

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

Evening, and morning, and at noon, will I pray, and cry aloud:
And He shall hear my voice.

Psalm 55:17

An integral part of our Christian life must be prayer, it has been said that prayer is the Christian's vital breath and we offer this hymn written by George McDonald as an encouragement to start our day with prayer.

Morning Hymn

Oh Lord of life, Thy quickening voice awakes my morning song!
In gladsome words I would rejoice that I to Thee belong.

I see Thy light, I feel Thy wind; the world, it is Thy word;
Whatever wakes my heart and mind, Thy presence is, my Lord

The living soul which I call me doth love and long to know;
It is a thought of living Thee, nor forth of Thee can go.

Therefore I choose my highest part and turn my face to Thee;
Therefore I stir my inmost heart to worship fervently.

Lord, let me live and will this day – keep rising from the dead;
Lord, make my spirit good and joyous – give me my daily bread.

Within my heart speak Lord; speak on, my heart alive to keep,
Till comes the night and, labour done, in Thee I fall asleep.

*From "Discovering the Character of God" Bethany House Publishers, 1989.
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From the Pulpit

What Shall We Say Then –
Part 3 of 4 – The Book of Romans
Linford Berry – 2014

Sweet are the promises, kind is the Word,
Dearer far than any message man ever heard.
Pure was the mind of Christ, sinless I see;
He the great example is and pattern for me!

Indeed sweet are the promises and we can trust Christ, but did you ever think about what it takes for us to trust God, what it takes for us to be able to trust He will fulfil his promises, have you ever thought about that? We are going to think about that, we are going to see what God himself says about that in our message today.

What kind of God does He have to be in order for us to be able to trust his promises, in order for us to be able to follow him unreservedly, what kind of God are we talking about?

These are the kinds of questions the apostle Paul asks and answers in Romans chapters 9, 10 and 11, and that is where we are today in our sermon series on the book of Romans. As we begin I think it would be good for us to look back a bit and see where these 3 chapters this morning fit into the whole book.

The book of Romans is written to the Christians in Rome, these Christians had never had the benefit of direct apostolic teaching, they had not had the benefit of the apostle Paul visiting with them and preaching to them, walking with them and teaching them as he had so many other churches, instead they had the Old Testament, they had at least part of scriptures, undoubtedly they had some believers there who had come from Jerusalem who had been witnesses to what had happened in the life of Jesus and the death and resurrection of Christ and so they knew enough, they had enough infor-

mation to be Christians, they knew about Jesus, they knew what He had done and they trusted him.

But Paul is writing this letter to them as an extended explanation of the Gospel and perhaps he is writing to encourage them I'm sure, probably he is also writing to kind of fill in some of the details that they might be missing and he is certainly writing to answer some of their questions.

These Christians in Rome were probably primarily Gentiles and probably also quite a few, or some of them, believing Jews in the church at Rome. In the first couple of chapters of the book of Romans Paul demonstrates how all people, including the Jews, are unrighteous apart from God, both Jews and Gentiles need the same Gospel.

Now certainly the Jews did have some initial advantage, they were the ones through whom Christ had been revealed to the world, they were the ones through whom God had chosen to reveal himself, but that advantage didn't make them less sinful or more holy. Then the apostle goes to great lengths in chapters 3, 4 and 5 to show that the righteousness that God requires only comes through faith in him.

And this is the way it always was and always has been even with Abraham, this is how Abraham was counted righteous before God.

In chapters 5, 6 and 7 Paul explains how this faith and righteousness work, how does this work? And he goes into detail about that and as we looked at in the first message of this series he talks about how we partake of union with Christ, we become dead to our sinful state and would become alive in Christ, but then there is still bit of an interface this dilemma that we face between our mortal bodies, the flesh, and our spirit which is made alive in Christ and how this is going to work out itself in our lives as we are not yet fully glorified. Romans chapter 7 and into chapter 8 talks about this, chapter 8 is probably the high watermark of this entire Epistle, the apostle gives us a beautiful description of the promises of God that are ours through Christ and what beautiful promises they are, sweet are the promises. Yes they are.

Then we come to chapters 9 through 11 and it seems like the apostle changes gears here, we will look at this more closely this morning, then

following chapters 9 through 11 we have the chapters outlining the practical outworking of the Gospel in our daily lives, how this does affect the way we live day to day with each other in our world and so this is the end of the Gospel in terms of the outworking of it.

