

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

Where do we stand?

Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter! Isaiah 5:20 a result of that there is no fear of God before their eyes. Romans 3:18.

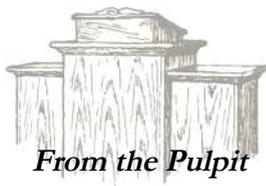
These verses show a progression of people's rejection of God nevertheless whether they acknowledge Him as their Creator in this life or not they will do so in the fulness of time, Romans 14:11 and Philippians 2:10 are quite clear and Isaiah 5:20 is a clear warning that woe will be unto them who follow that line of reasoning.

Some would like to describe the nation that they live in as a "Christian" nation; a look at history including today shows that there has never been such a thing in fact the opposite appears too often to be the case even where there are some in leadership positions who claim to be Christian.

Much evil has been done in the name of Christ there have even been those who thought they were doing God a service by killing those who did not follow their particular interpretation of God's Word – and woe indeed to them.

Today we see a more subtle influence in our society, it is the influence of humanistic philosophies that promote the concept that man is able to shape his own destiny outside of God's order claiming that he is the ultimate centre of judgement as to his behaviour and thus we continue to see various movements that promote that philosophy and today we have many movements that push for self-determination outside of God's guidelines for his creation, we thus see the increasing pressure from those who seek to destroy the foundation of the family as the building block for a society as God intended from the very beginning of creation.

More and more we see people of high standing in the affairs of the community, business and civil authority actively promoting those movements and in the past few weeks this has been evident in the awarding of so called honours by government to some who actively promote those philosophies thus reinforcing in the minds of those not acquainted with God's standards of morality and way of life for His creation that evil can indeed be good and what God considers good is evil or bad because it inhibits judgement of self and the expression of our carnal sinful nature. **Where do we stand?**



From the Pulpit

The Need for Transformation 1 of 2

Linford Berry

Calvary Mennonite Fellowship 2012

I invite you to open your copy of the Scriptures to the book of Romans chapter 12. The theme of this weekend is the transforming power of the Gospel. I've been given this text of Romans chapter 12 verse 2.

As you are finding Romans 12:2 in your Bibles let me relate you a bit of a personal story a bit of my personal experience with this passage and with these verses.

As a young person these verses were drilled into my consciousness, they were drilled there they were placed there through Bible memory, through teaching, through preaching, it was often referenced in sermons and as I began to grow through adolescence and into youth this verse often seemed to me to be used as a bit of a tool, a bit of a sledgehammer perhaps to beat us into conformity to a set of rules and regulations of the church and as a result of my own rebellion and probably also as a result at least partly of some misuse and some misinterpretation of this passage I came to dread these verses.

For me these verses came to represent something that was oppressive, something that was coercive.

I attempted to comply with the behaviour, the expectations that were laid out for me in the context of the command to not be conformed to the world and I think I probably did a pretty good job at least with the outside stuff, in some ways I perhaps appeared to be at least a kind of a model Mennonite, I was a preacher's kid, I knew what was expected and I didn't want to do things that would cause me to look bad.

So on the outside I think I did a pretty good job but the people that were close to me, the people that knew me best knew that that wasn't who I was on the inside. I was often proud and arrogant, sometimes hurtful in my conversation, in my speech, I often struggled with an inability to put to

death the sinful desires of my heart, the sinful thoughts that were inconsistent with how I looked and behaved on the outside.

Now some years later the light started to come on for me and this happened as I was reading Colossians chapter 2 while the preacher was preaching from Colossians chapter 3, I know you're not supposed to do that but that is when the Spirit of God got hold of me.

Colossians chapter 2 talks about external controls, the external controls of don't do this and don't do that, don't touch this and don't touch that, it says those things are actually a worldly way of exercising control, a worldly way of attempting to change behaviour and then Colossians chapter 3 talks about a change of mind, a change that happens on the inside of being renewed in mind toward Christ, putting off the old desires and putting on Christ being made new in the knowledge of God.

And so I began to see that genuine change happens not from the outside in but from the inside out and I began to see what I was missing all along in Romans 12:2, the antidote to conformity to the world was not more control or more regulation but rather transformation flowing out of a changed mind through full surrender to God.

The good news of the Gospel of grace began to be very precious to me and I realised my total inability, total inability, to change myself to do this for myself, I began to long for and seek after a more intimate knowledge of God and this study of theology the knowledge of God totally changed my perspective and my outlook on Romans 12: 1 and 2.

