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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

Freedom in Christ – Our Choice

Throughout the history of mankind, indeed since creation, man has always sought freedom from many things, poverty, hunger, slavery, oppression by others, just to name a few. The main driving force behind this quest for freedom I believe to be man's desire to be free to exercise his own will without constraint and until we come to Christ all of us desire the same to one degree or another.

The world offers many kinds of freedom to us. The flesh would ask for unfettered indulgence of our appetites. All we want, when we want it; no restraints, no limits. If it feels good, do it. That's the desire of the flesh, but that road leads to ruin. It leads to extreme selfishness and finally debauchery. It can lead to alcoholism, drug addiction, gluttony, or other excesses which finally destroy the flesh itself. In short, it leads to bondage.

But there is a better way, a more excellent way as our main message relates.

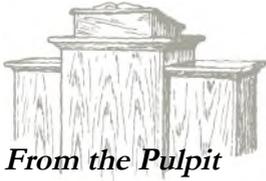
The rebellious heart of fallen man desires freedom of the will and this surely is not a more excellent way, the way to obtain real freedom, freedom in Christ, is to face the truth. In order to be able to face God, we must accept the truth about ourselves and others. God is truth and cannot abide where untruth is. This is not only the way to find God, but it is also the way to walk with Him and it takes

Our Lord's public ministry lasted only three years. Toward the end of that short time, in spite of all the wondrous works which Jesus had performed, a resistance to Him and His teachings grew and became more open. Many of those listening to Him began to believe Jesus encouraged them to be faithful, and He offered to lead them into freedom. If His disciples would live in freedom they must continue in His Word. This is more than a one-time acceptance of the Word; it means a daily walk, an abiding it is a continuing to the end of life. This brings truth, and truth brings freedom.

The freedom to choose rightly is one of God's oldest gifts to man, first given in the Garden and in my own words God said "Adam, you have a choice. You can stand tall, or you can fall. You are free."

Perhaps we could put our own name in place of Adam.

J.v.L



From the Pulpit

A More Excellent Way
Brother Fred Carpenter
Danskin Mennonite Church

The Lord gave each of us ears that hear indeed and eyes that see indeed so that we might understand the seriousness of the truth that He is presenting to us. We might realize that we have six thousand years of proof that there's one thing that is going to happen to every one of us and that is that this life is going to come to an end for us and we will be the face-to-face with our God. May God help us to grasp that truth and allow it to impress us to be serious in our relationship with the Lord as it did for Isaiah.

I invite your attention to 1 Corinthians 13, we would like to think about what the Scriptures call in the end of 1 Corinthians chapter 12, the last four words “a more excellent way.” Chapter 12 speaks about spiritual gifts then chapter 14 speaks about tongues and in both of those there is a need for us to apply the truths that we find here in these verses of chapter 13. He concludes chapter 12 with: “But covet earnestly the best gifts and yet show I unto you a more excellent way.” And then goes on to show them in chapter 13 which says:

1 Corinthians 13:1-13 (KJV)

“Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become *as* sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. ² And though I have *the gift of* prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing. ³ And though I bestow all my goods to feed *the poor*, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing. ⁴ Charity suffereth long, *and* is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, ⁵ Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; ⁶ Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; ⁷ Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. ⁸ Charity never faileth: but whether *there be* prophecies, they shall fail; whether *there be* tongues, they shall cease; whether *there be* knowledge, it shall vanish away. ⁹ For we know in part, and we prophesy in part. ¹⁰ But when that which is perfect is

come, then that which is in part shall be done away.¹¹ When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things.¹² For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known.¹³ And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these *is* charity.”

We want to notice a number of things in relation to this more excellent way of love. This word charity used in this chapter and everywhere else it's used in the New Testament (KJV) is the Greek word *agape* which refers to the divine quality of love. There is more than one word translated love many of them, or at least a number of New Testament usages of the word love, are the same as charity here, same Greek word, and we find this in Galatians 5 verse 22 where he names the fruit of the Spirit among other things he named love charity, it is this divine love which God desires to be in the lives of his children.

We would like to notice first of all the pre-eminence of love in the first 3 verses. As we note these verses we realize that there are perhaps some things here that we have never done, probably there are at least some things that all of us have done, and he points out to us the emptiness of doing them without having the love of God in our hearts.

LOVE: first of all love is the essence of God's nature. According to the Scriptures we understand that God is love, maybe we could turn briefly to 1 John 4 and notice a few verses here in Scripture that tell us what we want to understand, what love is, then we need to take a look at the love that God has for us. 1 John 4:7-10, Beloved let us love one another for love is of God and every one that loveth is born of God and knoweth God, he that loveth not knoweth not God for God is love. In this was manifested the love of God toward us because it God sent his only begotten Son into the world that we might live through him. Herein is love, not that we loved God but that He loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sin. Beloved if God so loved us we ought also to love one another, now verse 16; and we have known and believed the love that God hath to us, God is love and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God and God in him.

