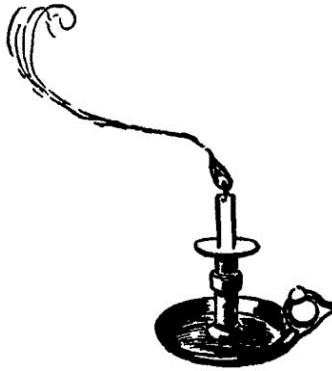


THE AUSTRALIAN ANABAPTIST

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*Have Faith in God*

Our Lord Jesus speaks much about having faith in God in Matthew's gospel and in that well known 11th chapter of Hebrews, sometimes called the Faith chapter, we are told that without faith it is impossible to please Him: for he that comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him, Hebrews 11:6

We as human beings relate to what we can see, feel, and understand, but God has chosen to limit our insight into the spirit realm. I believe that deep down we are all convinced that there is more to life than what we can see.

As Christians we do relate to an unseen God because we believe that He is and that there are no limits to Him or what He can do. That gap between God and man can be spanned only by faith.

By faith truths are revealed that are more reliable than the opinions and conclusions of learned men and by faith man finds security in a God he cannot see. The person who chooses not to believe God is blind to spiritual values and the operations of God.

Here from Matthew's gospel are three examples of people who had a need and came to Jesus and had their needs met because of their faith:

1/ Matthew 8:5-13, a centurion's servant was grievously tormented by palsy. Medical help as we know it was limited. The centurion believed that his help was in Jesus. Perhaps he had heard that Jesus performed the impossible. Something deep down in his heart inspired him that there was hope and help. That was faith.

2/ Matthew 9:27-31, two blind men who came to Jesus had a difficult life, how does a blind person make a living? Usually the blind are at the mercy of others. When these men heard of Jesus, they believed their lives could be different, they did not believe that Jesus would turn His back on their plea.

That was faith.

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

That was faith.

How is our faith?

J.v.L



From the Pulpit

Transitory Elements in the Book of Acts

— *Merle Ruth*

The Acts of the Apostles is the accepted title of the fifth of the twenty-seven New Testament books but in actuality this piece of divinely-inspired writing is a record of some of the acts of some of the apostles for while Christianity spread in many directions, this book confines itself to how it spread northward and westward over the backbone of the Roman Empire. The book opens with Christianity taking root in Jerusalem and closes with its establishment thirty years later in Rome, the capital of the then-known world.

In his introduction, the writer Luke throws further light upon the nature of the book. Luke indicates that his former document, known to us as one of the four Gospel accounts, was a narrative of “all that Jesus began both to do and teach” until His ascension ([Acts 1:1-2](#)). The writer is suggesting that what he is now introducing is a companion to that former document. This second writing is to be a narrative of what Jesus continued to do and teach after His ascension through His followers.

Just as a flowing body of water is ordinarily the purest at its source, so likewise the Book of Acts gives us glimpses of Christianity in its original purity and power. In its pages we meet men and women who were living beyond themselves by the wondrous power of the Holy Spirit. One can here discover what God has purposed to do for us and in us and through us in this our day. A discriminating reader can find here God’s ideal for the church today. Great indeed is our need for the spiritual vitality that characterized those early, Spirit-filled believers.

But a discriminating reader will also find in Acts some transitory elements. One almost hesitates to emphasize these transitory elements for fear of dampening people’s expectation of what God stands ready to do for His people today. However, failure to recognize these elements is at the root of some of the confusion that plagues the religious world. Is it right to encourage people to look for a duplication of the experiences, events, and miracles that marked the Apostolic era? Leaders of the charismatic movement claim to find in Acts support for their particular emphasis. Is their

claim valid? Or, are they building on elements that, when properly viewed, fall into the category of the transitory?

If something is transitory in nature it lacks the quality of performance. It is temporary in duration. The Bible alludes to numerous arrangements and patterns of experiences that in the reckoning of God were never intended to become the norm for this New Testament era in which we live.

Possibly some things could correctly be labelled semi-transitory. The Old Covenant, otherwise known as the Levitical system, would serve to illustrate this category. By divine decree, that was in effect for a long time, but, as the writer to the Hebrews points out, from its very beginning God had in view a “time of reformation” ([Hebrews 9:10](#))

This brings us to the first of the transitory elements that will be touched. In the Book of Acts, we meet a generation that had the unique experience of being on the stage of history during the transition from the Old Covenant to the New. Through no choice of their own, they lived in an era of God-authorized changes in the all-important sphere of religion. Here were men and women who could say, “I have lived under both covenants.” For the people of God especially, living through that transition was a perplexing and painful experience. They did not have, to the extent that we do, the benefit of God’s long-range perspective. It appears as though God inspired the writing of the Book of Hebrews for the purpose of helping them through that transition. Here, then, is one of the major transitory elements in Acts. Its characters belonged to a generation that, by virtue of historical circumstances beyond their control, witnessed a never-to-be-repeated transition.