And now Romans 12:1 and 2 these verses are sweet and precious to me.

Maybe none of the rest of you dreaded or dread these verses like I did, maybe none of the rest of you were as rebellious as I was but today by God's grace I desire to unpack this verse and its context so that you too will come to appreciate to delight in this precious text of Scripture.

Romans 12:1-2: I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. ² Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

My task as I understand it is to demonstrate the need for transformation so in order to do that I would like to ask this text 5 questions, four W's and an H.

The What, the Who, the Why, the When and the How.

Four W's and an H.

1st **W**hat is transformation?

2nd **W**ho needs transformation?

3rd **W**hy do we need transformation?

4th **W**hen do we need transformation?

5th **H**ow do we experience transformation?

Now the last question of how, how do we experience transformation that really gets into the next sermon so I won't spend too much time there now.

The first question what is transformation is more a matter of definition, a definition of terms so that shouldn't take too long either but where we want to spend the most time is in the middle 3 questions, Who needs transformation and why and when do we need it?

So first what is transformation?

Well before we can ever hope to understand our need for something we ought first to understand what it is that we are talking about so what is this transformation?

What does it mean to be transformed?

Well quite simply means to be changed, to be changed but not just any old change. Transformation describes complete and radical change, it is not just a minor change to the surface of something, it is not just a minor change to the shape of something it is rather a change of substance change from one thing into something else, the Greek word that is used here is used 4 times in the new Testament, it is used twice in the Gospels where it talks about the transfiguration of Jesus and it is used once here in Romans 12 and once in 2nd Corinthians 3 verse 18, and that word is basically the root word from which we get our word metamorphosis.

We know how metamorphosis works in the life of the caterpillar; the caterpillar goes into a cocoon and sometime later out comes a beautiful butter-

fly, change, substantive change, change from caterpillar to butterfly not just a surface change but a change of substance.

As I mentioned this word is also translated transfigured in [Matthew 17:2](#) where it says after 6 days Jesus took with him Peter and James and John his brother and led them up a high mountain by themselves and He was transfigured before them and his face shown like the sun and his clothes became white as light.

You see what happened here to Jesus was he was changed, Jesus appearance changed even his clothes appear to be something entirely different, a different substance.

I don't know about you but I don't think I've ever seen clothes that were white as light, as I look here today I don't see that kind of clothing, this was a change of substance, Jesus was transformed he was transfigured there was change.

In the spiritual realm that Romans 12:2 deals with we are to be changed in substance as well. Earlier in Romans 6 the apostle Paul talked about this change as a change from being dead to being alive. Now that is a change isn't it? From something that is dead and has no life, no ability to move, to act, to living to life, it's a big change, it's a change of substance, new life something that didn't exist before now it does.

[2 Corinthians 5:17](#) talks about it this way, Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.

This is far more than reformation, reformation wants to reshape that which already exists, this is more than that.

This is also more than revival, revival seeks to resuscitate or bring new life to that which is dying, this is more than that this is a change of substance this creation of something new and different.

So what is transformation?

Transformation is a change of substance the creation of something new.

But who needs this transformation?

Now that we know what transformation is we ask the question, Who needs it?

And the apostle Paul seems to think that somebody needs to be transformed he is writing this verse with a command to be transformed, he clearly and emphatically commands this, this is not an optional take it or leave it kind of thing, you must be transformed.

And so who does Paul think needs this transformation? Who is Paul writing to in these verses?

And to get the answer to that we need to go back to the first chapter of the book of Romans where the apostle Paul gives us an introductory sentence and in this introductory sentence Paul writes this,

Romans 1:1-7 Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the Gospel of God, ² which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy Scriptures, ³ concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh ⁴ and was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord, ⁵ through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations, ⁶ including you who are called to belong to Jesus Christ, ⁷ To all those in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Phew, that's a long sentence and when we come up for air we see that the apostle Paul was issuing this call in **Romans 12:2** to obedience of faith among all the nations, among all the people groups of the world and that specifically included the Christians, the saints at Rome.

In other words what he was writing here to the Romans was consistent with what he was called to proclaim throughout the world to all Christians everywhere, to all people groups, but he specifically refers to the people at Rome who are loved by God and called by God as his special people, it's another way to say saints, those who are set apart for God.