Scripture plainly says that God is love, love is the essence of God's nature of course we as mere mortals are not really be able to understand that if He hadn't in some way shown it and verse 9 tells us that He showed us that He is love by giving us his Son.

This was the supreme expression of his love, there was nothing greater that He could do to show to us His love, as we search Scriptures, as we consider the greatness of that love, the greatness of the mercy that it took for God to forgive my sins to redeem my soul, as we dwell upon that thought and as we study Scripture and understand that the experiences of life we face are allowed by God in his love and mercy toward us we begin to understand that love is the essence of God's nature. God is love.

1 John 3:1 puts it this way: "Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us that we should be called sons of God" Now you know God didn't have to do that, He didn't have to make us sons and daughters He could have kept us all as servants but He says it is above a servant it is as a son and that shows to us His love as well.

One fruit of the Spirit is love; the Spirit of God is the one who produces this love.

In the second place love, this agape love, (charity) is an attribute of the renewed mind and will. Romans 5 help us to understand this, Romans 5:1-5, Therefore being justified by faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ on whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand and rejoice in hope of the glory of God and not only so but we glory in tribulation also, knowing that tribulation worketh patience and patience experience and experience hope and hope maketh not ashamed because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts – how? you finish it! Right, by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us that's how the love of God is spread abroad in our hearts, charity is an added attribute of the renewed mind and will the Holy Ghost is the one who does this so a person who doesn't have the Holy Spirit living in him can't really have this love shed abroad in his heart it takes the indwelling Holy Spirit the love of God is shed and abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost unless we have him dwelling in us.

Galatians 5:22-23: The fruit of the Spirit is love joy and peace - and so on

fruit of the Spirit, if we want to have the love this charity that this chapter speaks about we need the Holy Spirit within us.

Thirdly love is the perfection of human character.

Colossians 3:14 says and above all these things put on charity which is the bond of perfectness.

As we think about that whenever individuals are united they can be united for various reasons, they can be united to kill, they can be united around false doctrine, they can be united in the truth and charity is the bond of perfectness, the true love of God is the perfection of human character whenever individuals are united because they love each other because the love of God is shed abroad in their hearts then that's a perfect bond itself. It is not like a bond being united to fight or to kill, love is far above that.

1 Peter 4:8 says and above all things have fervent charity among yourselves, charity shall cover the multitude of sins. Yes all of us have committed every one of us have committed our share sometimes say of sin. we all have our peculiarities, our faults, we all have things that others have to forbear with that in us and if we're going to be able to live together in peace and love we need that fervent charity among ourselves in order to not dwell upon those mistakes that others feel bad about or even the ones that they maybe don't feel bad about but to be able to rise above that and forgive and exercise love.

Well fourthly charity is the motivation that seeks the good of others and it is the only motive that God will accept, the big "I" must go, sincere love not favour or honour must be our motive. You know that's what he's pointing out here in the first several verses, maybe I'm an eloquent speaker but what's it worth if I don't have the love of God in my heart, maybe I can preach well, maybe I can teach well, maybe I can give you well quite viable thoughts, but what's it worth if the love of God is not in my heart?

Verse 2, though I have the gift of prophecy, and the next chapter here defines prophecy in verse 3: He that prophesies speaks of amending, edification, expectation and comfort. Maybe I have the ability to comfort others in their distress, maybe I have the ability to help my brother to see his wrong, to edify him, to help him to grow but what is it really worth on my part if I don't have love in my heart when I do it?

Maybe I understand all mysteries, maybe I can explain the book of Revelation better than anyone else and all knowledge, yes, and all faith, it is possible for us to excel in any one of these areas or maybe several of them but what is it worth if I don't have the love of God in my heart? He says I'm nothing, nothing. God will not accept our right action unless it comes from a right motive and love, charity, is the motivation that seeks the good of others and it is the only motive that God will accept.

The motivation of love far surpasses a sense of duty, verse 3, though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor. Maybe I give willingly into the offering; maybe I give willingly to my neighbour to help him in his need or whoever else it might be that I see in distress. Maybe I even give my body to be burned at the stake, what is it worth if I don't love the Lord, if I don't love my brother in my heart?

He says I don't have charity it profits me nothing, profits me nothing. If we find it difficult to appreciate and trust others it could be because we are not worthy of trust and appreciation ourselves.

Well these verses point out to us without charity my life is really not worth anything to God, and it is really not worth anything to myself and we could raise question how much is it worth to others.