Chapter one of Acts records the use of the lot in choosing Matthias as a replacement for Judas. Some have placed this in the category of the transitory. They claim that the apostles, not having yet experienced Pentecost, acted prematurely and without divine sanction in the using of the lot and the choosing of Matthias. They claim that Paul (Saul) was God’s man for that place rather than Matthias. Before you accept the validity of that claim, weigh well these considerations. It is true that Matthias is never again mentioned, but neither are some of the other eleven. As indicated earlier, the Book of Acts was not intended to tell the whole story.

Furthermore, Paul is nowhere mentioned as the successor of Judas but is distinctly the Apostle to the Gentiles. Again, the point raised by some that the choosing of Matthias made thirteen apostles, thus spoiling the

symbolic figure twelve, carries little weight in light of the New Testament applying the title *Apostle* to even more than thirteen men. A final consideration is that the sacred record gives a very full and detailed account of this action without any hint of divine disapproval. While the main thrust of this article is to enumerate the transitory elements in Acts, here is an example of an occurrence that really does not belong in that category although it is frequently put there.

Great indeed is our need for the spiritual vitality that characterized those early Spirit-filled believers.

Chapter one of Acts does, however, mention an experience that does belong in the category of the transitory. It tells of 120 disciples being assembled in an upper room in Jerusalem waiting for the promise of the Father (Acts 1:4, 13-15). This they did in obedience to a command of Jesus recorded in Luke 24:49. After ten days of waiting, “When the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance” (Acts 2:1-4).

Those who then comprised the Christian church were thus baptized with the Holy Spirit as a unit. Proper interpretation gives one no grounds for expecting in our time an exact duplication of this experience. That was as non-repeatable as that which happened at Bethlehem, on Calvary, and when Jesus arose. This pouring out of the Holy Spirit on all believers at one and the same time was unique. The normal pattern since then is for the Holy Spirit to be poured out each time an individual is converted. This experience can properly be viewed as one’s personal Pentecost, but the signs associated with that initial occasion are not normally repeated. Neither is it necessary today for a believing individual or group to wait or tarry, as they needed to, in order to be baptized with the Spirit. Jesus had given his disciples those “waiting instructions” in connection with a one-time historical event that was then about to transpire. Some groups sponsor “tarrying meetings” wherein saved people spend hours agonizing to receive, supposedly, the baptism of the Spirit. Although the motive may be good, this pattern makes a normative practice out of that which was not intended to be a normative.

Under the inspiration of that initial outpouring of the Holy Spirit, Peter preached to the multitude that had assembled in Jerusalem. Many “were pricked in their hearts” and said, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost” (Acts 2:38). “Then they that gladly received his word were baptized” (Acts 2:41), and it is obvious from their subsequent behaviour that they also received immediately the gift of the Holy Spirit. Without any delay, Jesus baptized those souls with the Holy Spirit just as John the Baptist said He would. Unlike the 120 they did not need to wait for the Spirit to be poured out upon them. That immediate reception of the Holy Spirit represents the normal pattern for the New Testament era.

For a few moments, let us return to the experience of the 120. Some Bible teachers make much of the fact that among those 120 were some who had already been followers of Jesus for as long as three years. On this basis, they therefore urge Christians to seek a second distinct blessing following conversion. But this reasoning overlooks the unique historical circumstances under which they lived. Because it was their lot to live in that transitional period their becoming disciples of Christ and their being baptized with the Holy Spirit were necessarily separate experiences.

Proponents of the two-stage theory also claim to find support for their teaching in the experience of certain Samaritans about whom we read in Acts eight. That chapter relates the favourable response of many Samaritans to the preaching of Philip. Hearing of this, the Jerusalem church “sent unto them Peter and John: Who, when they were come down prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Ghost: (For as yet he was fallen upon none of them: only they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.) Then laid they their hands on them, and they received the Holy Ghost” (Acts 8:14–17).

For these Samaritan believers, their initial reception of the Holy Spirit was clearly delayed. And it is obvious that even in that era it was recognized as unusual. Why did God operate in this way on that occasion? There is no God-supplied answer, but a very likely reason has been suggested. These converts were Samaritans and in those days Jews ordinarily had no dealings with the Samaritans. If God had not thus intervened, that long-standing rivalry might have continued even on the church level. Converted Jews might have had “no dealings” with converted Samaritans and vice versa. It appears highly probable that, in order to break down that

wall of animosity, God temporarily withheld the Spirit from those first Samaritan converts until the leading apostles came to investigate, and, by the laying on of their hands, acknowledged and confirmed the genuineness of their conversion. The Samaritan church was thus placed on full equality with the Jerusalem church. Furthermore, the Samaritans were made to feel indebted to the Jewish apostles and the latter were shown that people of other backgrounds could experience what they did on Pentecost.

In chapter ten, God is teaching Peter the same lesson, And it is significant that for Cornelius and his company there was no delay in their receiving the Spirit, because God had Peter right there on the scene. Neither was there special prayer or the laying on of hands. “While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word” (Acts 10:44).

Another passage that, when not properly understood, appears to support the two-stage theory is Acts 19:1–7. This passage relates how Paul, upon his arrival at Ephesus, found “certain disciples.” At first he may have thought that he had come upon a group of Christian believers. But the question he addressed to them did reflect a degree of uncertainty. “Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed?” (Acts 19:2) Their reply was, “We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost” (v. 2). Upon further questioning Paul learned that they were not disciples of Christ but had been disciples of the already deceased John the Baptist. As such they represent another of the special groups whose reception of the Holy Spirit is related in this transitional book.

