

THE AUSTRALIAN ANABAPTIST

God's solid foundation stands firm. 2 Tim. 2-19

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

Matthew 5:15

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For A Conservative Anabaptist Perspective

From The Editor's Desk

The spirit of man is the lamp of the LORD,
searching all his innermost parts. Proverbs 20:27

Matthew Henry commentary on this verse explains how we should view and use our God-given spirit he states "The rational soul and conscience are as a lamp within us, which should be used in examining our dispositions and motives with the revealed will of God."

Another verse in Scripture says Thy word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path Psalm 119:105.

Here in just two brief statements we have very clear direction what God intends us to do with the spirit that He has put within us and once we put it to its right and godly use then it will make clear our way to that strait gate Jesus speaks of in Matthew 7:14.

Even in this life we need light to find our way. In our natural state in our own strength without God we are like a lamp or candle each of which have a wick or an electric bulb with its filament inside each need the application of an outside source of energizing so that they can show forth the light which they were designed to give whether it be little or much.

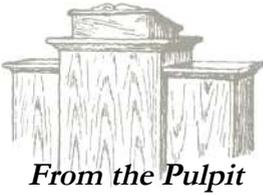
And the question arises what is that external source for our spirit that will energize it to bring forth light?

The answer is Jesus Christ, John 8:12 "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."

Then in John 11:10 But if anyone walks in the night, he stumbles, because the light is not in him." Notice He says the light not a light and I believe that this light spoken of is Christ himself indwelling us through his Holy Spirit which He promised, Luke 11:13.

It is not up to us to ignite the light or to supply the oil, God does that through his Holy Spirit. What we have to do this keep our lamps clean and bright and to guard against any thing that may obstruct the light of Christ shining for the world to see. We are to ensure that anything which might hinder or affect our testimony or mar our influence, dim our light so to speak is put away, Christ will see to it that our light shall have an effect on others in accordance with his purposes. Have you, have I allowed the light of Christ to illumine our spirit and are we allowing Him to trim our light through trials, tribulations and adversity?

J.v.L



A VIEW OF THE CHURCH
BRIDE OR HARLOT?
A Look at Proverbs 31:10-31

Most if not all Christians know of Proverbs 31 and in particular verses 10 to the end of the chapter, I'm sure most of you know what it is, it's about the virtuous woman, the heading in my Bible says "The praise and characteristics of a good wife."

The KJV has been retained as it was the Bible version used at that time.

I believe this portion of Scripture is used a lot by both the brothers and sisters with a view to a woman's ideal way of life and conduct, I would like you to think a little bit outside the box tonight, think outside the square and take a new look with me at this Scripture.

I'll just read it so that we get a fresh sense of what it says:

[Proverbs 31:10-31](#)

¹⁰ Who can find a virtuous woman? for her price *is* far above rubies. ¹¹ The heart of her husband doth safely trust in her, so that he shall have no need of spoil. ¹² She will do him good and not evil all the days of her life. ¹³ She seeketh wool, and flax, and worketh willingly with her hands. ¹⁴ She is like the merchants' ships; she bringeth her food from afar. ¹⁵ She riseth also while it is yet night, and giveth meat to her household, and a portion to her maidens. ¹⁶ She considereth a field, and buyeth it: with the fruit of her hands she planteth a vineyard. ¹⁷ She girdeth her loins with strength, and strengtheneth her arms. ¹⁸ She perceiveth that her merchandise *is* good: her candle goeth not out by night. ¹⁹ She layeth her hands to the spindle, and her hands hold the distaff. ²⁰ She stretcheth out her hand to the poor; yea, she reacheth forth her hands to the needy. ²¹ She is not afraid of the snow for her household: for all her household *are* clothed with scarlet. ²² She maketh herself coverings of tapestry; her clothing *is* silk and purple. ²³ Her husband is known in the gates, when he sitteth among the elders of the land. ²⁴ She maketh fine linen, and selleth *it*; and delivereth girdles unto the merchant. ²⁵ Strength and honour *are* her clothing; and she shall rejoice in time to come. ²⁶ She openeth her mouth with wisdom; and in her tongue *is*

the law of kindness. ²⁷ She looketh well to the ways of her household, and eateth not the bread of idleness. ²⁸ Her children arise up, and call her blessed; her husband *also*, and he praiseth her. ²⁹ Many daughters have done virtuously, but thou excellest them all. ³⁰ Favour *is* deceitful, and beauty *is* vain: *but* a woman *that* feareth the LORD, she shall be praised. ³¹ Give her of the fruit of her hands; and let her own works praise her in the gates.

I am sure that as some sisters read this they may think, Incredible, this woman must have 48 hours in a day! Some of you look at it and think I could never attain to that.

You may be right.

And then on the other side some husbands may look at this and think, Oh, I wish my wife was like that, why can't she be more industrious, why can't she do this or that?

