

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**Is God interested in his Church?**

I have no doubt that most of us would say yes, of course, did Jesus not say that He will build his church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it? *Matthew 16:18*. And it is not a statement I would disagree with, however, it seems to me that there may be those who have taken that statement to mean that their particular church, by which I mean the collective gathering or fellowship of those who profess to follow Christ, is God's prime concern and thus may at times over emphasise the importance of adherence to the doctrines/traditions of men when it comes to regulating the behaviour of its church members and can diminish the understanding of some members of a church, that our behaviour as followers of Christ should at all times be regulated by what Christ calls us to do in his word.

Over 100 years ago a Scottish minister by the name of George McDonald said that whilst God has an interest in his Church his main and overarching interest and concern is that those that profess Jesus Christ as Lord and have become members of his body, the Church, do what Scripture calls them to, Jesus is very clear in this regard when he says in Luke 6:46, Why do you call me Lord, Lord, and not do what I tell you?

In his book "The Gentlewoman's Choice" edited by Michael R Phillips he in part says this, "It is the individual Christians forming the church by their obedient individuality that have done all the good since men for the love of Christ began to gather together. No organisation, not even a religious organisation, can ever accomplish anything. It is individual love alone that can combine into a larger flame. There is no true power but that which has individual roots. Neither custom nor habit nor law nor foundation is a root. The real roots are an individual conscience that hates evil, individual faith that loves and obeys God."

We're not saying that fellowship agreements in regard to conduct either as individuals or collectively are wrong, however we as individuals, and especially those in leadership, must always be cognizant of the fact that it will not be the Church as a body that is called into account but the individual members of that body who will stand in judgement.

Let us remember the one who is weighed, and found wanting the most, is the one whose tongue and whose live do not match, he whose words outrun his deeds, he who says, "Lord Lord!" and does not do the thing the Lord says. *Quote from "The Gentlewoman's Choice" used by permission. J.v.L*



*Number 3 of 12 expository messages from:
The Book of Ecclesiastes by:
Brother Linford Berry
Calvary Mennonite Fellowship Virginia*

What Time Is It?

Welcome to the fellowship of God's people together around God's Word.

So much of our world today revolves around time and especially in our culture we are many times seemingly enslaved to the clock. There are some cultures which don't have quite the same view of the clock as we do and I think many of us will find it uncomfortable there, we would be frustrated by it and yet I'm not sure that we have it so much better. Somehow we have this illusion, this false confidence, that if we can only control time then we will be happy, that we will be successful and we will somehow achieve greatness and happiness but as we come to Ecclesiastes chapter 3 today I want us to see that the main point of this chapter, even the main point of this book, is that God is in control – not us!

God is in control of everything, He is in control of everything because He created everything and He is in control of time as we shall see in this chapter, chapter 3.

We will see this theme developed throughout the chapter that God is in control and the preacher in Ecclesiastes argues time and time again throughout the book that if we are going to find real satisfaction, if we're going to find real joy and meaning and purpose in life, if we are going to be really truly successful then we must look to God, we must rely on God, we must fear God, we must do His will rather than looking to our mere earthly existence. And so we have this language of under the sun, life is vanity under the sun, and what he is saying is that from a human perspective, from an earthly perspective, all we have is vanity, we have a fleeting momentary existence.

But what is under the sun is not all there is, God is, God creates and God works in us and in his world.

And so as we read Ecclesiastes chapter 3 I want you to be answering a question for yourself, the question is the title of this message “What time is it?”

What time is it? What time is it for me, what time is it for you, what season of life are you in right now? Because we will see as we work through this text that God has a purpose and a plan for everything, for every time, for every season, for every experience and our response to God and our response to God’s time and his seasons will make a difference between whether we experience vanity and emptiness or whether we experience real joy and lasting satisfaction.

So what time is it?

I would like you to stand with me as I read Ecclesiastes chapter 3.

Ecclesiastes 3:1-22 ¹ For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven: ² a time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted; ³ a time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up; ⁴ a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance; ⁵ a time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing; ⁶ a time to seek, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to cast away; ⁷ a time to tear, and a time to sew; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak; ⁸ a time to love, and a time to hate; a time for war, and a time for peace. ⁹ What gain has the worker from his toil? ¹⁰ I have seen the business that God has given to the children of man to be busy with. ¹¹ He has made everything beautiful in its time. Also, he has put eternity into man’s heart, yet so that he cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end. ¹² I perceived that there is nothing better for them than to be joyful and to do good as long as they live; ¹³ also that everyone should eat and drink and take pleasure in all his toil—this is God’s gift to man. ¹⁴ I perceived that whatever God does endures forever; nothing can be added to it, nor anything taken from it. God has done it, so that people fear before him. ¹⁵ That which is, already has been; that which is to be, already has been; and God seeks what has been driven away. ¹⁶ Moreover, I saw under the sun that in the place of justice, even there was wickedness, and in the place of righteousness, even there was wickedness. ¹⁷ I said in