We may be able to go through the right forms, we may know the language, we do we know what God expects of us, we know about what others expect of us but God looks deeper than that, God looks in our hearts and He sees if we are doing it for honour or for praise or He sees if we are doing it grudgingly or of necessity and He also sees if we are doing it cheerfully because we have allowed the Holy Ghost to shed abroad his love in our hearts and we want that love to flow out to others.

Now secondly to the proofs of love.

We see these in verses four through seven he says first of all: Charity suffers long and is kind. Sometimes this is suffering for doing right, charity suffers long and is kind, suffering long tries our spirit and tends to wear down our reserve but charity suffers long, true love is kind to others even when the tendency is to feel that they should first be kind to me, charity suffers long and is kind.

Proverbs 31 speaking about the virtuous woman says that in her tongue is

the law of kindness. Charity envieth not, charity is glad to see others prosper even if I am abased. Charity is glad to see others prosper even if I am in straits. Charity envieth not.

Charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, charity does not have to have the last word, charity does not boast about its abilities or inability or refer to itself unduly. You know the alphabet and our flesh both put “I” before “U” but contrary to this charity puts “U” before “I” vaunteth not itself is not puffed up and in so doing I can make two people happy at the same time if I put you before I.

Charity does not think of itself more highly than you ought to think, [Romans 12:3](#), but soberly as God has dealt to every man the measure of faith. No, it's something that we have to work at to be able to view others as better than ourselves, the Scripture says let each esteem other better than himself and some of you no doubt have read the story of the man in a village where the soldiers came in with intent to getting food for their animals and plunder, and one of the men in that village of Christians went up to the general and the general told him that he was to lead them to the field for their horses to feed.

So he walked along past one field and then another field and finally they came to another and he opened it up here you can feed them he said. The general, wondered why he walked past the others and the man said: “Those are my neighbour's, field this is mine” the general was impressed by that, he was impressed by the fact that here was a man who wasn't selfish and he wondered whether there were other men in the village like him and the man said, Yes many better than I. That was his attitude toward himself and that was his attitude toward his brethren.

Well charity doesn't vaunt itself it is not puffed up. We have that natural tendency that is contrary to the will of God; the proof of charity is that self is in the background.

Verse 5 another proof of charity is it does not behave itself unseemly, unseemly means to be unbecoming, it comes from a word that means inelegant or lacking in refinement, grace or good taste, in other words what the Scripture here is telling us is that it is not a part of it, is not an act of love on our part for us to behave ourselves unwisely, for us to behave ourselves unseemly because that puts an extra stress on others.

If one as a child about seven pulls a prank or something like that it puts stress on the parents, it puts stress on the rest of the family, they may be embarrassed by it, well charity doesn't do that, charity does not behave itself unseemly, does not embarrass others because of his own action, it behaves itself seemly so as to avoid bringing others or oneself into danger or disgrace, it conducts itself in a way that makes it easier for others to be comfortable in its presence. That is a proof of love.

It also says in verse 5 charity seeks not her own, her goals are higher than lining her own nest or priding herself and her children's appearances or actions or decorating our living room or resting first before helping others when she is tired or being thick with a certain few what we call a clique or many other things like that.

She seeks to serve her God by serving others that is what charity does, she seeks to make her children a glory to God not herself, she seeks to use her house to point souls to heaven not to earth. She seeks to give others needs priority over her own charity seekers not her own. She seeks to impartially spread out her time and her kindness, seekers not her own.

Is not easily provoked, a provoked spirit spits out unkind words, harsh judgments rash action and so forth to the damage of others and oneself but charity makes our attitudes soft and our responses gentle, it is not easily provoked.

Charity cultivates the virtue of the peaceable fruit of righteousness, James 3, and as one brother said dead men don't hurt, charity is not easily provoked, if what another person says or does hurts us it shows us that our flesh isn't as dead as it ought to be. Charity is not easily provoked. Thinks no evil, charity avoids evil surmising, does not jump to conclusions gives others the benefit of the doubt, thinketh no evil, we rather prefer to think good about our brother.

Rejoices not in iniquity, charity refuses to pass on evil reports unnecessarily especially if they're not proven true. Charity does not become a link in the gossip train rather it becomes a dead-end street because it lends no support to evil, rejoices not in iniquity.

We know that a part of this is what [Proverbs 27:6](#) says faithful are the wounds of a friend.

So in order to rejoice not in iniquity love will go and help out the brother or the sister who doesn't see their mistake, or at least doesn't appear to see it, faithful are the wounds of a friend. Rejoices not in iniquity but rejoices in the truth.

Charity speaks up in favour of others good points.

Charity rejoices with the angels of heaven when a sinner is converted.

I think it always should inspire and give us a lot of joy to see people humble themselves before the Lord and yield their hearts to him.