Maybe you are too demanding.

I would like to suggest something else to you out of these verses, there are a lot of types and shadows in the Old Testament and I believe this is one of those types and shadows portions and believe that this text can also be talking about the Church.

Turn with me to Isaiah 54 verses 5 through 8 and 13 to 15 for some context for this view.

Isaiah 54:5-8 For thy Maker *is* thine husband; the LORD of hosts *is* his name; and thy Redeemer the Holy One of Israel; The God of the whole earth shall he be called. ⁶ For the LORD hath called thee as a woman forsaken and grieved in spirit, and a wife of youth, when thou wast refused, saith thy God. ⁷ For a small moment have I forsaken thee; but with great mercies will I gather thee. ⁸ In a little wrath I hid my face from thee for a moment; but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee, saith the LORD thy Redeemer.

Isaiah 54:13-15 And all thy children *shall be* taught of the LORD; and great *shall be* the peace of thy children. ¹⁴ In righteousness shalt thou be established: thou shalt be far from oppression; for thou shalt not fear: and from terror; for it shall not come near thee. ¹⁵ Behold, they shall surely

gather together, *but* not by me: whosoever shall gather together against thee shall fall for thy sake.

These verses alone would form the basis of many messages but that is not our aim at this time. Briefly these verses describe God's love for His people as a husband loves his wife and his love is everlasting, full of compassion, just reading verses 5 through 8 should be sufficient for any of us to realise the deep and abiding love God has for his people, His bride the Church, also remember His people of the Old Testament are referred to as the Church in the wilderness, Acts 7:38.

God here is talking to His people, Israel, through Isaiah. God proclaims that He, thy Maker, is your husband, now that makes the other party His bride.

I believe our text in Proverbs 31 as we closely look at it is also talking about the Church, the Church victorious, the bride of Christ, there are many scriptures that would back that up as Christ being the bridegroom and we as his Church, his bride, are called to prepare ourselves for Him, the bridegroom, and to be busy about the tasks that He has set us until He calls His bride to that great marriage feast.

The second set of verses in Isaiah 54:13-15 portray how God is going to be our teacher, all thy children shall be taught, that is those who belong to His Church. He was speaking to no-one else but His people, Israel at that time, and that He will bring peace. But more than that we see here especially I believe in verses 14 and 15 a precursor to the statement by Jesus in Matthew 16:18 when He said to Peter, and I tell you, you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my Church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

The title "Bride or Harlot" is based in the Old Testament, God often likened the people of Israel to a prostitute, He called them harlots, that they had turned to harlotry by going away from Him, please keep that in mind but please also remember Rahab who in Scripture is called a harlot and yet was saved to become one of the important women in the lineage of Jesus Christ, (Matthew 1) who took on human form to come and save the human race and restore a right relationship with God, remember also that there is

redemption available to all who will come to Him in repentance no matter what name we are called or what life style we follow.

Let's now examine the text from Proverbs 31 and point out how these verses can relate to the Bride of Christ, the Church, which means us as being part of that body the Church, and how we can relate to those verses on a personal level and a fellowship so that we can truly become the Bride of Christ that we are called to be.

Proverbs 31

The opening statement in this portion of our text is a question to us all.

Verse 10: Who can find a virtuous woman? for her price is far above rubies.

With the exception of imperial jadeite and certain rare colours of diamond, ruby is the world's most expensive gem, rubies are also bright red or crimson, Christ's blood is described by one songwriter as a crimson flow and He was willing to shed that for the sake of His Bride, thus a price far above rubies is an appropriate simile I believe.

That is how God looks at his Church, his Church is his bride, his prize, and it is so far in value above the value of rubies that He gave his life for the Church, for the people, for his bride and did so willingly.

In doing so I believe that we as his Church are called to be faithful to Him and being virtuous is part of being faithful. Whoever heard of a marriage partner being virtuous and unfaithful at the same time?

Verse 11: The heart of her husband doth safely trust in her, so that he shall have no need of spoil.

Here the husband is satisfied with his wife, he does not go looking elsewhere and as we look at how Old Testament Israel too was in a sense the bride of Christ they deserted Him many times and betrayed His trust and so the time came when He brought salvation to the Gentiles, Romans 11:11: But rather through their fall (Israel's) salvation is come unto the Gentiles, for to provoke them to jealousy.

We are those other people, the Gentiles, that Christ came looking for and offered salvation because His intended bride was not faithful, she prostituted herself to foreign gods and different ways.

I pray that it is not so for us or our church today.

Verse 12: She will do him good and not evil all the days of her life.

And as a Church if we live in God's word and do not go back to where we have come from then we will be doing good all the days of our life and not evil. Any bride will do her husband good and not evil.

We need to live by the Scripture because if we don't we are then doing evil and prostituting ourselves to other ways.

Verse 13: She seeketh wool, and flax, and worketh willingly with her hands.

