

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

In that well known Sermon on the Mount we have that much explored and preached upon portion we call the Beatitudes, Jesus says in one of them "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God."

It may be well for us to remember that the converse of this is that if we are not pure in heart we shall not see God and that should bring a stringent examination of our heart to see whether it is in fact pure and that we will see God.

I for one struggle with this concept of being pure in heart at all times, temptations come, maybe we even give in on occasion and our purity is tainted and yes we can go on our knees and seek forgiveness from our Lord and Saviour.

I have been much encouraged by the words of George MacDonald, a Scottish minister, who wrote on this subject and I quote some of what he says:

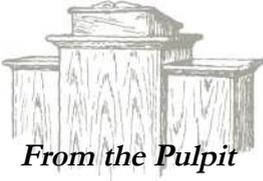
"What is it, then, to be pure in heart?" I answer: It is not necessary to define this purity would to have in mind any clear form of it. For even to know perfectly what purity of heart is, where that possible, it would not be the same as to be pure in heart.

Though you do not know any definition of purity, you know enough to begin to be pure. You do not know what a man is, but you know how to make his acquaintance – perhaps even how to gain his friendship. Your brain may not know what purity is, but your heart has some acquaintance with purity itself. Your brain, in seeking to analyse its components, may even obstruct your heart in bettering its friendship with it.

To know what purity is, a man must already be pure. But he who can ask the question already knows enough of purity, I repeat, to begin to become pure. If this moment you determined to start moving toward purity, your conscience will at once tell you where to begin. If you reply, "My conscience says nothing definite," I answer, "You are but playing with your conscience. Determined to be pure in your conscience will speak."

If you care to see God, be pure, if you will not determine to be pure, you will grow more and more impure, and instead of seeing God, will at length find yourself face-to-face with a vast void of empty space – a vast void, yet filled full of one inhabitant, that devouring monster, your own false self. If you do not care that you are bound to face such, I tell you there is a Power that will not have it so; a Love that will make you care through the consequences of not caring." End quote. *Knowing the Heart of God - George MacDonald/M Phillips*

Strive for purity and see God!



From the Pulpit

What is the Whole Counsel of God?

Linford Berry

Part 1 of 2

It is good to be here with you this evening and we trust that God will indeed bless us as we gather to consider what is the counsel of God, the whole counsel of God?

Our world today is full of books and some people think that with the advent of screen technology that we won't need books anymore, I don't think they are right, books might change format a little bit but our world is full of books and these books offer all kinds of things to us, these books offer advice for living your best life now, there are books which propose to solve the problems of your soul, books which offer success and pleasure if only you will follow their instructions.

You have a problem or you think you have a problem there is probably a book for that.

As the author of Ecclesiastes said a couple of thousand years ago of the making of books there is no end. At no time in history has that been more true than now because now you can self-publish, you think of a good idea for a book you don't have to wait for some publisher to come along and say yeah that's marketable we will publish that.

No, you just publish it yourself. And so there is this proliferation of books, there are many voices in our world competing for our attention promising to find the solutions for our problems, they publish a torrent of books and articles and blogs and all sorts of things but there is one book that is different from the rest.

There is one book that completely fulfils its promises, there is one book that will provide everything, everything that we need in order to be competent men and women of God, it is this Book, it is the Word of God.

It is this Book that we must read, it is this Book that we must preach, it is this Book we must live by if we are going to survive in this increasingly evil day in which we live.

It is in this Book that we find the counsel of God, God has spoken and He intends to be heard, He intends to be heard not just when He originally spoke and caused these words to be written but He intends to be heard today – now!

He intends to be heard through his spoken word and his written word and furthermore He will accomplish what He has set out to do.

[Isaiah 55:11](#) says: “So shall my word be that goes forth out of my mouth it shall not return to me void or empty but it shall accomplish the purpose for which I sent it and it shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.”

So God’s word is no empty word, it is not a powerless word, it is a word that accomplishes something, it is a word that does something.

Jesus himself in his final remarks to his disciples and to us regarding our responsibilities says this, “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you.....” ([Matthew 28:19-20a](#)) And there is the counsel of God, all that I commanded you, the whole counsel of God.

And so when the Apostle Paul was giving his farewell address to the Ephesian elders in Acts 20 he defended himself and his record telling them this, For I have not shunned or I have not neglected to declare unto you the whole counsel of God. [Acts 20:27](#).

The Apostle Paul thought having done that he had fulfilled his ministry, he had been responsible for the task that God had given him.

So what is the whole counsel of God, what qualities does it have, what effect does it have?

