

THE AUSTRALIAN ANABAPTIST

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

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

Matthew 5:15

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For A Conservative Anabaptist Perspective

From The Editor's Desk

Responding to the Seed – Mark 4:10-20

There is little doubt in my mind that all those who profess to be disciples of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ have read the parable of the sower which our Lord relates to a large crowd in the first nine verses of Mark chapter 4, the last words of that short discourse that Jesus utters are “He who has ears to hear, let him hear.”

It is obvious that we are given a choice to hear or ignore.

Jesus then goes on in verses 10 through 20 to further explain his parable and I believe that the words contained in that portion of Scripture are ones that we need to apply to our lives on a daily basis as we ponder which of the four soils our heart contains and then consider what we need to do to make that soil, whatever the type, more receptive to the seed, more fruitful and ultimately be a blessing to others, be productive in the Kingdom and more importantly bring honour and glory to the Sower.

Recently in our reading we were again impressed with the words of wisdom of one of God's “messengers” in the 1800s and we share an extract of his written words, he wrote:

“In this parable of the seed sown we see different human soil, different responses to God, and the elevation of either self-denial of self, all the soils are types of individuals that represent ourselves and in fact all of humanity, past, present and yet to be. All of these have to make choices that will determine in which direction their growth will progress.

The variety of the responses from humanity to the still small voice of God in their hearts illustrates once again the timeless truth of “the secret of the Kingdom of God” which Jesus clarifies in Mark 4:13-20 – different people respond in different ways.

The question to people in time past, to you and I today, and for those yet to be has always been the same namely: Will we live our lives conscious of the invisible kingdom of God that surrounds and fills the world OR will we waste away these few precious earthly years consumed with how we look, what others think of us, with wealth and gain and importance and status? Will we live for others or for ourselves?”

Throughout Scripture and indeed throughout our life in these clay vessels awaiting the return of the Lord the call is and will forever be “Follow Me!”



From the Pulpit

Biblical Basis of Non-Resistance

Brother Merle Ruth

The Biblical Basis of Non-resistance #1.

We live in a strife-torn world. We have no choice in the matter. There is no other option. Where else could we live? From north to south, from east to west, the blight of strife is everywhere. The practice of non-resistance presupposes that the saint finds himself in this kind of world, a strife-torn world.

Nonresistance was not needed in the Garden of Eden. Neither will there be any occasion for it in heaven. But at this stage of history, we must live our life in a fallen world, inhabited by many people who do not know the way of peace (Romans 3:17).

The Origin and Spread of Strife.

Genesis 3 tells us of the spoiling of a once congenial relationship; let us call it man's first quarrel with God, it is followed very closely in Genesis 4 with the story of man's first quarrel with man. However, even before Cain killed Abel, his father Adam, had started the habit of blaming his wife, but not until he had first committed with her the first act of disobedience to God. We ought to learn from the sequence of those happenings that strife between man and man is the inevitable result of an impaired relationship between man and God.

After the Fall, it did not take long for the fighting spirit to become deeply embedded in fallen human nature. If I want my way in preference to God's way (Isaiah 53:6), I will likewise want my way in preference to my neighbour's way. A world in which each person wants his own selfish way is bound to have in it a great deal of interpersonal and intergroup conflict. Even large-scale wars have this as their underlying source. The prevalence of this element of conflict in society is the circumstantial factor that has necessitated God's call for His people to be characteristically non-resistant in the midst of a strife-torn world.

Restraining Measures Introduced.

Following the Flood, lest the earth be quickly filled with violence again (Genesis 6:13), God introduced restraining measures. Noah was told, “Whoever sheds man’s blood, by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of God made he man” (Genesis 9:6). Possibly this was the point at which God implemented the principle of civil government. However it is viewed, clearly this announcement was designed to be a deterrent against crime. The offender was not to go free as Cain seemingly did. The note at the conclusion of this announcement highlights the sanctity of human life. “For in the image of God made he man.” This is God’s call to stop and think: “That person on whom you are tempted to inflict harm is My workmanship and bears My image.”

After calling to Himself a covenant people, God gave them laws. Some of these were civil in nature, for God knew the degree to which they remained a carnally minded people given to strife. In the Ten Commandments, murder was forbidden (Exodus 20:13). Furthermore, personal retaliation was prohibited and legal retaliation was restricted to a just and equivalent injury (Leviticus 24:20).