Please remember when it says "she" we are referring to the Church, the Church through its ministers seeks inspiration and direction from the Word of God so that it does not become as it says in Romans 12:11 Not slothful in business which is that work of God, fervent in spirit serving the Lord, complete dedication to the task at hand.

If you are an employer would you not just love to have employees like that?

We need to get our minds around that that we need to seek the wool and flax, in other words to seek the materials that God wants us to work with and those materials for us to work with are contained in the scriptures and God will reveal them to us and how to use them and do so willingly.

I believe this applies to all of us not exclusively to the ordained brethren or those in some form of ministry.

Verse 14: She is like the merchants' ships; she bringeth her food from afar.

Merchants' ships carry goods from one place to another and we as the Church do that, the Church through its outreaches and missionary efforts, exports if you wish, not only the Word of God but also aid and comfort in material things to not just far off places but also closer to home.

We have our ministers in our local congregation who bring those things to us, we as members of the body of Christ, the Church, bring those things to each other and our communities and in that sense we become like merchant ships that bring them goods and spices and things but more importantly we bring them the Word of God that many may want but all need.

Remember before we can deliver anything we must first load up our ship so to speak.

Verse 15: She riseth also while it is yet night, and giveth meat to her household, and a portion to her maidens.

Giving meat to her household to me signifies the giving of spiritual food. It speaks to me of a Church that never sleeps and makes provision for the spiritual food needed by her members. That food comes through studying the Word of God and the giving of ourselves to prayer and praise to our heavenly Father, Matthew 6:25-33, God provides and thus we have food to pass on and from that flows our praise, Ephesians 1:3.

Because of time differences around the world somewhere in the world at any time there would be praises going up to God and in that sense the Church never sleeps and rises while it is yet night in my little corner of the world and our heavenly Father continues to provide us with meat so we can also impart it to those outside of our circles.

Verse 16: She considereth a field, and buyeth it: with the fruit of her hands she planteth a vineyard.

This speaks to me of outreach and ministry work, she considers the fields in which she is going to labour because it says that she plants a Vineyard, we know who's the Vineyard is it is the Lord's we are doing it on his behalf at his request, He has asked us to take care of his Vineyard while He is gone and we await his return.

I'm sure you all know the parable from Mark 12 about the master that went away and left his servants in charge of his Vineyard. We are those servants today. We don't know when He is coming back but we are responsible to make sure that the Vineyard is trimmed and prepared.

There is a lot of work in a vineyard, I worked in one for a few years planting, pruning, harvesting and it is hard work, sometimes you ask what am I doing here? especially on a cold winter's day with ice on the ground drizzling rain and you are pruning the vines. I think that outreach work can be somewhat like that you shake your head and you say, what am I doing here? Where are the results of my labours? When is the owner coming back to take charge of this?

Some of you here may have been in that place, maybe some are still there, it may be on an individual basis with somebody that you're ministering to but I do know that many missionaries go through those times.

But nevertheless she (the Church) goes on,

Verse 17: She girdeth her loins with strength, and strengtheneth her arms. She does not give up she doesn't throw in the towel, she gets on with it, gets on with the job at hand and that is what the Church has to do is to get on with it and not to sit back and say it's too difficult, it is too hard, I'm tired, we're tired, people and circumstances are coming against us.

We are told that is what will happen Jesus did not say He was going to send peace in fact He said the contrary, He promised a sword, Matthew 10:34, and that to me speaks of trials and tribulations so we to be ready we need to be prepared to gird ourselves with strength, roll up our sleeves and keep at the task at hand that the Lord has given to us, his Church.

In the next verse we see her perceptions of the things that she brings,

Verse 18: She perceiveth that her merchandise *is* good: her candle goeth not out by night.

Do you really believe the Gospel? Do you believe what you are living is right?

If your merchandise is good, and it is very good as only the merchandise that you have from God can be then as Romans 8:28 says, then you will desire to share it

I would urge you not just alone but as a body of believers comprising the Church, the Bride of Christ, don't let your candle go out at night, don't let the word of God depart from your heart, don't sit back and say, Well I'm comfortable, I'm all right, we've got a nice fellowship here, we meet every week and often during the week, we have a nice social life, we've got ministers to come and visit us and comfort us, when I've got a problem I'll ring them up and they will solve it.

It is not what we are asked to do, God asks us, indeed commands us, to reach out and that's what I see in that not letting our candle go out by night it is not to give up when we have a dark spot in our life but rather to let our light shine forth not to hide it under a bushel so that all men may see. We live in a world filled with darkness and the only light that can help is the light of Christ in us all the time.

Verse 19: She layeth her hands to the spindle, and her hands hold the distaff.

Again we see the reference to a woman and again we see her as representing the Bride of Christ, the Church.

