

THE AUSTRALIAN ANABAPTIST

God's solid foundation stands firm. 2 Timothy 2:19

Vol. 17 No. 5 – MAY 2020



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

Every person has a mother – let us remember our mother no matter our perceptions of her – Jesus too had an earthly mother and acknowledged her.

Beatitudes for Mothers

Blessed are the mothers of yesterday, for their memories shall be called beautiful and beneficent. They are like flowers growing by sunken gardens and decide still water and green fields, for they are like soft winds that blow with peace and love on wistful wings.

Blessed are the mothers of today, for they have the keeping of tomorrow in their hands and in our hearts; and the destiny of nations, hearts and homes.

Blessed are the mothers of today, for they have the keeping of tomorrow in their hands and in their hearts; and the destiny of nations, hearts and homes.

Blessed are the mothers of tomorrow, for they have been summoned to a great and heroic hour for they shall be called the mothers of men who shall make miracles of human life. The mothers of tomorrow shall breed a race of giants who handle lightning as a little thing, and make the clouds and thunder obey their wills; blessed are the mothers of tomorrow.

Blessed are the mothers of scientists and statesmen; of labourers and poets; of preachers and prophets; of teachers and dreamers; for dreams and visions and prophecies and the glow and glory of creation is born in the hearts of mothers.

Blessed are the mothers, for they are conservers of the human race.

Blessed are the mothers, for they taught barbarian ancestors to grow grains and build shelters.

Blessed are the mothers of the world, for they have conserved the spiritual things of life for the sake of their children.

Blessed are the mothers of the earth, for they have combined the practical and the spiritual into one workable way of human life. They have mended little dresses, washed little faces, and have pointed little eyes to the stars and little souls to eternal things.

Blessed are the mothers!

William L. Stidger 1886-1946

*The Rise of Anabaptism
Neither Catholic nor Protestant*

*A short treatise on the emergence of
a people during the Reformation era
living in a society where the State
dictated and controlled man's relationship
with his Saviour and his fellowman
but chose to follow Christ and the Scripture.*

*They were called Anabaptists,
many of whom accepted martyrdom.
They were willing to contend for the Faith
which was once delivered unto the saints, Jude 1:3*

*For this Faith many gave their life even unto death,
at the stake, through fire, by sword or drowning.*

*The scriptural directives they lived and left for us today
have their basis in Scripture since
the foundation of the Christian Church at Antioch*

This is the true Faith and Vision of the Anabaptists.

May the Lord bless your journey of discipleship with His Son

*Editor's Note: The original title of the message is "Key Anabaptist Positions" but for clarification purposes "The Rise of Anabaptism" has been used as the primary title. Complete original audio message available at:
<http://www.anabaptistmennonites.net/index.htm/files/GS3150.mp3>*



The Rise of Anabaptism – Part 1

Melvin Burkholder

We greet you in the name of Jesus Christ our Saviour.

This assignment is intended to show the difference between Anabaptist, Catholic, Protestant, especially Protestant, it is a big subject, I'll share some thoughts on that but I don't claim to understand everything you do for that matter. A good place to start would be with their view of the Scripture.

1]. Key position number one.

Roman Catholic, Protestant and Anabaptist all agree that the Bible is authoritative but the Anabaptists had a different view of the relation of the Testaments, they had a step view of the Bible in which the New Testament was on a higher level than the Old Testament, it had more authority and we call that key position number one, a step view of the Bible.

Anabaptists demanded, because they viewed the Bible this way, New Testament backing for every church ordinance and for the entire ethic of the Christian.

Reformers also recognized differences between the Testaments but they did not believe that the New Testament could forbid what the Old Testament allows and you still find people interpreting Matthew 5 and 6, Matthew 5 especially in that way as if Christ can't possibly be saying something different from what the Old Testament said and yet the natural reading of that passage is definitely that Christ is changing the standard a bit.

The Reformers reached back in the Old Testament to justify many practices not found in the New Testament, practices like the state church, the elaborate liturgies, the oath, and so forth.

The relationship of the Testaments has many implications. The Mennonite encyclopedia says it was, this relationship between the two Testaments, was discussed at length in each of the major disputations between the Anabaptists and the Reformers and that shows that both sides saw the importance of the question.

The Reformers, when the Anabaptists talked about the relationship between the two Testaments the Reformers said: Well you are throwing away most of the Bible!

Zwingli said: "The Anabaptists deny the entire Old Testament which I have seen with my own eyes for they wrote to our magistrate that the Old Testament has been done away with."