Well charity beareth all things, bears the infirmities of the weak, bears the responsibility of nurturing and guiding and training children, bears the sleepless hours to care for the physically or spiritually sick, bears the pain of disappointments, bears the pain of being misunderstood, bears a pain, if we can call it that, of being highly esteemed or the pain of being despised and rejected of men perhaps even of a brother or sister.

Charity bears all things bear all things – how?

Well without resentment or self-pity, willingly bears and exercises forbearance, that's charity, that's a proof of love, believes all things and when my brother comes to me for the 70th time seven times and asks again to be forgiven charity believes all things, believes that he's sincere, that he really does want to be forgiven, charity is not suspicious of others' motives, beliefs not fears. [1 John 4:17-18](#) says that perfect love casts out all fear, believeth all things, hopes all things, hopes to see others grow stronger in the Lord, hopes to serve the Lord more effectively, anticipates spiritual victories, hopes to see truth prevail in the lives of the unconverted and prays to that end.

Hopeth all things. Charity endures all things, the crying of babies, the mistakes of growing children, the knowledge of the ignorant, charity endureth all things, the wisdom of the simple, perils, the fastings, the discomforts, the necessities, the wants, the disruptions and so forth, charity endures all things.

Love makes bearing and enduring much less burdensome, these are fruits, fruits of love.

Then the last part of verse 8 to the end of the chapter points out the permanence of love. It says charity never faileth.

There are many things that will fail, prophecy shall fail, perhaps this means that once the prophecies are fulfilled they will no longer be needed or perhaps it means that there will be a time when there will be no more prophecy because all will be fulfilled.

Whether there be tongues they shall cease.

For the most part we understand in relation to the tongues that chapter 14 talks about that they have ceased and even apart from that the various languages that we expect to be able to understand each other in heaven where there will be one tongue instead of many. Tongues shall cease.

Knowledge shall vanish away it has but a temporary place but that's not the way it is with charity.

These verses point out the permanence of love.

God hates great things in which love is not the motive but He delights in the little things that are prompted by a feeling of love.

These verses show us that love is powerful and durable, love wields its power and in those whose lives it fills, they are magnetic they draw and when other if their love is for the Lord , if they have a true charity then their lives draw others not only to themselves but to the Lord .

1 John 2:10 says he that loveth his brother abideth in the light. There is an endurance there a permanence there he that loveth his brother abideth in the light.

Someone has summarized this chapter in this manner he says in verses 1 to 3 love puts quality into service, verses 4 through 7, love puts maturity into character, verses 8 through 13, love with eternity into life.

How is that possible that we can have eternity in this life? Well verse 8 says that charity never faileth so if we have the love of God set abroad in our hearts and it continues to be there we have eternity in our lives, love lasts and what love does will last, love gives and gives and gives and to its surprise gets more than it gives.

Shall we pray.



GRACE –HAVE YOU RECEIVED IT AND ARE YOU USING IT?

For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, Ephesians 2:8

If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. 1 John 1:9

Grace is God's unmerited favour. It is the Divine influence upon our heart. It is undeserved, we cannot earn it, buy it, give it away or trade it for something else and it is for all people so that they can make the decision to belief and have the faith that they can come to God in true repentance confessing their sins and trusting in the shed blood of Jesus Christ to cleanse them from all unrighteousness – when we believe that God will do what He says in His Word, 1 John 1:9 – that is having faith in God and through having that faith of believing Him and believing His promises and His power to cleanse us from our sin then He will exercise more grace toward us in the forgiving of all our sin and that then is salvation.

We are saved because we believe, through the free gift of His grace and we exercise that faith, believe and are saved and forgiven.

Ephesians 2:4-10 But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, ⁵ Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) ⁶ And hath raised *us* up together, and made *us* sit together in heavenly *places* in Christ Jesus: ⁷ That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in *his* kindness toward us through Christ Jesus. ⁸ For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: *it is* the gift of God: ⁹ Not of works, lest any man should boast. ¹⁰ For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.

Through repentance and belief in the atoning blood of Jesus Christ and the power of God you are now brought into a state of salvation, your past sins are all blotted out, and you are made partaker of the Holy Spirit; and then you can or should have a hope full of immortality, that is assurance of salvation, you must not attribute this to any works or merit of yours; for when this Gospel reached you, you were all found dead in trespasses and dead in sins; therefore it was God's free mercy to you, manifested through

Christ, and God gave us the chance to belief through His grace and, having believed by the power of the Holy Spirit, we have received, and are sealed by the Holy Spirit of promise; so that this salvation is in no way because of ourselves, but is the free gift of God; not of any kind of works by us ; so that no man can boast as having saved himself or even contributed anything towards it. And only our choice to believe Him glorifies God.