I know only a little of spinning wheels but I do know you cannot work with one hand, I know you have to use the treadle with your foot, I know that you have to hold the wool, the raw materials, and card it before you can put it on the distaff, the dictionary says a *distaff* is the stick onto which wool or flax is wound in spinning. Since spinning was traditionally done by females, *distaff* took on figurative meanings relating to women or women's work, and so this verse is saying that you have to use your hands and your feet, you cannot sit there to my knowledge spinning wool and eat a sandwich or read a book at the same time it is a task that has to be done with full concentration and commitment if it is to be done properly and that is the same with God's work we have to fully concentrate and commit ourselves to it and not be distracted by the things of the world.

Verse 20: She stretcheth out her hand to the poor; yea, she reacheth forth her hands to the needy.

Well this verse is clear and self-explanatory when we talk about the Church, it is what the Scripture calls us to especially in the New Testament read Matthew 25 and James 2 and you will see what God's call is in relation to those who are in need and also realise the consequences of not doing the will of God in these instances. Yes I realise Jesus also said you have the poor always with you (Matthew 26:11) He also told the young man in Matthew 19:21 to give to the poor and that his reward would be a storing up of treasure in heaven.

I believe we have ample opportunity to store up treasure in heaven in this area of life.

Verse 21: She is not afraid of the snow for her household: for all her household are clothed with scarlet.

It does not matter what the conditions are, the external conditions that we have to work under or in.

You have people in hot climates, you have people in cold climates, you have people in pleasant climates, and I would say that the ones in pleasant climates are probably more likely to give up than the ones in the hard climates because the hard things of life are not pleasant and we all like our pleasant circumstances do we not? Don't be afraid when you are asked to step out of your comfort zone where there is perhaps no air conditioning or hot and cold running water, indoor toilets, big supermarkets, roads that vir-

tually don't exist, or all the things that we believe we need to be comfortable and say, No, I couldn't do that I could not give up all my comforts, God will take care of you.

Because I can assure you that Scripture tells us one day that is all going to be taken away from us anyhow so why worry about it now.

The scarlet clothing here portrays the colouring of the curtains of the Tabernacle namely deep violet, dark red and scarlet wool woven into fine twined linen as spoken of in Exodus 28, scarlet is also mentioned in a number of other places in the Old Testament and in the New Testament we have in Matthew 27:28 the scarlet robe put on Jesus to signify his kingship even though they did it as an act of ridicule.

From these references in Scripture we can take I believe that the Church should clothe, present herself, to the world with the best that is available and that is the blood (which is scarlet or red in colour) of Christ which was shed for all men.

We can see that this idea of clothing as being nothing but the best and in the colours of royalty continues on in:

Verse 22: She maketh herself coverings of tapestry; her clothing *is* silk and purple.

When we speak of the Church that she is making herself coverings of tapestry, and perhaps you may say I am drawing a long straw as the saying goes, maybe I am stretching it a little but I hope you will forgive me because I am using word pictures, I'm using imagery to try and express a point of view, but the tapestry that the Church covers herself with are all the different people, all the different races and cultures around the world.

Tapestries are colourful things and they tell a story, tapestry is not just made up of one colour it is made up of many different colours like your quilts they portray a story.

And what is the beauty of a quilt or in this case of tapestry? It is the pattern, it is the colours, those things that are pleasing to our eyes and I believe that when God looks down and sees all the different races that are in his Church and form his body that He is pleased to see all the different races, He doesn't see and make judgement on the colour of people but He sees what is in their hearts, in fact John was shown how this body of Christ, this Bride of Christ, the Church was made up, Revelation 5:9 says that Christ

was slain and has redeemed us to God by his blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation.

It reminds me of a living tapestry which is the Church and brothers and sisters it is a colourful picture, it is a tapestry that God can be and will be proud of.

So it does not matter what language people speak, it does not matter what nationality they are what their colour is or their heritage they are all included in this and we should be that inclusive because if you are not you are exclusive and I would dread to stand before God on that final day and have him tell me because I excluded people from my fellowship or from fellowship with him because of their heritage, their culture, their nationality, their language that is different to mine, I'm quite confident that He will then exclude me from fellowship with him and I don't want that. I want to be in the fellowship of the saints and if you do then you need to think about these things, I'm not saying that you don't I'm sure you do but sometimes we need to go a little bit further and get rid of any lingering prejudices we may unwittingly harbour in our hearts, ask God and He will show you.

Verse 23: Her husband is known in the gates, when he sitteth among the elders of the land.

Well the husband of course is Christ and the sitting amongst the elders of the land I believe is that we as the Church proclaim Christ so that He can be amongst his people and be seen to be amongst his people through us.

There are people groups in this world that have not heard of Jesus Christ and the salvation that is available to them, they need to know him, they need to hear of him so that He can sit in their midst like He is in our midst.