my heart, God will judge the righteous and the wicked, for there is a time for every matter and for every work. ¹⁸ I said in my heart with regard to the children of man that God is testing them that they may see that they themselves are but beasts. ¹⁹ For what happens to the children of man and what happens to the beasts is the same; as one dies, so dies the other. They all have the same breath, and man has no advantage over the beasts, for all is vanity. ²⁰ All go to one place. All are from the dust, and to dust all return. ²¹ Who knows whether the spirit of man goes upward and the spirit of the beast goes down into the earth? ²² So I saw that there is nothing better than that a man should rejoice in his work, for that is his lot. Who can bring him to see what will be after him?

Let's pray.

Our Father God this is a passage that brings some stark reminders to us, it is a passage that makes us somewhat uncomfortable or maybe a whole lot uncomfortable but I thank you for it and I thank you for what it must teach us about who you are and about who we are, about our response and responsibility to you. So guide us as we study and learn from this text today, may you write the eternal truths here on our hearts today we pray in Jesus name. Amen.

So I want to answer the question this morning "What time is it?"

I want to answer that question in 4 ways from this text;

The first answer to the question what time is it is: It is God's time.

It is God's time not ours!

Let me ask you some questions, these are some rhetorical questions that I want you to think about and attempt to answer in your mind as we think about time, as we think about whose it is, so let me ask you, If you make something, if you design something, if you build something, if you create something do you exercise control over it? Or does what you make take on a life of its own and do its own thing?

The Bible says how can the clay say to the potter why have you made me this way? It can't.

And whether you are fashioning something out of clay or whether you're building something out of wood or stone or whether you are welding metal

together, whether you are sewing a dress, whether you're preparing a delightful meal, whatever it is that you are designing and creating you have control over it do you not? And even in today's world with all of our computer technology and all of our robotics we still cannot design, build and create a machine that is self-sufficient, the robots still need to be programmed to do what they are supposed to do, they are still dependent upon the creator, the designer, the builder.

And so it is with God. God creates so therefore God controls.

Now let me ask another question, if you own something does that mean that you control that thing?

Maybe another question to ask would be can you own something over which you do not exercise control? Or to put it in another way if you cannot control something do you really own it?

If someone else dictates what you can or cannot do with something then you don't really own it do you? The whole purpose of ownership is that you can exercise control, if you own a house that means you get to say what colour paint goes on the walls, if you don't own the house you have to ask permission.

So who owns time? Who owns time, who controls time, who creates time?

Now let's bring it a little bit more closely to home, now we are thinking in the abstract, but let me ask you questions that come really close to home, how about the times and seasons of your life?

How many of you chose to be born? Anybody here choose to be born? Didn't think so. How many of you here will choose when you die?

Let me give you a little bit of an aside here, suicide is a choice of when to die and it is a choice that people in our world are increasingly making, it is a terrible, terrible tragedy, I would say too it is a terrible sin because it is one of the ultimate and most final forms of rebellion against God, it is basically saying to God, God I don't trust you with my life, I don't trust you to know what is best for my life, I'm going to take my life into my hands rather than trust in you God.

But we do not choose the time to die, we try to prolong it, as I said a couple weeks ago we are all dying, good health is simply the slowest possible

way to die but you cannot escape the dying but you cannot choose exactly what moment that will happen.

How many of you can control the weather?

Anybody here control the weather? I would like to talk with you afterwards if you can I have some jobs for you to do. Anybody control the weather here? I didn't think so.

I have a friend he is a weather forecaster works for a radio station in Washington DC, sometimes I send him a little message asking him to kind of tweak the weather for me but he cannot control the weather either he simply reports it and tries to predict it.

We cannot control the weather, we cannot control the seasons, we cannot say, well we can say we'll go out and plant our corn in January and now with modern technology you can actually do that, you plant a seed that has a coating on it and it won't sprout until it's time but the point is it won't sprout until it's time and you cannot control that time.

That's God's business!

How many of you can eliminate pain and suffering from your life?

Some of you try it's not going to work forever I can tell you that.

How many of you can control the fact that everything that you own breaks down eventually, every piece of machinery, every automobile, every computer, every device will fail you eventually, how many of you can stop that?