By grace are ye saved, through faith in Christ. This is a true doctrine, and continues to be essential to the salvation of man to the end of the world. But how are we to understand faith or salvation as being the gift of God?

This question may be asked: Is not faith the gift of God?

Yes, but it is first through the gift of God's grace that faith can be produced; but God's grace or the power to believe, and the act (or doing) of believing, are two different things.

This is the true state of exercising faith: God gives the power – Man uses the power God has given, and that brings glory to God: Without the power given by God no man can believe. With it, any man may be saved.

And every man according to Scripture is given that choice. God wants it that way and He has made a way for that to happen as we read in John 3:16-18 ¹⁶For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. ¹⁷For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved. ¹⁸He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.

We see here that it is man's choice to believe or not and we also see the result of not believing in verse 18 – he is condemned.

God does not believe for us or have faith for us but gives us His grace so that we can make the effort or choice to believe. God never believes for any man, God does not repent for him: we have to do that. The penitent sinner has through this grace from God been given the power or ability to choose to believe for himself. We may not believe straightaway; the power to believe may be present long before we use it, why otherwise the solemn

warnings which we meet everywhere in the Word of God, and the threats against those who do not choose to believe? So the ability to believe must be there if we can choose not to believe. They believe not and so are not established in faith. They choose not to believe that repentance will lead to God's grace and forgiveness and salvation and so miss out on being saved.

We read many times about that call of God to people – the Scripture says “whosoever” meaning anyone and everyone, not just a select few as some people try to tell us. Here are some verses and they are not the only ones, that bear this out:

[Matthew 7:24](#)

“Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock.

[Matthew 10:32-33](#)

So everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven,³³ but whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven.

[Matthew 12:50](#)

For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.”

[Mark 3:35](#)

For whoever does the will of God, he is my brother and sister and mother.”

[John 11:26](#)

and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?”

[John 12:46](#)

I have come into the world as light, so that whoever believes in me may not remain in darkness.

[Acts 2:21](#)

And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.’

[Acts 10:43](#)

To him all the prophets bear witness that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.”

[Acts 13:26](#)

“Brothers, sons of the family of Abraham, and those among you who fear God, to us has been sent the message of this salvation.

We see from these selected verses that God has given man the choice and He does that by giving them His grace to make that decision to believe and the through believing being justified as the Apostle Paul says in Romans 3:24: Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus:

We are justified and being treated as if we are righteous. We cannot be regarded righteous or treated as being righteous by any merit or effort of our own, or by personal obedience to the Law of Christ— in other words not by our works. When we have come to God in repentance and we believe in faith that He will forgive us our sins as we confess them then we are treated as righteous or justified freely by or through His grace as this verse says, it is a mere favour from God to us, not because we have a right to it or deserve it but it is a gift.

This is the essence of the gospel and to show this and the way in which it is done is the main design of this Epistle to the Romans.

Romans 3:22 says that the righteousness of God by faith in Jesus Christ, is “upon all who believe,” who are all “justified freely by His grace.” Then in Romans 3:23-34 it goes on to say: For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: Whom God hath set forth *to be* a propitiation through faith in his blood, (the blood of Jesus Christ) to declare His righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; (propitiation means that God is satisfied with the sacrifice of Jesus to pay for our sins)

We see the work of God’s mercy and grace at work here because He could so easily demand that we pay the price for our sins, But no, He is so full of mercy that He continues to exercise His grace to all so that who make the choice to follow Him.

The Old Testament speaks a lot about people finding grace in the sight of God and it is the same for us today, we too find grace in the sight of God and the rest is up to us.

John 1:14 The Word (Jesus) was made flesh and dwelt among us and that He is full of grace and truth.

John 1:17 Moses gave the law but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.

Acts 15:11 The Apostles believed that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved.

Paul 1 Corinthians 15:10 says that by the grace of God I am what I am.

And I believe the same is for us when we come to Jesus as our Lord and Saviour, He will then help us to become what He wants us to be and we know that sometimes the way is not easy, that is why Jesus speaks of taking up our cross daily and following him. (Luke 9:23) I suppose very often it is not easy but we know that He will help us through.

So we can see that:

1. Grace is a gift from God.
2. It is that gift of grace that allows and helps us to make a choice to believe in Jesus Christ.
3. It is that gift of grace that allows or helps us to realise our sinful condition.
4. It is that gift of grace that helps us to decide to come to repentance before God.
5. It is that gift of grace that enables to us having the firm believe or faith that Jesus Christ is the One that He is the justifier of him which believes in Jesus Christ and that brings us to salvation.
6. It is that gift of grace, amazing grace that saved a wretch like me, a sinner like me, from the penalty of sin which is eternal death.
7. It is that gift of grace that has brought me to where I am today and keeps me in His Kingdom here on earth whilst I wait for that call to come to home to be with Him forever more.
8. The grace of God will never fade away but we can reject it and be lost forever more. *J.v.L*



CREATION—REGENERATION

We believe that God is the creator and preserver of all things visible and invisible. He is able to create something out of nothing. This creativeness of God inspires us and is worthy of our meditation.