And maybe a bigger question for us today: Why does it matter anyway?

There are a lot of people in our world that ask these questions, that are questioning the whole counsel of God and I believe if we were to single out just one thing about the whole counsel of God, one characteristic, one quality, one reason why it matters it would come down to this it would come down to the matter of authority.

Now when you get a notice from the IRS (Taxation Office) in your mailbox why do you open it?

You open it because it matters, right, and why does it matter? Because this is some information this is a notice that has come to you from an authority, somebody that has the authority to make your life very miserable if you do not comply with the regulations and what they ask of you.

When we talk about the nature and the character of the counsel of God, the Word of God, we are talking about something that comes to us with more authority than that IRS letter comes to your mailbox.

Now sometimes it is easy for us to go in circles when we try to defend or describe the Word of God but in order to bring some clarity to this I think we have to recognise that we must start with some presuppositions, we must start with some kind of starting place otherwise we just get in this circle of: – How do we know the Bible is authoritative? Well because it's God's word. Well how do we know it is God's word?

And we just go round and round and round.

I think one of the most important presuppositions or one of the most important basic facts we must come to this study with is the reality of the authority of God and the authority of the Author of this Book, every other authority must surrender to God, and so God's counsel or God's word is the most authoritative communication that we can ever receive and it must, this counsel of God, must stand in authority over every other communication – period – with a biblical worldview. Authority and ultimate authority resides with God and God alone.

You see God did not inherit his authority there was no one to bequeath it to him.

God did not receive his authority for there was no one to give it to him.

God's authority did not come by way of an election, there was no one to vote for him.

God did not seize his authority, there was no one to steal it from.

God did not earn his authority, it was already his.

God inherently embodies authority because He is the great I AM.

Romans 13:1 says, Let every person, that would be us, let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist, those other authorities, have been instituted by God.

And so God's authority becomes obvious and becomes unquestionable when one considers three basic Christian presuppositions and is where we derive the authority of God as Christians:

First– God created the heaven and the earth and everything that is in it, God made it, God created it. And interestingly enough for the purposes of our discussion tonight God created by his Word, God spoke and it existed. That is very authoritative communication brothers and sisters, how many of you can do that? Can anybody here do that? Can you say something and it will appear? sometimes we wish we could do that but we cannot but God did and God does.

Secondly – God owns everything that He has created. He owns it, He owns it in the terms of control and:

Thirdly – in the end God declares that He will consume it and He will make it all new again, [Revelation 2:5](#), Behold I am making all things new And so God is in authority.

And you know we could easily spend a whole weekend just talking about God's authority and discussing God's authority as it relates to the Bible, it would be a worthwhile study, it is a study that is neglected in many of our churches even.

But I believe the first thing we should take note of when we are talking about this counsel of God is that it is authoritative and it is authoritative because it comes from the One who is authority, it is the whole counsel of God and because it is the counsel of God or the Word of God it comes with certain qualities and certain properties that do not apply to any other counsel, it does not apply to anybody else's communication, but it does apply to God's communication.

We will go down through a few verses of Scripture here that describe some of these qualities to us.

[Isaiah 46:9-10](#) Remember the former things of old; for I am God, and there is none else; I am God, and there is none like me,

Now listen this is what God says he does: ¹⁰ declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, 'My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure,'

[Isaiah 40:8](#) The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever.

2 Timothy 3:16-17 Every Scripture is inspired by God and useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the person dedicated to God may be capable and equipped for every good work.

2 Peter 1:20-21 No prophecy of Scripture ever comes about by the prophet's own imagination for no prophecy was ever born of human impulse rather men carried along by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.

So in these verses and many others including the ones our brother read this evening from Psalm 119 we see something of the characteristics, the qualities of the counsel of God, of the Word of God, and we see in this some distinct truth emerging.

Firstly we see that the whole counsel of God is anchored in himself, it is anchored in who He is and in this counsel, in this word, He reveals himself discloses himself and discloses his purposes what He intends to do, He discloses his glory, his beauty, his Majesty.

Secondly we see that the whole counsel of God is authoritative, that it has the power to accomplish what God has said, what He said He will do He will do.

Thirdly the whole counsel of God is clear, it is clear in the sense that God has revealed himself and He has revealed himself in ways that take action. So there is clarity, it is not fuzzy business.

And there are many other things we could say about the Word of God that is inspired, that it is expired actually is the proper terminology it is breathed out by God it is a product of his breath, He has created it and by it He creates.