The point of these questions is to demonstrate that you don't own time, you don't own it, it is not yours to control, you didn't create it, God is in control of the time and seasons of your life, you are not in control,

Now let me ask you is that offensive to you, is that uncomfortable, do you find that a comforting thought or when you hear that kind of statement do you cringe?

Some of you are already starting to argue with me in your heads and the sovereignty of God is indeed offensive, it is offensive to us.

By the way sovereignty is another word we use to talk about control, to talk about ownership, to be sovereign is to be in control, to be sovereign is to own, to exercise ownership over. So why is this so offensive to us?

What's the problem here? Well the problem is that we want to be in control at least in some measure we want to exercise control, we want things our way but why, why do we want things our way, why do we want to be in control?

Well at the root of it, at the bottom of it, it's because we don't think God's way is good enough. That's really what it is about, we think our way is better than God's way so we don't trust him, we don't really trust him.

But why don't we trust him? Why don't we trust that God knows what is best why don't we rely on him and surrender to him and his control and his Lordship, which by the way is his sovereignty, why do we insist on keeping a little bit of control for ourselves?

Well I believe the reason why we do that is because we are selfish, that's the bottom line, but perhaps also we don't really have a right view of who God is.

If we really understood how great God is, how good God is, how holy God is, how just God is, if we really understood that wouldn't we trust him instead of ourselves?

But no we want to be god, with a little g, we want to be in control and here is the root of the problem and here is the reason for the Gospel.

The message of the Gospel is that we surrender all, we give up ourselves, we surrender to Him, we trust completely in Him we retain no ownership, He is in control.

But no we want to be god and so this matter of control by God, the sovereignty of God, the Lordship of God is offensive to us.

Now there seems to be another problem here in the first 8 verses of this chapter, this list, this poem, this beautiful poetry, when you add all of these things up it all adds up to nothing.

Did you think about that as I was reading it, if you take all of this poem and you add it all up, you take the positives and the negatives and you take the negatives and the positives what do you have when you are done?

Nothing!

Because you see death cancels out birth, uprooting cancels out planting, killing cancels out healing, and so on and so forth.

There is a time for everything, the passage is clear about that, but these times kind of end up cancelling each other out and so we ask a question that the preacher asks here in verse 9, What gain has the worker from all this toil? What is this all about anyway, what's going on here?

And you see once again we do not trust that God knows what He is doing, that God knows what He's up to and that God knows how all this stuff will work out in the end.

We want to understand, we want to know, we want to figure it all out and we will see in just a moment that God has actually placed that desire in us, it is called eternity in our hearts, we are not content but we have to reckon with fact that we are not in control of time, we are not in control of the times and seasons of our lives.

That is God's domain.

That's the message of this passage.

Doctor Martin Lloyd Jones a great preacher in England used to end all his pastoral prayers this way, "And may the Triune God abide with us throughout the remainder of this our short uncertain earthly life of pilgrimage."

Some people thought he was being kind of sour and a little bit negative but I think maybe he was reading Ecclesiastes, life is shorter, life is far more uncertain than you think, you are not guaranteed tomorrow much less next year so what are you going to do with time?

What time is it anyway?

And the first thing you must know is that it's God's time.

The 2nd thing you need to know is that it's time to fear God and the fact that God exercises control over time demonstrates that He himself is outside of time, He is bigger than time, and so while for us time is very temporary God is not subject to it in the same way.

We heard about this in [Psalm 90](#) that was read, "One day is with God as a 1000 years and a 1000 years as one day" He counts time in totally different ways than we do because He is outside of time, He creates it, He manages it, He owns it, He controls it.

What we do in time is fleeting, it is temporary, it is subject to change at a moment's notice, no pun intended, but there is this change that is always

happening because of time but it says in verse 14 that what God does endures for ever ([Ecclesiastes 3:14](#)). When God acts there is a certain finality to it and the reason for this it says is so that people will fear God, that is what He has done all this for, that's what all these times and seasons are for so even if they cancel each other out, even if the dying cancels out the being born, there is still a purpose in it and the ultimate purpose is so that people will fear God.

So it is a time to fear God.

The Bible also tells us the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge ([Proverbs 1:7](#)).

Once we surrender to the control of God, once we surrender to the sovereignty of God then we can truly begin to understand what time it really is. We see that God has created time, He controls time but at the same time He put eternity into our hearts, ([Ecclesiastes 3:11](#)) He created us with this certain longing, this certain capacity that is longing for something else beyond time, something that we cannot have in this life, He creates us with this quest for eternity, for immortality, we're always looking for something bigger more significant, always looking for something beyond us.