The Envisioned Ideal

The spiritual restoration of man has always been God’s ultimate purpose. God’s ideal, in terms of human relations, is depicted in the words of Isaiah 11:9: “They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain.” However, the full realization of this goal needed to wait until the arrival of a new stage in God’s program. The Old Testament was therefore an era during which God depended heavily upon outwardly imposed restrictive measures. And, since the majority of people still choose to remain in their unregenerate state, the need for restrictive laws today, based on those given to Israel, continues.

How Does This All Relate to Me?

In a very direct way. For there are unavoidable consequences attached to living in this kind of world. Like everyone else, I will at times be taken advantage of, mistreated, and falsely accused. At some time or other, I will likely become the object of someone’s jealousy or hatred. Furthermore, if I am a Christian, this fact alone will bring upon me additional suffering. For, in the degree to which I live a blameless life, I will be to the ungodly

people around me a source of irritation. Jesus forewarned His followers that this would be their normal lot. “If the world hate you, ye know that it hated Me before it hated you” (John 15:18).

Where Do I Learn How to Respond to Such Treatment?

“Is there any word from the LORD?” (Jeremiah 37:17). There is, positively! From the lips of the holiest men who have ever lived has come repeatedly this claim, “Thus saith the LORD. . .” Under the promptings of God, this spoken Word, as much of it as God wanted preserved, became the written Word.

This process, known as divine revelation, was progressive in nature. As “holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost” (2 Peter 1:21), more and more of God’s plan and will for man became known. Hebrews 1:1 highlights the culmination of this process: “God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by His Son.” During His ministry, the rate of divine revelation was accelerated like never before. But still the process was not completed. Before His return to heaven, Jesus told His followers, “I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now” (John 16:12). When He came back to earth on the day of Pentecost, in the Person of the Holy Spirit, He began to teach them these “many things.” Under His direction, the New Testament Scriptures came into being. This explains why Paul could make the claim recorded in 1 Corinthians 14:37: “The things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord.”

We now have our answer to the question in focus. The Bible is the highest and final authority by which Christians live. Therein every sincere seeker can learn how God wants him to respond to those who commit wrongs against him

The Biblical Basis of Non-resistance #2.

A Common Mistake

The normal place to start reading a book is at its beginning. The Bible begins with the Old Testament. Sometimes those who want to find the answer to a question get stalled in the Old Testament. The Old Testament, no less than the New Testament, does constitute a part of the divinely inspired

Word. However, much of it was designed to be temporary and preparatory in nature. Since, as has been shown, God revealed His will for man gradually, it is not surprising to find in Old Testament times, even among the people of God, a lower ethical norm than God requires now. A further reason for this difference lies in the unique duality that characterized the Old Testament people of God. For reasons known best to God, Israel had assigned to her the functions of both church and state. Accordingly, God supplied her with regulations to implement the maintenance of law and order and the curbing of violence. Even capital punishment was to be administered for some crimes (Exodus 21). That Israel was God's agent to punish wicked nations is another dimension of how God used His people in this Old Testament period. Unfortunately, these God-directed actions are built upon to justify participation in warfare by many today

Early Appearances of Nonresistance

As already indicated under specified circumstances during the Old Testament era, the use of coercive measures was sanctioned by God. However, we must not allow this detail to distort the total picture. Even before the giving of the Law, along the godly line, the light of divine revelation was sufficiently bright to allow men to perceive that peaceable personal relationships constituted God's ideal.

Rather than becoming involved in a quarrel, Abram contented himself with the less than best choice of land (Genesis 13). Rather than strive for them, Isaac allowed the herdsmen of Gerar to take from him the wells that his servants had dug (Genesis 26). Joseph, the once-badly-mistreated brother, when the opportunity for revenge arrived, chose rather to forgive (Genesis 45). In their response to those who wronged them, these Old Testament saints, on at least these occasions, rose to the New Testament level of returning good for evil.

It is noteworthy that the Old Testament Law had woven into it strands of teaching wherein the way of peace and non-resistance was held forth as the prescribed way for an Israelite to respond in the situations described (Exodus 23:4 and Leviticus 19:18). In this Leviticus passage, loving one's neighbour as himself is made mandatory. Finally, in Proverbs 25:21-22, the call for non-resisting love is sounded so clearly that a New Testament writer (Romans 12:20) employs it to strengthen his appeal to New Testament saints for non-resistant behaviour.

So then, what shall we conclude? Was non-resistance taught and practiced during that era? Within certain limits it definitely was. But for reasons already noted, it could not be for them their total way of life.