In Colossians chapter 1 it talks about in Christ all things hold together or in him all things consist. And I've said already that God spoke and this world existed and if God stops speaking it would fall apart. The Scripture tells us in Deuteronomy that we are as dependent, actually more dependent on the Word of God than we are on our daily bread.

There is no other Book brothers and sisters like this one, none!

The authority of Scripture, the inspiration of Scripture, the inerrancy or truthfulness of Scripture, all of these things are under attack in our world

and in our churches today but the authority of Scripture is not necessarily a matter to be defended so much as a matter to be asserted.

I like what Charles Spurgeon said about it, he said the Word of God is like a lion, you don't have to defend a lion all you have to do is let the lion loose and the lion will defend itself.

And so we need to remind ourselves frequently that it is the teaching, it is the preaching, it is the exposition of the Bible that really establishes its truth and its authority.

Remember when the Bible is read when God's word is disclosed God's word does things, that's the very nature of it, when God speaks things happen, when God speaks through his word it talks to hearts, it crushes hard hearts, it surprises deaf hearts, it renews dried up hearts.

And so we could spend all evening and all weekend defending various points of truth relating to the whole counsel of God, we could talk about its power, we could talk about its inspiration, we could talk about its truthfulness, its clarity, its endurance and its sufficiency and on and on and on we could go but I think the best thing we can do in these next moments is to let the Word of God speak for itself, to let the lion out of the cage.

Turn with me to Psalm 19.

Psalm 19 is a short Psalm unlike Psalm 119 which is the longest chapter in our Bible. Did you ever stop to think that the subject of the longest chapter in our Bible, and at the very centre of our Bible actually, the subject matter of that chapter is exclusively the Word of God. That should probably tell us something about the priority that God places on how we understand his Word.

But Psalm 119 is actually a commentary and it is a commentary on Psalm 19 and so tonight we are going to go Psalm 19 to look at a few verses here which I think of as the most monumental, the most profound, the most densely packed statements ever made about the Word of God.

Now at the beginning of Psalm 19 we see here this declaration the heavens declaring the glory of God in the sky in the day and the night and so on and so forth and what we are talking about here is God's general revelation, God has made himself known in other ways besides this Book and one of

those ways is nature, He makes himself known through nature, but no one can be saved by looking at a tree.

You can learn a lot of things by observation, you can learn an awful lot of things by observation and even by imitation but there is one thing you will never learn by observation and that is why, why.

You can learn what and maybe you can even learn how but you will not learn why – this Book tells us why, nature will tell us all kinds of good things about God, about his glory, his beauty and his majesty, his love and all sorts of other things but it will not tell us why and for that we need his Word and so beginning in verse seven of Psalm 19 we have this declaration about the Word of God, the Council of God.

And it says: The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple; ⁸ the precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes; ⁹ the fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever; the rules of the LORD are true, and righteous altogether. ¹⁰ More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb. ¹¹ Moreover, by them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward. [Psalm 19:7-11](#)

Now let me say this at the beginning, the psalmist David, who is the author of this Psalm I believe, is a man who understood, a man who endured the struggles and trials and troubles of life and endured these things to a degree that few men have and you know in some of David's Psalms he begins on a kind of very depressed note, Why are you cast down oh my soul?

But if you look at those Psalms even the more depressing Psalms, when you get to the end of the Psalm almost always the psalmist David looks out through a window of hope and that window of hope is almost always related to this Word, to the counsel of God and what God has said He will do, even in David's darkest moments he believed that God had the authority to do what He said he would do and that gave him hope.

David understood God's power and authority and he understood that the answers that he sought were to be found in God's revealed Word.

Now as we look at this section of Psalms we are going to look primarily at verses seven, eight and nine tonight.

I want you to notice the structure of these verses, there are six parallel lines of thought, each of those six lines has three parts or three elements.

First of all we see a descriptive title for the word of God or the counsel of God.

Secondly we have a characteristic or a quality of the word of God.

Then thirdly we have a benefit, how does this affect us, what does it do for us.

So we have a title, we have a quality, we have a benefit.

Now I want you to notice another element, another sixfold element, another thing that happens six times.

Six times in these three verses we read the words “of the LORD” – the law of the LORD, the testimony of the LORD, the statutes of the LORD, the commandment of the LORD, the fear of the LORD, and the judgements or ordinances of the LORD.

And we note that this represents a word from God.

Here we have in Psalm 19 through the psalmist David God’s own testimony to the power and authority of his counsel of his word.

The first title that we see for Scripture or the word of God is the term “the law.” And this gives us an emphasis of the word of God, the word law is the Hebrew word Tora which basically means divine teaching or instruction and this points to the teaching nature of the word of God, it is God instructing man, it is God teaching us.