Now the passage will tell us later that we are like beasts, in some very significant ways we are like animals, but here is the way we are different, you see you just like your dog or your cat, or whatever other pet you have, you are mortal, you are going to die and you are trapped in time you cannot escape it, but unlike your dog you know that there is more, that there is more than just this life.

You see a dog when he is well fed and is in a nice warm environment would just lay down and go to sleep, he doesn't want anything more than to be loved and fed and have a nice place to sleep, but we are not content with that, we're looking for something else so that makes us different to animals, it is a part of being made in the image of God and it's part of eternity that He has put into our hearts.

We want to understand, we want find the meaning, we want to solve mysteries, we want to know why, but we are trapped because we are subject to time and mortality.

Walter Kaiser Junior says we have a deep seated desire a compulsive drive to know the character, composition and meaning of the world and to discern its purpose and destiny but we cannot.

We must realise that we will always have questions, it says God made it that way, He made it so that we couldn't completely understand, He put this eternity into our hearts so that we have this quest but then He makes it so that we are not ever going to figure it all out.

And you say well that's terrible of him, why would God do that if He is really a loving, good, holy God, surely He wouldn't do this bait and switch trick on us?

Wait a minute, not so fast! He did this so that we would rely on him so that we would fear him, so that we would look to him otherwise we would be self-sufficient we could get it figured out, we could do our thing.

So God has created time and God has created us to live in time while at the same time He has placed eternity in our hearts and He made some things to be frustrating for us so that in our natural existence under the sun we will still seek him, so that we would fear him, so that we would trust him and He uses time and He uses these lessons of time to teach us about himself and there is a little hint here in verse 15, that which is already has been; that's which is to be, already has been; and God seeks what has been driven away or what has been pursued ([Ecclesiastes 3:15](#)).

I think the meaning here is that God will keep bringing back things around until we learn our lesson, He will keep bringing it back around, He is going to keep trying to teach us these things until we get it.

Augustine Hippo said, "You have made us for yourself O Lord and our hearts are restless until they rest in you."

And indeed that is one of the reasons why God has created time that's why He controls time that's why He has put eternity into our hearts.

So let's look at this in a slightly different way now in the negative.

What happens if we don't realise and surrender to God's control of time and the seasons of our life?

What happens if we don't recognise this, what happens if we don't realise it is God's time that it is time to fear him?

Well first of all we will see as the preacher says everything will be vanity, there will be no meaning, it will be empty, it will be temporary, fleeting, useless, there will be no lasting purpose and satisfaction.

If we do not realise what time it is nothing will really be beautiful and it says here that God makes everything beautiful in its proper time but if we are not depending on him, if we're not looking to him for what is the proper time not depending on him in whatever season of life it is that He has brought us to, we're not going to find any beauty and we will never be content with what we have, we will never find joy in our circumstances and in our work unless we recognise that it is God's time and that He designed it so that we would fear him.

There will be no fear of God.

And one aspect of the fear of God is trusting God because that is what we were talking about earlier, we don't want to trust him enough we are scared of him being control, completely in control because we don't trust him enough but one aspect of fearing God is trusting him.

So if we don't trust God we will find everything to be vanity, we will trust in our own interpretations of what is good and beautiful and true and we will not find ultimate contentment and satisfaction in life because our standard of what is good and true and beautiful is skewed, it is mistaken, and instead of being content we will be constantly looking for that something else, something bigger, something better which will satisfy us.

We must realise that God is in control and it is his call and our responsibility to fear him, to trust him, to honour him.

Martin Luther explained it this way, "It is none of our work to steer the course of Providence or to direct its motions but to submit quietly to him who does. There is a king, a king who reigns and that King is not us."

So what time is it? It is time to fear God.

This passage goes on in verse 16 and following to tell us it is also time to give an account.

Not only is there a king in control but this king will also judge, this king will set things to rights once and for all.

So another reason to fear God in relationship to time is because He is the one that sets the standard about the proper use of time.

Remember time is not ours, He creates it, He controls it and He will judge us on the basis of what we do with it, so here we have our responsibility. Yes God is in control He is sovereign but we have a responsibility in response to him and to what He has given us and verse 17 says that God will judge the righteous and the wicked. Do you get that? He will judge the righteous and the wicked because there is a time for every matter and for every work, ([Ecclesiastes 3:17](#)) and the insinuation there is that some people are doing things outside the proper time, are doing work outside of God's proper time, and God will judge. There is coming a time for judgement.

