

THE AUSTRALIAN ANABAPTIST

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

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

Matthew 5:15

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For A Conservative Anabaptist Perspective

From The Editor's Desk**THE LIGHT THAT CAN PENETRATE DARKNESS.**

Many of us have heard of the conditions that the people of North Korea are forced to endure and recently reading a book by a North Korean defector the author made this statement referring to North Koreans; "Their suffering is often so traumatic that even when they have been able to flee to freedom they carry within them a darkness which is so strong that it obscured their hopes for the future." (Seven Names by Hyeonseo Lee).

There is no doubt that evil is the pervading force that controls the people of North Korea either directly through those who have submitted to it as a way of life or as they inflict unimaginable suffering on others.

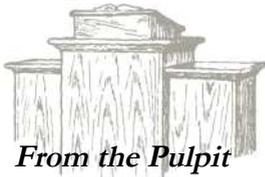
That lifestyle of choosing to be evil is not confined to North Korea but other places and people too and I believe it is what the Apostle Paul refers to in 2 Timothy 3:13 when he writes: But evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived.

On the other hand the testimonies of many of those who have gained freedom from such regimes testify of the Light that has come into their lives but has also been observed by them in the lives of those who suffer under such regimes and whose freedom from that suffering only came with physical death.

Jesus himself tells us He is the light of the world (John 8:12) and that He has come into this world as light so that whoever believes in him may not remain darkness (John 12:46) and we have that encouragement that the Light which is Christ shines in the darkness and cannot be put out.

Even in our own darkest moments of life when all hope seems lost that Light never fades or wavers, it is there to guide us and call us to our heavenly home where the Lamb is the light thereof (Revelation 21:23).

As we continue to follow the Light which is Jesus he reminds us that we also are to be a light to the world (Matthew 5:14) and shine forth as a witness of Christ in that darkness which is threatening to engulf it. Let us pray for those who are living in darkness or being afflicted by those who do so. May we each be the light that Christ would want us to be. J.v.L



From the Pulpit

The Gospel According to Micah.
From a message by Brother Merle Ruth.

On this occasion I have chosen to have us listen to the gospel according to Micah.

Now that choice of a sermon title might at first strike you as a blunder, possibly you always associated Matthew with the first gospel account, Micah lived long before Matthew and so you naturally wonder how could he be a herald of the gospel?

The answer is simple God gave it to him by divine inspiration.

The writer to the Hebrews says this: For unto us was the gospel preached as it was unto them. [Hebrews 4:2](#), meaning the Israelites in Old Testament times. Because God is a God of comfort he penetrated the darkness of that pre-Christian era with the rays of gospel light so I suggest that you open your Bible to chapter 5 of the prophecy of Micah. Here is one of those instances where the light breaks through and where the New Testament gospel is heard in terms of that day.

Micah was a younger contemporary of Isaiah, while Isaiah was preaching to the ruling classes in Jerusalem Micah was preaching out in the country districts, in the villages of Judea. In Micah's day the sun was already setting on Judah's era of prosperity, their sins had already robbed them of the blessing of God. The heyday of Assyrian domination had arrived. Micah predicted both the doom of Samaria, the northern kingdom, and also the destruction of Jerusalem, but Micah was also a prophet of hope. By the spirit of prophecy he was enabled to see beyond the doom and punishment that lay ahead to the distant horizon when there would dawn a brighter day.

Now where and how does chapter 5 [of Micah] fit into the message of Micah? Well chapters three, four and five form the middle section of his prophecy.

Chapter 3 focuses on the failure of the rulers of Judah, for their sake Jerusalem and the temple were to be destroyed; the kingdom was to be brought to an end. Chapter 4 brings into view the new Kingdom and chapter 5, the one of special interest to us this morning, brings into focus the new king.

Chapter 5 as I see it revolves around these three ideas; the coming Christ, the conquering Christ and the cleansed kingdom of Christ.

Let us listen to the gospel according to Micah section by section. The first section consisting of verses 1 through 3 has for its keynote the coming Christ, and I'm going to for warn you that verse one may strike you as a dark saying. [Micah 5:1-3](#) Now gather thyself in troops, O daughter of troops: he hath laid siege against us: they shall smite the judge of Israel with a rod upon the cheek. ² But thou, Bethlehem Ephrata, *though* thou be little among the thousands of Judah, *yet* out of thee shall he come forth unto me *that is* to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth *have been* from of old, from everlasting. ³ Therefore will he give them up, until the time *that* she which travaileth hath brought forth: then the remnant of his brethren shall return unto the children of Israel.

Now in order to hearten the people of that day God moved Micah to foretell in verse two the advent of a mysterious ruler who would evidently deliver them and restore the kingdom that was soon to be destroyed. The need for this heartening message is reflected in the strange message of verse one. Because of the many troops, because of the many soldiers she had within her walls in Jerusalem is here referred to as the daughter of troops, and so verse one is a call to Jerusalem to marshal her forces for a siege in which the ruling king will be humiliated.