God teaches us all kinds of things through his word, He teaches us what to believe about himself, what to believe about ourselves, He teaches us what to believe about how things work and how things are to be and how things are not to be, He teaches us about conduct, about character.

This is teaching from God for life.

And it says that this teaching or instruction from God through the Scriptures is what, what qualities does it have?

It is perfect. In the book of James the Apostle James writes it is the perfect law, the perfect law.

Now I don’t know about you but there’s not very many laws in our land that I find to be perfect there is some imperfections many times but in this instruction, in this teaching, in this law there is perfection, it is complete, it

is enough, it is sufficient, it covers everything, it lacks nothing, it is a comprehensive source of teaching about God and from God to us and the particular focus here in verse seven is that it is perfection, it is related to this benefit, this blessing, of converting the soul.

So the instruction of God has this characteristic of perfection and so this instruction has the power, the ability to convert the soul.

Now this is a difficult thing for us to get our minds around many times because we don't understand what an impossibility this really is to convert someone's soul. Do you know what that takes? Do you know what that requires?

The book of Ephesians says we are dead in trespasses and sin, our souls are as dead men, no life there at all, and yet God's word has the power to create life, He did that once in creation didn't He and He does it again in the new creation when He converts our soul and it is his word that does this, it is his word, his perfect word that has this power, this power to transform the real you.

This perfect law of God is sufficient for conversion, transformation, for restoration, for spiritual birth and growth.

I've already read the verse from second Timothy where the Apostle Paul reminds Timothy that the Scripture is able to make you wise for salvation and then to make the man of God complete or competent equipped for every good work.

And yet today, today it seems that there are people who do not believe this, there are people who do not believe in the power of the Word of God to convert souls and they feel that because the Word of God is inadequate or not powerful enough that maybe it might need to be assisted by packaging it in some slick packaging, maybe they package it in worldly entertainment, maybe they attempt to shield people from the hard sayings of the word of God, maybe they want to water down the truth to make it a little easier to take but do we really need to do that?

Do we really need to make slushy appeals to the emotions of people based on their feelings, their bruised egos and their need for self-esteem?

When we do that brothers and sisters when we water down, when we tamper with the Word of God we destroy it and it has no power anymore, we alter the truth of the Word of God and in some way we destroy it.

It ceases to be the whole counsel of God and it gets mixed with some other counsel, some less authoritative counsel, some counsel like the counsel of men, the counsel of men is in contrast to the counsel of God, it is very imperfect, very insufficient to convert the soul.

And when we engage in these kinds of games with the Word of God what we are really saying is that we don't trust God, we don't trust God to do what He said He is going to do.

Salvation and transformation of the whole person is found in and through the Word of God and yet many people are not looking there.

Is it any wonder then that the Apostle Paul in his final instructions to young Timothy said preach the word! The word of God is sufficient to convert the soul.

The second line we see here in verse seven is that the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple. [Psalm 19:7](#)

Now the word testimony here is another term now used to identify the word of God and this looks not so much at the divine instruction for the divine teaching as it does at divine witness a divine testimony God giving testimony to who He is and what He does and what He requires.

You know sometimes we want to treat the Bible like a rulebook and you know there are places like the 10 Commandments and some other places where there are definitely some rules laid out, we could talk about this in terms of the Law or the instructions of God, but there is a whole lot of parts of this that are not rules, they are stories are they not.

Now how do we see that, do we see those stories as just as authoritative as the rules?

When you think about those stories what are you reading about when you read the stories? You are reading the divine testimony, testimony about what God has done, about who God is and about how He acts in the world and about how He treats his people, that is the divine witness, that's a divine testimony.

And again it says that this testimony has a quality, what does it say? The testimony of the LORD is what? It is a sure thing isn't it.

You know sometimes people's testimony isn't very much of a sure thing, there's a reason why when you go into court they have you put your hand on the Bible have you swear or affirm to tell the truth and nothing but the truth, why would they need to do that?

Are they concerned that somebody is not going to tell the truth?

I don't know what putting your hand on the Bible and saying a few words is going to do to fix that problem but nevertheless it is a problem isn't it but with God's testimony, with God's witness, with God as the witness there is no problem telling the truth it is a sure thing, it is reliable, it is trustworthy and so the word of God provides a foundation on which life and on which eternal destiny can be built without hesitation.

To be concluded in our March Issue.

Message brought at the Fellowship of Concerned Mennonites Conference April 2016. Used by permission.



Thy word *is* a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.