A little later in **Romans 1:15-16** he writes that he is eager to preach the Gospel to these saints and he says that he is not ashamed of the Gospel for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, both Jew and Greek,

Now we often tend to think that the Gospel is for lost people, and it is, but do you ever think that the Gospel is for saved people too, yes, we need the

power of the Gospel for our initial salvation but we continue to need the power of the Gospel in our daily lives as children of God.

We will get to that a little later when we talk about the need for transformation.

So in this context it should be clear to us that people everywhere need the transforming power of the Gospel but most specifically those who are called out by God to be his saints they are the ones who must be transformed, they are the ones the apostle Paul was writing to here and just in case it isn't clear to you all the nations, all the people groups that includes us, that includes people in the United States of America, it includes people in the cultural group that we call Mennonites, that means you.

So who needs transformation? I need transformation, you need transformation, we all need transformation.

Well why do we need it then? Why do we need this transformation?

Why would we need to be changed into something that we aren't already?

Now most of us can understand why a person who is not a follower of Christ needs transformation, we look at them and we say, yes they need to be changed, yes they need the new life that is found in Christ, those who are spiritually dead need to be made alive.

But why do those of us who are already Christians need transformation?

As Mennonites we often tend to think that we kind of have this whole Christianity thing figured out, why in the world would we need to be changed to be something else? What's wrong with us anyway?

As we turn to the text it is made very clear what our problem is, the reason that we must be transformed is because we are being conformed to this world.

The apostle Paul says stop being conformed to the world, the antidote to conformity to the world is to be transformed by the renewal of our minds but you say, we don't have this problem do we? We of all people, we who hold highly to nonconformity and separation from the world that is part of our distinctives as Anabaptists as conservative Mennonites so surely we don't have this problem of being conformed to the world?

Well one of the things that we need to understand here is that the world that we're talking about here is not the physical planet on which we live, God has created that and He called it very good and it is still beautiful although marred by the Fall it still reflects some of the glory and goodness of God, God has created us so that we would live here.

The physical world is not what this text is referring to, the word translated world here is often talked about in the Scripture as the spirit of the age. In the Ephesians 2 passage it talks about it as the course of the world or the way the world works ([Ephesians 2:2](#)), the motivations, the philosophies of the world are what is in view here.

To be conformed to the world then is to be made to fit in, to think like the world, to operate by worldly principles to operate according to worldly philosophies.

Jesus in John chapter 17 prays for us as well as his disciples and He makes it very clear that we are not to seek to leave this world this physical planet, we are to be in the world but not of it, in other words we live here, we go about our lives here on this earth, we interact with the people of this earth but we don't live according to the predominant principles the motivations the philosophies of the world. ([John 17:15](#))

What we are talking about is far more than a different way of living, it is far more than just a different way of living by being distinct or doing things that are distinct from the world, although we will do things that are different and distinct, that is not the primary definition. What we're talking about here is the kind of motives, the philosophies that drive us that control us that dictate how we live.

And I fear that many times we as conservative Mennonites have actually done the opposite of what Jesus calls us to in John 17, our instincts have been to live separate from the world to isolate ourselves from the world from the people around us but unfortunately many times we are still living according to worldly principles, in essence we have been off the world in substance while not living in it.

Well you say, well that is not right, that's not true, yes we might be a bit isolationists in our tendencies but don't accuse us of being of the world! We are living in very different ways from the world!

Okay well then let me ask you a question, What are you known for? By your neighbours by the ones who look on what are we known for? What are the things that make us stand out in our world? What do your neighbours point out as the significant difference between you and them?

In many communities the conservative Mennonites are known for their distinctive clothing, they are known for their large families and family values, often they are known for successful businesses or maybe frugal ways. In many communities Mennonites are known for their good cooking.

Will let me ask you another question then, How are these things different from what we know about the Muslims or Jews or Mormons? I'm sure there are some nuances of difference but the point is you don't have to be a transformed child of God to wear distinctive clothes or to have a large family or a successful business or be frugal or know how to cook well.

As I alluded to in my introduction we as Mennonites have become focused on the outward indicators of not being conformed to this world and some of those are good and right but my contention is that we are often altogether conformed to the world in very significant ways.

Many have tried to accomplish transformation by external confirmation to a set of rules and regulations, do this, don't do that, don't wear that, don't go there. Colossians 2 says: If with Christ you died to the elemental spirits of the world, why, as if you were still alive in the world, do you submit to regulations—²¹ “Do not handle, Do not taste, Do not touch”²² (referring to things that all perish as they are used)—according to human precepts and teachings?²³ These have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting self-made religion and asceticism and severity to the body, but they are of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh. [Colossians 2:20-23](#)

Notice the spirit of the world tries to work this way, the world's systems and philosophies tell us that in order to change behaviour we must regulate externals, they have no other way but nobody is ever going to be transformed by obeying a code of behaviour, by depending on these external manipulations we are actually revealing our conformity to the world. People might get reformed but they are not going to be transformed.