Some of you I know that is what you are waiting for, you just can't wait until we get to the practical section of Romans, you want the apostle Paul to tell you what to do, you don't have much use for all this debatable theology and long explanations.

Well not so fast, let me remind you of a few things.

First of all the practical outworkings of the Gospel are of very little value without an understanding of the Gospel, without an appreciation for the Gospel. So if you want chapters 12 through 16 then you have to have chapters 1 through 11 otherwise everything you do in chapters 12 through 16 is empty and void of any lasting value.

Well you say then just give me chapter 8; I can deal with chapter 8.

All right, chapter 8 is beautiful, it is encouraging, it is promising and we can resonate with that.

Well let me attempt today to show you how the promises in chapter 8 depend on chapters 9 through 11.

The promises in chapter 8 are not very sweet, they are not very good unless we have a God who is good, a God who is true, a God who is sovereign, a God who is all powerful, otherwise those promises are worthless.

You see in chapter 8 we have all these great and precious promises regarding the work of Christ on our behalf from eternity past to eternity future, if we come to him in faith we can experience and participate in these blessings.

But the Christians, to whom Paul is writing, they had read the Old Testament, they had heard about God's chosen people the Jews, they had read all the promises that God had made, all the blessings that He had promised the Jews, his chosen people, then they looked around and they saw that the Jews were not being blessed the way God had promised, in fact it looked as if those promises were empty, it looked as if they had failed.

So how were they going to believe these new promises that the Apostle Paul was giving them in Romans chapter 8?

And what was going on with the Jews anyway, weren't they God's chosen people, so why are they still in their sins, why do they not believe? Perhaps there were some believing Jews in Rome, as I have already said, perhaps they were a little bit miffed as to why these Gentiles were getting all these blessings and yet the Jews are not, God's own chosen people shouldn't they be receiving the blessings?

And so this is the context for these next 3 chapters and I'm going to read all three chapters, 9, 10 and 11 and then I am going to make some comments but before I read I think it would be helpful to us to keep a few other things in mind to prepare us as we hear the Word of God.

Before we read let me say first of all it is so important that we let these texts of Scripture, these chapters, we let them say what they want to say, we have to approach the Word of God with humility, we have to approach the Word of God with the attitude of yes Lord, yes. We must try to approach the text of Scripture, all Scripture, with this honest willingness to hear and understand.

Now it is our temptation, our inclination to bring out preconceived ideas and understandings to the text and then read it in light of what we already know.

Let's try not to do that this morning.

Secondly let's keep in mind that there are lots of implications that we will not have time to unpack or explore this morning, this is very rich text, okay, there are lots of things here that we could spend a lot of time on but we don't have time for that this morning and even if we did have time for it I still don't think we could unpack it all. Why? Because this is bigger than us.

So you are going to have to be okay with that, with reading this and not understanding everything.

You must be willing to rest and trust God with some of these things, you don't have to have it all figured out, you may trust that God does have it all figured out.

So don't trust in your own ability to make sense of it all.

Thirdly it is often a temptation when we run into some of the hard teachings in these passages to dismiss them or to disregard them because they

don't fit with our view of who God is, Surely God couldn't do that? No, God isn't like that!

Well let me remind you, you are not God, and He is.

And secondly He has revealed himself to us and this is part of his revelation.

Remember one other thing this isn't a God who is aloof, this isn't a God who sits in some heavenly mansion far removed from the reality of his people and his created world and who capriciously or arbitrarily issues commands and judgements.

No, this is a God who has entered our world, this is a God who came and lived with us and walked with us and died for us, this is a God who loves us, this is a God who loves us to the extent that He gave of himself for us, this is a God who cares deeply. He is a God who knows how it is, He is a God who cares, who knows, who loves, who acts accordingly.

So before you charge God with being unjust or cruel or arbitrary think who you are talking about.

(Reads Chapters 9, 10 & 11 – not published here for brevity's sake)

Having read chapters 9, 10 & 11 of Romans ought to cause you to worship that is the only proper response.

Now I realise we don't have much time left to unpack all of this but I think it is important for us to have the weight of this text to come to bear on us but this morning here is what we are going to do in the time that we have left, we are going to go through these 3 chapters and are going to note the places where the apostle answers objections, where he answers questions.