EZEKIEL'S VISION

The prophet Ezekiel had various visions during his life and work, one of which we will consider at this time. It is recorded in Ezekiel 47:1-12. This vision, like many others, could possibly have different interpretations. However, for this article we will consider Adam Clark's reasoning that it was a prophecy concerning the coming of the gospel era.

In brief, the sequence of his vision was as follows: He saw an issue of water coming out from under the threshold of the house which, according to the Hebrew words used, was probably a dampness or oozing that produced at the most a small trickle of water. Nevertheless, as the man measured a certain distance, this trickle became an ankle-deep stream. Having measured again and again, the stream continued to increase in volume and depth until it could not be crossed any more.

Standing back and observing this river revealed the life-giving quality of the water; the riverbanks were full of vegetation on both sides, even though

it travelled through the desert. The prophet observed that there was life and healing in the water, so much so that upon reaching the Dead Sea, even that corrupted, stagnant body of water was healed so that great multitudes of all kinds of fishes were gathered. On the other hand, the shallow places were not healed but were given to salt. This vision indicated to the prophet a clear description of the nature of the coming gospel era.

Jesus said in John 5:39, "Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me." If this mighty power of healing and restoration depicted in this vision is truly a testimony of Christ and His work, then there must be evidences of this in the New Testament era. As we search the teachings of Jesus, we find ample testimony to verify Ezekiel's vision. Following are a few of them: The small mustard seed becomes a tree (Matthew 13:31-32), the leaven leavened the whole three measures (v. 33), faith in God will remove mountains (Mark 11:23-24), and Christ is the propitiation for the sins of the whole world (1 John 2:2). These teachings fit well with Ezekiel's vision.

There are also tangible examples of this power being manifested in the early church, such as three thousand baptized in one day (Acts 2:41), the church grew daily (v. 47), and the faith was spoken of throughout the whole world (Romans 1:8) starting out with the eleven disciples until Pentecost when the number was one hundred twenty, it would indeed be interesting to know how many members the church had grown to by the end of that generation. These numbers would fit comfortably with Ezekiel's vision.

The burden of this writing is this: Is there something hindering the power of this river today? This question could be divided into numerous other questions: Why are there not revivals like a generation ago that lasted six weeks and converted hundreds? Why are so many members of the church sickly? What about the many who have died spiritually and are on the outside and stay that way? Why do so few of our congregations consist of a cross section of the communities in which we live? Is there not a cause that this vast healing stream does not seem to be doing what Ezekiel prophesied?

Yes, we know that the church today is growing and reaching out to many corners of the world. Statistics verify that even nominal Christianity is not keeping pace with world population growth. The true faith is truly only a grain of mustard seed. Our real concern should be that it is really genuine.

And if it is, then should there not be phenomenal effect where this healing stream is flowing?

One interesting aspect of Ezekiel's vision is the man with the line going into the water at different depths. Faith in God and in His church has always been a great factor in the effectiveness of the Gospel throughout the ages. When believers are in the crossing that cannot be crossed over is when the stream takes control and becomes powerful. When believers' feet are no longer anchored to the things of the world then the river carries them where God wants to carry them. It is then that the efforts and prayers of the church are effective and blessed. Only then do the miracles of faith and restoration appear in greater volume. When too many stay in the ankle-deep water it becomes a marsh that is given to salt and is not healed. The stream then flows slowly and becomes ineffective. Christian believers who are in the deep waters will swell the river and increase its strength, speed, and power.

Jesus asked a sobering question in Luke 18:8, "When the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?" In considering this question, one could take two different paths of thought, one being a negative interpretation and the other a positive one. Jesus' teachings were never negative. Even though He talked about the strait and narrow way, with few finding it, His intention was to provoke more faith and effort for us to find it. Likewise with this question, He wants to inspire us to more faith. How is the faith of our generation? When we think of the effectiveness of the gospel in the church today, do we believe that mountains could be moved into the sea? Or have we settled for much less?

John writes in 1 John 5:14-15 concerning faith: "And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us: And if we know that he hears us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him." Faith of this quality is completely satisfied in only knowing that God heard. Applying the principle of this quality of faith to the effectiveness of this gospel stream will release the power of the gospel in our present world. Do we really believe in this gospel? Do we believe that the doors of the church are open to the entire world and that anyone could become one with us? If this is a rational possibility, then it is also possible for all of them to be healed by the ever-enlarging river of salvation. We as individuals, congregations, boards, and the conference at large need to be ready to cast our nets again at Jesus'

command, even though we have toiled all night and taken only a few.