A part of God's creative nature is His ability and desire to regenerate that which has decayed. A craftsman who is able, with new material, to produce a beautiful work is appreciated. But one who is able to take something old or damaged and restore or reproduce it is greatly admired. We stand in reverence before a God who has seen His creation repeatedly and continually defiled; yet He restores and redeems. This power of regeneration is a distinctive characteristic of God.

We have often marveled that God transforms a dismal, nearly hopeless situation into a blessing through His redeeming power. This is not only something He does on occasion; it is His delight, His very nature. Because of this, we have hope and are comforted. It is also for our encouragement in an evil and darkening world.

The miracles Jesus performed were a demonstration of the power of God to regenerate physically and naturally. Jesus related physical healing to the spiritual when He taught that He could forgive sins as well as make the lame to walk (Matthew 9:6). Both the Father and Jesus have that about them that they desire to regenerate that which is corrupted through Satan and the curse of sin.

Ezekiel's vision of the dry bones and the restoring of those bones to an exceeding great army speak of the mighty power of God to regenerate (Ezekiel 37:114). The creative power of God did not cease with the creation of the world. He continues to be the same God, and He is very interested in that which He has made.

We think of regeneration as the miracle of the new birth and the new life that results. That is a vital truth essential to our salvation. We believe in God's power to change the heart and life of the believer. This change is more than reformation. There must be evidence of the life of Christ within (Galatian 2:20). When He comes in, there will be regeneration. We know the evidence of Christ dwelling in the heart. It is characterized by meekness, purity, gentleness, love, humility, forgiveness, obedience, peace, and quietness. Man does not possess this without the indwelling Spirit. It is important that this element of regenerative life, born of God, is evident in every Christian brother and sister.

In proving ourselves, we need not ask if we are good enough to be saved, but rather have we experienced the regeneration of Christ through the Spirit? We may be tempted to settle with being better but not having had the touch of God. We need not look at regeneration as a burden and a requirement but rather the privilege of partaking of the life that is in Christ. There is something in our nature that likes to possess a finished product. We would like to feel, "I am a Christian; I have met the requirements." But our satisfaction is to be in Him and not in our rightness. He is our satisfaction. He is the great "I am." That is our joy and rejoicing.

This work of regeneration is an ongoing effort of God in us and around us. He continually takes situations that look impossible and transforms them by a work of grace. How many of us haven't made mistakes that we needed to repent of and in the end God used them for our growth and the edification of others? When we observe the history of mankind we see that God has repeatedly taken the failures of man and turned them to the advantage of His glory and the good of men. That is the nature of God. It is this characteristic of God that gives us hope.

As we review our lives, what has brought us to the point where we are today? Has it been our spiritual skills? Has it been the grit and determination of our will? Has it been our deep spiritual insight? In all honesty, we would have to say that, in spite of us and our frailty, God has made us what we are. His work of sanctification goes on in our lives, unplanned on our part and sometimes unnoticed.

God had His purposes when He allowed Satan such a free hand with the man Job. But the destruction that Satan wrought did not begin to challenge God's ability to regenerate Job. God did restore Job, and by doing so, He demonstrated both His ability and His love for the faithful.

We often view today's problems in the human dimension. We see the downward spiral of men's consciences. It is disappointing, and we say it is inevitable that things will get worse. We may even hesitate to pray for renewal and revival because "it is just going to be this way." Evidence points to the fact that our country is declining and men's hearts are becoming hard. The moral foundation that we have known in past generations seems

to be ignored by many. We have some apprehensions about the church's ability to withstand this tide. But we must consider the regenerating capacity of God.

It was a dark time for Daniel when he was captive under a foreign power. He would have had reasons to lay down his hands. But Daniel knew God and had faith that He would redeem His people. The people of God were in a deplorable situation and that because of the judgment of God. In that setting, Daniel set himself to pray for his people. And God heard him. At times we hesitate to hope that God might do a work in someone we consider to be nearly "hopeless." If that is our thinking, would we dare personally approach that person and speak a word to him? If we do speak to such a person, what kind of ring do our words have? How are we praying for that person if we feel he is probably hopeless? The conviction of our heart tells us that our God is able to deliver, to regenerate spiritually, emotionally, and physically.