In quite a few places he writes “what shall we say then” or “but how” or “I ask then” and as he has done so many times before in this book the apostle anticipates questions, he anticipates the objections and he takes them head on. And I think by looking at these objections, by looking at these questions we can more clearly understand the point he is trying to make otherwise the objections or the questions would be irrelevant but we can see through the questions, see through the objections what he is really getting at. And so that's what we are going to do today we are just going to take

all these, I think there are about 11 of them, and we are just going to go through them one at a time.

So the first question, and the first question is not stated in this way but I believe this is how it goes, so if the Israelites had all of these promises, they had this list here in chapter 9 verse 4 and following, if the Israelites had all of these promises of God how come they are not experiencing them? How come they are not being made effective in their life?

And the underlying question is so has the word of God failed, have the promises of God failed, is that what has happened here?

And the apostle Paul says no, that's not what has happened here. But you have to understand Paul says is that not all the physical descendants of Israel, not all the Jews by flesh, by birth, are the real Israel. No, the real Israel are children of the promise, the ones whom God has said you shall be born as He said about Isaac.

Not all of the descendants of any of the Old Testament fathers were children of the promise, so not all of Abraham's children were children of the promise, remember there is Ishmael, also a son of Abraham; he wasn't a child of the promise.

And then there were Jacob and Esau, and Jacob was the child of promise and Esau wasn't even though they had the same father.

And so what he is pointing to here is that your lineage doesn't matter, who you are a descendant of doesn't matter, that doesn't bring you any special favour with God. No, what brings you favour with God is if you are a child of the promise. The only people who are God's people are the ones of the promise and so there is the Israel who are Israel by the flesh but then there are the true Israel who are Israel by the promise.

And now you say, wait a minute here, wait a minute, and the apostle Paul he anticipates this objection and he says, What shall we say then, verse 14, is God unjust?

This doesn't sound right to us does it, is God unjust, this isn't fair.

Well let me ask you, do you really want fair, do you really want what is fair, do you really want justice? Then none of us would receive anything but the wrath of God. The apostle Paul has already made that very clear, all of us, Jew, Gentile, all of us are subject to the wrath of God.

So we don't want fair, we need mercy, and he says here God has mercy on some, now this isn't fair, remember we don't want fair, but it is just, and here is why it is just and here is what he says: If God's mercy depended on something that we have done to deserve it, if God's mercy depended on who we were related to and then He did not show us mercy He would be unjust.

But because God's mercy depends not on our will, not on our efforts, not on who we are related to then He can be just, and He is just in showing mercy to whomever He wills because it does not depend on who we are related to and it doesn't depend on what we have done to try and earn favour with him.

So He is just and showing mercy to some and letting others go their way to destruction.

But then there is a 2nd objection that comes quickly on the heels of the first, why does He still find fault? verse 19.

Okay, so God chooses whom He will show mercy to, okay, then why does He still blame me for my choices and my actions?

And the apostle realises that this is going to be the objection; this is going to be the question, so he deals with it head on and says, Who are you O man to talk back to God? Who are you anyway and who made you anyway? And if God made you and holds you responsible for your choices and actions then who are you to disagree with Him?

And he goes on to explain; don't you see how He can use those whom He has created to accomplish his purposes? He has that right, He can take out of the same lump clay and He can make different kinds of clay pots and some of them can be used for very honourable purposes and others for more ordinary purposes, that is his prerogative because He is God.

Maybe He wants to use the Jews and their rejection of himself to accomplish the salvation of the Gentiles, that is the right of God to do that.

In all of this we must depend on God, we must trust him, we dare not second-guess or judge God, He has a plan for all of this and for all his people.

Hosea and Isaiah these Old Testament prophets they realised this they saw that unless God would work through the children of the promise we would all be like Sodom and Gomorrah, unless God would act, unless God would promise we would all be subject to destruction like Sodom and Gomorrah.

And then the prophets went on to acknowledge that not all the descendants of Abraham were really sons of God and God was using some of them to raise up other sons who were not physical descendants of Abraham.

And so the question comes then in verse 30 of chapter 9, What shall we say then? What are we going to do with this?

We can see that only those who have faith in God will be righteous, if we attempt to be in God's family by our lineage or by our attempts at obedience to the law we will not succeed, only those who believe in Christ will be saved. This is the way it has always been, this is the way it will always be for Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes. Chapter 10 verse 4.

But then another question comes immediately, So what does this faith consist of, what is the message?

Well the message is this – if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead you will be saved.