In 1 Corinthians 13:13, the Apostle writes: "And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity." Jesus says in John 13:35, "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another." In presenting the gospel whether to our neighbours at home or in different cultures in distant lands, there must be faith that this gospel is for them. It is powerful to transform them into Christians regardless of their circumstances. It must also be accompanied by a lively hope of good results. Then it is love that is the unfailing force that makes the stream flow. A Christian full of the love of God, the love of the truth, a love for the church and for the people he is ministering to will witness amazing results, because love never fails.

In the light of all of this, could we at least imagine what it would be like when whole cities would repent like Nineveh did? Does our faith allow us to think that even half of our local towns could become part of this river? We know that God is all powerful, and He could do all this without us. We also know that we, at the best, can do nothing. We do though have the privilege to be witnesses of His great works and are blessed by them.

In conclusion, let us consider what we read in Matthew 17:18-20, "And Jesus rebuked the devil; and he departed out of him: and the child was cured from that very hour. Then came the disciples to Jesus apart, and said, Why could not we cast him out? And Jesus said unto them, Because of your unbelief. for verily I say unto you, If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you."

May we all go to Jesus apart and ask Him our questions, knowing that He hears us. Then may we cast again our nets into the sea of humanity. Then, in these last days, as the Lord is moving to save them all, we will witness miracles of greater proportion than we have known. "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go unto my Father" John 14:12

Brother Lloyd



Thy word *is* a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.

Have Faith in God

Recently reading through the gospel account of Matthew I pondered on having faith in God. In that well known 11th chapter of Hebrews we are told that without faith it is impossible to please Him: 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

We relate to what we can see, feel, and understand, but God has chosen to limit our insight into the spirit realm. But deep down I believe we are all convinced that there is more to life than what we can see. As Christians we do relate to an unseen God because we believe that He is and that there are no limits to Him or what He can do. That gap between God and man can be spanned only by faith. By faith truths are revealed that are more reliable than the opinions and conclusions of learned men. By faith man finds security in a God he cannot see. The person who chooses not to believe God is blind to spiritual values and the operations of God.

Here from Matthew's gospel are three examples of faith in people who had a need and came to Jesus and had their needs met because of their faith. These three accounts are about people who were in desperate need and today there are many who also have needs. They came to Jesus because they could not find help anywhere else. Having a vision of Jesus as a miracle worker, they resolved that to Him and Him alone they would turn. Any serious problem, one which has no answer but in the Lord, is an opportunity for the Lord to do His work.

Faith is the substance of things hoped for the evidence of things not seen. Hebrews 11:1. It is what motivated these people we read about in Matthew's gospel.

1] In the first case, Matthew 8:5-13, a centurion's servant was grievously tormented by palsy. Medical help probably was limited. This man believed that his help was in Jesus. Perhaps he had heard that Jesus performed the impossible. Something deep down in his heart inspired him that there was hope and help in the Lord.

That was faith.

2] Two blind men who came to Jesus had a difficult life, Matthew 9:27-31. How does a blind person make a living? Usually the blind are at the mercy

of others. But when these men heard of Jesus, they believed their lives could be different. They did not believe that Jesus would turn His back on their plea.

That was faith.

3] In Matthew 15:22-28 we read of the Syrophoenician woman whose daughter who was plagued with a devil. This mother felt her utter helplessness. Where could she go? Acknowledging her unworthiness, something in her heart settled on Jesus as the solution to her problems and those of her daughter.

That was faith.

Faith in God is not a mysterious process, nor is it something imaginary. It cannot be manufactured by an act of the will. Rather, faith is the result of accepting God and accepting the truth of His power. Such acceptance brings trust and dependence on God into our lives.

In Mark 11:22. Jesus tells us to have faith in God, We are also told in Romans 10:17 that faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God. Ephesians 2:8 informs that by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God.

We can see from these few examples that faith is important, we are to have it, we are obtain it and develop it by hearing and reading the Word of God and there are numerous other references also in Scripture that bring that out.

Faith is essential to salvation. Without faith in God and the sacrifice of His Son on Calvary we will not have our sins forgiven and be born again.

In our modern society great gains have been made in many fields of human endeavour and has led to raising of living standards, there is much affluence in the society in which we find ourselves however we cannot say that great gains have been made in matters of faith.

What are seen as gains in worldly accomplishments frequently make man feel self-sufficient and less dependent on God.

Is our faith in God growing or is it becoming weaker? Are we more willing

to make sacrifices for the invisible things of God? Is there in our hearts a growing personal awareness for lost souls?