In personal Christian experience the initial reception of the Holy Spirit occurs simultaneously with the New Birth experience.

As already indicated, this passage likewise does not support the view that salvation comes in two distinct stages. Some have taken Paul’s question — “Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed?” — and addressed it to persons who clearly have already met the conditions of salvation. But that practice is both unjustified and misleading. That is taking Paul’s manner of dealing with the not-yet-Christian disciples of John the Baptist and making it the norm for dealing with already-born-again persons. It leads people to believe in and seek for a second distinct crisis experience following conversion. This unfounded teaching has produced a great deal of spiritual anxiety and frustration. In personal Christian experience, there is only one Holy Spirit baptism. That is the initial reception of

the Holy Spirit that occurs simultaneously with the New Birth experience. **Romans 8:9** will allow for no other conclusion for it is there stated that, “if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his.” However, a correct theology of the Holy Spirit readily acknowledges that a close walk with God, subsequent to conversion, will bring to one many fresh infillings of the Holy Spirit.

For the sake of further clarification, it ought to be said that some individuals have had the misfortune of being baptized with water before they were inwardly baptized with the Holy Spirit. This possibility exists because sometimes people, and especially very young people, are baptized prematurely, before they are really converted. Every such instance is an irregularity and provides no ground whatever on which to erect a two-stage theology.

Another transitory element in the Book of Acts would consist of the apostolic office. Although the apostles did choose a replacement for Judas in the days immediately following Christ’s ascension, there is no indication that any attempt was made to choose “successors” for the faithful apostles as they passed off the scene. For example, when James was beheaded, no effort was made to appoint another person qualified to exercise his apostolic prerogatives. When Paul spoke of his approaching death, he gave no instructions concerning a successor to perpetuate his image as an apostle. By its very nature, the apostolic office could not be a continuing office because it was filled by persons who as Peter stated, “have companied with us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us” (**Acts 1:21**). And so, when John passed off the scene about the end of the first century the apostolic office had served its purpose and ceased to exist. This conclusion is in line with what is suggested in **Ephesians 2:20** where the church is represented as being “built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets.” This would suggest that both the immediate apostles of Christ and the New Testament prophets belonged in a special way to the foundation period of the church. They were mightily used of the Lord to once-for-all lay the foundation.

The Mormons, for example, fail to see the significance of this. They have wrongly allowed Joseph Smith, who appeared centuries later, to make a foundation laying contribution. Some other groups subscribe to the false concept of an apostolic succession. Catholicism, for example, claims that

Peter was the first bishop of Rome and that their popes have been his successors. That, too, is an unfounded claim.

Still another transitory element was the prominence of the miraculous. This was closely linked to the apostolic office. In writing to the Corinthians, Paul sought to vindicate his apostleship by giving them this reminder. Truly the signs of an apostle were wrought among you in all patience, in signs, and wonders, and mighty deeds” (2 Corinthians 12:12). Frequent miracles characterized that period for it was one of “the signs of the apostles.” The healings performed in that era, for example, served not simply to alleviate suffering, but also as is indicated in Hebrews 2:3-4, as God’s stamp of approval upon the new movement and those who were promoting it.

Another of the miraculous manifestations was “speaking with other tongues.” There are those who deny that this was meant to be transitory. But here is a fact often overlooked. There were three miraculous signs given along with that initial historic outpouring of the Spirit. If the experience of the disciples at Pentecost was indeed intended to be a pattern for believers today, why not look also for a duplication of the other two sign miracles — the sound of a rushing mighty wind and the cloven tongues like as of fire? To claim that the one is permanent and the other two transitory seems like a wholly arbitrary selection. Furthermore, to the continuance of “tongues speaking” at Corinth affords little ground for its practice today. For it appears, does it not, that “tongues speaking” at Corinth continued as an abuse of a sign miracle given initially to herald the opening of a new era.

A fitting conclusion would be one writer’s admonition stated as follows: “Rather than teach the experience of the apostles, let us experience the teaching of the apostles. The experience of the apostles is found in transitional Acts; the teaching of the apostles is found in the Epistles that follow Acts.” Out of those teachings should come the normative patterns. But let it be clearly declared and widely known that normality for the Christian is a life of self-transcendence in which one rises above what many regard as normal living.

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RIGHTEOUSNESS!—FILTHY RAGS?

“And all our righteousness’s are as filthy rags” Isaiah 64:6.

What is the truth about righteousness? Is all righteousness as filthy rags? What is self-righteousness? Can it be known and avoided? How important is it to know the difference between true righteousness and self-righteousness? These questions deserve serious thought and answers that are scripturally sound. “Follow . . . holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord” (Hebrews 12:14) is one of many scriptures that indicate the high place Scripture accords righteousness and holiness.