Now gather thyself in troops oh Jerusalem, daughter of troops, he, the enemy has laid siege against us, they shall smite the judge of Israel with a rod upon the cheek. To smite on the cheek was esteemed by the Orientals a great personal affront. In the fall of both Samaria and Jerusalem, Israel's leaders were treated by their captors in that manner, in a humiliating manner. ([1 Kings 22:24](#))

You remember that Zedekiah the last ruler of Israel was compelled to witness the slaying of his sons before his eyes, then they gouged out his own eyes and then in chains was marched off to Babylon, ([2 Kings 25:7](#)) but I see something more reflected in verse one or at least suggested, the dangerous exposed condition of Jerusalem when the Chaldean army surrounded its walls is only a faint shadow of the perilous position of every man and woman outside of Christ.

Such persons are besieged by the armies of the evil one and by mighty lusts from within that war against the soul, that siege is planned with strategic skill and malignant determination and even though we become children of God the forces of evil do not leave us alone, they encamp about us waiting for an opportunity to break through our defences.

If God did not provide a liberator, if God did not provide a protector, our case would be hopeless. So verse one depicts human hopelessness in face of the onslaughts of the enemy.

Then in verse two (Micah 5) God is seen coming to the rescue, providing a new king who unlike Judah's kings will not fail.

There is another possible link between verses one and two.

The insults heaped upon Israel's King was in a sense an insult to Israel's greater king, the coming Messiah, this then leads naturally to a foretelling of His advent in verse two. Not proud Jerusalem but lowly Bethlehem was to be honoured by having his birth occur there, the future ruler chose not to Jerusalem but Bethlehem as his birthplace.

Here we behold one of the marvels of divine providence for Bethlehem means "house of bread" and it was precisely there that he who is the bread of life came into this world, a world starving for the bread of heaven. But why, why was this person of incomparable greatness why was he to be born into such obscurity? He had what no other man ever had, the power of selecting his own parentage and his own birthplace, he might have been born of royalty and nursed in a Palace instead he chose a place so little and insignificant that in modern parlance it was barely on the map.

I believe that selection had behind it the best and highest wisdom; it was God's way of laying bare the vanity of human pride.

Had he been born in Jerusalem in an earthly Palace they might have sought to use him but being born in Bethlehem only loyal hearts welcomed him so that the cradle like the cross tested men and revealed, brought to light the real state of their souls. Out of the Bethlehem shall he come forth unto me. Unto whom? Why unto God, for God is here speaking through Micah about the future ruler. The fact of his birth, the scene of his birth, the timing of his birth were all according to a divine plan, by a decree of God it

was destined, for he was destined to be a ruler over Israel and furthermore he would rule Israel in a far higher and nobler sense than David and his successors ever ruled, for his throne would be in the hearts of people over whom he came to reign.

He would set up on earth the kingdom of heaven and of that kingdom there would be no end. [Luke 1:33](#)

Then in the latter part of verse two ([Micah 5](#)) his identity comes into focus: Whose goings forth have been from of old from everlasting. The Christ who came to earth previously existed in heaven; he eternally coexisted with the heavenly Father.

Now what might be the meaning of this expression; whose goings forth? Well for one thing it depicts him as being ever active. Jesus said that on one occasion: My father hitherto worketh and I work. [John 5:17](#). He was ever active before he appeared on the stage of history as the Creator he filled the immensity of the universe with innumerable worlds, as the Angel of the covenant he went forth in old Testament times to visit selected men and women clad temporarily in human form but finally one of his goings forth issued in coming out of Bethlehem with something he never had before namely a little human body.

700 or more years after Micah wrote these words something happens one day in Jerusalem that greatly troubled King Herod, a delegation of wise men from the East sought an audience with him and enquired: Where is he who is born King of the Jews?

Immediately Herod demanded of the Jewish scribes where their Messiah King was to be born. ([Matthew 2:2](#))

When you look at verse 2 ([Micah 5](#)) you are looking at the very passage to which those Jewish scribes referred when they answered King Herod.

Verse three ([Micah 5](#)) gives the reader an insight into how Israel was to fare during those long intervening centuries. Therefore will he give them up until a time that she which travaileth has brought forth. Therefore because of his settled plan God would leave Israel to suffer their calamities until that time that the Messiah's virgin mother would give him birth, then the remnant of his brethren shall return unto the children of Israel.

This seems to indicate that the birth of their Messiah would mark the beginning of a turning to God on the part of the spiritual remnants of the Israel of that day. New Testament accounts indicate that this did indeed occur beginning with Pentecost they came by the thousands and later and we read of a great company of the priests coming in obedience to the faith, although they had been as sheep gone astray they were returned unto the shepherds and the Bishop of their souls.

We leave now behind the coming Christ and follow Micah as he depicts the conquering Christ.