Now in this life under the sun we often see injustice, we often see things that are not right, our news media has been portraying this the last number of weeks, we see things like court cases that come up and it doesn't appear that justice is reigning supreme, there is injustice even in the institutions of justice even in the places where justice is to be carried out we find injustice. Verse 16 says that even in places where there is supposed to be righteousness wickedness exists, ([Ecclesiastes 3:16](#)) and the only way that we can live with this, the only way we can survive with this dilemma and not go crazy, is because we know that God is the judge and that God will ultimately set things to rights again and He will do it in his time not necessarily in our time, not necessarily according to what we think is right but according to what is right because we are biased, we don't see the whole story, we don't know everything there is to be known about every situation but God does and so God will judge rightly.

God is the judge and He alone can completely answer the question what time is it?

Our response must be one of surrender and submission, the fear of God, but we must also understand our responsibility.

You see we cannot change the seasons of our life, we have already demonstrated that, we are on this march toward death and we are all in different seasons of life and it is irreversible we cannot control it, cannot change it but we can make decisions that will affect how we live in those seasons of life how we are going to respond to the time and season that God gives us.

We will give an account for how we respond to his control, to his sovereignty, to his Lordship and we will give an account for what we do with the time that He has given us.

And this is true both in what seems good to us and in that which seems bad to us, we are accountable for both, we are accountable for our response to both to both sides of this ledger as we read down through this poem in the first 8 verses of Ecclesiastes 3 there is the positive and there is the negative, we don't like the negatives but God is saying they are there they are going to be part of your experience whether you like it or not.

So what are you going to do with it, how are you going to respond to God?

How are you going to respond when something good and beneficial and happy happens to you what are you going to do with that?

What are you going to do if something good and beneficial and happy happens to somebody else that you care about? Are you going to do like the Scripture says and rejoice with those who rejoice, are you going to thank God and praise him or are you going to take credit for yourself?

You do know don't you that everything you have and everything you are is a gift from God, you know that right? So even if your wise decisions and smart moves seem to have paid off that is still a result of God's work and He does not guarantee that it will always be that way.

Many people have worked diligently, many people have worked hard they've made good decisions, the best decisions they could have made that they could have known how to make but things went very badly for them, very badly. So don't go gloating in your accomplishments, don't go gloating in your good things.

But how about when things go badly, how about when you suffer injustice, how about when you suffer pain and hardship, how about when somebody hurts you, what are you going to do with that?

Are you going to blame other people, are you going to reject God or do you thank God for this time as well?

In Psalm 90 that was read the psalmist says thank you God for the days in which you have afflicted me. (Psalm 90:15) how many of you are ready to do that?

Do you thank God for these times of hardship realising that we will not completely understand what his purposes are and how He is going to use

all of this for his glory and for our good but we must trust that He knows best.

So you see God is using the times and seasons of your life to test you, this is a test, this is only a test but it is a test for something bigger than this life, verse 18, I said in my heart with regard to the children of man that God is testing them that they may see that they themselves are but beasts. [Ecclesiastes 3:18](#).

So the point is God uses time and seasons to show us who we really are, to show us our place in his economy.

So are you only going to live only for yourself and what seems good to you or are you going to recognise that you are made for something else, for someone else?

From a purely human perspective then, under the sun perspective it appears that we are no different to animals, that's what it looks like, we have no other revelation and so an atheist by the name of Bertrand Russell said this, "Unless you assume a God the question of life's purpose is meaningless." I'll repeat that: Unless you assume a God the question of life's purpose is meaningless.

Without God, without anything above the sun, we're just nothing more than animals, a dead man looks a lot like a dead dog in terms of the effective death and from a purely human perspective we wouldn't know that the soul of the animal goes down into the earth and the soul of the human returns to God who gave it.

So the test of time is are you going to be accountable to God or are you going to live like an animal?

That's pretty much the question.

What time is it? It is time to give an account.

And fourthly what time is it? It is time to live.

So what do we do in response to this reality of who God is and who we are in response to his control of the time and the seasons of our life how do we live and respond to that?

And the answer from the preacher in Ecclesiastes is, live and enjoy doing good, make the best use of the time God has given you and in so doing you will find joy and satisfaction in life.

Life lived in the fear of God is not dull, it is not stoicism, it is not a drudgery, life lived in the fear of God is one of joy and happiness and deep-seated satisfaction and meaning.

Life lived in the fear of God is a life of joy, a life of pleasure even in the hard things, even in the difficult things and so we are to enjoy God's gift of time and seasons of life, not to fight against it, because we ultimately cannot win that fight. Writing to the Philippians the Apostle Paul says for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content, I know how to be brought low and I know how to abound, in any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me. [Philippians 4:11-13](#).

The Apostle Paul knew the secret and you can know it too, the secret is to trust in God completely knowing that He knows best.