Now please do not misunderstand me the church must speak to what is proper behaviour and what is proper conduct and what is proper dress but the church must never depend on those things for transformation!

Now some of us have perhaps rejected the external regulation but what have we replaced it with? In some of our circles it has been replaced by an emphasis for theological precision, as long as you believe the right set of facts then everything will be okay.

And I would ask how is that working for us, is that really where it is?

Once again what we have is a worldly way of thinking.

What about our family values, what about frugality and successful businesses what did Jesus have to say about that? And Jesus said to his disciples, “Truly, I say to you, only with difficulty will a rich person enter the kingdom of heaven.”²⁴ Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God.”²⁵ When the disciples heard this, they were greatly astonished, saying, “Who then can be saved?”²⁶ But Jesus looked at them and said, “With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.”²⁷ Then Peter said in reply, “See, we have left everything and followed you. What then will we have?”²⁸ Jesus said to them, “Truly, I say to you, in the new world, when the Son of Man will sit on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.”²⁹ And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or lands, for my name’s sake, will receive a hundred-fold and will inherit eternal life.”³⁰ But many who are first will be last, and the last first. [Matthew 19:23-30](#)

I don’t think I need to comment much further except to say that far too many of us are stressing out trying to provide for our children so that they have a better life than what we had when what Jesus says is important is following him whatever the cost, even if that means leaving houses, lands, father, mother, children. But for far too many of us our children, our family, our businesses have become more important than what God wants.

Again please understand children and family are important but the things of God are more important.

And so we have become worldly in our thinking even in the good things that God has given us and we have valued the gift more than the Giver.

So why do we need transformation?

We need transformation because we are being conformed to this world.

Well when we do need this transformation?

The verbs in this text indicate a continual action, a continual action, this isn't something we just do once and then we're done, this transformation is an ongoing work, it is a continual work, we need it right now we will continue to need it as long as we live in this world as long as we are being conformed or made to fit in to this world's system.

The need is great; this isn't just for unbelievers it is for us for all of us in every stage of life we must be transformed, we cannot afford to keep on pursuing the American dream or any other dream that does not involve Gospel powered transformation. Far too much has already been lost, far too many souls already conform to the world and we will continue to need this transformation as long as we live in this world and in this body of flesh.

The need is great, we need transformation now and we need it continuing into the future, beginning today!

Well how do we experience transformation, how are we going to do this, how do we accomplish transformation?

As I've already said this is a topic for the next sermon but I don't want to leave you entirely waiting, I've already alluded to some of the ways transformation won't happen, transformation won't happen through more regulation, transformation won't happen through doctrinal precision or the flip side of that accommodation to our culture.

Some people attempt transformation that way, if we can only be relevant, no, it will not happen that way and furthermore transformation won't happen through a search for a more emotional or more passionate worship experience, which is another way or means people tend to use.

How transformation does happen is through surrender, surrender to God resulting in repentance and a changed mind. Notice verse one of Romans

12, [Romans 12:1-2](#) I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. ² Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

This transformation that he is talking about here is not something that we can do, every time this word is used in the new Testament it is spoken of as something that happens to us that is done to us, it is not something that is possible for us to do, this is something that is done to us and through us by the power and mercy of God and so there is no formula that we can follow, there is no 12 step plan or 3 step plan to transformation but in order to be transformed we must obey the Gospel of Jesus Christ, not just believe it but obey it.

[Romans 10:9-10](#) talks about how we are to be saved “Because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. ¹⁰ For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved.

But then if we skip down to [Romans 10:16](#) he says “But they have not all obeyed the Gospel” So this is a matter of obedience we must surrender to King Jesus, He is the Lord we are his subjects, we are his slaves, He is the Master.

And verse one of chapter 12 puts this in the context of sacrifice it says if we were to voluntarily place ourselves on the sacrificial altar and to say with Job, in Job 13, though He slay me yet I will trust in him ([Job 13:15](#)).

Unconditional surrender, no strings attached, we give Him everything that we have, everything that we are, everything that we might ever hope to be, our family, our fortune, our dreams, our ambitions, our reputation even our physical bodies we give it all in full surrender, even that is not possible without the drawing, working power of God in our lives.