This applies to everyone, Jew and Gentile, Greek and Pagan, American and Chinese, everyone who believes in him, everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved, this offer is extended to everyone, the only people who will be saved are those who trust God and submit to his Lordship and believe that what He has done is sufficient for our salvation.

But then the 4th question, Okay, okay but how are we, how are they to call on him if we don't actually believe, how are we going to call on him if we don't actually believe and how are we going to believe unless we hear?

In other words how are they going to get this promise so that they can believe and trust? This isn't fair is it, God is saying that you cannot be saved unless you respond to this message but how are we going to get the message?

Well we depend on God again, we depend on God.

Notice how this works, (chapter 10 verse 14) How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? How do they believe in him of whom they have not heard? How are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent?

And who does the sending? It's God, it is God who sends the prophets, it is God who sent his Son, it is God who sent the Apostles, it is God even today who sends missionaries and preachers and evangelists.

This all goes back to God. God has appointed messengers to deliver this news and He works in our heart so that this message takes roots, these are the means that God has chosen by which to bring the Word to bear on the hearts of those who will believe.

But here comes the 3rd objection. Okay but obviously not everybody that hears believes. Right, we know that, you can preach to the sinner until you're blue in the face but it doesn't mean he is going to believe.

So is there something wrong with the Word of God, is there something wrong with the message, is God not powerful? No, no.

How about the Jews? I mean the evidence here is that the Jews have the advantage, the Jews of all people ought to be believing. Maybe they didn't understand it maybe that is what the problem is, verse 19, did Israel not understand, I mean why have they rejected God? They heard yes, it says they heard and the words of God went to the ends of the world. So not hearing was not the issue.

Maybe the issue was the not understanding it. No that's not the issue either. They understood it, they heard it they understood it but what happened? They were disobedient, they were contrary, they said I don't want it, I'm not going to obey, I'm not going to listen.

So they rejected the word of God and it indicates here in verse 20 that there were others outside of the physical Israel who were actually seeking the Word, they were actually seeking out the prophets even while God's own people were rejecting him.

So it was in a matter of understanding because these other people came and they understood and they believed.

So what does this all mean?

Chapter 11, I ask then so does this mean that God has rejected his people? Is that what this means?

By no means! God forbid! No it doesn't mean that.

God still has a people, the apostle Paul says I am proof that God has not rejected his people, I am an Israelite, I am of the tribe of Benjamin, in other

places he talks about himself as an Israelite of the Israelites, I'm still here, God has not rejected his people!

And then he recounts the account of Elijah who had similar questions, God what have you done, they have killed all your prophets, there is nobody left but me! And God comes and says no, I have kept a remnant, I have kept for myself seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to Baal.

God is faithful, God is faithful to his people, God still has his people.

True Israel is still obeying God, true Israel is still trusting God. Remember not all of the descendants of Israel are children of the promise, all through history God has had his people, so it's says those whom God has foreknown, those whom He has chosen those have been his people even to the present time, it says in verse 5 there is a remnant chosen by grace.

Now this isn't based on whether one person is more righteous than another in their own effort, this is based on the grace of God.

Those who are the true Israel, those who trusted God by faith have always received the promise and blessings of God, God's promises have never failed for those who have trusted in him, ever!

And those who were not true Israel those who have rejected God have continued in their sin and disobedience and are subject to the wrath of God.

Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. It is that certainty, it is that promise and it is that understanding of the sovereignty of God that empowers us and motivates us to pray for lost souls. Why would you ever pray for someone to be saved if you did not think God was capable of saving them? Why would you ever go preach or teach or evangelise if you didn't think that God was capable of saving those people when they heard his word.

God has always blessed, God has always fulfilled his promises to those who have been obedient to the faith.

So then another implication comes, another question comes.

So these non-remnant, the not true Israel ones, did they stumble just so that they would fall, is that all this is about? So they tripped and they fell just so

that they could fall, is that the end of their purpose is that all they are good for? No.

What is the purpose of God in all of this? Even those children of the flesh God has used for his good purposes it says here that in the failure and disobedience of the Jews God has brought salvation to the Gentiles. And He has done this, and notice how this is, this is beautiful, so in the fall, in the stumbling of the non-Israel of Israel, the not true Israel, in their stumbling in their falling the Gospel is made known to the Gentiles and because of that Gospel being made known to the Gentiles the Jews become jealous and they are drawn back to God.