Nonresistance Becomes a Rule Without Exception

This change was one of many changes associated with the inauguration of the New Covenant. Arrangements that had always been preparatory and temporary in the reckoning of God became outdated as God's plan unfolded into its next stage.

A very significant announcement of this transition is heard in the following passage: "Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth: But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil" (Matthew 5:38, 39).

Because He not only brought the Word of God but also was Himself the Word personified, Christ could thus speak with an authority that was obvious to all. By the choice of His terminology, He was here identifying Himself as the Lawgiver of the New Covenant.

In effect, He is saying that from now on for the people of God, it is going to be different. There can be no more participation in war. Neither can there be any involvement in the punishment of evildoers and the maintenance of justice. These functions are incompatible with the role to which His New Covenant people are to be assigned. They would also be incompatible with the higher-than-ever ethical norm to which He is herewith elevating the level of Christian morality.

The Label - Nonresistance

The passage in Matthew 5:39 is the source for the term *non-resistance*. As a label, it accurately reflects the meaning of our Lord's words that we are to resist not evil, and that which follows clarifies that the evil in focus is evil treatment. Like most non-resistance passages, this one needs very little interpretation; the meaning is so obvious. Under no condition should we allow ourselves to retaliate or in any way strike back at one who mistreats us.

Does This Prohibit Every Form of Resistance?

The resistance that is here prohibited is obviously, as shown in the following verses, the kind to which the man of the world would naturally re-

sort. Spiritual resistance, the kind that saints must exercise in order to survive spiritually, is nowhere forbidden and, on the contrary, is expressly commanded (James 4:7). “We wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against . . . spiritual wickedness in high places” (Ephesians 6:12). “The weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds” (2 Corinthians 10:4). These Scriptures reflect an often overlooked fact. In the most important battle of all (while their worldly counterparts remain passive), non-resistant Christians wage an intense warfare. Those who charge the non-resistant Christian with being a passive parasite are usually blind to the important contributions he makes to the preservation of society.

But It Sounds So Negative

Our day is one in which popular opinion is anti-negative. In many minds, positive thinking is almost equated with Christianity. The poorly instructed saint, influenced by this mentality, may hesitate to accept any teaching that carries a negative label. Nonresistance is that kind of label.

But do not be intimidated by public opinion. When He gave the Ten Commandments, God Himself employed a whole list of negatives. Christian behaviour cannot be fully defined without employing some negatives. If you are a Christian, you are that not only by virtue of what you do but also by virtue of what you do not do. Nonresistance singles out one thing the true Christian does not do. When he is wronged, he does not in any way fight back.

Nonresistance Illustrated

For the purpose of further explaining the spirit of non-resistance, our Lord, after issuing His call to be non-resistant, related four simple illustrations. “Whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also. And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain. Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away” (Matthew 5:39-42). These four responses reflect a similar spirit. Rather than retaliate, the non-resistant person patiently endures insult and even injury. When taken advantage of, he remains very gracious. If imposed upon, he goes beyond what is demanded of him. The fighting spirit is completely absent, and in its place is

open-handed generosity. By the use of these illustrations, our Lord has drawn the portrait of a beautiful, non-resistant personality.

The Biblical Basis of Non-resistance #3.

The Active Side of Nonresistance

By poorly informed people, the non-resistant person is frequently viewed as a liability to society. Being thus misunderstood is part of the Christian's experience of bearing the reproach of Christ (Hebrews 13:13). Commonly overlooked is the fact that non-resistance is only part of the package of love. Non-resistance is love absorbing the wrongdoing of others. But love, the kind that God sheds abroad in the heart of His regenerated children (Romans 5:5), is expressed also in other ways. Because he is motivated by this kind of love, the true child of God is able and required to do good as opposed to evil.

“Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you” (Matthew 5:43, 44).

Even while we are absorbing mistreatment, we are to be aggressive doers of good. This is possible and, in a sense, natural because agape love expresses itself in both ways-passively and actively, in non-resistance and in assistance.

Being Non-resistant Identifies You as a Child of God

After dwelling on the active aspects of the non-resistant way of life, our Lord introduces a further reason for choosing this way of life. Structure wise, the verse that follows begins in the middle of an unfinished sentence. However, subject wise, it forms a unit of its own. “That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for He maketh His sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust” (Matthew 5:45). Our claim to be His children ought to be verified by an actual likeness to Him. Our non-resistant love should be expressed in the ways outlined in verse 44 for this reason: so “that ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven.” As is suggested in the remainder of the verse, in His relating to the children of men, more often than not, God is non-resistant in that He is good to all irrespective of how they treat Him. Doing likewise identifies one as His child.