We must depend on Him to even get on the altar, we must depend on Him every day to make that sacrifice of obedience in faith, this only happens as we obey the Gospel. One of the first commands that Jesus issued when He was here on earth was repent and believe.

To repent is to change your mind, it is a similar thing to what we read here in Romans 12 this a renewal of our minds, this mind being made new as it says in Philippians 2 we have the mind of Christ, ([Philippians 2:5](#)) and now we seek first the kingdom of God instead of our own kingdom, but the power to repent, the power to obey the Gospel is given us by God in [John 6:44](#) He says: No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day.

Transformation will not happen without unconditional surrender and repentance, a change of mind empowered by God himself.

And the results of this will be that we will do the right things, we will believe the right things, we will demonstrate to our watching world what is good and acceptable and the perfect will of God. [Romans 12:2](#)

But there are no shortcuts this is a lifelong process and you cannot do this from the outside in, it must be the power of God working from the inside out.

In conclusion many of our young people today seem to be unsure about what real Christianity is or whether they even want to be a part of it and many of our young parents and middle-aged people are preoccupied with career, with family, with recreation and only secondarily committed to serving King Jesus. Far too many of our older people are content with kicking back in retirement and living a life of ease instead of running the last few laps of the Christian race with all the stops pulled out.

Many people today are crying for revival in our churches they want to see fervent worship with a passionate emotional response, they want to seek active Christian service, many today are calling for a recovery of family values and family togetherness, some are calling for more strict reformation of dress and behaviour or limitations on technology and media.

Some of us are looking for the perfect theological position that is precisely defensible or practical in our modern world, if we can just get all our doctrinal ducks in a row then everything will be okay.

Yes we need revival of emotion and desire and yes we need reformation of conduct, yes we want strong family units and we must be concerned with theological position but more than all of that we need transformation, we

must have transformation, transformation of individuals, transformation of families, transformation of churches and even transformation of our alliance.

And this transformation must be ongoing, the moment we stop being transformed into new creations in Christ we begin to be conformed to this world. That is the default setting.

And the moment that we give up or stand by the sidelines is the moment where we begin to be conformed to the world.

Without transformation all of the emotional response, all of the changed behaviour, the family values, the theological precision, all of this without transformation is nothing more than an empty shell of legalism and conformity to a worldly way of outside in control, and it has no eternal value in restraining the flesh, in restraining sinful indulgence or creating new life.

But with a continual inside out transformation through the power and grace of the Gospel we will begin to see fervent worship, we will begin to see passionate service for Christ, family will take its proper place on the altar of sacrifice, behaviour and dress will no longer take their cues from the world, theological precision will flow out of a rich and sustained communion in the word of God.

This transformation will not happen without unconditional surrender to God and complete trust in the work of Jesus Christ to purchase our redemption through his sacrificial death and through the power of his resurrection.

This transformation will not happen until the Holy Spirit moves in our minds in our hearts to unveil the truth of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

And this transformation will not happen until our minds are changed about our own sin, about our own selfish ambition.

And this transformation will not happen until we obey the Gospel through the power of the Holy Spirit and the grace of God.

So who needs transformation? I do, you do, we all do!

Let us pray.

Come Holy Spirit and move among us, open our minds to the truth of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, reveal to us our terrible sin and rebellion, help us to see ourselves as God sees us, as painful as that is.

Oh God empower us to complete an unconditional surrender, renew our minds, change the way we think by the truth of your word.

Transform our lives from the inside out we pray. Make us into new creations that are modelled after your Son Jesus and make of us a marvellous masterpiece of your glory. Help us to fulfil your good and acceptable and perfect will. May we be a reflection of your glory to a watching world.

Oh the depths and the riches and wisdom and knowledge of you oh God, how unsearchable are your judgements, how mysterious your ways, for who has known the mind of the Lord or who has been your counsellor or who has ever given you anything worthy to be repaid? For from you oh God and through you oh God all things exist and continue to have their existence.

To you oh God be all the glory and the overwhelming dominion and power for ever and ever. Amen.

This message has been edited original available by request. The Editor.



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

There's a Miracle in Your Hand

So the Lord said to him, "What is that in your hand?" Exodus 4:2

One thing that stands out about the early followers of Jesus is that they were ordinary men, doing ordinary things – but seeing extraordinary results. One of the most compelling examples of this was when a young boy gave his small lunch to Jesus. What happened next is a miracle still talked about to this day — a multitude was fed with two small fish, and five loaves of bread.