It is God’s will to establish true righteousness in the lives of His people and in His church. This is evidenced in every person experiencing the new birth by the subsequent desire to live a holy life. The same is true when an individual, or a congregation, enters a time of spiritual renewal. The result is always a renewed desire to know the will of God. Even Saul, when he was struck down with the light, immediately asked, “What shall I do, Lord?” This was not a question asked reluctantly, but it was the glad response of his liberated heart. It is only natural for the new nature we have received to “hunger and thirst after righteousness.” Indeed, if this ingredient is missing in a convert, it conveys serious questions as to the validity of the experience.

The many positive biblical references to the righteous and to righteousness leave one without question as to its importance. Why then is righteousness so often wounded in the house of her friends? Why is it often a point of controversy even in the church?

To “live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world” is the area where the values of heaven meet with the workaday world. Is it any wonder that Satan has chosen this as his area of contest? A misunderstanding of Isaiah 64:6 could be a contributing factor to the difficulty some Christians are finding with being “righteous.” A superficial reading of this scripture would seem to imply that all righteousness is useless; it is filthy rags, something to be despised. Then, when this is connected with the New Testament teaching of salvation by grace and not by works, it can quickly convince us that any emphasis on outward “things” is unscriptural and tends to work against the faith of the Christian.

However, a closer examination of this scripture in Isaiah shows that the spiritual condition of Israel at that time was not good. In chapter 1, he de-

scribes the condition of the Israelites very graphically. They were doing the required things but were corrupt in heart. In that condition, their “righteousness’s” were unacceptable to God and abhorrent to Him. What was true in Isaiah’s day is true today. A corrupt tree cannot bring forth good fruit. God looks at the fruit of His people now as He did then, and He judges them by the thoughts and intents of the heart.

When we do what God requires of us even though we have a carnal heart, He looks at our pitiful offering of “righteousness” as filthy rags. If our heart is not right with God, our good performance has no value in His sight. When self is the source of our righteousness and we try to be acceptable to God by this righteousness, we are self-righteous. It is a different matter when the heart is surrendered and filled with love to God. Then the fountain of righteousness is pure, and the water is sweet.

When the Christian has a “faith which worketh by love” Galatians 5:6, his works are as “fine linen, clean and white” Revelation 19:8.

Another misconception that could be contributing to the present confusion surrounding righteousness would be a wrong concept of the relationship between the Old and New Testaments. There seems to be a common idea that under Moses’ law, people were saved by their works, in contrast to being saved by grace through faith in the gospel era. It is true that we are saved by grace through faith today, but the plan of salvation was laid before the world was made. Was there ever any other way to be saved?

Could anyone, even in the Old Testament, be saved by their works? Is justification by faith not an Old Testament doctrine? “By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice . . . By faith Abraham...By faith Isaac...By faith Jacob...By faith Joseph” (Hebrews 11). The testimony of Abraham, and so many others, indicates that faith was the basis of their salvation.

There is a spiritual unity of God’s church that spans all time and every era. Paul saw this unity and expressed his view in 1 Corinthians 10:3-4, “And [they] did all eat the same spiritual meat; and did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ.”

Menno Simons, also, saw this continuity and explained it this way: “Although at different times she was under different ordinances and usages, and, although the church is called by different names, as said, yet all, before, under and after the law, who, in sincere, true fear of God, walked, and

continue to walk according to the word and will of God, and trust in Christ, are one community, church and body, and will ever remain so; for they are all saved by Christ, accepted by God, and gifted with the Spirit of His grace.”

Thus it is our understanding that those who lived in the old dispensation were not saved by their works but by a faith that produced works. In his letter to the Romans, Paul goes to some length in making the point that Abraham was justified by faith, not by the keeping of the ordinances such as circumcision. His righteousness was a result of his faith.

Some today are sensitive to any referral to the law as needful or binding for the Christian. This is understandable and right in regards to the ceremonial and judicial laws, but not so with the moral law, the moral code of God’s law is embodied in the New Testament, and is given its full ministration in its application, under grace, through the spirit of the gospel—rather than having been annulled.” Paul, in Romans 8:4, says, “That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.” Here he is, no doubt, referring to the moral law of God. If we relegate the law to something that Christ did away with, we are likely to see any church guidelines as law and contrary to the doctrine of salvation by grace through faith.

We live in a day when much of the world scorns anything holy or sacred. Reverence and holy fear are not part of child training in many homes. The Christian lives among people who not only subscribe to a different set of values, but will even ridicule those who live holy and righteous lives. Even among professing Christians, this type of intimidation is encountered.

Many so-called Christians have taken the doctrine of justification by faith and turned it into a doctrine that justifies while living in sin. This is a doctrine of imputed righteousness that, in essence, says: “Christ died, so I can be free to do as I want. He bore His cross, so I have none to bear. He suffered, so I will have no reason to suffer or even be inconvenienced. He is my righteousness, so there is no need for me to try to be righteous.” This doctrine turns the grace of God into a license to serve the flesh and yet claim justification by the blood.

If this doctrine were found only in nominal Christianity, we might not be feeling its effects in the Church of God, but that does not seem be the case. The appeal of the so-called “liberty of the spirit (flesh),” and the easing of

the burden of self-denial is very alluring to the shallow Christian in the church today.