The Anabaptists responded something like this: "You are using the Old Testament to reason away the clear teachings of Jesus Christ."

Dirk Philips said it like this: "The false prophets cover and disguise their deceptive doctrines by appealing to the letter of the Old Testament, whatever they cannot defend by the New Testament scriptures they try to establish by the old."

The Anabaptists did recognize the inspiration of the Old Testament and used it freely for an example for instruction Menno Simons said, I'm not going to have quotations through the whole thing but I have a few at the beginning here, Menno Simons said: "The whole scriptures both the old and New Testaments were written for our instruction, admonition and correction."

And yet somebody calculated in his writings I saw in a book on theology that he quoted the New Testament three times as much as the Old Testament and I counted it myself in the Dortrecht confession and there are 25 references to the Old Testament and 140 references to the New Testament. So this difference between the Testaments as seen by the Anabaptists was one of the key positions that they based their doctrine and practice squarely upon the New Testament.

2] Key position number two, I'm going to call it full obedience.

Anabaptists were Biblicists who held that the New Testament was to be literally obeyed; they were people of the Book.

If the New Testament did not include liturgies well that they were not going to have liturgies, the same for elaborate church buildings and many other things. And one modern Mennonite historian says about their turning away from liturgies in church buildings and suchlike he says: "The Mennonite traditions deprived of necessary beauty."

And that is interesting, I think the Anabaptists would have scoffed at such

an attitude and would have said something like; God knows better than you what we need and we are going to go by what He says – Literal obedience.

They believed in explaining the commands and then living them out instead of explaining away and then ignoring them. And this insistence upon obedience brought accusations; they were called externalists and legalists. Zwingli said: "If one looks into this matter closely it is seen that you contend only for unimportant outward things."

You are just concerned about the outward, you're externalists.

Obbe Philips who ordained Menno Simons and later defected from the Anabaptists cause complained: "The letter of the scriptures took us prisoner." So he is saying in legalism we are taken bondage by the letter.

Now the Anabaptists replied like this: "Whosoever boasts that he is a Christian must walk the same as Christ walked."

They would have said that is not legalism that is just Christianity, following and obeying the Lord Jesus Christ. They spoke a lot of the law of Christ.

Zwingli could call it legalism, Luther could urge to sin bravely or sin boldly because salvation is by faith alone.

The Anabaptists always objected to that they said: "Works demonstrate the validity of faith, faith without works is dead."

But the reformed clergy could make the distinctions between primary and secondary commands and they said things like love and justice and faith, they are primary, they are important but baptism and church discipline they are secondary.

The Anabaptists attitude was: "Show it to me in the New Testament, without obedience faith and love are empty noises."

The Anabaptists denied the charge of legalism, they said too that the law of Christ is not external it is spiritual, it is written on the heart, they were not in bondage but were set free to obey Christ, no one forced them, they freely chose to follow, obedience was an expression of inner liberation.

Obedience flowed from within; it was not imposed upon them externally from without.

And as far as church membership they said; None are forced to join us and

all are free to leave us, this is freedom this is not legalism, voluntarily accepted discipline is not legalism.

I think these insights on legalism and freedom are very pertinent to us today, very pertinent indeed as today we still face charges of legalism and the answer to the charge is still basically the same if we can still say it that this is something that is not imposed upon us from without but rather it is something that the Spirit of God writes within us and we love to do His commandments!

And may we all say that and may our young people also be able to say that.

3]. Key position number three is related, discipleship is the keyword here. The Anabaptists made following Christ's central, paying special attention to His example in teachings in the Gospels, the Sermon on the Mount as well as His death and especially His resurrection. Keywords were discipleship, following.

The theology of the Reformers tended to start in the Old Testament and when it reached the New Testament tended to skip over the life and teaching of Jesus Christ and go right to His death as interpreted by Galatians and Romans. And I think probably that is due partly to Luther's life changing discovery that "the just shall live by faith" in the book of Romans, (Romans 1:17) and even today contemporary reformed writers their focus still tends to be on the theological implications of Christ's death rather than on practical discipleship.

Calvinism as an example of reformed theology where does it rest? On the Sermon on the Mount? No, on Galatians and Romans especially.

Anabaptists were more concerned with following Christ than with an intelligent understanding of His work.

They believed all the epistles said, it is not that they did not believe them, but they spent little time trying to explain the theology. When they spoke on theology they tended to stay with the words of Scripture and did not attempt to decipher the inscrutable, they were not theologians they were disciples.