Possibly our response to our neighbors and acquaintances is affected by our belief that they will not be interested in what we have to tell them. We may not allow ourselves to believe that they really do have a deep longing for spiritual fulfillment. The outward characteristics of a person sometimes convince us that this person is no candidate for repentance and salvation. However, when we pause to remember what kind of a God we have and how He "specializes in things thought impossible," our love and hope is rekindled.

Does the darkness of these last days cause our missionary vision to ebb away? Should it? When we read of the great supper Jesus told about we notice that the invitations were made and many turned away. But the lord of the house told his servant to go out into the highways and hedges and compel them to come in so that the house would be filled (Luke 14:23). Surely that speaks of our time. We tell these people of the way because we know the power of God to change the heart.

How does our vision of God and His regenerating nature affect our brotherly relationships and administration? It is possible that we are seeing situations among us that are not like they should be, but we are helplessly standing by because we cannot grasp that there is power to regenerate. We

know how this brother or sister usually reacts. We know the family blood-lines and that it has been this way for generations. Or we know that this person is friends with someone who will stand in for them. It causes us to draw back from expecting God to do a work in this situation that we honestly know is less than the Bible standard. At times, all God is looking for is someone to face the truth that "This isn't right." It is God's work to effect the change. It is our work to say that we need God. It is for us to admit that we are crippled. It is God's work to heal the lame.

We have observed God's wonderful work of regeneration in the church. We have experienced revival at various times in the past. Conviction for revival must not be lost. When we are weak in our belief in God's power to revive, then we find ourselves lacking in our response to needs that we see. Our reasoning finds another way. Responsibility is passed to someone else. Souls that are in bondage remain in bondage. Problems are often prolonged when we hesitate to take God's way of facing needs or sins.

A beautiful testimony was given of Daniel when he was taken up out of the lions' den. There was no manner of hurt on him "because he believed in his God" (Daniel 6:23). There is no question that the situation looked dismal when Daniel faced the hungry lions. Daniel would have had reason to resign himself to being a martyr. But he knew that his God was one who redeems hopeless situations. Daniel's God is God of all and that includes us today.



Passionately Seeking Jesus

"I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus" Philippians 3:14

Passion is a powerful motivator. Its strength lies in the way it rules the heart, pushing out other thoughts. Passion supersedes cold consideration and calculation. The immediate need of the body or spirit becomes paramount. It pushes aside any thoughts of what people might think, and calls for action. In our lesson, passion shaped itself as a strong effort to approach Jesus for healing. No search will begin without a keen realization of a need, so a good starting point may well be a prayer for vision to see our needs.

Mark 2:1-5 ^(KJV) “And again he entered into Capernaum after *some* days; and it was noised that he was in the house. ² And straightway many were gathered together, insomuch that there was no room to receive *them*, no, not so much as about the door: and he preached the word unto them. ³ And they come unto him, bringing one sick of the palsy, which was borne of four. ⁴ And when they could not come nigh unto him for the press, they uncovered the roof where he was: and when they had broken *it* up, they let down the bed wherein the sick of the palsy lay. ⁵ When Jesus saw their faith, he said unto the sick of the palsy, Son, thy sins be forgiven thee.”

The four friends who carried the palsied man to Jesus are worthy of mention. Their friend was sick, but he had no way to help himself. Was it his urgent, unrelenting pleas that moved his friends or was it his hopeless apathy that touched their hearts? These men had heard of Jesus, and the reports of the miraculous healings wrought by His hands raised a tumultuous hope in their hearts. Could He, would He, help their sick friend? If the reports were true, He was a compassionate man and helped all who came to Him. But how could they get their friend to Him? Then came the news that Jesus was in Capernaum, in a house known to them. Was this an answer to their prayers? They quickly picked up the bed on which their friend lay and started for the house at which they knew people would be gathering. But the crowd! They had not counted on the house being already overfilled with people. They could not get close to Jesus. However, their fervent desire to help their friend did not allow them to be dismayed. What might they yet do? Was there another door? No, it was already jammed with people. A window? No, it was too small to allow the bed to pass through. The roof? Maybe! They could uncover part of the roof and lower their sick friend right to the feet of Jesus.

With considerable effort but even more determination, the four men raised the sick man to the roof, made an opening, and lowered him to where Jesus was teaching. Jesus saw the palsied man, looked up, and saw his friends, expectant, waiting. Jesus commended their faith and forgave and healed their friend. What a wonderful sense of working together with God they must have had as they repaired the roof!