When Jesus asked the question, “Nevertheless when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?” Luke 18:8, He knew there would be plenty of people who believed that He had walked this earth at one time. He could as well have asked, “Will I find true righteousness when I return?” Will there be those who believe like James writes in chapter 2 of his epistle, “And the scripture was fulfilled which says, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the Friend of God. Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only”? True faith will always produce obedience, and when obedience is produced by that faith, it results in righteousness.

There are two aspects of this issue that are a concern today. One area would be those individuals or congregations that may have presumed upon the grace of God. They have found room under the blood for the works of the flesh in the fruits of affluence, worldliness in possessions, lifestyle, and permissiveness. The other would be those who may not have understood the covering of Jesus’ blood and have sought to find favour with God in works and form. One is not better than the other since they both originate in the fallen nature of man.

If the root is the same, it would follow that the remedy would also be the same. John preached repentance and laying the axe to the root of the tree.

Paul says to “awake to righteousness, and sin not.” Yet there are varying degrees of need, and God may use various means of restoration. Sound doctrinal teaching is always a necessity, but it may be needed now more than ever. We are living in the last days, and Paul would, no doubt, emphasize the same words to us as he did to the Romans, “Exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.”

Jesus’ own words should be a comfort to the pilgrim as he travels toward that eternal reward of the faithful, “Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father” Matthew 13:43.

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KEEP THE FEAST

The Apostle Paul admonished the Corinthians to "keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth" 1 Corinthians 5:8. This verse, no doubt, pertains to the communion ordinance, but to apply it more broadly does no violence to the truth. Let us think here of the "feast" provided in the grace of Christ for the Christian walk of life.

It is obvious that the great Apostle is invoking in the believers' minds their knowledge of the Passover in Egypt. As the day of the Israelites' departure from Egypt drew near, every home was do away with all leaven (Exodus 12:15, 19). They were to take only unleavened dough out of the land (v. 39). This was the commencement of the feast of unleavened bread, "for in this selfsame day," the Lord said, "have I brought your armies out of the land of Egypt: therefore shall ye observe this day in your generations by an ordinance forever" Exodus 12:17.

Thus, God established a perpetual witness to the fact that they made a clean break with Egypt when they went out that memorable night. This was to be commemorated every year "forever."

We understand God's promise to David that his throne would be established "forever" (2 Samuel 7:16) as being fulfilled in Christ Jesus. It carried over into the New Testament era and found its true fulfillment under grace. Likewise, the commission to the Israelites to eat the Passover with unleavened bread and keep the feast of unleavened bread "forever" carries into the gospel age in a spiritual sense. It symbolizes the walk of life undefiled by the old flesh and the world.

The setting of the Apostle's urging to "keep the feast" with "unleavened bread" needs to be considered. The Corinthian church was tolerating a case of gross immorality among them. They apparently were thinking that the grace of God covered such a thing, and they gloried in that. It is unlikely they were glorying in the immorality but in a mistaken notion about grace in relation to sin. But Paul told them, "Your glorying is not good. Know ye not that a little leaven leavens the whole lump?" (1 Corinthians 5:6). They were keeping the "feast" of the grace in Christ Jesus with the old leaven, not with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. Leavened bread and grace have no affinity.

When one looks at Christendom today, is not the spirit of the mistaken Corinthian believers in evidence on every hand? This is not spoken solely of tolerating immorality but in a broader sense of a pervasive, deceptive concept of grace that effects little purging of the old leaven. O beloved people of God, beware!

The Lord calls whosoever will to a feast, saying, "Come; for all things are now ready" Luke 14:17. How can our limited minds take in the extent of that which God provides for His people (2 Peter 1:3)? In Christ Jesus, and by Him, a table that is all sufficient is set for the believers. David knew that feast table and said that even when his enemies assailed him it was set for him (Psalm 23). Not only is there great quantity of food but the variety is appropriate for every situation in life. There is grace for every trial through His "exceeding great and precious promises." Eating at this table, we are made "partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust" 2 Peter 1:4.

Jesus taught us that to serve Him is our duty, because we are blood-bought servants. And when we come in from "the field" and are hot and dusty, He is entirely within bounds to ask us to gird ourselves and serve Him a meal before we eat. Having done all this, we should yet say, "We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do" Luke 17:10. But in another sense, in the feast of grace, Christ is serving our table, and He does not serve sparingly. In a foretaste of the great eternal feast after the Judgment, Christ even now girds Himself, makes us sit down, and comes forth to serve us (Luke 12:37). Christ puts unleavened bread on the table. Eating at the Lord's table will ensure a vibrant Christian life. One wonders why some experience leanness of soul, like David's son, Amnon, did. He was asked, "Why art thou, being the king's son, lean from day to day?" 2 Samuel 13:4. Paul would say to us, "Keep the feast. There is plenty of provision."

As the Israelites came clean out of Egypt, symbolized by having destroyed the old leaven, so true repentant believers come clean out of the world. That is, the spirits, attitudes, lusts, and all the "rudiments of the world" (Colossians 2:8) must be left behind. This old leaven includes what the world likes and values highly, its accent, and its way of reasoning. All

this is the old leaven and must be left behind. Sometimes we may loathe the unleavened bread of the pure gospel like the Israelites despised the manna, which was miraculously provided for them (Numbers 21:5). Too many want to come to the Lord's table with their own bread, and it is always leavened bread. The only true bread of the feast is "the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth."