Being Non-resistant Identifies You as a Follower of Christ

Those who look with disfavour upon non-resistance are hard pressed to reconcile their stance with the non-resistance of Jesus. The one perfect life that was ever lived had in it instance after instance revealing that our Lord was consistently non-resistant. How can anyone ignore His example and still claim to be His follower?

“For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow His steps: Who, did no sin, neither was guile found in His mouth: Who, when He was reviled, reviled not again; when He suffered, He threatened not; but committed Himself to Him that judgeth righteously” (1 Peter 2:21–23). In this passage, the non-resistant aspects of His life are expressly singled out for us to pattern after.

Non-resistance Is the Way of the Cross in Human Relations.

The typical worldling is quick to protect his supposed rights and to employ physical force or the arm of the law to keep others in place. Giving in, allowing ourselves to be mistreated by others — these are viewed by such as symptoms of weakness. In contrast to that, rather than inflict suffering on others, the Christian, following the example of His Lord, chooses the way of the cross in human relations. Paul chided the Corinthians because they employed the law against each other when they ought to have rather suffered themselves to be defrauded (1 Corinthians 6:7). A better example can be found in those apostles who are represented as “rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name” (Acts 5:41). In another context we read of Christians who “took joyfully the spoiling of their goods” (Hebrews 10:34). These soldiers of the cross were demonstrating fortitude of the highest order. It is only by being non-resistant that a Christian can be consistent, for whoever really loves his neighbour as himself will not in any way harm him, violently or otherwise.

Being Non-resistant Identifies You With the Kingdom of Christ

In Colossians 1:13 saints are said to have been delivered from the power of darkness and translated into the kingdom of God’s dear Son. Every living person belongs to one or the other of these two kingdoms. This two-kingdom concept appears also in Romans 13:1-7. In that passage, the pronouns *he* and *they* are employed to designate an officer of the state; the pronouns *thee* and *ye* are employed to identify the saints to whom the pas-

sage is addressed. The agent of the state “beareth . . . the sword” for he is “the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil” (Romans 13:4). Obviously, he cannot fill that role and also be consistently non-resistant. Nevertheless, Christian people recognize that the civil officer is serving as an agent of God to administer justice in a society of evildoers. Although we cannot serve as government agents, we ought not to be antigovernment in attitude.

Our Anabaptist forefathers correctly asserted that the state is ordained of God outside the perfection of Christ. By making that assertion they were acknowledging that the ethic of love and non-resistance is for Christians, not for the state. In a very noteworthy statement, our Lord spoke thus of the two kingdoms and the cleavage that exists between them: “My kingdom is not of this world: if My kingdom were of this world, then would My servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is My kingdom not from hence” (John 18:36).

Significantly, the point of cleavage is here the employment or non-employment of violence. This declaration of our Lord compels every man to choose to identify with one or the other kingdom, for they are not sufficiently compatible to allow identity with both.

Non-resistance Allows God to Retain His Prerogative

As early as the time of Moses, God made this disclosure: “To me belongeth vengeance, and recompense” (Deuteronomy 32:35). In the light of this declaration, the wrongness of purely personal retaliation stands out in bold relief. Centuries later, another divinely inspired writer, Paul the apostle, grounded his appeal for non-resistant living on this unchanging fact:..... “Recompense to no man evil for evil. Provide things honest in the sight of all men. If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men. Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is Mine; I will repay, saith the Lord” (Romans 12:17–19).

Non-resistance Is the Paradox That Promotes Peace

Being negative in name, it is nevertheless positive in expression. The above-quoted passage ends on this note: “Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head. Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good”

(Romans 12:20, 21). The exercise of non-resistant love holds the best prospect for turning an enemy into a friend. It is here implied that in the withholding of physical force, there is an unleashing of spiritual force. Non-resistance coupled with assistance, motivated by love, and practiced in the Name of Christ — is the greatest peacemaking power on earth. Therefore, let us not be intimidated by those who heap disdain upon our non-resistant stance. In a world of violence, non-apologetic non-resistance is still the Bible way. And because it is the Bible way, it is the best way.

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SEVEN NEEDFUL SPIRITS.