There are five great lessons we learn from this one amazing miracle.

1. First, never underestimate the Lord's ability to meet a need. The place was a desert, and the time was late; the people were many, and the need was great. But Jesus not only met the need; He did it with abundance!

And He can meet whatever need you are faced with today.

2. Second, never count yourself out when the Lord starts to work. A man seeing the news about disease, hunger, poverty, and sorrow in the world, turned to his wife and said, “Sometimes I just want to ask God why doesn’t He do something about all of this!” “What’s stopping you from asking Him?” his wife replied. “Because,” the man said, “I’m afraid He will ask me the same question!”

Jesus gave the loaves to the disciples, and they gave it to the people. In other words – the miracle happened in their hands, while they were passing the food out to the people. There is a miracle in your hands, too!

3. Third, never assume that what you have is too insignificant to matter. A boy with a sack lunch containing five loaves and two small fish – that’s all it took. One disciple asked, “But what is this among so many?” It is tragic how many count themselves out simply because they feel they do not measure up to the moment.

4. Fourth, never think that He will fail to meet your needs while using you to bless others. The Bible says that they did all eat, and were full. As for the disciples, they collected the fragments and filled twelve baskets – one for each of them. Your service to Him will never go unnoticed, nor unanswered.

5. Finally, never hold on to what the Lord is asking from you. What if the boy had kept his lunch for himself? Well, he would’ve had lunch – and that’s all. But, giving it to the Lord Jesus took that young man into history. And now, Jesus is asking you, “What do you have? Bring it to Me.” History awaits your response.



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

Grace, License, Denial

As we come to the passage that we would like to examine together would invite your attention to Jude chapter 1 verse 4, one verse in the book of Jude, this verse is in the context of a series of warnings, a fairly detailed argument against apostasy, Jude has just invited them to contend for the faith and it is The faith which was once delivered to the saints, it doesn’t mean your personal faith although that is included but it is The faith as presented in the whole of Scripture.

Book of Jude: Verse 4, For certain men have crept in unnoticed who long ago were marked out for this condemnation, ungodly men, who turned the grace of our God into lewdness and denied the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ

This passage is not unfamiliar to us I would suppose and yet its message runs against the tide of our culture.

We have been previously warned of some of these things and I felt that it would be helpful for me and perhaps for all of us to think further about the matter of apostasy. Apostasy as we shared with the children earlier is a turning away from the truth, an apostate turns away from the truth, an apostle has turned toward the truth and this is about apostasy, apostates, those who have turned away from the truth.

And may I say if it were a common thing in the time of the New Testament it is fully more common today and apostates are not easily discerned in the sense that they come in among true believers and appear to be true believers until their doctrine is examined. And so it is entirely possible that here in this congregation there could be apostates, in fact there likely are.

The apostle Peter, writing before Jude, warned of the coming apostasy, Jude describes it further basically saying it is already here now, these people have come in with stealth is the idea as the verse says, they have come in unnoticed, they have come in with stealth, they have infiltrated the church. They are spoken of here as certain men, that does not necessarily exclude the women, but the men are the subject, those who would come standing before us and teaching things that are contrary to the word of God.

And so the first thing that I would like us to notice that this is something that has happened as Jude writes to those who are called sanctified by God the Father and preserved in Jesus Christ, and thus it could be said he writes to us here and now.

For those who are truly saved would be described there in verse one and he says certain men have infiltrated the church, one of the things that we always need to keep before us is that the attitude quote "it cannot happen here" unquote is a most dangerous attitude and it is essentially a false attitude, it can happen here!

It happened to the very congregations that the apostles started and no one here has been face-to-face in the flesh with the Lord Jesus for 3 years under his instruction as the apostles were and if it could happen to their ministries it can happen here and so let us understand that this is a real possibility, in fact it's probably more than a possibility it is probably a fact that apostates do infiltrate the church today.

Now this verse describes them and we will review this description as we go forward in our study of the verse but it describes them as and I am going to use a long word I will define it and some of you already know it well it describes them as antinomians.

The word antinomian is made up of 2 words anti-or against and nomian which is a reference to the law. These people that have infiltrated the church would be those who are against law.

Now let me help us to understand that as you look at this verse it talks about they turn the grace of God into lewdness or we could say license, the old word licentiousness, they change the message of grace as given in the scriptures to a message of tolerance and permissiveness, they are antinomians, they are against law, they are against rules.