The people of God are who they are by the grace of God, not by their merit. The grace of God produces the identity of "a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light" 1 Peter 2:9. Let us keep the feast with unleavened bread, having purged out the old leaven of the world, and thus exalt His grace.

Courtesy The Messenger of Truth Gospel Publishers Moundridge Kansas



The Woman of Samaria – John 4

*The empty pitcher to the pool she bore in listless mood;
In haste she turned; the pitcher full beside the water stood.*

*To her was heard the age's prayer: He sat upon the brink;
Weary beside the waters fair, and yet He could not drink.*

*He begged her help. The woman's hand was ready to reply;
From out the old well of the land she drew Him plenteous supply.*

*He spake as never man before; she stands with open ears;
He spoke of holy days in store, laid bare the vanished years.*

*She cannot grapple with her heart, till, in the city's bound,
She cries, to ease joy-born smart "I have the Master found."*

*Her life before was strange and sad; its tale a dreary sound:
Ah! Let it go – good or bad, she has the Master found.*

By George MacDonald 1824-1905 – A Hidden Life – Public Domain

The following article is reprinted from "Unspoken Sermons Series One" by George MacDonald, 1824-1905 first published in 1867. Minimal editing has been done even though the language may be somewhat flowery to our day and age. This message is vital to our Christian life and a companion to Jesus Christ's words in Matthew 22 – Love thy neighbour. Most of MacDonald's work is freely available at www.projectgutenberg.com from which this copy was made.

LOVE THINE ENEMY.

"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; 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.

For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same? And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? do not even the publicans so? Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect." Matthew 5: 43-48 (kjv)

Is not this at length too much to expect? Will a man ever love his enemies? He may come to do good to them that hate him; but when will he pray for them that despitefully use him and persecute him? When?

When he is the child of his Father in heaven. Then shall he love his neighbour as himself, even if that neighbour be his enemy. In Leviticus 19:18, quoted by our Lord and his apostles in Matthew 5, we find the neighbour and the enemy are one. "Thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people, but thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself: I am the Lord."

Look at the glorious way in which Jesus interprets the scripture that went before him. "I am the Lord," "That ye may be perfect, as your Father in heaven is perfect."

Is it then reasonable to love our enemies? God does; therefore it must be the highest reason. But is it reasonable to expect that man should become

capable of doing so? Yes; on one ground: that the divine energy is at work in man, to render at length man's doing divine as his nature is. For this our Lord prayed when He said: "That they all may be one, as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us." Nothing could be less likely to human judgment: our Lord knows that one day it will come.

Why should we love our enemies? The deepest reason for this we cannot put in words, for it lies in the absolute reality of their being, where our enemies are of one nature with us, even of the divine nature. Into this we cannot see, save as into a dark abyss.

"Are our enemies men like ourselves?" let me begin by asking. "Yes." "Upon what ground? The ground of their enmity? The ground of the wrong they do us?" "No." "In virtue of cruelty, heartlessness, injustice, disrespect, misrepresentation?" "Certainly not.

To err is human is a truism; but it possesses, like most truisms, a latent germ of worthy truth. The very word "errare" is a sign that there is a way so truly human that, for a man to leave it, is to wander. If it be human to wander, yet the wandering is not humanity. The very words humane and humanity denote some shadow of that loving-kindness which, when perfected after the divine fashion, shall include even our enemies. We do not call the offering of human sacrifices, the torturing of captives or cannibalism humanity. Not because they do such deeds are they men. Their humanity must be deeper than those. It is in virtue of the divine essence which is in them, that pure essential humanity, that we call our enemies men and women. It is this humanity that we are to love, it is a something deeper altogether than and independent of the region of hate. It is the humanity that originates the claim of neighbour; the neighbourhood only determines the occasion of its exercise." "Is this humanity in every one of our enemies?" Yes, "Else there were nothing to love." "Is it there in very deed? Then we must love it, come between us and it what may."

But how can we love a man or a woman who is cruel and unjust to us? who sneers with contempt, or cuts off with wrong every attempt we would put forth to embrace? One who is mean, unlovely, carping, uncertain, self-righteous, self-seeking, and self-admiring? who can even sneer at the most inhuman of human faults, far worse in its essence than mere murder?

These things cannot be loved. The best man hates them most; the worst man cannot love them. But are these the man? Does a woman bear that form in virtue of these? Lies there not within the man and the woman a divine element of brotherhood, of sisterhood, a something lovely and lovable, slowly fading it may be, dying away under the fierce heat of vile passions, or the yet more fearful cold of sepulchral selfishness--but there? Shall that divine something, which, once awakened to be its own holy self in the man, will loathe these unlovely things tenfold more than we loathe them now--shall this divine thing have no recognition from us? It is the very presence of this fading humanity that makes it possible for us to hate. If it were an animal only, and not a man or a woman that did us hurt, we should not hate: we should only kill. We hate the man just because we are prevented from loving him.