The book of Isaiah has been called the Old Testament Gospel, because many years before Christ came, Isaiah clearly depicted what was to be. In chapter 11 of his book, he speaks of Jesus and the glorious kingdom He would introduce. He begins by prophesying of the nature of the coming Redeemer. This description is important to us, because Jesus is the firstborn of many brethren, Romans 8:29, and, therefore, the epitome, or ideal example, of what His followers should be. All who follow Him need the graces here described. Verse 2 states, “And the spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD.” The virtues and graces described in this verse are no less the fruit of the Spirit than those listed in Galatians 5:22-23. In the King James Version, LORD, when it is in all capitals, as we have printed it above, means that God’s name, Jehovah, is indicated.

The first attribute of Jesus was that He would be endowed with the Spirit, or mind, of His Father. Being filled with the Holy Spirit, Jesus demonstrated the full measure of His influence. In all His teaching and works, He made it clear that He was not doing His own will but the will of the One who had sent Him. “Wist ye not,” He told His parents at a young age, “that

I must be about my Father's business?" Luke 2:49. The Spirit of the Lord defined His whole life, making heavenly things His main interest.

What a contrast to the spirit of the world, the spirit that works in the children of iniquity, which minds earthly, sensual, temporal things, heedless of eternity. Christians follow Jesus' footsteps. New birth endows them with the nature that loves the will of God. They will love God, truth, righteousness, and good men unless their new life is choked out by "the cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the lusts of other things" Mark 4:19. As a result, they, like the primitive believers, will earn the name "Christian" because they resemble Him. The Spirit of the Lord is at the head of the list, of course, because it is the one that gives birth to all subsequent virtues.

The next listed spirit of wisdom is of great value, discerning between right and wrong, always choosing right. Wisdom is the opposite of the frivolous, shortsighted, self-serving spirit that abounds in the unconverted and the lukewarm believer. Wise Christians habitually take the long look, choosing eternal values over immediate pleasures. The spirit of understanding differs from wisdom. It is the grace that empathizes with others. Love motivates understanding, causing those who possess it to perceive the desires, fears, feelings, and infirmities of others. Because He understood, Jesus saw, heard, and helped those in need.

The spirit of understanding will do the same for us. The third verse of Isaiah 11 says, "And shall make him of quick understanding in the fear of the Lord: and he shall not judge after the sight of his eyes, neither reprove after the hearing of his ears." The spirit of understanding cannot indulge in snap judgments and superficial generalizations that so often cause us to misjudge our fellowman.

Fourth in the list of spirits is the spirit of counsel. Jesus was not silent about the needs of humanity. He willingly shared His infinite resources with His creatures. Primarily, He helped and continues to help with counsel. The Gospels abound with His teachings and examples of counselling His followers. For us, as well, it is not sufficient to empathize with our neighbor; we must be willing to counsel. So often it is risky to do so.

Sound counsel is many times not pleasant to the flesh, just as good medicine is not always tasty. To give counsel risks misunderstanding and/or alienation. Jesus never flinched. We cannot question that He spoke the truth in love, and so must we. The spirit of counsel is not reckless. The love that inspires wisdom and understanding also governs our call to counsel.

The spirit of might is Heaven-endowed power, which Jesus had in the fullest measure. He repeatedly promised the same power to His followers. To our shame, we so often fail to exercise it. His power suffices to overcome sin every time, Romans 8:37. It is sufficient for performing the work He asks us to do in His kingdom. Jesus is active, not passive, 2 Corinthians 10:4-5. He is the rider on the white horse who went forth conquering and to conquer, Revelation 6:2. His followers cannot be passive or unconcerned about the encroachments of evil into their own lives or into the church. Jesus has the absolute perfection of knowledge of all things spiritual and physical. His is the one “in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” Colossians 2:3.

The spirit of knowledge contrasts to the spirit of superstition and prejudice. Those who possess this spirit do not base their conclusions on feelings, fears, or current miracle cures. God’s children do not prize ignorance, neither are they addicted to worldly learning. The spirit of knowledge does not allow one to be satisfied with hearsay; it causes God’s children to be deeply concerned that they be on the solid ground of truth. The faithful are interested in the deep things of God which are revealed by the Spirit, 1 Corinthians 2:10, yet need to be diligently sought out.

The last spirit Isaiah mentions is the fear of the Lord. All of Jesus’ plentitude is enveloped in the beautiful garment of humility, of which the fear of God is an integral part. As He took upon Himself the likeness of man and the form of a servant, He retained a great respect and fear of the Godhead. The fear of the Lord entails worshipful submission, reverential awe, and obedient respect. It is much more than trembling, although to “work out your own salvation with fear and trembling,” as mentioned in Philippians 2: 12, is very much a part of the Christian character and firmly embedded in New Testament doctrine. The fear of God is in short supply these last days. Jesus informed His disciples that “because iniquity shall abound, the

love of many shall wax cold” Matthew 24:12. Love and the fear of God are intertwined virtues. They cause believers to pay close attention to the Father’s will and to be uncompromisingly committed to keeping a distance between themselves and sin. Godly fear does not repel, but it draws His children to Him. When the fear of God wanes, decline and apostasy are not far behind.

