged from his father. Outwardly he obeyed the rules, but his heart was not inclined to the same tender love as his father. Perhaps he was strongly opinionated. Perhaps like the Laodiceans, he believed h was rich, needing nothing, yet no understanding the depth of his spiritual poverty. Was his anger proof that he did not love his brother and that he had not truly forgiven him? Why didn't he ask his younger brother to tell him what had brought him home? Surely, this would have changed his proving and softened his heart.

Is there a difference between striving and seeking? It appears that some will seek but will not be able to enter in. When choosing God, we must "want to" more than anything else. No casual attitude, no "give it a try" will work; only wholehearted determination will bring us through. By the grace of God, this kind of choosing and striving will take us through the pearly gates.

The subject of the power of choice is thought-provoking. If all of the choices we made in life, with their results, were highlighted, what an impressive picture it would be.

We must have vision to make good choices. True vision is that ability to see beyond the normal and the immediate. This vision could be compared to radar for the airplane pilot or a telescope for the astronomer.

The Bible states that Moses chose rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season. He did this because his eyes were fixed upon the coming day of recompense ([Hebrews 11:26](#)). It was the inner eye of faith that enabled him to see rightly; consequently, he chose wisely.

Learning to be responsible while we are young provides a solid base for

building good character and proper values and that applies to those who may come to the Lord later in life as well. As children grow older, they can be given more liberty to make their own choices and should be taught to accept responsibility for the outcome of their choices. Teaching this too early in life, however, can hinder the lessons of submission.

Patience and self-discipline are important principles. Not many noble, enduring things come quickly and easily in life. People who are patient make fewer rash decisions and, therefore, have fewer regrets to live with. Self-discipline helps a person to be less influenced by his feelings and emotions. We need to endure hardness, the Bible teaches. After losing his birthright, Esau regretted that he had not borne his hunger with self-discipline. Like Moses, we can patiently choose our destiny and accept the road, or we can be like Esau, who foolishly and impatiently chose the road and was compelled to accept his destiny. What will your choice be?

Making decisions is easier for some individuals than others, for various reasons. Our feelings of inferiority or superiority can greatly influence how we make decisions. Whether we are impulsive or overly careful in our decisions, being humble will always help.

As we grow older, making decisions becomes harder, probably, because we understand more clearly the responsibility and the consequences of our choices. It is good to be introspective at times and to try to understand ourselves. A double-minded, or undecided, man is unstable in all his ways, and his decisions will likely prove it. Not being honest with ourselves makes choices unnecessarily hard. If the fear of God is in our hearts, we will not go far wrong in any decision, especially when we have a good reverse. Being open to others helps us no matter what our tendencies are.

It has been said that what happens in me is more important than what happens to me. Even by making proper choices we cannot escape all the difficulties of life. There are certain undesirable and painful experiences we must face. Jesus said that offences must come, but how they affect us inside is our choice. Whether our troubles will make us bitter or better is of our own choosing. The wonderful thing about the gospel of Jesus Christ is that when we choose to follow Him, our hearts can be at rest. Can you think of anything of more value than being at peace with God?

Youth should remember that choosing wisely in the little matters of life prepares them for more far-reaching decisions such as conversion and marriage. A pattern of selfish choices made in earlier youthful years, does not

give them a good foundation to build on.

Someone has said that God gives the best to those who leave the choice to Him. Do you think that Isaac could have made a better choice for a wife if he had taken it into his own hands? We know that God's ways are best and may we be of the same determination as Joshua, who stood before the people and said, "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord" [Joshua 24:15](#).

May our meditation on this subject create in us a greater carefulness in making choices as we listen to God's pleading with us, for ultimately choices determine our eternal destiny.