Mark 5:25-34 ^(KJV) “ And a certain woman, which had an issue of blood twelve years, ²⁶ And had suffered many things of many physicians, and had spent all that she had, and was nothing bettered, but rather grew worse, ²⁷ When she had heard of Jesus, came in the press behind, and touched his garment. ²⁸ For she said, If I may touch but his clothes, I shall be whole. ²⁹ And straightway the fountain of her blood was dried up; and she felt in *her* body that she was healed of that plague. ³⁰ And Jesus, immediately knowing in himself that virtue had gone out of him, turned him about in the press, and said, Who touched my clothes? ³¹ And his disciples said unto him, Thou seest the multitude thronging thee, and sayest thou, Who touched me? ³² And he looked round about to see her that had done this thing. ³³ But the woman fearing and trembling, knowing what was done in her, came and fell down before him, and told him all the truth. ³⁴ And he said unto her, Daughter, thy faith hath made thee whole; go in peace, and be whole of thy plague.”

The chronic disease of the woman had led her on many a quest for healing, to physician after physician. She would hear of yet one more doctor who just might have the answer to her need. He held out hope; she took the medicinal herbs or powders, only to have hope turn to despair once more as the bitter aftertaste of the medicine blended with and magnified the bitterness of one more failure! The sick woman’s admirable tenacity led her on and on, but finally her resources were gone. Even her hopes were nothing but embers. Hearing of Jesus the Healer, her passion to be well flamed up again, and she conceived a plan. “He is not like the physicians. He prescribes no medicine. If reports are to be believed, He heals with a touch. If I could but touch Him!” Passionate desire and faith somehow came together in her heart, and she believed it could be a reality. Was she surprised when it happened? Even though she trembled when she was called into Jesus’ presence, her heart must have been filled with a rising anthem of praise.

It takes humility to admit a need. Denial is very natural; self does not want to acknowledge insufficiency. Even in physical sickness, our initial reaction may be denial. In spiritual matters we may be even more reluctant to face a problem. After all, having a spiritual problem does not reflect well on us. But we should not waste time in self—defeating disavowal. Humbly

taking full responsibility for the condition of our spirit opens a door that remains closed as long as we shift blame away from ourselves. Hearing a sermon, reading the Bible, or reading inspirational articles may cause us to become aware of a need. Although knowing about a need is a good start, it must become a heart matter. As conviction takes hold, we no longer try to excuse or justify ourselves. We deeply contemplate our helplessness and our need of Jesus' healing touch. Just as in the instances of physical need desperation and total helplessness are often the birthplace of faith. Without faith there will be no passionate reaching out. That is why Satan puts forth great efforts to distract people from their spiritual need. The world is drowning in distractions that are expressly designed to keep the heart far removed from serious thoughts. According to Satan's plan, people would never get in soul trouble. The voice of conscience would be forever stilled if he had his way.

Even Christians who have tuned out much of the clamour of the world may need to set aside, as much as possible, the everyday distractions so that full attention can be given to addressing a spiritual need. "And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force" (Matthew 11:12). "He that will take possession of the kingdom of righteousness, peace, and spiritual joy, must be in earnest: all hell will oppose him in every step he takes; and if a man be not absolutely determined to give up his sins and evil companions, and have his soul saved at all hazards, and at every expense, he will surely perish everlastingly. This requires a violent earnestness" (*Adam Clarke*).

The general softness, insulation, and affluence of our times tend to keep us from the "violent earnestness" of real passion. Even though we cannot change the times we live in, we can pray for the needed fervency of spirit. We need to recognize that the connectedness of today's world is a serious threat to spiritual life. The cellular telephone culture seems to favour shallow, distracted thinking. Having communicated too much on a superficial level, people find it hard to go deeper and think seriously. Text messaging has an inherent lack of accountability that lures people into saying things electronically that they might never say aloud to someone's face. The needs of the soul will not be met if we ignore the Spirit's gentle voice

prompting us to turn away from distractions and get passionate about seeking Jesus.

The questions for us maybe could be: What are some things that keep us from a passionate search for Jesus? Are we capable of being passionate in this day of comfort and ease? Are we willing to expend physical effort to reach our spiritual goals?

What will your answer and my answer, be?



DO YOU SO LOVE THE TRUTH that you welcome, or at least submit willingly to, the idea of an exposure of what in you is yet unknown to yourself—exposure that may redound to the glory of the truth by making you ashamed and humble? Are you willing to be made glad that you were wrong when you thought others were wrong?

WITHOUT LOVE there can be no understanding. Hate will sharpen observation to the point of microscopic vision, affording opportunity for many a shrewd guess, and revealing facts for the construction of the cleverest and falsest theories, but will leave the observer as blind as any bat to the scope of the whole, or the meaning of the parts which can be understood only from the whole; for love alone can interpret.

George MacDonald 1824-1905

Compiled & Edited by: J van Loon

E-mail: shimaracourier@gmail.com

Web: www.anabaptistmennonites.net