Who can improve on Jesus’ relationship to the Father? He prayed that we would enjoy the same: “That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us” John 17:21. Every provision has been made for us to enjoy such a relationship as we, by faith, partake of His Spirit.

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Meditation and Holiness.

A key to successful Christian living.

We acknowledge the Bible as the inspired inerrant word of God and thus believe what it says.

We will find these words written in Scripture “thou shalt make thy way prosperous and then thou shalt have good success.” Joshua 1:8

Now I am sure that most of us would subscribe to being prosperous but let me hasten to add that I have taken those words out of context and what they appear to promise in the way of material prosperity and success is misleading, sadly there are those in Christendom who do quote scripture out of context to suit their own thinking and I’m sure that many of us have come across people who do that, perhaps we have been guilty of that ourselves as we try to justify an un-scriptural action or behaviour on our part.

Let us read the whole verse from Scripture from which I have taken the phrase first quoted and we find that in Joshua 1:8 which says: “This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is writ-

ten therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success.”

Here God commanded Joshua to meditate on His law but back in Deuteronomy 6 He commanded Israel to keep the words He was speaking to them in their hearts, Deuteronomy 6:6, and to be successful in our Christian life we need to do exactly that for out of the heart are/come the issues of life. Proverbs 4:23

We can see in this verse that there was something that we need to do before we can make our way prosperous and have good success and that is to study the word of God.

One of the things that we must do when studying or meditating on the word of God is to find out the context in which the verse was written which in this case is God speaking to Joshua after Moses’ death and giving him instructions in respect of leading Israel into the Promised Land. Joshua 1:1-9

Another thing that we need to do is to determine the meaning of the words which were written in the Hebrew language and how that would be expressed in our language today.

We have a number of tools that are available to us and one of the most commonly and probably most reliable tool is Strong’s concordance of both the Hebrew and Greek texts from which we have our English language Bible.

The first part of our text verse Joshua 1:8, “this book of the law (in our day and age we might say the Bible) shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou may use observe to do according to all that is written therein” is comparatively straightforward in its meaning it is however the last phrase “for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success” is the phrase that needs closer scrutiny and especially the words ”prosperous and good success” which whilst some would like to apply to material matters only are in fact words which have little application to material matters.

We have taken the following translations from Strong's Talking Greek & Hebrew Dictionary.

The word **prosperous** when translated from the original Hebrew has the implication of to *push* forward in various senses, literal or figurative,:- break out, come (mightily), go over, be good, be meet (suitable), be profitable, (cause to, effect, make to, send) prosper.

The word **success** has the implication or meaning to *be* (causative *make* or *act*) *circumspect* and hence *intelligent*: - consider, expert, instruct, prosper, (deal) prudent (-ly), (give) skillful, have good success, teach, (have, make to) understanding, wisdom, (be, behave self, consider, make) wisely, guide wittingly.

Now it can be easily seen from this that this verse Joshua 1:8 is not speaking of material riches or success being a direct result of meditating on the book of the law but rather that as we do that and obey the instructions contained in that verse which state that thou shalt meditate therein (the book of the law) day and night that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein and from this we will reap some benefits the greatest one of which appears to be that we will obtain the wisdom leading to wise behaviour and in the context of the Scripture wise behaviour means living a life which conforms to the character of God – in other words it prescribes obedience.

In the context of our text verse then to be successful or living wisely as the Bible speaks about involves two things, the first one being that we obey or live according to the truth of the Word of God, Jesus Himself makes it very clear in a number of places in Scripture that we would be wise indeed to live according to His Word, (Matthew 7:24, 26, Mark 8:38, Luke 9:26, John 12:48)

Secondly to produce that way of life the Bible speaks about we need to study it, meditate upon it on a daily basis so that we can search out its truths and the application of them to our life in Christ.

As with anything in life for the optimum performance of any equipment or function we need to thoroughly acquaint ourselves with the instruction manuals and God in His wisdom has given us an instruction manual to operate our lives in the manner that He has designed us for, as we study it,

pray about what it reveals to us, discuss it with others, accept and not reject it then it will become such an integral part of us that we will in a sense live and breathe the Scriptures so that we will be able to see the fulfilment of God's promise in Joshua 1:8 for us today.