And it is interesting that the Roman Catholics and the Reformers both made so little of the Sermon on the Mount, I mean after all according to

what I've read the Catholics considered the Sermon on the Mount, especially the words of Jesus which began; "It hath been said but I say unto you." They considered them as counsels of perfection Capital C and capital P, Councils of Perfection to be kept by capital C Christians, the clergy, but not by small "c" christians the normal person, the laity.

And some devout lay men and lay women became dissatisfied with this attitude about these teachings in this Sermon on the Mount and they took these so-called counsels of perfection to heart as well as voluntary poverty and celibacy and this was the beginning of the monastic orders in the Catholic Church.

Years later when the Anabaptists took the Sermon on the Mount literally and obeyed it Martin Luther dismissed Anabaptism as a revival of mediaeval monasticism, and it is interesting, I've often thought that our position as a church shares some of the good traits of monasticism, that serious commitment and separation, withdrawal from the world, but even today nominal Christians fail to take the Sermon on the Mount seriously.

The extreme dispensationalists relegate it to some future age and say it does not apply today.

Well the early Anabaptists took a different attitude they said the life and teachings of Jesus Christ are very important to him, he sees himself as a disciple of Jesus and attempts to follow His Lord.

And it is hard for me to see how any serious Christian could ignore the Sermon on the Mount, after all it is the longest portion of Jesus teaching existing, the biggest section of red print in your Bible, it lays out the ethical framework of the kingdom of God, it is given great emphasis by Jesus himself.

And I would like you to turn just now to notice this, I like to hit this point pretty hard this morning, but Matthew chapter 7 just notice the conclusion of the sermon here, we start at verse 13, Matthew 7:13-15 "Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide *is* the gate, and broad *is* the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in there at: ¹⁴ Because strait *is* the gate, and narrow *is* the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it. ¹⁵ Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves."

Starting at verse 13 it is not exactly ethical teaching but it is testing and then verse 21 and a final conclusion of the sermon he says: Matthew 7:21-27: “Not every one 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. ²² Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? ²³ And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity. ²⁴ Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock: ²⁵ And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock. ²⁶ And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand: ²⁷ And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it.”

These words have always been made much of by Anabaptists, this is not just the 20th or 21st century Mennonites that make much of these words, but, when you read those words and it says "not everybody" and then proceeds to explain who are the true followers of Jesus Christ, it is those who "hear these sayings of mine and do them"

What are these “sayings of mine” that Jesus is talking about?

Well I think if you go back into His sermon you will see, go back to chapter 5 and verses 21-22: Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment: ²² But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire.

Verse 27: You have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery. But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart.

Verse 31: It has been said, Whosoever shall put away his wife let him give her a writing of enforcement, But I say unto you, That whosoever shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, causeth her to commit

adultery and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced committed adultery.

Verse 33: Again ye have heard that it hath been said by them of old time, Thou shalt not forswear thyself but shall perform unto the Lord thine oaths, But I say unto you, Swear not at all.

Verse 38: Ye have heard that it hath been said, an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth, But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil.

Verse 43: You have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour and hate thine enemy, But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you and persecute you. (Matthew 5:21-43)

There is a forbidding of anger, a forbidding of lust, divorce, of oath swearing, there is the commanding of nonresistance and love for enemies.

The very things, now listen, the very things that Catholics said were not necessary for ordinary Christians and that Luther dismissed as monasticism and that the dispensationalists say do not apply today and that nominal Christians explain away as unnecessary are the things that Jesus Christ said will tell who are the real Christians and will stand in the judgment and who will not!

Let us not get too far from the Sermon on the Mount!

I'd do not want to be misunderstood, the Anabaptists did not neglect the death of Christ and the epistles teaching what His death means to the believers they just felt that the Reformers were neglecting practical obedience to a living Lord who issues real commands in favor of an intellectual emphasis on theology.

4]. Key Anabaptist position number four. The Anabaptists saw salvation as a process.

In the Reformation days when salvation was simple, bring your baby to the clergy or the priest for baptism and the child is saved. Both Catholics and Reformers looked at it that way, get your baby saved, getting saved right away, getting saved while he is little, you get him and bring him into the church, the water will cleanse him, the water will wash away his sinful nature, his original sin. And you can make sure he is saved.

And they looked at Anabaptists who refused infant baptism as being unfair to their children, it was a terrible thing, don't you want your children to be saved?