Take pleasure in the mundane and basic things of life, it is good to enjoy the good gifts of God even things as temporal as food and drink, the New Testament tells us that God has given us richly all things to enjoy, ([1 Timothy 6:17](#)) He has created this world for our benefit and so enjoy it from his hand but don't you dare forget that these things are a gift from God, they are God's gifts to us they are not yours to hoard to yourself they are yours to use to please God.

Rejoice in the work that God has given you to do. Later in this book the preacher will declare whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might.

So be all in, be fully invested, live life to the fullest and live in the present, don't worry about what might come in the future, remember God is in control of that, it is not your responsibility to worry about it.

Matthew chapter 5 in the sermon on the Mount Jesus is very clear about that we are to trust him, He will take care of tomorrow.

Verse 2 of Ecclesiastes 3 says who can bring him to see what will be after him? ([Ecclesiastes 3:22b](#))

We can't know tomorrow, we can have some pretty good plans, and there's nothing wrong with that, but we must always realise that these plans these ideas that we have are subject to God.

So don't try to live in the future live in the present and don't try to live in the past either, that time is gone never to return again in the same way.

So learn the lessons that God has for you to learn in the past and look to him in faith for the future but live now don't squander the opportunity and the time that God has given you now today, make the best of it.

Another person who wasn't really a Christian but was a wise man, a man by the name of Benjamin Franklin said this, "Do you love life? Then don't squander time because time is the stuff life is made off."

Be wise, and then the Apostle Paul wrote this, Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish but understand what the will of the Lord is and do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart. Giving thanks always and for everything, (not just some things, everything) giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. [Ephesians 5:15-20](#)

Every day, every moment of this uncertain life is a gift from God and so enjoy it, live in it, enjoy every day that He has given you, the times and seasons of our life are beyond our control so enjoy God's gifts and fear him.

And how much more should this be true of us those of us who know God, know what He has done for us in his Son Jesus Christ.

What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all how will He also not with him graciously give us all things? ([Romans 8:31-32](#)).

If He gave his only Son, his most precious Son for our redemption is it a small thing to think that He could provide for us in material ways, in emotional ways.

What time is it?

It is time to live, it is God's time, it is time to fear God, it is time to be accountable to God but ultimately it is time to live in the fear of God and for his glory enjoying what He has given us.

So let me close as Lloyd Jones did with his congregation;
 “And may the Triune God abide with us throughout the remainder of this our short uncertain pilgrimage” and let me add this; May you know the love of Jesus Christ, the One who died to give you all things, may you fear God who is in control even if we are not and may you enjoy every good gift that God has given you to enjoy in this life. Amen.



The Good Shepherd

“I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep.” *John 10:14-15*

When Jesus walked among the people, they were attracted to him. Although He spoke with authority, He was meek and tender. It was clear that He cared about people. Jesus took no honour to himself. He did not understate what He said about himself, neither did He overstate it. He spoke the truth. By his teaching and example He revealed sin, but He also had a solution for sin.

Jesus is among us today. He is here to love and be loved. He wants to be a personal companion to us. From him proceed light and truth for our daily needs. We are not to follow him for the "loaves and fishes." Are we attracted to Him only for what He does for us, or do we love him for what He is? He is the Son of God, our Savior, and the Good Shepherd. He is the only one who can truly satisfy the heart. May we love him, praise him, and yield ourselves to his guidance.

Why? Because He takes care of us – if we but let him, *Isaiah 40:11* says of him that He will tend his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms; he will carry them in his bosom, and gently lead those that are with young.

We must also remember that we are not the only the only sheep there are others that He desires to take care of and because He does , even to the extent of laying down his life for them, his Father loves him. This taking care of the sheep is a charge that his Father has given to him and He is faithful to carry that out: *John 10:16-18* And I have other sheep that are not of this

fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd. ¹⁷ For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. ¹⁸ No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father.”

Jesus spoke directly and plainly to the people. His words had a way of revealing the truth about himself and his purpose. Even though He spoke these words to relatively few people, this message has resounded throughout time and around the world. In this scripture, the Lord introduces himself to the world.

We appreciate all that is written about Jesus and what He did. However, it is precious to read his own words and feel the love and purity of his words. In his words we feel his spirit and sense his intent.

Jesus tells us here of the relationship He desires to have with us. He would be our shepherd. He would be the caretaker of anyone and everyone who would allow him to do so. His care is personal and tender. It is clear that He has more in mind than being there for people for emergency use. His children, those who know him, have a different concept of him than this. They love him.

Jesus teaches about a sheepfold. This is a special dwelling place of safety for those who know him. What about those who seem to know him but do not know the sheepfold? He has a plan for them and would lead them to the sheepfold.