We would now like to look a little more closely at that call to meditate upon the book of the law the Bible which God has given to us today.

The word meditate or meditation as used in both Old and New Testament means to ponder, imagine, speak, study, talk, and so we can see it is an active participation on our part and the dictionary sense of meditate is to empty the mind of thoughts or concentrate the mind on one thing in order to aid mental or spiritual development, contemplation or relaxation, to think about something carefully, calmly, seriously and for some time and often.

As we look at the foregoing definitions of meditation we can see that it is a very active participation indeed and something that we need to make a place for in our life on a regular basis if we are to benefit from the wisdom contained in God's word so that we can then apply to our lives to that and they may be a blessing to others but more importantly to bring praise, honour and glory to God our Creator.

Meditation should not be frivolous exercise on our part but rather spring from a sincere desire to immerse our self in God's Word and seek direction for our lives which will be in accordance with the will of God for each of us.

The psalmist was aware of the need and benefits of meditation and he has much to say on that subject. He acknowledges that meditating on God's law and on God Himself is a delight to man, Psalm 1:2, it is a delight to himself, Psalm 63:1-6, he then on a number of occasions in various Psalms makes it clear that meditation on God's precepts and statutes is an act of will, Psalm 77:12, Psalm 119 verses 15, 23, 48, 78, 148 and Psalm 143:5.

The psalmist further asks that God will consider his meditations that they will be acceptable to Him, that what his heart meditates on shall be of understanding and how he loves God's law, in fact he loves it so much, that he meditates on it all the day.

In the New Testament Paul tells Timothy to meditate upon these things that he has been teaching him to give himself wholly to them so that his profiting from them may appear to all.

The only other location in the New Testament that the word meditate is used it is used by Jesus in a negative sense in Luke 21 when He speaks of the persecution that will come upon His disciples that they are not to meditate upon their answer but rather to rely on Him, He says in Luke 21:14-15: Settle *it* therefore in your hearts, not to meditate before what ye shall answer: ¹⁵ For I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which all your adversaries shall not be able to gainsay nor resist.

If it is our desire to prosper and have good success in our Christian life Psalm 1 provides an encouraging picture for us it gives us the outcome of meditating in God's law.

Psalm 1:1-3

¹ Blessed *is* the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. ² But his delight *is* in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he meditate day and night. ³ And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper.

Then we have the contrast of those who do not meditate here in verses 4 through 6, Psalm 1:4-6: The ungodly *are* not so: but *are* like the chaff which the wind driveth away. ⁵ Therefore the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous. ⁶ For the LORD knoweth the way of the righteous: but the way of the ungodly shall perish.

This short Psalm reveals the great importance of meditating, studying the word of God and as we have already seen the psalmist certainly saw the need for the blessings of meditation on God's word.

Meditation on God's word is not only essential it was commanded in the Old Testament as we have already seen in our text verse, Joshua 1:8, if we desire to prosper spiritually in our relationship with God and have good success in our walk with God.

J.v.L

Note: The KJV has been used in this short dissertation but we recommend you also read other versions such as the ESV and the Amplified Bible which may give you a better grasp of the quoted scripture verses.



Which Gospel? What Is Your Preference?

1] The Gospel of the Kingdom preached by Jesus

Matthew 24:14 ^{ESV} And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come. ^{ESV}

Luke 4:18 ^{ESV} “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed. ^{ESV}

OR

2] Another Gospel – Satan's Subtle Devices

Genesis 3:1 ^{ESV} Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, “Did God actually say, ‘You shall not eat of any tree in the garden?’”

2 Corinthians 11:4 ^{ESV} For if someone comes and proclaims another Jesus than the one we proclaimed, or if you receive a different spirit from the one you received, or if you accept a different gospel from the one you accepted, you put up with it readily enough.)

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The greatest battle ever fought began at creation and will continue until the end of time in the heart of every man. Satan maybe ever so powerful, but there hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able” 1 Corinthians 10:18.

Our opening verse at Choice 2] takes us back to the Garden of Eden, where Adam and Eve were first challenged by the craftiness of the serpent. They blamed others for their sin and failed to fully own their guilt. Satan delights in casting doubt on the truth and making us believe a lie. “That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ” Ephesians 4:14-15.