Today some still believe in salvation by sacrament, by baptism, by the mass or salvation by formula, the four spiritual laws, repeat these prayers, sign your name on the dotted line, raise your hand up in mass evangelism meetings, put your hand on the radio while the radio evangelist prays and the reformed doctrine of eternal security makes the transaction final and irrevocable.

They are not all so extreme as I'm saying here but too many are that way.

But if you look up saved in the Bible you will find that Christians are saved and that Christians are being saved and that Christians will be saved, you will find all that in the Bible - past, present and future.

We are saved in the past – that is called justification when our sins are taken away through our repentance and faith in Jesus Christ.

We are saved in the present – that is called sanctification, it is obedience and discipleship and a purifying of life.

We are saved in the future – that is called glorification.

Salvation is a process that is finally completed only when the Christian is faithful to the end and if he neglects any part of the process before that it is not salvation

Saved, that is the Anabaptist concept.

And that is I think partly why they looked with a little suspicion upon assurance of salvation as it is taught by some because it smacks of this one time shot saying that it is all done and settled and wrapped up and it is guaranteed now and the Anabaptists say, No, no it has to continue, you have to continue in obedience and discipleship and be faithful to the very end and when you are received into glory then you are finally saved.

So really as you think through that question: Are you saved?

It is a good question but it is incomplete, a better question is do you know Jesus and are you following Him in company with the believers?

That is what it means to be saved.

The Roman road to salvation admit your sinfulness, confess your sins, believe Jesus died to save, accept Him as Saviour, that is all good but it is in-

complete without Luke 9:23, If any man will come after me let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.

The Roman road is the way to justification but then there must be a growth, a sanctification, a practical discipleship to Jesus Christ if we are ever going to come to glorification.

You see salvation is a process.

That is the Anabaptist concept as opposed to the Protestant concept

5]. Key Anabaptist position number five.

The Anabaptists viewed the church as a separated, disciplined Fellowship of saints namely of all believing regenerated Christians, children of God, born from above by the Word and the Spirit, this is the view of the church.

The Reformed view is as Calvin would have put it is this: The church is that mass of men, (now I want you to think carefully about the difference here) "That mass (or collective body) of men among whom the Word of God is purely preached and the sacraments administered."

That is the church according to reformed theology, John Calvin.

The church is that mass of men among whom the word of God is purely preached in the sacraments and administered.

In other words if somebody is upfront and preaching from this Book, and what this Book says and then distributes the sacraments, the bread and wine, this is the church of Jesus Christ.

Does that make it a church?

I go back to the Anabaptist view of the church, A separated, disciplined Fellowship of saints, all believing regenerated Christians, children of God, born from above by the Word and the Spirit.

You see here you have a changed people and the other way you do not have changed people.

There is a drastic difference.

In the Anabaptist concept of the church you have Fellowship, it is the body, you have saints, people who actually are holy, that is the root of the word saint, believing, there is faith in there and works, regenerated, born again and in the other definition it is just "a mass of men" and it is the whole population in Calvin's mentality among whom the word is purely preached in the sacraments administered.

The question is this; is the Church of Jesus Christ an element in society, a changed regenerated element in society or is it coextensive with society? Is the church a body of believing saints or is it a regional body based on geographical location and civil government?

Those are two mutually exclusive concepts.

If the church is regional then all in the region are members regardless of their beliefs, actions, age or whatever.

If the church is confessional and demonstrated by works then small children are not included because they cannot confess faith, evildoers are not included because their works do not prove their faith.

What it comes down to is do we believe in Christianity or Christendom?

One brother used that word Christendom, (*meaning those who profess to be Christians*), to say; People in Christendom don't see things like we do or don't experience what we experience.

Christendom technically in the old days was a state church set up but the New Testament Church is the ecclesia, the called out ones, God calls, "Come out of her my people, wherefore come out from among them and be ye separate saith the Lord and I will receive you." 2 Corinthians 6:17.

The New Testament Church is a separated subset of society in the world but is not of the world. We live in this society, the church co-exists within the society but not of it, it is separated, it is a subset.

Whereas the Reformed view, the church state/union view, is that if this is society why then this is the church, it is coextensive, if you are here if you are in this society then you are in the church. (*with the same limits, boundaries & scope as the State.*)

This concept of a pluralistic society with freedom of conscience was revolutionary to pre-Christian societies. whether the Jewish or Roman or European, they all counted on religion being the glue, both Jew and Roman counted on religion being the glue to hold society together.