The righteousness of God is revealed in the gospel through faith. Our faith should continue to grow and develop as our faith desires to know more of the marvellous righteousness of God.

Except for two occurrences in the Old Testament the word faith appears numerous times in the New Testament. It is interesting that when Jesus came people were admonished to have faith.

I have often thought how wonderful it would have been to have been there when Jesus was walking among the people but would my faith have been like that of the ones we read about in Matthew? Remember many did not believe Him even though they walked with Him.

It would seem that with God appearing in a visible form there would be less need for faith, but just the opposite is true. The gospel can be experienced only by faith.

Today we can see God working in the church, in our brethren, in our own lives and I believe there is a need for encouraging not only each other to continue to grow in faith in God but also to call those who have not responded to the call of God in their life.

Hebrews 11:6 teaches that without faith it is impossible to please God. To come to God requires that we believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.

2 Corinthians 5:7 also reminds us that in this matter of trusting God "we walk by faith, not by sight" Experiencing self-denial as taught by Jesus can be done only through faith.

We can only be purged of the covetousness of our nature by a deep faith in God, knowing that He will provide for our needs. Ephesians 3:20 says that He is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us.

That is faith.

Our trust or faith in Him enables us to be detached from the affections for possessions.

Witnessing, reproving, and praying all require faith in God. We need to have faith to labour victoriously for the Lord. The degree of our faith in God is reflected in the purity of our Christian walk.

A man of faith will understand his failings and be a humble person. It is impossible to really know the Lord and be proud. It is, however, possible to be very religious and yet be proud. The man or woman of faith will not be attracted to the things of the world because God holds the place of highest importance in their life, their eyes are open to the vanity of all the world's promises. Paul writes, "For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith" Romans 1:17.

So the righteousness of God is revealed in the gospel through faith. Our faith should continue to grow and develop and faith desires to know more of the marvellous righteousness of God.

True faith embraces the belief that the Bible is the divine will of God delivered to man. We believe the Bible means just what it says and that it contains the answers for all our problems.

A deep reverence for the Word causes us to devote ourselves to its study and to order our lives according to the precepts of the Word. Many people are seeking other answers for their lives. The intellectual and humanistic view advises individuals to explore other possibilities such as counsellors, drugs, and other things that money can buy to solve their problems.

The people in the scriptures from Matthew had this settled in their hearts: Christ was the only answer to their need. A delayed response from the Lord did not alter that conviction.

That is faith!

It takes faith to do what we really know we should do.

Faith in the Lord inspires us with the needed courage and conviction to move ahead.

Faith in God puts us on a different course from those around us. Moses, for example, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter. Personal ease, economic advantage, and social status were sacrificed. Maybe it was a hard choice to make, but it was a clear choice: enjoy Egypt (sin) or enjoy the blessings of God, Hebrews 11:26-27. "He had respect unto the recompense of the reward ... he endured, as seeing Him who is invisible" He was a man who looked beyond convenience and personal desire and persevered in performing God's will.

That is faith. And each of us will face that test of faith from time to time as Satan tries to draw us away from God.
 May we be like the heroes of faith mentioned in Hebrews 11 and endure to the end so that we shall be saved.



Thy word *is* a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.

What a Difference! Being Born Again!

John 3:5-6 Jesus answered Nicodemus, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. ⁶ That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.

Jesus also says in Matthew 18:3, “Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

Not only strong words but indeed a definite direction as to how we are to start our lives on the pathway to heaven.

The title “What a Difference! Being Born Again!” is an expressive or vehement declaration, and rightly so. The new birth will make the difference between joy and sorrow, fulfillment and discontentment, and heaven and hell for anyone who receives it. The new birth is an essential building block in Christian life. Our opening verse clearly tells us that there is no other possible entrance into the kingdom of God. How true are the words of the poet, "There is no other hope, there is no other plea; salvation full salvation free, must come alone through Thee." The vilest sinner can be converted and become the child of the King through Christ's sacrificial blood just as Saul the persecutor of the brethren became Paul the evangelist.

Nicodemus, a Pharisee and a ruler of the Jews, was well educated in the Scriptures. He came to Jesus by night, perhaps for several reasons. He knew Jesus was very busy during the daylight hours, and at night he could visit with Him on a one-to-one basis. It is probable that Nicodemus, being a ruler of the Jews, was afraid to be seen with Jesus. No doubt Nicodemus felt unfulfilled in his position with the Jewish elite and had a desire for

something more, even though he did not understand his need. Nicodemus showed a certain respect and reverence for Jesus by addressing him as rabbi and a teacher come from God. Jesus must have felt the cry of Nicodemus' heart and began to explain one of the most important doctrines of His ministry.