We are a blessed people indeed even though we might think at times that we are hard done by because things are not going my way. Let's remember to follow the example of Jesus when He was about to undergo suffering that none of us will ever be asked to undergo, He spoke to his Father in heaven and said not my will but thine be done, Luke 22:42, in fact a number of times Jesus made it plain that He was doing the will of his Father and we as followers of Christ should not only be willing but are called to do the same.

Neither should the Church and we as its members sit still in idleness but always be busy in the work of our heavenly Father. We all know of course that if one is idle nothing happens.

Verse 24: She maketh fine linen, and selleth it; and delivereth girdles unto the merchant.

In other words we need to do things, to prepare things so that we have something to deliver to people via the merchants' ships spoken of in verse 14, something that is worthwhile and whilst we do not actually sell those things that we deliver to people, which is the good news of the Gospel, they do have to pay a price as we all have and that price is to give up self for the sake of Christ.

I think we are all familiar with the term girdles although today's definition does not reflect the Old Testament definition of girdle which was an item of clothing which performed the function of what we would call a belt today in other words it was to hold clothing in or up but it was much more substantial.

In the context of the Church we need to give people things that will support their spiritual life in their spiritual journey with God.

We need to give them encouragement, we need to let them know we are praying for them, we need to talk with them not at them but with them, there is a great deal of difference, and I'm sure you all realise that. These are some of the things we can do at a spiritual level.

But then there are other things of a more material nature that we can provide or deliver to them to help them on the narrow road to heaven such as Bibles and other Scripture based literature, things like clothing, food, shelter, medical aid, all the things which we take for granted but which in many mission fields are in very short supply and we could sit the latter part of this verse very comfortably in with verse 20 where the Church stretches out her hand to the poor and the needy.

You may ask do we get anything in return? It is not a question we should really be asking if we are doing God's work but as finite human beings with limited perception of God's ways we do and the answer is partly here **Verse 25:** Strength and honour *are* her clothing; and she shall rejoice in time to come.

The honour comes from Christ and she, his Bride, the Church, will rejoice in time to come on that final day when she is called up to be with him forever more to go to the marriage feast.

If the Church has not that strength and honour as her clothing she will not be able to enter in, it is her clothing it is what she puts on and it needs to be

the right sort of clothing and we can only get that from our scriptures. Yes the Scripture does say that Christ will build his Church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it, we are to be on guard as individuals and as the Church, (1 Peter 5:8) but let us remember that each one of us who profess to be followers of Christ are a part of that Church, we are the living stones who build up that spiritual house (1 Peter 2:5) which is the Church and we as individual members of that body are also called by Christ the head of the Church to be clothed in the appropriate garment so that we will be included in the marriage feast, we see that described to us in the parable of the wedding garment in Matthew 22.

Verse 26: She openeth her mouth with wisdom; and in her tongue *is* the law of kindness.

Well there is very little that we can say about that because it is pretty well self-explanatory opening your mouth with wisdom, wisdom from the Scriptures. We are told in another chapter of Proverbs to seek wisdom, to seek after it, to pursue it and if we do that then we will certainly be able to open our mouth with wisdom the wisdom that God gives, we get that wisdom by meditating on the word and listening to our brothers and sisters, listening to our ministers and taking heed of what they say so that we as the Church may open our mouth with wisdom.

We get that wisdom from God and his word.

The latter part of the verse speaks of the tongue and Scripture has much to say about the tongue and it certainly does not have the law of kindness in it if it is not controlled by God, many verses would point this out and yet also many verses point out how the use of the tongue can be a blessing, it is interesting to do a word study of the word tongue in Scripture and understand both the good and evil that it can be used for but here it speaks of the law of kindness being in her tongue.

The law of kindness I believe is what is portrayed in Matthew 19:19, Love thy neighbour as thyself.

How much greater kindness can we show? It is the 2nd greatest commandment the law of kindness to love thy neighbour as thyself.

Verse 27: She looketh well to the ways of her household, and eateth not the bread of idleness.

I think this possibly pertains more to those in ministry and I'm sure that your ministers here look well indeed to the ways of the household of God, you individually, as a fellowship, that is the household of God don't ever forget it and allow your ministers to serve you, after all you are all part of the family of God as the songwriter says, that is what they have been called to do by God they are servants to the people as Christ saw himself as a servant and I'm sure that they look well after your souls and that they have your welfare at heart for which they will be called to account.

So I plead with you that if there are times when you are not comfortable with what they say or require of you that you go away and pray about it and not go away and grumble to somebody else. You need to support them in prayer and in telling them and thanking them for looking well after your soul and welfare.

I'm sure that each one of the ministers here does not eat the bread of idleness when it comes to ministering God's word to you it is a very onerous task I'm sure and I'm fairly sure of how some must feel when Sunday comes around again and again and again and again and it never stops coming every week and yet his commitment is that he looks well after the household that has been appointed to him to by God.