THE TRUE SPIRIT OF CHRIST AND DOCTRINE by *Brother Arlo*

Is there a danger that one places more emphasis on doctrine than is prudent and overlooks other aspects of obeying God? Was this a problem the Pharisees had? We may say that to embrace the true doctrine is of utmost importance. Can one be saved without endorsing or embracing the doctrine (or doctrines) of the Bible, which is the doctrine of the church? If a brother or sister is weak in a certain doctrine, how does this affect their relationship with the Lord Jesus? Some might say that depends on which one or ones they are weak on. For example, they may make a little difference if one is weak on the issue of not charging interest or keeping the avoidance or photography. Perhaps one lacks vision in the area of nonconformity and tends to identify with the world in the latest fad or fashion. Or they may be a little weak on the vision of the one true faith (the church). Just how important is it to be well grounded on these principles?

Some might say these aren't as important as believing in the creation, the incarnation of Christ, the virgin birth of Christ, and that Jesus was God. These are cardinal doctrines, together with the resurrection and others, which we would say we must believe in order to be saved. Yet, God grants His Spirit and fills with love the hearts of our adolescent children and ignorant sinners who come to God with a surrendered will, bringing their sins and begging forgiveness. God accepts them without them having an understanding of all the doctrine.

What is God's criteria for giving His Spirit to man? Is it not a total yield-

ing to God and His will? It is based on obedience to Him. He gives His Spirit to those who obey Him (Acts 5:32). "For he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him" Hebrews 11:6. So what is most important to God, and what makes a person a man after God's own heart?

What is doctrine? First of all, it is truth, which establishes the fact of the existence of God, the creation of the universe, man, and all things that are. To the true Christian, it is the only thing that has a foundation. It alone can be built on for the endless ages of eternity with total confidence. Next, it establishes who God is and what kind of being He is. He is, above all, righteous, He is love, and He is merciful. It also tells us how God thinks and feels about things. In a sense it reveals His personality. Could we say that the value and importance of doctrine is to know and understand God so we can live as He has planned? We are to address Him as our Father, and if He is truly our Father, then we are His offspring. Like begets like; so if our spirits do not duplicate His in relating to our fellowman, He is not truly our Father. Jesus said, "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect" Matthew 5:48.

There is a principle of Christ's doctrine that must be lived and will accompany the receiving of the Holy Ghost. When the Holy Ghost moves in and dwells in a man's heart, he is non-resistant without having an intellectual knowledge of the written doctrine. On the other hand, a man with a good knowledge of the doctrine can be resistant.

We meet people who say they are Christians, and their spirit is Christ-like. It feels good with them; yet they are quite ignorant of the historical faith as we know it. Then there are those people who had been living in a false religion or with no real hope. When they were told the simple gospel story of Jesus as the true Mediator, faith was born in them. Their testimony is that life has been different since that time as they continued to follow the Spirit's direction. Their salvation was intact as long as they faithfully obeyed the Holy Ghost, even though living in ignorance until more light shone on them. Now the question is who has the greater hope—the persons just referred to or a member of the church having confidence in knowing the "truth," yet manifesting a spirit that brings a dark spot on the beloved bride?

May we not console ourselves because we are members of the church and living the doctrine (so we think) when actually the oil in our lamp may

be almost gone. We would basically then have only a profession. The Jews claimed Abraham as their father, but their flesh was not crucified and grace was not abounding. To pursue fulfilment of the flesh in things of this world, such as in expensive, fine homes, classy vehicles, sports, eating and dining, and water sports, would not be the faith of Abraham. He sojourned here and looked for a city that had foundations and confessed that he was a stranger to this world.

How do we know if we truly have oil in our lamps? What does it mean to "love not the world, neither the things that are in this world?" Could it be that loving anything other than the souls of men is loving the world? It would appear this is the example Jesus gave us in word and deed, and we are to love as He did. To have oil in our lamps makes us humble, meek, teachable, longsuffering, seeking not our own, and not easily provoked. May our emphasis be on this, while not ignoring doctrine.

In conclusion, church membership and orthodoxy will not save us if we lack the Holy Spirit-controlled life that manifests meekness, kindness, charity, and love for the souls of men. Such a person is drawn with compassion to those needing salvation, like Jesus was.

The church's work and our individual work also beyond evangelizing the world includes living an exemplary life before the world, imparting to the renewed minds in Christ the ways and will of God unto spiritual growth and Christian maturity, and being vessels of honour, fit for the Master's use."



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