We push over the verge of the creation, we damn just because we cannot embrace. For to embrace is the necessity of our deepest being. That foiled, we hate. Instead of admonishing ourselves that there is our enchained brother, that there lies our enchained, disfigured, scarce recognizable sister, captive of the devil, to break, how much sooner, from their bonds if we love them! But we recoil into the hate which would fix them there; and the dearly lovable reality of them we sacrifice to the outer falsehood of Satan's incantations, thus leaving them to perish. Nay, we murder them to get rid of them, we hate them. Yet within the most obnoxious to our hate, lies that which, could it but show itself as it is, and will show itself one day, would compel from our hearts a devotion of love. It is not the unfriendly, the unlovely, that we are told to love, but the brother, the sister, who is unkind, who is unlovely. Shall we leave our brother to his desolate fate? Shall we not rather say, "With my love at least shalt thou be compassed about, for thou hast not thy own lovingness to infold thee; love shall come as near thee as it may; and when thine comes forth to meet mine, we shall be one in the indwelling God"?

Let no one say I have been speaking in a figure merely. That I have been so speaking I know. But many things which we see most vividly and certainly are more truly expressed by using a right figure, than by attempting to give them a clear outline of logical expression. My figure means a truth.

If anyone say, "Do not make such vague distinctions. There is the person. Can you deny that that person is unlovely? How then can you love him?" I answer, "That person, with the evil thing cast out of him, will be yet more the person, for he will be his real self. The thing that now makes you dislike him is separable from him, is therefore not he that makes himself so much less himself, for it is working death in him. Now he is in danger of ceasing to be a person at all. When he is clothed and in his right mind, he will be a person indeed. You could not then go on hating him. Begin to love him now, and help him into the loveliness which is his. Do not hate him although you can. The personality, I say, though clouded, besmeared, defiled with the wrong, lies deeper than the wrong, and indeed, so far as the wrong has reached it, is by the wrong injured, yea, so far, it may be, destroyed."

But those who will not acknowledge the claim of love, may yet acknowledge the claim of justice. There are those who would shrink with horror from the idea of doing injustice to those, from the idea of loving those whom they would shrink from with equal horror. But if it is impossible, as I believe, without love to be just, much more cannot justice co-exist with hate. The pure eye for the true vision of another's claims can only go with the loving heart. The man who hates can hardly be delicate in doing justice, say to his neighbour's love, to his neighbour's predilections and peculiarities. It is hard enough to be just to our friends; and how shall our enemies fare with us? For justice demands that we shall think rightly of our neighbour as certainly as that we shall neither steal his goods nor bear false witness against him. Man is not made for justice from his fellow, but for love, which is greater than justice, and by including supersedes justice. Mere justice is an impossibility, a fiction of analysis. It does not exist between man and man, save relatively to human law.

Justice to be justice must be much more than justice. Love is the law of our condition, without which we can no more render justice than a man can keep a straight line walking in the dark. The eye is not single, and the body is not full of light. No man who is even indifferent to his brother can recognize the claims which his humanity has upon him. Nay, the very indifference itself is an injustice.

I have taken for granted that the fault lies with the enemy so considered, for upon the primary rocks would I build my foundation. But the question must be put to each man by himself, "Is my neighbour indeed my enemy, or am I my neighbour's enemy, and so take him to be mine?--awful thought! Or, if he be mine, am not I his? Am I not refusing to acknowledge the child of the kingdom within his bosom, so killing the child of the kingdom within my own?" Let us claim for ourselves no more indulgence than we give to him. Such honesty will end in severity at home and clemency abroad. For we are accountable for the ill in ourselves, and have to kill it; accountable for the good in our neighbour, and have to cherish it. He only, in the name and power of God, can kill the bad in him; we can cherish the good in him by being good to it across all the evil fog that comes between our love and his good.

Nor ought it to be forgotten that this fog is often the result of misapprehension and mistake, giving rise to all kinds of indignations, resentments, and regrets. Scarce anything about us is just as it seems, but at the core there is truth enough to dispel all falsehood and reveal life as unspeakably divine. O brother, sister, across this weary fog, dim-lighted by the faint torches of our truth-seeking, I call to the divine in thee, which is mine, not to rebuke thee, not to rouse thee, not to say "Why hatest thou me?" but to say "I love thee; in God's name I love thee." And I will wait until the true self looks out of thine eyes, and knows the true self in me.

But in the working of the Divine Love upon the race, my enemy is doomed to cease to be my enemy, and to become my friend. One flash of truth towards me would destroy my enmity at once; one hearty confession of wrong, and our enmity passes away; from each comes forth the brother who was inside the enemy all the time. For this The Truth is at work. In the faith of this, let us love the enemy now, accepting God's work in reversion, as it were; let us believe as seeing his yet invisible triumph, clasping and holding fast our brother, in defiance of the changeful wiles of the wicked enchantment which would persuade our eyes and hearts that he is not our brother, but some horrible thing, hateful and hating.