Now something for the rest of the family of God's Church, the children of God so to speak,

Verse 28: Her children arise up, and call her blessed; her husband *also*, and he praiseth her.

Here is an instruction to us, the ones who make up the Church this family of God the Bride of Christ, we are the children and we need to call the Church blessed and hold it up as blessed, we need to bless our ministers, we need to bless each other and give praise where praise is due, let's remember a word of encouragement does far more good when someone is doing their best then a word of discouragement, remember Proverbs 25:11, A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in pictures of silver.

And then it goes on to say that her husband, who as we said before portrays Christ, He praises her, what a wonderful thing that Christ, Jesus Christ can call his Church blessed and that He praises her by extending his mercy and blessings to her,

Let us make sure that we are worthy of his praise and commendation, we need to work at that and I know that there have been and continue to be

times in my life when I've read this or other portions of Scripture that I truly tremble at the thought of standing before God because I have not honoured him, blessed him, in the way that I should because of my actions or forgetfulness.

What about achievements? Are there any? We all like to do and achieve.

Verse 29: Many daughters have done virtuously, but thou excellest them all.

I see that word daughters as speaking about the children of God, his sons and daughters, 2 Corinthians 6:18, it is speaking about us individually but also collectively, when human beings have children they call them sons and daughters, when new believers are added to the Church they then too take up the title of sons and daughters as the case may be.

Please note that it says many have done virtuously so conversely it appears that some have not done so, which one am I, which one are you?

We can praise and worship God but what He is looking for is a Church, not individuals per se, He is looking for his Church to be his Bride and when we read the Book of Revelations and the warnings that are given to the churches there I suggest that we need to read them regularly and see where we fit in and when we see our standing in light of that to then make a determination to heed the words of the Christ to the churches, he that has an ear let him hear what the Spirit says unto the churches, that's us, and then do what it says next which is that he that overcomes will be given to eat of the tree of life which is in the midst of the paradise of God, Revelation 2:8.

In this next to last verse we see a warning about deception and its alternative which we do well to heed

Verse 30: Favour *is* deceitful, and beauty *is* vain: *but* a woman *that* feareth the LORD, she shall be praised.

There are many churches out there, you're probably acquainted with the term mega church, that believe they are really blessed by God because they are so prosperous in the material sense, they are prosperous in the numbers of people that attend their church. They think they are being favoured by God because they have large numbers of people attending, because of the many thousands of dollars that come in as tithes and offerings, the businesses that they run make money, they dress it up, it looks nice, and that is

how people get drawn in and deceived, apparent favour and the trappings that go with it are displays of vanity and ultimately deceitful.

God forbid that we should even contemplate that for ourselves as a way of honouring God.

And I think the words in 2 Timothy 3:13 and Titus 3:3 would be an applicable description for this state of affairs.

But then in the latter part of this verse we have the opposite of this, we have this woman that portrays the Bride of Christ as someone who fears the Lord and obviously this is someone who has begun their relationship with Jesus Christ with wisdom by fearing the Lord, Proverbs 9:10. Let us keep this in mind and be those who fear the Lord as individuals and as a Church let us fear the Lord and do his will so that we will hear those words of welcome that Jesus speaks to those on his right hand in Matthew 25:34 rather than those words of rejection that he spoke in Luke 13:27 depart from me ye workers of iniquity.

Let us never ever get to the stage where we put our primary focus on financial success, nice buildings, the praise of men, the satisfying of the flesh, thinking that this indicates the favour of God on us and see them as the blessings that God has for us in this life but more particularly lay up those treasures in heaven so that we can be with him for ever as his Bride.

And now in this last verse we could say there is the reward for the faithful bride of Christ, his Church.

Verse 31: Give her of the fruit of her hands; and let her own works praise her in the gates.

Do you know about the fruits of the Church, what are they?

The fruits of the Church are seen in an increase in the people that come to the Lord.

The fruits of the Church are seen in the safekeeping of those who have chosen to enter it.

The fruits of the Church are seen in the way that you live your life in public and in private.

The fruits of the Church are the examples that you give to others and your witness of Christ in the world.

Contrariwise our self-made fruits self-gratifying fruits, the fruits of our hands are self-praise or self-exaltation, your actions and the way that you live, your business dealings and the many other things that promote self.

The fruits of the Church are the opposite of that and let those works, those fruits, praise her, the Church who is the bride of Christ, in the gates, in the world, in our communities, in our lives.

Let us be an example to the world around us which is certainly not in need of the fruit brought forth from covetous hearts but rather it is in great and desperate need for the fruits of the Church delivered through the hands and efforts of those who make up the Church, the Bride of Christ, the time will come when the world will take not be a partaker of the rewards meted out the Church, the Bride of Christ, comprised of His saints in the final judgement, Matthew 25:31-46.

We have briefly spoken here of how the Church is portrayed in our text verses and I put this one question to you:

Am I or is the church that I am in is it the Bride of Christ or are we prostituting ourselves?