Now as opposed to the word antinomian there is another word that we are more familiar with the word is legalist and it is essentially the opposite of antinomian.

A legalist in terms of the doctrines of the scriptures as exposed in the book of Galatians, which we have been studying, a legalist is one who says it is all about law, it is all about behaviour and your following of the law will save you.

The legalist, the theological legalist depends on his behaviour in order to be saved, he may not depend on it 100%, he may depend on it 50%, he may depend on it 10%, he may depend on it 1% but he is still a legalist if in any way he claims or believes his behaviour guarantees his salvation.

And so you have these 2 extremes and the whole book of Galatians speaks against legalism but then we have these points in Jude and elsewhere in the New Testament that speak equally against antinomianism and so these apostates can be known Jude says by their declarations against rules.

Now most, many of us, I shouldn't say most but many of us don't want to hear that, we don't like that because we like to be against rules. But keep in mind this is what the Scripture says, okay.

So these apostates have come, they have infiltrated the churches, and Jude is writing with a historical perspective whereas Peter earlier was writing with a prophetic perspective he is telling them that this is going to happen and then Jude is saying now it has happened.

Now there is something else in this verse that we need to look at and that is these words "marked out for condemnation" they were long ago marked out for this condemnation, the old translation here is not the best it gives us the word ordained if I remember correctly that is not an accurate rendering, the rendering that I am reading is better, much better, they were long ago marked out for this condemnation, their end is going to be condemnation.

That type of message is clear Old and New Testament as a condemnation or condemned of God and so basically he is taking the argument from Peter, yes, but then even beyond that they were long ago marked out for this condemnation.

This is apostasy, full-blown he is saying and those who take, shall I say antinomianism, those who take that position it has been clear through the centuries he says that this is the path of condemnation.

So we are not talking about an alternative view we're talking about the difference between heaven and hell and he is making it very clear I believe. So the apostates are on a career path to hell, that message is not an alternative, it is not a matter of interpretation, it is not something that we could say well they are good people and they are going to heaven they are a little mistaken here but they are going to heaven, no, Jude is quite clear, this path is the path to hell.

And as you think of the understanding of this whole context he is talking that way repeatedly and emphasising the fact that apostasy, an apostate, one who turns away from truth, particularly truth that affects the Gospel that is not just some alternative that is eternally applicable, it is eternally the issue of condemnation.

Now he goes on to describe in this verse a bit of the character of these people and you will notice in verse 4 again he refers to them as ungodly and that is the sum of his view of the apostate, their character is ungodly, God is not first, as you see later in the verse God is not Lord, they operate in

another god sphere, basically their god is themselves, selfish, self-centred, self-serving and so he emphasises that their character is ungodliness.

I have seen this illustrated in this way, someone will be in the midst of a discussion, maybe argument is a better term, about some type of behaviour maybe the way somebody talks, maybe the way somebody appears and they will say this is unscriptural. No references, no indication of where it's unscriptural, this is unscriptural.

This type of response may not always be the response of an apostate but it can be this kind of blanket statement this is what I want to be understood, this is how I see it and so the Scripture must be with me. And that is unwise at best.

Let us not get too legalistic about that and always have to give chapter and verse but let us on the other hand be sure of what we say when we say something is unscriptural, let's understand that the Scripture is quite enough for us for life and godliness and it very seldom will let us down if we are in the truth, maybe I should say it will never let us down if it lets us down it is because we didn't handle it well.

I think many of us will come to the point where we know what we think is right but have not connected that with Scripture and when we know what we think is right but have not connected it with Scripture we have in a sense put ourselves on a path to apostasy because you see we know what is right but we have not investigated to see whether that is what God says is right.

And so I think it is extremely important that in this message about apostasy we see ourselves, our church, our fellowship and understand that we need to be in the scriptures so that we know what is right based on what God has said not on the basis of what we may say or think.

It is fine for us to have personal opinions but let's not put them forth as dogma unless we have scriptural support for doing so because this is part of the road to apostasy.

So these men are ungodly.

Now again to what we touched on earlier you will notice here toward the end of the verse it says they turned the grace of God into lewdness, the concept is license.

In other words it is a redefinition of grace.

Now we are getting to the message of salvation and sanctification, they re-define grace this way, no one is going to tell me what to do I am free in Christ to do what I want to do.

And there are variations of that statement but that is the concept.

Jude is saying that is apostasy, that idea is apostasy.