Old Testament Jewish society was not a pluralistic nation in faith or inseparably entwined, that Israel was both the political and the religious entity, one religion, one state, every child born in political Israel joined religious Israel as an infant through the ritual of circumcision, get them in right away, into the religion. There is more to that, in the Old Testament there was faith there too but as a type of society Israel was a civil/religious set up.

To be concluded in the June 2020 Issue.



THE CHRISTIAN LIFE – THE POTTER’S WORK

But now, O LORD, you are our Father; we are the clay,
You are our Potter; we are all the work of your hand.

Isaiah 64:8 (ESV)

One day, as the Master Potter walked by, He reached down and picked me up. I was just a small lump of clay beside the path. I had seen the Potter before and had heard of others that He had made into beautiful vessels, but I never thought that He would want me. I was full of pebbles, and people had stepped on me. Surely He could never make me into a beautiful vessel. But He said, “You are special to me. Will you come and let me make you into a vessel so you can serve me?” I thought about what I had heard—some said that the Potter was a hard Master, and always they talked of the vessels going through the fire! That scared me. I was not sure He could make me into anything beautiful. He was still looking down at me, and then He said, “Whosoever will save his life shall lose it, and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it” Matthew 16:25. I thought of how worthless I felt lying here beside the path, and I decided to surrender myself to Him. Really, I had nothing to lose. He took me to His house and began the process right away.

“First,” He said, “we will need to get rid of these rocks and other impurities.” I did not know how He could ever do that. But He said, “My Son gave His life for you and all the other vessels I have made. Washing in His blood is the only way you can be cleansed.” He poured Jesus’ blood over me, and I saw my impurities all sink to the bottom of the basin. The Potter threw them away where they would never be seen or remembered again. I felt an amazing, refreshing joy in my heart, like I had never felt before. “Therefore, being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” Romans 5:1. I also felt an overwhelming love and grati-

tude for the Potter's Son who had given His life so I could be clean. "I will love and serve you forever," I told the Potter.

The days went on, and I learned to know the Potter well as He shaped me on His wheel. He shared His promises with me. "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find." He, also, gave me His word and said, "Study to shew thyself approved unto God" 2 Timothy 2:15. "Read My word every day and learn more about Me. This will inspire you and help you to serve Me better." He also told me to spend time with the other vessels, "Seek out the old and worn ones. Even though they are not the most beautiful, they have served me well for many years, and they will help you."

Day by day He shaped me, one hand on the outside shaping my appearance, attitudes, and conduct, and the other deep inside my heart, making my thoughts and desires into what He wanted me to be. Finally, the day came when I was ready to be purified through the fire. I did not want to go, but I had learned to trust the Potter. His last words to me were, "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee" Hebrews 13:5. When I came out of the fire, the Potter seemed pleased. "Now you are ready to be filled with my fruit." So He filled me up with the fruits of His Spirit: love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, and temperance. "Share these fruits with others; that are what I made you to do."

At first I was glad to share His fruits with others. I felt so unworthy of His love for me. Then I started noticing that some of the people sent to me were ugly. Some looked tired and unhappy, and some did not even say thank you. They are not worthy of my fruit, I decided. I retreated to a corner away from the other vessels. Soon I noticed a strange thing! Flies of envy, hurt feelings, and anger were settling on my fruit. It was rotting away. I was so ashamed. The Potter came by, and I could not look Him in the eye. "Come," He said, "I will wash you in Jesus' blood and give you a fresh start." After that, I shared my fruit willingly, and the Potter supplied me with more each day.

One day, a man walked into the Potter's shop. He was handsome and well dressed, but I did not like the look in his eye. "I want to buy some vessels," he said. "No," the Potter answered, "they are mine. I made them.

I would never sell you one of my vessels unless they choose to go with you.” When the man had left, I asked the Potter about him. “He is very wicked,” the Potter said, “he will fill you up with the poisonous fruit of his lies, and soon you will be broken and cracked, no longer useful. Stay with me, and you shall have a great reward someday.”

And so I stay in the Potter’s house, unworthy of His love but striving to learn more of Him and how to serve Him better each day.

Contributed by a Sister in Christ.



FORGIVENESS AND MERCY

All mankind is in need of forgiveness. The Scriptures tell us, “As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one” Romans 3:10 and “For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God” Romans 3:23.