We can be one or the other and in our ungodly world full of temptations to the flesh and bodily appetites it is easy to slide into the harlotry that is spoken of in Scripture.

How we answer that question and the position we choose will determine our final and eternal destination.

J.v.L



THE BRIDEGROOM, THE BRIDE, AND THE WEDDING

Most of us show keen interest when we hear of a newly-planned marriage. According to the scriptures, there is a great marriage coming. Revelation 19:7 tells us, "For the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready." The Word of God speaks clearly of the church as the Bride of Christ.

My thought for this writing has been to bring it more closely to us as individuals. It is more natural for a woman to think of herself as a bride than a man, but in the spiritual realm, it becomes applicable to a man, also.

How does a bride prepare, and where are her interests? Does not her heart, after a soul search, begin to give her full attention to her heart's love? She becomes single-minded. Whatever her interests and plans may have been, they are discontinued for the one purpose of becoming united in one with the man who has become the love of her life.

After God had created the world and placed trees, birds, fish, cattle, and creeping things in it, He made man. When He had made man, He saw that it was not good for man to be alone. To prepare Adam a soul mate, God caused a deep sleep to fall upon him, and He took one of his ribs, of which He made a woman. In Eden, there was full communion with Christ.

When man sinned through disobedience, this union was severed, leaving Christ without this union. Christ, the Son, continually seeks a bride who will give Him full allegiance. The price paid by Christ to purchase His bride was much beyond a rib. It took the agony of Gethsemane, bearing the weight of our sin, and the final outpouring of the blood of the Son of God to purchase His bride.

When Jesus returned to Heaven (Acts 1:9-11), those who witnessed His ascension were told that in like manner as He ascended, He would return. The apostles and others frequently mentioned His return and their anticipation of His coming.

When God calls, convicts, and invites, and one responds in true repentance, he becomes a new creature in Christ Jesus. "Old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new" (2 Corinthians 5:17). When this encounter with God is experienced, we have become engaged to the true heavenly Bridegroom. He is Lion of the tribe of Judah, the bright and morning Star, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. He is worthy of honor and praise. "Saying with a loud voice, Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing" (Revelation 5:12). When this transaction is complete, we, His bride, are sealed with a seal unto eternal life and final marriage when Christ returns (2 Corinthians 1:22; Ephesians 1:13-14). This seal is broken only when the bride breaks the covenant and promise; this can be compared to an engagement.

This is where the battle for the bride's allegiance comes into full focus.

Jesus faced Satan, the tempter, immediately after His baptism, for forty days and forty nights in the desert wilderness. This same archenemy becomes a suitor to win the bride from Christ.

Beloved ones, how are we faring in this last and perilous time? Jesus clearly warns about the deceitfulness of riches. He made it very plain that you cannot serve two masters. You cannot serve God and money (Matthew 6:24).

The Church, through the Word of God, the preaching of the Word, spirited articles to the Messenger of Truth, her counseling brethren, etc., continues to warn and lift concern for our spiritual well-being. The vision of the church of God, her doctrine, her discipline, and true justification is being challenged.

Beloved brides, where is the love that we had at first? (Revelation 2:4-5). "Nevertheless when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?" (Luke 18:8) was Jesus' question. The changing fashions of this world find their way into our midst much too quickly. How it must grieve our Bridegroom, Jesus, when He sees us so easily overcome by them. Most fashions and worldly trends are designed in the councils of evil by Satan and his advocates. Most have sensual connotations, such as, shadow beards, low-cut trousers for men, revealing clothes, high-heeled shoes, etc. for women. Materialism, covetousness, and the resulting affluence have blurred our vision of modesty and simplicity.

Matthew 25:1-13 records an account that Jesus told. There were ten virgins. Five were wise, and five were foolish. While the Bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept. When the Bridegroom appeared, they who were ready went in with Him to the marriage, and the door was shut.

To those many, who are faithful and unworldly, be courageous. The flood that Satan spews out into the world is unable to harm those who are safe in the arms of Jesus. Jesus' promise in Matthew 10:22, and many other promises in His Word, give clear hope for those who endure.

"And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband" Revelation 21:2.

Are we looking to that final wedding with the hope of being a pure bride, or are we flirting with the world?

Brother Orville From: The Messenger of Truth Gospel Publishers Moundridge Kansas

THE PRACTICAL SIDE OF CHRISTIAN VICTORY

Practical: concerned with actual facts and real life, not theory; appropriate, sensible, and likely to be effective; plain, functional, and suitable for everyday use (Encarta Dictionary). This definition describes an aspect of Christian life that is easily overlooked.

Walking in the footsteps of Christ Jesus and giving heed to the Word is Christian living. One may think of that in a theological way, or as consisting of "experiences," but miss the practical side. There are indicators that too many believers are not seeing the practical aspect of happy Christian living.