Paul’s first epistle to the church at Corinth was written to admonish the general carnality of the believers and their conduct. The second epistle to Corinth was probably written within a year of the first letter. Paul’s spiritual burden for the Corinthians was paramount in his heart, yet there were those who questioned his sincerity and apostolic authority. Paul speaks of his distress in mind, spirit, and body using the words infirmities, reproaches, persecutions, and distresses for Christ’s sake. Through the spirit of humility and contrition, Paul found joy and strength in being of service to his Lord and to his fellowmen.

The danger of heeding “another Jesus” or “another gospel” is perhaps more pronounced today because of the many groups that proclaim they have the truth. Christendom in general has found a way that pleases the flesh and brings a certain satisfaction to the mind. Paul warns against “having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof” 2 Timothy 3:5. Paul, speaking to the Corinthians about another Jesus, was making a profound teaching on deception.

The spirit of deception is “another Jesus” and is so dangerous because it mimics the truth in many ways. It cannot, however, give godly sorrow for sin, lead to repentance, or deliver from sin. Another misconception is believing that a crown of life can be gained without cross-bearing and self-denial. The Word of God is the foundation of truth on which all doctrine is based. When we love the truth we will embrace and obey the doctrines. When we find ourselves questioning doctrine, we are in jeopardy of rejecting the truth.

May we never forget that Satan's aim is to kill and to destroy. Every soul that is accountable is engaged in the battle between good and evil. God created man with the power of choice, but He desires that men would serve the God of heaven. Those who choose to serve God receive a portion of His Spirit at the time of conversion. The Spirit guides the believer into all truth and keeps him from deception. John 16:13

Are we allowing the Holy Spirit to be our guide? And if your answer is yes then this will follow:

Faith and Fruit

Philippians 1:10-11 ^(ESV) that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, ¹¹ filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.

The opening thoughts of the letter to the Colossians reveal to us the foundation of the Christian church: faith in Christ Jesus. Studying Scripture should give us a greater knowledge and spiritual understanding of His will and our focus should be on the true faith and the fruit it produces. Recognizing faith as a gift will cause an expression of thankfulness to emanate from our lives.

Faith in the gospel of Christ is the power of God unto salvation. Romans 1:16. Through faith the righteousness of God is imputed [attributed] to us, Romans 3:22. The faith of Christ brings forth a new life that is born of the incorruptible Word of God. Its characteristics are righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost. The new life and the ability to maintain it are gifts from God. "If thou knew the gift of God, . . . thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water" were the words of Jesus to the woman of Samaria, a Gentile like us, John. 4:10. And as we start to understand the gift of eternal life that God has for us we too can say "Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift" 2 Corinthians 9:15.

We can also use the words of Colossians 1:3-4 as we grasp what the suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ means for all mankind; "We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love that you have for all the saints,"

Let us also thank God for our faculties of hearing and sight, Paul tells us that faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God. But how can we hear unless someone will tell us, and how can some-one tell us unless they know and understand the Word? "How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things. Romans 10:14-17. Realising God's gift of free salvation we need to be eager to be His hands, feet and lips as we share the good news of the Gospel – it will produce fruit.

We are living in a busy and complex world. Much effort is being exerted to search out new ideas, entertainments, and styles. In this setting, the unchanging Word instructs us to ask for the old paths and to walk in them, that we may find rest for our souls (Jeremiah 6:16). The psalmist describes a Christian as one who delights in the law of God and who meditates on His Word day and night. As he applies himself to wisdom, he becomes like a tree planted by the rivers of water that brings forth fruit in his season, Psalm 1:1-3.

To live our Christian lives we will need to practice self-discipline. Jesus spoke of branches that had to be removed from the tree because they were not bearing fruit. The writer of the book of Hebrews declares that though hastening does not seem joyous when it occurs, it will bring the peaceable fruit of righteousness if we allow it to work in us, Hebrews 12:11.

Are we willing to be the clay that the Master Potter can mould to His pattern? But now, O LORD, you are our Father; we are the clay, and you are our potter; we are all the work of your hand. Isaiah 64:8



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



Thou Art My Portion

*Thou art my portion, O my God;
Soon as I know Thy way,
My heart makes haste t'obey Thy Word,
And suffers no delay.*

*I choose the path of heavenly truth,
And glory in my choice;
Not all the riches of the earth
Could make me so rejoice.*

*Thy precepts and Thy heavenly grace
I set before my eyes;
Thence I derive my daily strength
And there my comfort lies.*

*Now I am Thine, for ever Thine,
O save Thy servant, Lord;
Thou art my shield, my hiding place;
My hope is in Thy Word.*

Isaac Watts

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