It takes an honest spiritual hunger and thirst to understand the spiritual mystery of the new birth. Jesus explained to Nicodemus that man, by his natural birth, is blind to the kingdom of God and is unfit to enter into it. As an infant cannot be born of itself, so we are also powerless to bring forth a new birth experience. As man feels his burden of sin, and his total helpless state without the shed blood of Jesus Christ, he comes to the foot of the cross. The Holy Spirit then beckons him to "behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world" John 1:29. Then as Christ forgives his sins, he becomes a new creature, and "old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new" 2 Corinthians 5:17. This is the greatest miracle that can be wrought in the soul of man.

The scriptures speak of water and its cleansing power. The Word washes and regenerates us as we read it and believe it. It is both meat and drink to the believer. Water is used in our baptismal services as an outward sign of an inward cleansing. Being born again brings us into a spiritual family that is "not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible" 1 Peter 1:23.

The songwriter said it well when he wrote, I've been changed, I've been "new-born," All my life has been rearranged, What a difference it made when the Lord came and stayed in my heart, oh, yes, I've been changed!

How true are the words of the poet in this song. And then to hear the beauty of those words from Jesus "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" Matthew 11:28.

Christ, as a tender Shepherd, gently calls and leads His sheep. A true shepherd does not drive his sheep but rather goes before them, leading the way. But being born again does not mean that we continue our journey on that narrow path to the strait gate disregarding those around us and especially not those of our own household

As Christ is our Shepherd we as parents are to be shepherds to our family and as parents need to teach and nurture our children from infancy to adulthood. Early in life a child needs to learn obedience and subjection to

his parents, which brings happiness to parent and child alike. Children need to learn unselfishness and to give of themselves voluntarily to others. Permissiveness, lack of parental guidance, and an unwillingness of parents to say no will bring problems. When children are allowed to make choices the parents should make the result will be confusion and insecurity to the children.

Children need affection and discipline. If we teach with love and firmness, guided by the Holy Spirit, we give them a quiet, secure home. Then, when the Lord calls them, they will answer gladly as Samuel of old. Why is it that some children say they are not called or they do not understand the call to repentance? The world in which we live today is moving at a fast pace, and there are many things to vie for our attention. It seems there are not enough evenings in a week to accommodate all the social engagements. All parents with children and youth need to spend time at home being shepherds to those precious souls the Lord has entrusted into our care. Are we taking the time to be home in the evenings with our families, conversing, playing, having devotions, and singing?

When one becomes a new creature in Christ, one's heart is filled with love, obedience, teachable, tenderheartedness, and a feeling of unworthiness. When we are transformed, we want to be more like Jesus. When we feel the burden of sin on our heart and hear the call to repentance and yield our life to Him, what joy will fill our heart. It is such a simple experience and yet so profound. Such a feeling of unworthiness and thankfulness should then fill our soul. A clear and distinct turning about from a life of serving self to a life obedient to the Holy Spirit is still required of every born-again person today.

"Oh, the love that sought me!

Oh, the blood that bought me!

Oh, the grace that brought me to the fold."

To be born again and to be able to say that what a difference to it is to our former life we need to know that only true repentance brings a complete turning from the old life to the new, a broken and contrite spirit, and deeds that bear witness to the Spirit of Christ. If we want the Lord to be near us let us heed the words of the Psalmist when he says: "The Lord is close to those who are of a broken heart and saves such as are crushed with sorrow for sin and are humbly and thoroughly penitent." Psalm 34:18, (*Amplified Bible Translation*)

Conversion and the new birth are not synonymous in the strict sense even though the terms are often used interchangeably. Rightfully said, conversion is preceded by repentance and the new birth. Conversion refers more to the change that takes place as a result of the new birth. Beginning in one's spirit and attitude, then working outward, one puts away his former life and becomes another person by the grace of God." At times it appears the new birth has taken place but the conversion is weak. As more weak conversions are experienced, there is a danger of accepting that standard. This is a part of the challenge that the church of God faces in the closing days of time. "This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy ... Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away" 2 Timothy 3:1-5. Those who follow the natural course of life will drift with the tide of humanity around them. Those who catch a godly vision of where this will lead and make a course correction and go against the drift will secure a safe haven for themselves and a much brighter prospect for their posterity.

And here are some encouraging words from Scripture which show how we will be after that new birth.

2 Corinthians 5:17: Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.

Colossians 3:10: And you have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator.

Titus 3:5: He saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit,

1 Peter 1:23: Since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God.

What a difference it will make!

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