The message of grace calls us to unconditional surrender to Jesus Christ. to give up. as opposed to legalism which says you must do something in order either to get saved or stay saved.

The antinomians say we don't do anything we do what we want to as long as we at some point in the past received Jesus as our Saviour.

And Jude focuses on the issue of Lordship here as we close the verse but before we do that let us understand that when grace is defined as license to the extent that we say nobody can tell me what to do I'm free in Christ to do what He says!, those are dangerous statements because what does He say? He tells us what to do! And He puts an authority structure in place for that here on the earth and so it is pure apostasy to say with its broader extensions no one is going to tell me what to do.

That is the very thing of which Jude speaks. So grace is turned into license to do whatever I think is right and when the Scripture is brought to bear on that type of an apostate the response is that is your interpretation, in that idea that's your interpretation but not mine. That is apostasy, that whole concept is apostasy, it is turning away from the truth.

Now may I say it is not about the preacher's interpretation, it is not about your interpretation it is about God's interpretation and as we have said over this pulpit before there is only one interpretation of the word of God, not mine, not yours it is God's, our job is to find it and to stand on it and bow the knee to it and to submit to it.

And so the attitude that no one's going to tell me what to do is pure apostasy. It's actually a joke because God is on the throne and you will bow the knee to him sooner or later.

And so let us understand the nature of the apostasy of which the scripture speaks here it is turning the grace of God, the free grace of God into license whereas grace extends to us the opposite of what we deserve and empowers us to obey the Lord, we accept the Lordship of Christ we bow the knee to him, surrender to him, while grace does that it most certainly is not a free for all and it is not a do what I want to do thing. Not in the least!

And so it seems to me that Jude focuses in on that issue as one of 2 issues that define apostasy

The other issue is deny, notice the end part of the verse they deny the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ.

I hope you notice the emphasis on the word Lord because that is a part of his focus writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the people the antinomians against law, against rule, they by that deny Lordship because they say nobody can tell me what to do. Because Lordship and that is the emphasis it's actually the climax of the verse, Lordship is what it is all about bowing the knee to Jesus Christ in unconditional surrender.

That is what salvation is all about, that is what sanctification is all about, that is what the Christian life is all about.

And so he is saying by their message they deny the Lord God. They say in other words I am lord, I will decide what is best for me and they may put some spiritual holy water on that but it remains their message, I will decide!

So in that case who is God? Themselves. They themselves are their own god but that is not the message of the Scripture, the message of the Scripture is He is Lord, not me.

And so as you look at this verse again there is this denial of the only Lord God, in practice, in speech, a denial of the Lordship and then to reinforce it and our Lord Jesus Christ.

And so again let me say there is no my interpretation there is God's interpretation of what He has said and if you object to what this verse teaches or you try to put different words to it may I say that our faith stands on the written word of God leading us to the Living Word the Lord Jesus Christ and if words mean nothing than all hope is lost and we have nothing and we are of all men most miserable, we think we have something and we don't.

But if words do mean something and God has spoken to us in words which point to The Word, the Lord Jesus, then we must take heed of this passage and we must stop playing loose with Scripture and saying such things as that is only your interpretation and I have a different interpretation. Most of those people who say that's just your interpretation I have a different interpretation, don't really have any interpretation they just don't want to obey the Scripture, they haven't studied it, they haven't examined what the

words mean, they just have a concept of the way they want to live and they call that scriptural and they are lying probably most of all to themselves as well as to others because the Scripture is quite adequate if you studied carefully and you are willing to bow the knee to the one who gave the scripture, God himself in Jesus Christ.

So may I ask you to examine yourselves and ask myself to examine myself.

Have we been playing loose with the scripture, have we been playing loose with grace? Making our own definitions not accepting God's definition?

It is very interesting that Jude actually calls that sort of thing immoral, the word license here has the idea of the morality and hence the translation that I read this morning calls it lewdness, so have we been immoral in our understanding of truth?

Let's examine ourselves.

May we pray.

Thank you heavenly Father for this passage of your word it is important as all your word is and we have not always paid attention to it, we like to think that if someone is a part of our assembly they are not apostates but it would seem from this passage that it could very well be that people in the congregations that we love our, at least some of them, and so help us to take heed of the message of this passage.

Help us to be warned and convicted, help us to set our feet on the Rock, we pray in Jesus name, Amen.

Paul Emerson, Calvary Mennonite Fellowship.

This message has been edited original available on request. The Editor.



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

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