In sharing about Christian faith and life, the discussion can sometimes revolve around the fine points of doctrinal understanding. If done in sincerity and truth, this is good and can be edifying. However, if it doesn't lead to a practical application, it is of little value.

Or, an "experience" mind-set may define one's concept of the Christian walk. "Experiences" are often heart-warming and inspirational, but they are not the essence of Christian living. The beautiful fruit of bearing the image of Christ is more readily found in the valleys and plains of life, not on the mountain tops.

The Scriptures say nothing about "experiences" in the context of how we commonly use the word. The forefathers' writings contain little or nothing of such a concept of spiritual living. Real life teaches that the keeping power of experiences is often short lived; regardless of how inspirational or impressive they may have been at the time. A witness to this is Peter's outstanding experience of assaying to walk on the water and Jesus needing to rescue him. Not too far down the road, Peter failed utterly by denying the very One who had lifted him up and walked with him to the ship. The blessings of discipleship and victory over sin are best served by giving heed to the practical exhortations set forth in the Scriptures, and in one sense, by walking in that way is the best of all experiences.

The aspect of experiences puts emphasis on the gracious and miraculous intervention of God in man's behalf. This makes an experience outstanding in one's mind, which is entirely right and good and redounds to God's honour and glory. Repentance of one's sins is by "the goodness of God" (Romans 2:4). That is an experience of the Holy Spirit's power. Receiving the forgiveness and remission of sins, or the new birth, is about God's mercy and grace; this is the foundational experience. Sanctification and consecra-

tion also have an element of experience. But when the Lord says, "Now, take up your cross, and follow Me," the focus shifts from experience to practical application of the Word. In so doing, the secret of victory and perseverance is found.

Chapter six of Romans provides an example of the practical dimension. The Apostle begins by setting forth the theological points of being baptized with Jesus' baptism of suffering and the old man being thus buried with Him. Upon that, one resurrects with Christ Jesus unto newness of life. These are deep spiritual truths, and one desires the revelation of the Holy Spirit to better understand them. But then Paul comes into the practical part of his teaching:

"Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Romans 6: 11). The word reckon stands out. Other translations say, "Consider yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin." This indicates a continued action of the will and thought, which establishes a set of the mind and heart. The Apostle is saying, "Being as you have experienced the grace of God and have identified with Christ's suffering, death, and resurrection, now consider yourselves to be dead unto sin." He says nothing of an emotional or dramatic experience that would leave one in awe with hardly any temptation, but only "consider yourselves dead—dead indeed—to sin." That's practical. God only knows how many are waiting for an experience to place them above sin, when the Holy Ghost says, "Don't wait for that; you reckon yourself dead indeed unto sin and then walk accordingly." God honours such reckoning and gives the needed grace; this is not just the so-called power of positive thinking.

The Scripture continues in this line of thought: "Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof" (Romans 6:12). Again the needed action of the will is notable—decision and determination are called for. As though Paul was pressed to make the point beyond refute, he further says, "Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin, but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God. For sin shall not have dominion over you" (Romans 6: 13-14).

Where can one find a clearer, simpler, everyday recipe for victorious Christian living than this? The Great Apostle says nothing of experiences such as some today are wont to seek. His emphasis is on the practical side:

"appropriate, sensible, and likely to be effective." In our customary revival efforts, experiences are often related, and some brothers and sisters can even be anxious about having an experience. Not minimizing the blessing of any experience, one does wonder if heart-felt expressions in line with Paul's practical points would not bear more fruit unto holiness in the long run.

Readers will perceive that the practical side of Christian victory leads into Jesus' teaching of self-denial. "And when he had called the people unto him with his disciples also, he said unto them, Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me" (Mark 8:34). The gospel message is that there is power in Jesus' blood unto "the double cure." Christ taught the way of salvation in simple terms; He was the most practical teacher of all teachers. He didn't say that believers would need many experiences along the way in order to follow Him. He only said, "Deny yourselves and take up your cross, and follow Me."

Living the practical way is hard on the flesh; the way of the cross is not an easy road. The practical way and the way of the cross go together. One could suspect that some desire experiences with the mindset that then the way would be easier; then they would have sufficient strength to endure.

"But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength;
 They shall mount up with wings as eagles;
 They shall run, and not be weary;
 And they shall walk, and not faint"
 Isaiah 40:31

From: The Messenger of Truth Gospel Publishers Moundridge Kansas



HOLINESS

Christ will be master of the heart,
Sin must be mortified.
If your life is unholy, then your heart is unchanged,
And you are an unsaved person.
The Saviour will sanctify His people, renew them,
Give them a hatred of sin, and a love of holiness.
Grace that does not make a man better than others
Is a worthless counterfeit.
Christ saves His people, not IN their sins,
But FROM their sins.
Without holiness, no man shall see the Lord.
—*Charles Spurgeon*

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