We are all born of sinful flesh. But there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared, Psalm 130: 4

Forgiveness is the blotting out of sin. The only way we can become reconciled to our Creator is through His mercy and forgiveness. We have a God who loves us with an everlasting love; indeed, He is love. Though He could judge us coldly and harshly, our heavenly Father extends mercy and withholds the punishment we deserve. He gives us many opportunities to accept His plan of salvation. It is only through God’s mercy and grace that we are able to experience the forgiveness of our sins. May we open our minds and hearts as we think on this important, lifesaving topic.

Jesus was teaching and healing in the town of Capernaum. Pharisees, scribes, and doctors from every town of Galilee, Judea, and Jerusalem had gathered to observe Him. Likely, they were looking for an occasion to find fault. A large multitude of the common people had gathered to listen to Jesus’ teachings and to observe Him healing the sick. Four men, carrying a paralyzed man, found the entrance to the house blocked. They could have

given up or decided to wait for a better opportunity, but they were resolved to obtain healing for their companion. They climbed on the roof, removed some tiles, and lowered the sick man down to Jesus. Luke 5:18-26.

We need that same determination today when we desire to meet Jesus. We should not allow ourselves to be deterred. Often our sense of urgency is dulled while waiting for a more suitable time. "To day if ye will hear His voice, harden not your hearts" Hebrews 3:15. Many times when healing the sick Jesus asked them whether they had faith. When the answer was yes, He declared, "Thy faith hath made thee whole." Jesus observed this faith in the hearts of the four men who had brought their friend, and His heart went out in compassion to them. His primary concern was the spiritual ailment of the paralytic. He said, "Thy sins are forgiven thee." Were these the words the men expected or wanted to hear? Though the sick man was lying there unable to walk, he must have rejoiced at those words.

When the Pharisees questioned the Master's authority, Jesus verified His power by telling the man to arise and walk. The power to heal, physically and spiritually, can only come from God.

The Epistle of James emphasizes the importance of being merciful. We will be judged by the standard we have used to judge others. This does not allow us to wait until the other individual has measured up to our perception of repentance, nor do we have the right to withhold forgiveness until an apology has been offered. Compassion will bring forth mercy. Mercy will then effect forgiveness even though we receive no apology.

During the sixth day of creation God created man in His image and caused him to become a living soul. "And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul" Genesis 2:7. God created Adam and Eve pure and sinless. Their hearts must have felt perfect peace. There was nothing to condemn them or cause them to feel guilty. We do not know many details of their life in the Garden of Eden, but we know that God came to the garden in the cool of the day and walked and talked with them. There was no barrier between the Creator and His creation. Since Adam and Eve had not sinned, they did not know how it felt to carry iniquity in their hearts or how

heavy a burden sin could be. If they had known, surely they would have been more careful to obey God.

He had given Adam and Eve the liberty to eat the fruit of every tree in the garden except the tree of knowledge of good and evil. When Eve was challenged by the serpent she listened, took of the forbidden fruit, and shared it with Adam. They then became sinners. Something changed in their hearts. Adam and Eve had changed from being perfectly innocent to being knowledgeable of evil. When the time of God's visit neared, they felt something they had never experienced before. A barrier of guilt had been created between them and the Lord. This guilt of sin caused them to become aware of their nakedness. They sewed fig leaves for clothes and tried to hide themselves among the garden's trees. Can you imagine the shame they felt?

The Lord must have grieved as He cast them out of Eden and caused hardships to become a part of their lives. Because of their disobedience and guilt, sin would become a part of every human being born into this world. Man was appointed to die without hope of eternal life. God could have destroyed man at this point. Instead, He extended mercy to His creation and promised them a redeemer. With this promise, God called man to trust Him completely, to follow Him in obedience, and to serve Him. Sadly, God's offer was largely ignored, and two thousand years later sin was so rampant that God destroyed all the inhabitants of the earth except a faithful few. After the flood, the world again became wicked. God then called on faithful Abraham to leave Ur and promised him posterity that would bless the whole world. Abraham's descendants carried the torch for another two thousand years.

Then Jesus, the promised Redeemer, was born. Ironically as the Jews attempted to preserve the old dispensation by killing Christ, they fulfilled God's promise to Adam and Eve. As Jesus' blood spilled from His body, the atonement for sin was achieved. The door for forgiveness was opened. Today, because our inherently sinful natures lead us to transgress God's law of righteousness, we deserve eternal death and damnation. But Jesus' blood covers those who believe on Him, sincerely repent of their sins, and serve Him faithfully. The barrier of sin can be removed from our hearts,

and our heavenly Father will walk and talk with us. “For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us” Ephesians 2:14. How precious it is to experience the sweet peace that only God’s forgiveness brings. We can be set free from the bondage of sin.