But again I must ask, What if we are in the wrong and do the wrong, and hate because we have injured? What then? Why, then, let us cry to God as

from the throat of hell; struggle, as under the weight of a spiritual burden; cry, as knowing the vile disease that cleaveth fast unto us; cry, as possessed of an evil spirit; cry, as one buried alive, from the sepulchre of our evil consciousness, that He would take pity upon us the chief of sinners, the most wretched and vile of men, and send some help to lift us from the fearful pit and the miry clay. Nothing will help but the Spirit proceeding from the Father and the Son, the spirit of the Father and the Brother casting out and revealing. It will be with tearing and foaming, with a terrible cry and a lying as one dead, that such a demon will go out. But what a vision will then arise in the depths of the purified soul! "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect." "Love your enemies, and ye shall be the children of the highest." It is the divine glory to forgive.

Yet a time will come when the Unchangeable will cease to forgive; when it will no more belong to his perfection to love his enemies; when He will look calmly, and have his children look calmly too, upon the ascending smoke of the everlasting torments of our strong brothers, our beautiful sisters! Nay, alas! the brothers are weak now; the sisters are ugly now!

O Father, thou art All-in-all, perfect beyond the longing of thy children, and we are all and altogether thine. Thou wilt make us pure and loving and free. We shall stand fearless in thy presence, because perfect in thy love. Then shall thy children be of good cheer, infinite in the love of each other, and eternal in thy love. Lord Jesus, let the heart of a child be given to us, that so we may arise from the grave of our dead selves and die no more, but see face to face the God of the Living.



DIVINE WISDOM

O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out! (Rom. 11:33).

"To God only wise, be glory through Jesus Christ forever," are the parting words of the apostle Paul in his letter to the Romans. That God is wise is undeniably evident in nature. As Creator, He is wisdom personified. It has been said that wisdom is the ability to make decisions and judgments in the

view of reality and eternity. Only God is able to see things as they really are and to observe time without end, so He is “only wise.” God is not wise because He possesses wisdom but because He is wisdom.

God’s wisdom is sometimes mysterious because it defies human reasoning. God’s wisdom is described in His Word as being infinite, unsearchable, and precious. For a man to gain divine wisdom is, in fact, to come into contact with spiritual reality. This wisdom is found in God’s Word, in quiet moments of spiritual contemplation, in prayer, and, most importantly, in humility. Are you seeking His divine wisdom above all else? We are truly living in perilous times, and we each desperately need divine wisdom to discern the path for our lives today.

“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom: and the knowledge of the holy is understanding” Proverbs 9:10. In centuries past, Christians often referred to God in ways that denoted respect and reverence. “Holy and awful” and “great and terrible” were frequently used terms indicating the veneration and awe in which they held God. Today, Christendom has adopted a much more casual approach to the “high and lofty One that inhabits eternity” Isaiah 57:15.

It is necessary for the Christian to gain the proper fear of the Lord. It took a revelation of “the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up” Isaiah 6:1, to enable Isaiah to recognize his own weak and beggarly condition. This revelation caused him to cry out, “Woe is me! for I am undone” (v. 5). It is only when we catch a glimpse of God’s greatness that we receive an objective view of ourselves. This vision is truly the beginning of wisdom.

“Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time” 1 Peter 5:6. Accepting one’s own weakness in the light of God’s greatness is the first step in humility. It is to a humble heart alone that God imparts His wisdom. That is why the fruit of divine wisdom, as set forth in James 3:17, so closely resembles that of humility. “But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, Without partiality, and without hypocrisy.”

God desires to share His wisdom with His children. He would impart the knowledge of Himself and His ways. He yearns to hold fellowship with each of us that we would better learn to recognize His voice and increase in our understanding of how we ought to walk in His sight. His divine wisdom also enables us to cast off the blinders of our senses and human rea-

soning that tend to create gray areas where the Lord would plant sound conviction.

The need to understand God's wisdom is especially needful in our day. Without it we cannot discern spiritual matters nor gain understanding to rightly divide the scriptures. The car we drive, the clothes we wear, the words we speak to a searching soul, and the discernment of how we ought to behave and what we should possess as befitting pilgrims and strangers are all saintly concerns. Our desire to please the Lord and the sure knowledge that we will give an account to Him should persuade us to seek out His wisdom in these and other more pressing matters.

Life presents many perplexing questions, and we do not always have a ready answer. But could it be that too many are willing to live without God's personal guidance because of an unwillingness to accept the cost of acquiring it? We must apply our hearts to wisdom, and that involves diligence and effort on our part. The Scriptures exhort us in James 1:5-6, "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives generously to all without reproach and it will be given him. But let him ask in faith, with no doubting." This condition of "in faith, with no doubting" reflects God's aversion to sharing His wisdom if the one asking has not abandoned his own reasoning. The one asking must have committed himself to following the Lord's counsel without regard to any sacrifice it may require.

Our time here is short. God holds the balance of our lives in His hands, and we will soon pass on like so many billions of souls before us. But that is not the end. "Thou hast set our iniquities before thee." We will all stand before our loving, merciful, righteous, and holy Father to give an account of how we have lived our lives. "But know thou, that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment" Ecclesiastes 11:9. It is for this reason that Moses prays, "So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom."

The brevity of time should compel us to give earnest heed to eternal values and yield ourselves to the counsel of infallible wisdom.

A wise man once said that a short life should be wisely spent. Mere head wisdom (knowledge) will not be sufficient.

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