Who else could have thought up something like this? This is beautiful. God has done this, God has used the failure and the disobedience of the Jews to bring salvation to the Gentiles, He has brought salvation to the Gentiles to make Israel jealous so they will be motivated to turn back to God.

Now if, if their rejection of the Gospel as it says here in verse 12, if their rejection of the gospel has done all this imagine what their inclusion will do, imagine then how it will be when they are restored, if God can use the failures and disobedience and falling and stumbling of the descendants of Abraham imagine what He can do with their obedience, imagine what He can do when they are included.

Another question. Now you mean to tell me as a Gentile the reason I am saved is because some Jew did not believe, that is what you are saying right? The reason I as a Gentile can believe is because some Jew didn't? Well not exactly.

And there is this long section here in chapter 11 about this grafting process.

Now some of you are more agriculturally minded than others you understand how this is but basically when you graft something you break off a branch of a tree, you might cut it off, but in any case you take a branch from another tree, it might be totally unrelated, and you splice it in to the place you have prepared, you wrap it up and then sap begins to flow from this trunk or this main branch into this grafted on branch and it becomes fastened to the tree, it becomes a part of the tree.

It is amazing, who would have ever thought about something like that.

But this is how God works.

And so He works with his people, it is true that because the branches of unbelieving Israelites were broken off that it did make a place where as a Gentile we could be grafted into the tree but He says be careful and don't be proud about this, okay, remember it is always unbelief and disobedience that gets the branches broken off, always, and it is always faith that fastens the branches to the tree.

That is the only way it works.

So if God didn't spare the natural branches when they didn't believe neither will He spare you, you are the wild branch that has been grafted in, if God didn't spare the natural branch when they became disobedient and unbelieving and He broke them off yes you can be sure He is going to do the same with you even though He took you and grafted you in, if you are not going to believe you can be broken off just like they were.

And if through the mercy and grace of God those broken off branches, notice what he says here in verse 23 of chapter 11, and even if they, the broken off branches do not continue in their unbelief they will be grafted in, God is going to graft them in, He has the power to do so. And actually by the way they are actually the natural branches so they are even going to be a better fit then you are, okay.

But what is all this going to depend on?

All of this is going to depend on the power of God; God has the power to graft them in again.

Guess what, a branch cannot graft itself, never, this is a super natural work of God that must graft the branch in, He can do that with unbelieving Israel, He can do that with Gentiles but it is the same power of God that must work to graft either the wild olive tree or the natural olive tree.

So don't think you're so smart, don't think you have it all figured out, don't think you can do this in your own power.

Remember God is still at work even with unbelieving Israel, they have the same opportunity, they have the same responsibility as you do.

Remember at one time you too were disobedient, at one time you too were unbelieving and how did you come into the family of God?

It is only by the mercy and grace of God, it wasn't because you are smart, it wasn't because you are good, it wasn't because you were related to somebody. No, the only way you have come into the family of God is by the call and mercy of God himself.

All of us it says here by nature are disobedient, God has consigned us all to disobedience, verse 32, so that He may have mercy.

And so we are obligated, we are obligated to humility, we are obligated to respect, we are obligated to awe, and our response must be the response of the apostle Paul.

When we get here to the end of this weighty section in the book of Romans and we are wrestling with some of these uncomfortable truths about God, wrestling with some of the uncomfortable realities of who we are, what are we going to do, what are we going to say then?

You see the bottom line is this, the bottom line of the whole book of Romans, the bottom line of Romans 9, 10 and 11 is this: If God does not act first we are all lost, every one of us.

If God doesn't act none of us stand a chance, neither Israel nor the Gentiles, only the children of the promise, only those who believe will be saved and the only way we are going to believe is if God does something, He sent his Son to die for us, He sent his messengers to preach the Gospel, we are dependent on him.

What this should cause us to do is to worship, to throw ourselves down before a mighty and holy God, an all-powerful God, a God who can and will fulfil his promises, a God who loves us, a God who sacrificed himself for us, we must throw ourselves on his mercy and his grace.

We cannot trust ourselves, we cannot trust our lineage, our heritage, we cannot trust our abilities we must trust Him and Him alone. We can trust his great and precious promises.

We can trust his great and precious promises precisely because He is great and He is sovereign and He is powerful otherwise we could not trust him. He is powerful, He is mighty to save, we have no other option but to say what the apostle Paul says here in the last few verses of Romans chapter

11, “Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgements and how inscrutable his ways! For who has known the mind of the Lord, who has been his counsellor? Who is told him what to do? Who has given him a gift that he might be repaid?”
And the answer is nobody.