Christ impressed upon His disciples the need to forgive others. When Peter asked Jesus how often he needed to forgive, he was told to forgive seventy times seven. Christ also taught us that we should pray for God to forgive us as we forgive others. We cannot be unforgiving in our heart and expect God to forgive us. God’s love dwells only in a pure heart. Resentment and love cannot abide together in the same heart. We must look past the offenses or imagined wrongs we have experienced. Although we may feel justified in our feelings, we must be merciful and release an offender. Only then can we forgive and allow God’s love to flow into our hearts.

We will never earn our way to heaven by our perfection, though sometimes we try to do so. We put blame on circumstances or on others, trying to absolve ourselves of fault. On the other hand, when we realize we have failed again we fall into discouragement, despairing of ever being able to live without failings. May we realize that Christ died for us, not because we are able to be good or perfect but because we are prone to sin and need the mercy and forgiveness of a loving Saviour.

Each of us who has accepted Christ as our Saviour has experienced the mercy and forgiveness of God. Some have been dramatically changed by this experience. For others, the experience was a quiet resignation to the Lord’s call. All felt the burden of sin and surrendered everything to God. The magnitude of the experience is of little importance; it is possibly just an indication of how deeply one has fallen into sin. The important thing is that our lives are yielded to our merciful Father.

Saul’s experience was dramatic. He was working directly against God, arresting and imprisoning Christian men and women. His testimony caused some to be put to death. He consented to Stephen’s death and was present at his stoning. In mercy, God extended salvation to Saul on the road to Damascus. An astonished Saul heard the Master’s voice and chose to re-

spond. He later called himself the “chief of sinners.” He spent the rest of his life as an instrument of God, building and strengthening the church.

This same God calls us to Himself and extends mercy to us. Although we feel unworthy of God’s love, He will forgive our sins if we respond to His call. He accepts us as His children.

May we, like Paul, spend the rest of our lives faithfully serving Him.



The Two Ways

“Thus saith the Lord, Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls” Jeremiah 6:16.

In the beginning, God created man perfect and with the power of choice. Man remained in close fellowship with God until Adam and Eve chose to eat of the forbidden fruit. At that point, man became a sinful being, estranged from God. God, in His love, sent Jesus into the world to make a way for man to become reconciled to Him. Jesus was crucified and died on the cross, shedding His blood to make a way for man to escape eternal death and to obtain eternal life. As every person becomes accountable before God for his sins, he must make a choice. He may choose to enter the wide gate and travel the broad road to destruction or he may accept the plan of salvation, enter the strait gate, and travel the narrow way that leads to life eternal. The decision we make has eternal consequences.

The beautiful Sermon on the Mount was recorded during the time of Jesus’ popularity. Jesus saw the great multitudes and went up into a mountain to teach the people. Jesus taught them how to pray, how to get along with their fellowmen, and how to serve God. Near the end of the sermon He described two different ways by which men travel through life, the broad way and the narrow way.

The broad road is sometimes entered by default. If we do not make the decision to enter the strait gate, we will enter the wide gate. The ways are very different but so are the destinations. The broad, easy road leads to a

final, fiery destruction while the narrow road leads to glorious, eternal life. Jesus warned the people there would be false prophets pretending to be true prophets preaching and teaching a way that would sound alluring but would not lead to heaven. Although the prophets' words would be cloaked in apparent righteousness, they would point to the broad road. These prophets would appear sincere in their efforts to convince men there was an easier path to heaven. As a good tree bears only good fruit, a true preacher of the gospel will be identified by his fruit. A Christian bears the fruit of the Spirit and love will flow from God through the Christian to others. He will be patient, kind, and filled with grace. When he fails and yields to temptation, he will be truly repentant and confess his error before God and man. Jesus finished His sermon with the illustration of the wise man and the foolish man.

The teachings and doctrines of Jesus are the rock upon which we must build our house of faith. We can always trust in their stability. When we stray from His teachings, we begin to trust other things and build upon sand. The storms are sure to come, and only our complete trust in Christ will give us the strength to stand. The path we take through life is our choice. We may desire to serve the Lord and enjoy the world at the same time, but there is no middle way. We can follow our natural inclinations and keep all our lusts and selfish desires and thoughts as we walk through the wide gate. We may determine within ourselves to enjoy just a small part of the world and to keep away from grave sins. If we continue on this way, we will become accustomed to sin and accept more and more of the world into our lives.