Jesus portrayed no pride or self-promotion. His manner was straightforward and pure. Jesus made no excuse or justification. He did not apologize for being one with God. He is completely at rest with His standing. He is completely at peace with being the son and God being the father. Jesus revered the Father. His mission and the Father's are the same. They share the purpose of giving us eternal life.

The intent of Jesus' life was to give Himself for the sheep. It was not to be that men would take His life, but that He would lay it down. In this He was fulfilling the will of the Father.

The Jews of Jesus' day saw Jesus in person and heard Him speak, but they said, "Tell us plainly if you are the Christ." They were not able to accept in

faith what He had spoken so plainly. Therefore, they did not know him. They knew him as a person but not as the Messiah. They did not recognize him as the Good Shepherd.

The Shepherd of the sheep looks for those who acknowledge that they are the sheep and that they need the Shepherd. The sheep know his voice. Something in the heart of the born-again believer relates and says "Amen" to the will of the Lord. The adversarial position of our will toward Christ is changed to willing obedience. His will is born in our heart. It is not there by nature. His will becomes our will as we let him live in us.

The Shepherd also knows the sheep. He knows the markings, the characteristics, the personality, and the longings of each individual sheep. His care and direction is very personal. It is his deep desire to see each one safely home with the Father.

Eternal life is the gift He has given to the sheep. He wants all men to have eternal life. His providence and power are such that no one is able to take life from one of his trusting sheep. In this the sheep can be completely confident. No one has ever lost out who did not wander away from the tender guidance of the Shepherd. There is no doubt at all that He will keep all his sheep if we let him. All the power of both the Father and the Son are committed to the preservation of the saints. We think in terms of trying to be faithful. Jesus does not "try" to keep us any more than He "tried" to create the world. He is perfectly able to fulfill this promise.

The devotion of Christ to God the Father is obviously complete. He wanted none other than God's will to be done. Is it possible that we can be so devoted to God? Our stated purpose is to do the Lord's will. What is it in practice?

We are instructed, "Be still, and know that I am God" *Psalm 46:10*. That is something that has always been difficult to do. How quiet do we need to be? How willing and obedient must we be to really know him?

Some, when referring to their conversion experience, speak of coming to know the Lord. This must involve more than an introduction to him. Our walk with him must bring us to know him in a personal way. Our confidence in him will grow and our commitment to him will become more complete as we walk with him.

What is the fruit of a person's life who truly knows the Lord? Can such a person be proud? Can he be hateful of his brother? Will this person be dis-

contented? How can a person who knows the Lord be self-willed? Can he be covetous? The person who knows the Lord comes to know himself also. He knows his utter dependence on God. Such a person recognizes his failures and loves the Lord for his forgiveness. He does not believe in eternal security in the sense that he cannot fall from grace. He is very dependent on the Good Shepherd day by day.

We have no doubt that God's will was the theme of Jesus' life. He meant to glorify God in all He did. And He did glorify God. Is Christian life about oneself or about the Lord? Are our prayers centered on ourselves or on the Lord? Has it ever made a person happy to focus on his own interests or problems?

How it must please the Lord when we trust him to guide us. We let him be the Shepherd rather than relying on ourselves to have the right amount of spiritual activity or to find the balance of financial involvement in our lives. How much do we look at what others are doing to make these judgments rather than relying on him? If we would more fully trust him, would the direction be clearer? How much is our will affecting our judgment in these matters?

Given the organization of the church today, it is increasingly easy for believers to rely on the structure of the church. This can take away from our reliance on the Shepherd. While a certain amount of organization is useful, in a spiritual body nothing can replace the guidance of the All Seeing Eye (*Psalm 32:8*). Revival meetings, committees, and boards can become a crutch for us that will not sufficiently fill the spiritual need of men, women, and youth who are striving to be saved.

We need to listen to the voice of the Good Shepherd who will lead us in everlasting eternal life, *John 6:47* in the Amplified Bible explains it clearly, Jesus says: I assure you, most solemnly I tell you, he who believes in me [who adheres to, trusts in, relies on, and has faith in Me] has (now possesses) eternal life.

Are we listening and following?



PEACEABLE FRUIT OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

The righteousness that comes from God is distinguished by fruit that is recognizable. While many desire to possess the fruit of righteousness, few are willing to meet the conditions to experience that fruit.

Hebrews 12:11 says "For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it."

When we yield to the correction of God, whether it is experienced through material and bodily affliction or intense spiritual trials, there are spiritual benefits. Such trials have a way of purging out elements of our proud, self-ish natures. The particular characteristics of the righteousness that God is creating in us are of interest.