Our God is without peer, our God is God and we are not.

Everything He does, everything He says is self-existing for from him and through him and to him are all things.
To Him be glory for ever. Amen.



KNOWING HIM

What is at the core of Christian life? What best identifies the person who believes in Christ as his Saviour?

There could be many answers to these questions, and most of them would have merit. Surely one answer we should consider is that a Christian is a person who looks to Jesus for direction and who finds in Him a true example to follow. “Let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith” Hebrews 12:1-2.

A disciple of Jesus is focused on the One he is following. For him, Jesus is not the first love among many others, He is his love, and everything else is subjugated to that affection. One song composer has identified a cry common to the hearts of true Christians: Dead to every worldly pleasure, Dead indeed to sin am I; But alive to Christ my Saviour, Daily to Him I'm drawing nigh. Let me see Jesus only, Jesus only, Jesus only. . . Only He can satisfy.

When we struggle unduly with earthly desires, it may be because we do not know Jesus very well. Surely, to know Jesus as He is is to love Him.

The Apostle Paul expressed to fellow Christians at Philippi the burning purpose and desire of his life. He said, “But what things were gain to me,

those I counted loss for Christ. Yea, doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, and be found in him . . . That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death” Philippians 3:7-10. For Paul, the blessedness of knowing Jesus surpassed every other desire. All other ambitions were as rubbish in comparison to this. In that blessedness, Paul identified three outstanding components: a) Knowing Jesus, he would find the power to live a resurrected life, b) He would fellowship with Jesus in His sufferings, and c) He would experience with Jesus the death of self-life.

Most Christians would aspire to experience the power of the resurrected Lord in their lives. But to ask to fellowship in His sufferings and to be made like Him in His death may well require a deeper vision of life and its meaning. Do I really want to learn to know Jesus by sharing in His suffering and in His death? Can I really know Him unless I do? Among Christian friends, there are few things that form a deeper and longer lasting bond than shared suffering. Mutual hardships and deprivations reveal depths of love, generosity, and selflessness that were not as evident in good times. In sharing difficult circumstances, friends learn to know each other in new and deeper ways. Similarly, the believer who embraces suffering for the cause of Christ enters into a fellowship with his Master that is deeper and more fulfilling than that known before. He understands more fully, and in a more personal way, what Jesus sacrificed for his salvation. In cross bearing and self-denial, he finds his Lord very near and very real. When suffering as a disciple of Jesus, he experiences an ineffable grace and power not his own. He also feels His love and approval in ways that are deeply satisfying.

To know God and Jesus His Son is to have a relationship with them. We speak with them. We understand what they say; we feel they understand us. It is not a “buddy” relationship but one that evidences on our part deep respect, trust, and reverence. It is a relationship of openness. We can, and do, share everything we find in our hearts and minds— burdens, problems, joys, fears, victories, defeats, thanksgiving. A portion of that relationship is in Bible reading and prayer. We not only read words and mouth sentences, but we make contact with His Spirit. We want to know His will for our

lives and are listening carefully for His directives. We converse with God through the day as our thoughts remind us of Him. We sing the songs of praise, aspiration, and supplication that rise up in our hearts, and so give expression to the moving of God within us.

Knowing God means to experience something new, challenging, or rewarding each day, for we walk “in newness of life” Romans 6:4. These experiences come as God opens doors to serve Him in ways hitherto unexplored. We walk in newness as He gives us heaven’s strength to serve others and to give in ways we would have thought impossible. We know Him as we submit to His plan for our day (and to the plans of those about us) and find that His ways are better than our own. “And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent” John 17:3. Salvation and eternal life are found in knowing God and Jesus His Son. In spite of the simplicity of Jesus’ words, men do not easily come to know their Maker and Saviour. To know “the only true God” requires willingness to diligently search for Him, humility, and submission to a plan for life that includes cross bearing and self-denial.

Many people know much about God, but the record of their lives indicates they do not really know Him. Even some Christians and church members try to find a short cut to eternal life rather than learning to know the Father. Some make a great effort to do good deeds, going out of their way to help people in need. Others build their lives around the church. They serve on committees and boards, faithfully attend all church functions, liberally quote church doctrine, and, in general, uphold what they believe to be “the faith.” Some substitute knowing the right people for knowing God. They quote popular religious leaders and emulate those they believe are held in respect. Many times the lives of the people just described show little evidence of a daily contact with God or of power over self and sin. In the end, there is no substitute for knowing God and walking with Him in Spirit. Nothing else fills the void in the human heart. That walk involves knowing the “power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death.”