The broad road is very alluring. When we are young we may see the fun and pleasure it offers. As we become older we may look at and covet the opportunities to become successful and wish to establish our financial security. We may observe luxurious living and desire it. This brings a constant yearning for things not convenient for a Christian or beyond our means. We see people traveling the broad road who appear to enjoy life without boundaries. Although this way seems easy, it is, in reality, a very hard way. We do not always see the bondage sin brings nor the heartache and despair experienced on the broad way. At the end of this road there will be nothing but death and eternal damnation. "There is a way which

seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death" Proverbs 14:12. Even while men walk this broad road, the Lord reaches down in love and touches their hearts with a certain hunger for the way of righteousness and offers an opportunity to alter course. God has made heaven perfect and will allow no sin to enter there.

To choose the road He wishes us to travel, we must own our sinfulness, accept the cleansing blood of Jesus, and pass through the gate of salvation, leaving our own will and desires behind. Though this way takes effort and consecration, perfect trust in Jesus makes it truly pleasant. Jesus said, "For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light" Matthew 11:30. This way is followed by few and may sometimes seem quite lonely. Even if we are the only ones in our family circle who follow the narrow way, we have One who is always with us. "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world" Matthew 28:20. We must be careful to keep our attention focused on our Master. If we spend too much time observing the broad way, we may be drawn toward it. Satan uses every possible means to persuade us to join the crowd on the broad road. During the time of the apostles and through the centuries following, he used fire and the sword to attack the travelers of the narrow way. The result of persecution was that Christian faith spread into other lands.

Today Satan seems to have changed his tactics. In this age of affluence, he uses many allurements to attack the Christian and entice him away from the truth. Today, more than ever, we need personal conviction to stay on the right way. As Christians we find direction through the gentle promptings of the Holy Spirit. He will touch our hearts when we allow our eyes to stray from Christ and begin to desire the world. He will gently encourage us to forgive when an offense comes our way. We also find direction as we follow the guidelines offered by the church, the bride of Christ. We must realize that we cannot walk with one foot on the broad way and one in the narrow way.

We are on either one road or the other. When the Christian life seems empty and without meaning, we will find we are trying to serve two masters. Like the wise man who built on the rock, may we choose the narrow way. To think we can get by with walking the broad road for a little while

is to think like the foolish man who built on the sand. The time will come when we will reach the end of our life, and our destination is determined by the choices we make now. Where will it be?



Respect of Persons

For if you love them which love you, what reward have ye? Do not even the publicans the same? - Matthew 5:46

Cornelius the Roman centurion was instructed by an angel to send men to Joppa and summon Peter, for “he shall tell thee what thou ought to do” Acts 10:6. But Peter himself was in need of some instruction, which is why God gave him the vision of unclean animals. Peter said later that it formerly had been “an unlawful thing for a man that is a Jew to keep company, or come unto one of another nation; but God hath shewed me that I should not call any man common or unclean” Acts 10:28.

As God’s chosen people, the Jews looked with disdain on people outside their group. The Law said, “Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself” Leviticus 19:18, but the Jews thought their neighbours included only fellow Jews. However, Jesus gave the parable of the Good Samaritan to teach that any person in need is one’s neighbour, Luke 10:25-37. And Peter said, “God is no respecter of persons: But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him” Acts 10:34.

Although we each [may] have a church and family members who are special and dear to us, a condescending attitude toward those of different faith, background, or culture is not Christlike. Many people we meet daily have never experienced the sincere love and concern for them that Christ wants to show through His people.

Consistent Christian love is difficult for even the hardest heart to reject, but a disdainful attitude of spiritual superiority can drive away even the most sincere seeker. Although we need to exercise discernment in all our relationships, our attitude must never portray us as exclusive people who think ourselves better than those who are different from us. For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. - Romans 8:14

From Beside The Still Waters – June 2018



The Lord Is Near

The Lord is near! Why should we fear? His power will uphold us;
He is our stay, rejoice always, His mercy will enfold us.

The Lord is near! Then make good cheer attend our expectation;
That in His strength we win at length and gain our souls salvation.

The Lord is nigh! Why should we sigh with needless worries troubled?
His loving care for us will bear our cares though they were doubled.

The Lord is nigh? To Him on high we plead for grace and favour;
He keeps our hearts, to us imparts the peace of Christ our Saviour.

Paul E Kretzmann 1883-1965



But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought
near by the blood of Christ. – Ephesians 2:13

Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands,
you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. – James 4:8

You also, be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is
at hand. – James 5:8

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