James 3:17-18 explains but the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere. And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace. The fruit of righteousness can be experienced by those who have met Jesus at the cross and by those who are exercised by the trials of life. The surrender of ourselves to the Lord yields this fruit that James calls "wisdom." Godly wisdom is recognized by being pure, gentle, easy to be entreated, etc. This fruit is so very necessary for the operation of the church as well as our witness to the world. In fact, this very spirit of wisdom is the identity of the true faith.

True righteousness will always be peaceable. Self-made righteousness will not have the fruit of being gentle, easy to be entreated, and having no partiality, even though it may pretend for a while. The peaceable fruit of righteousness is not a fabrication of man. This fruit is the work of God through Jesus. Philippians 1:11 says being filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.

There is a great need for the righteousness that produces these gentle fruits, which honor the Lord by bearing the witness of humility. In the absence of humility, it is natural for us to devise our own recipe for righteousness. There are things that we have chosen to observe and do, and we feel good about doing those things. We have reasons that convince us that we have a satisfactory set of standards.

Our recipe of righteousness often makes allowances for liberties that we want to take, trying to make up for them with notable good deeds. Howev-

er, only the righteousness that is experienced by yielding to God will produce the peaceable fruits.

Because of the prevalence of impure types of righteousness and, also, because of unwillingness, there has arisen an aversion to righteousness. Some would actually hesitate to live their honest convictions lest they be seen as thinking they are righteous. Christians who are otherwise quite sincere are careful to not be perceived as being too righteous. Something is wrong when we feel to avoid righteousness. Righteousness, as believed by the faithful children of God and as taught in the Scripture, is something to be sought diligently and embraced. In seeking to avoid the pitfall of impure righteousness by being less righteous, we create our own brand of righteousness. This will not produce the peaceable fruit that is reserved for those who submit themselves to Christ.

The wisdom that is from above is given as a gift only to those who, by wholehearted abandoning of Self, have given themselves to God. That wisdom has nothing of self built into it. There is no subtle, selfish preference involved. It is that purity that makes it so lovely and so desirable.

The only source of righteousness is God through Jesus. It is comely to be clothed with the garment of His righteousness. Generally, that righteousness does not repel. It has a characteristic that draws men and inspires confidence in them. On the other hand, without realizing what we are doing, we try to put on fruits that imitate the peaceable fruits. Much effort is made to be friendly, hospitable, outgoing, and generous. There can be some hypocrisy in that and some partiality, also. The fruit of righteousness will be kind, hospitable, and generous, and will be humble as well.

It takes patience to wait for the fruit of true righteousness. The Scripture quoted above says "afterward" the trial yields this fruit. Even afterward, we may not be so aware of the fruit. In our haste, we "pin on" fruit that we know ought to be there. With that, we feel better able to meet our friends, the public, and our brethren. However, there is something that doesn't warm the heart. When we patiently submit to the chastening hand of God, He sometimes slips the fruit in without our notice. Probably more important than patience is obedience to the Holy Spirit. Willing obedience to Him will bring forth the fruit of righteousness. When these fruits are missing, it can be expected that somewhere our obedience has been lacking.

Probably one of the most satisfying fruits of righteousness is communion with God. It doesn't matter how much we try, God doesn't walk and commune with the proud. When we accept the kind of righteousness He gives, we discover that He isn't far away. Communing with him doesn't take all the problems away, but He is there with us in the difficulty. In this fellowship with him, there is a fountain that flows with life-giving inspiration. The anxious restlessness is gone when the Lord is there.

We can be sure that true righteousness will have fruit. That fruit will be consistent with humility, modesty, and the fear of God. When one thinks that he can have peace with God but continues to live in independence and self-will, indulging himself in the "good" things of life, this is deception. A broken and a contrite spirit are the distinctive traits of godliness. When we realize the magnitude of the God we serve, we will lose our resistance.

Some have begun to believe that they can live as they wish rather than submitting to the counsels of the church. These have drawn their own lines and feel confident in what they do. The counsels of the church, whether at a local level or conference wide, are not the opinion of a man, neither are they a law. These directives are the "wisdom of the just" (Luke 1:17). To minimize this wisdom is not the peaceable fruit of righteousness



That person is perfect in faith who can come to God in the utter emptiness of feeling and desire, without a glow or an aspiration, with the weight of low thoughts, failures, neglects, and wondering forgetfulness, and say to Him, "Thou art my refuge, because Thou art my home."

From "The Truth in Jesus" by George McDonald
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Compiled & Edited by: J van Loon
 E-mail: shimaracourier@gmail.com
 Web: www.anabaptistmennonites.net