Oh the joy the peace, that comes in knowing
Such a friend, who leads thru
paths so dim; O how sweet the thought while I am going,
just to know I walked today with Him. *Contributed by Brother Richard.*

A LIVING FAITH

Following are some inspirations and convictions on the faith of our forefathers. This faith we sometimes refer to as the Anabaptist Faith. Jude writes in verse 3 about giving diligence and earnestly contending for the faith which was once delivered to the saints.

Among Christian circles we often hear and use the terms of being saved, becoming a Christian, being born again, and others. These statements refer to having met Jesus and having our sins forgiven through faith in His blood that He shed on the cross, thereby setting us free. It is a common understanding that the experience of forgiveness is the foundation for our salvation and the beginning of a new life in Christ. We do not want to underestimate the importance of this experience. In John 3:3, Jesus says, “Except a man is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.”

Just before Jesus returned to Heaven, He commissioned His disciples to go and teach all nations and baptize them, Matthew 28:19. In verse 20, He says, “Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you.” Are we, as believers, living up to this part of the commission, and what does this all include? As we look at the world at large, it is evident we are living in difficult times. The Bible has warned us that this is how it will be at the end of time. We are facing many challenges, and the church is trying to chart a course that will take us safely to eternity. We, as a church, are looking back to the apostles’ faith, to the historical writings of the faith of our fathers, and to the Anabaptist faith, which we could call the original faith. This is our faith, and we are endeavoring to keep it in its pure and simple form.

We also look ahead in faith, trusting in the guidance of the Holy Spirit to give us understanding, knowing that no prophecy of the Scripture is of any private interpretation, 2 Peter 1:20. We make no excuses for the human element that often hinders the work of the kingdom. This element has always been there, and will be to the end. God has promised that the gates of hell will not prevail against His church. The storms of life may rock the church, but she is a much safer haven than facing the storms of life on our own.

The true faith has upheld the teachings of the Bible as close as the church, with the guidance of the Holy Spirit, understands them. This includes sensitive issues like feet washing, the holy kiss, and giving and taking reproof as taught in Matthew 18:15. The church accepts the Bible teaching that women wear a head covering. It also accepts the Bible teaching of excommunicating the unfaithful one and avoiding him in kindness to help him see his sin. Matthew 18:18 teaches, “Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in Heaven.” Second John 10 says, “If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed.” This is the faith our martyr brethren died for and that we are endeavoring to uphold.

The Bible speaks of perilous times coming on us in the last days, Matthew 24:4-26. Jesus told His disciples, “Take heed that no man deceive you. For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many.” In verses 23 and 24 of the same chapter, He goes on to say, “Then if any man shall say unto you, Lo, here is Christ, or there; believe it not. For there shall arise many false Christs, and If it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect.” Are these the times we are living in? “Not everyone that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven” Matthew 7:21.

The church is speaking and warning about false christs and their deceptive ways. How can the true faith be known? “The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise” Psalm 51:17. Jesus said, “By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another” John 13:35. “And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers” Malachi 4:6. “And he said to them all, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me” Luke 9:23. Is not the key to avoiding deception a humble heart? Is it possible to have a love for the truth without a broken and humble heart and a teachable spirit? “Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” Matthew 5:3. “Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble. Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that

he may exalt you in due time” 1 Peter 5:5-6. “For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears” 2 Timothy 4:3. “He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal” John 12:25.

In the true faith, there is no true spiritual life without death to the flesh. Self has to die in unconditional surrender. There are many Scriptures warning us that we are in the last times and that they will be perilous times with false teachers and deceivers. The Bible speaks of Satan appearing as an angel of light offering salvation without surrendering our wills and our stubborn natures. As we yield ourselves to this way of thinking, our spiritual lives become a cross less journey with no need to crucify the flesh, and therefore allowing ourselves many liberties. When we accept this light from Satan, he gives us this world’s peace, and there is no need to surrender our wills, take up the cross, and die to self. It will also give us a renewed zeal and determination that we are walking in the true light, and we may find ourselves frustrated that others are questioning the liberties we are taking.

In Matthew 6:23, Jesus says, “If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!” “He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in him. He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked” 1 John 2:4-6. The true faith will draw us together and give us a love for one another. “If a man say, I love God, and hates his brother, he is a liar” 1 John 4:20. The light from Satan is a dividing light. He uses enough "truth to impress and convince those who give him a listening ear. “And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness” 2 Corinthians 11:14-15. Satan’s aim is to bring us into confusion, thereby separating us from one another and from the love of God. He instills in us a false security, which ends in spiritual death.

How important it is for us to remember that “we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places” Ephesians 6-12. Second Corinthians 13:5 encourages us to examine ourselves whether we are in the faith. We need to do this to prove that we are filled with the love of God, resulting in a compassionate and tender heart. This will work in us a carefulness and a desire and zeal to clear ourselves with godly fear, 2 Corinthians 7:11. We need to allow the true light of Jesus to illuminate our hearts so it can radiate the light to those around us.

Let us trust the promises of God knowing that nothing can separate us from His love if we humble ourselves and allow Him to cleanse us from our pride and self-will. A living faith, unchanging through the ages, that sets men free and brings them home to God, and crimson stains, they mark the way before us to show us where the saints of God have trod.



THIS GREAT INVITATION

“In my Father’s house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you” John 14:2.

And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely. Revelation 22:17

Early in life we begin to realize that this world is full of sin, sorrow, and suffering. With much labour, we seek for something that will bring us happiness, but the satisfaction is fleeting and leaves us with an empty heart. Then God calls us with a loving invitation. “But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the Water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life” John 4:14. This great invitation calls us to give our hearts to Jesus. Let us not squander the opportunity.

Jesus further calls all peoples to “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto

your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.” Matthew 11:28-30.

Jesus invites all who are heavy laden to come to Him. This includes the man who burdens himself with the pursuits of wealth and honour, the many who are oppressed with seeking sensual and earthly pleasures, those who labour to establish their own righteousness, the sinner heavy laden with guilt, and even the believer with his trials and burdens. Jesus invites every one to come to Him for rest. When we humbly follow Him, we will truly find rest for our soul. He will supply our every need. If we could only see the feast that is spread out for us and the pleasure at God’s right hand, we would not find it difficult to turn from our sins to take our place at the feast. The sight and sounds of the delights prepared for us would make it easy to give up the cheap things of this world. What an invitation!

The invitation from Jesus is far more important than any other invitation we will ever receive. It involves our eternal destiny. Matthew 25:31-46 tells us that the Son of man will come in all His glory to judge the world. It also says that God has prepared two eternal habitations for mankind. One is heaven, eternal bliss with God and those who have been faithful to Him. The other is hell, a place of eternal damnation and everlasting fire, inhabited by the devil and his angels. Our response to Jesus’ invitation will determine which of these places will be our destiny. God wants no one to be lost.

He sent Jesus to this world to show us the way of righteousness. He has given us the Gospels in the Bible, written by inspired men who tell what they saw and heard when Jesus was among them. When Jesus left this world, He sent the Holy Spirit to draw all men unto Him (John 15:26). God is merciful in granting us today to make our choice. Someday time will be no more. Why would we wait? Why would we reject this blessed invitation?

By His life and example, Jesus showed us the way to eternal life. Now He invites us to walk with Him in that way. What a tragedy it would be to reject so wonderful an invitation! What could stop us from accepting this beautiful plan? Did not Jesus come to this earth to rescue our souls from eternal damnation? Do we not believe that eternal fire will be our lot if we choose a selfish life of sin instead of serving him? Do we reject the prompting of the Holy Spirit because it looks too difficult to acknowledge our sins and turn from them? Do we love the things of this world so much

we cannot give them up? Surely we would not choose to be among those whom the god of this world has blinded “lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them”? 2 Corinthians 4:4.

We are called to extend God’s invitation to all as part of the great commission Jesus has entrusted to the Church, He has said: “Go then and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,²⁰ Teaching them to observe everything that I have commanded you, and behold, I am with you all the days (perpetually, uniformly, and on every occasion), to the [very] close *and* consummation of the age. *Amen (so let it be).*” Matthew 28:19-20^(AMP)



"Behold, I Come"

**"Behold, I come"—the darkness lightens
Above all sorrow and all fear;
Beyond the clouds the Daystar brightens,
And our deliverance is near;
The groaning earth awaits the hour
When all the wrongs of time are past,
And clothed with glory and with power,
The King of kings shall reign at last.
—Annie Johnson Flint**



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