Micah 5:4-9: "And he shall stand and feed in the strength of the LORD, in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God; and they shall abide: for now shall he be great unto the ends of the earth. And this man shall be the peace, when the Assyrian shall come into our land: and when he shall tread in our palaces, then shall we raise against him seven shepherds, and eight principal men. And they shall waste the land of Assyria with the sword, and the land of Nimrod in the entrances thereof: thus shall he deliver *us* from the Assyrian, when he cometh into our land, and when he treadeth within our borders. And the remnant of Jacob shall be in the midst of many people as a dew from the LORD, as the showers upon the grass, that tarrieth not for man, nor waiteth for the sons of men. And the remnant of Jacob shall be among the Gentiles in the midst of many people as a lion among the beasts of the forest, as a young lion among the flocks of sheep: who, if he go through, both treadeth down, and teareth in pieces, and none can deliver. Thine hand shall be lifted up upon thine adversaries, and all thine enemies shall be cut off."

Here we learn a great deal about this eternal being who was to make his appearance at Jerusalem. We learn first that he will combine the strong tender care of Shepherd with the dignity and majesty of a King and his rule shall extend to the ends of the earth, under him his people would enjoy peace and be given victory over their enemies, the numbers in the expression seven shepherds and eight principal men are used proverbially to indicate the sufficiency of the leaders that should be raised up in his cause. Also in him and through him Israel's mission to the world would be accomplished, just as King Hezekiah was delivered from the clutches of Sennacherib so the Church, the true Israel of the day, is to be delivered from

Satan and the powers of darkness, the gates of hell shall not be able to stand against the witness and testimony of the Church.

That in brief is the glorious message of these verses in [Micah 5](#). That is good news, that is New Testament gospel truth.

Now look again at verse four, ([Micah 5](#)) it is made very obvious that the one in view with more than an ordinary man; and he shall stand and feed in the hand of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God. He would be of God/man. And they shall abide. Those to whom he ministered would abide, permanent security is there spoken of, the Church shall abide and he in it and with it always until the end of the world.

Verse five: ([Micah 5](#)) And this man shall be the peace. He is the fountain-head of peace between God and man, between man and man. He came and preached peace and then he made peace by the blood of his cross and now he offers his followers a peace that the world can neither give nor take away.

Do you my friend have that peace this morning?

Especially do God's people need him when the Assyrian shall come into our land and when he shall tread in our palaces, then shall we raise against him seven shepherds and eight principal men and they shall waste the land of Assyria with the sword and the land of Nimrod and the entrances thereof. Thus shall he deliver us from the Assyrian.

Maybe I should reread that and include some insertions for the sake of clarity.

This man shall be the peace when the Assyrian shall come into our land, when he shall tread in our palaces then we, then shall we raise against him, the Assyrian, seven shepherds and eight principal men and they, these shepherds and principal men, shall waste the land of Assyria with the sword, the land of Nimrod and the entrances thereof, thus shall he, he the conquering Christ, shall deliver us from the Assyrian.

This had an initial fulfilment and the deliverance of Hezekiah and his kingdom from the power of sin and Sennacherib but the way in which it is here used makes it obvious that this Assyrian is meant to represent any and

all enemies that fight against the people of God. So that this promise of protection and victory is one that we can claim when the Assyrian invades our land whether it be in a natural sense or a spiritual sense. This Shepherd King although he is in himself almighty to save has nevertheless for wise reasons chosen to use human instrumentality. We as his followers are so blessed off him that when the Assyrian invader invades, we his people, will be able according to verse 5 to raise against him seven shepherds and eight principal men and they shall waste the land of Assyria, these leaders shall not only defend their own land against the enemy but shall carry the war into hostile territory and conquer it. They shall waste the land of Assyria. How true this was of the Apostles of our Lord for example. They penetrated the strongholds of the enemy. Paul was known in hell because of the battles that he had fought and won with the forces of evil.

Maybe you are one whom God is preparing to be one of these shepherds, one of these principal men, that he will raise up when some modern-day Assyria makes an invasion against his people.

Will the conquering Christ be able to count on you or will you yourself forget your identity and join the Assyrian?

I would like to add this yet; the worst of all invasions is the invasion of the human soul by the forces of evil, by means of sin Satan seeks to invade the Palace of the human heart. How thankful we ought to be for this triumphant defender for he alone is able to deliver us an in a provisional way he has delivered us.

In this connection I would like to read from Luke 11:21-22, these are the words of the conquering Christ. "When a strong man armed keepeth his palace, his goods are in peace: But when a stronger than he shall come upon him, and overcome him, he taketh from him all his armour wherein he trusted, and divideth his spoils." (Luke 11:21-22)

The context indicates that Jesus viewed himself as the Liberator of those whom Satan had brought under his power, as the stronger man he had come to disarm the strongman Satan, and he did, in the cross event he destroyed the principalities and powers, triumphant over them in it, made a show of them openly, he brought life and immortality to light through the gospel for those who were in the darkness of sin and now he offers himself to us to be our Liberator, to be our defender against every modern day As-

syrian who would attempt to invade our own soul and breakdown our barriers.

Furthermore those whom he liberates and defends he uses to his honour and glory among the peoples of the world. Notice the similarity in the verology between verses seven and eight; and the remnant of Jacob shall be in the midst of many people as a dew from the Lord. Now verse eight; and the remnant of Jacob shall be among the Gentiles in the midst of many people as a lion among the beasts of the forest.

As he, the conquering Christ, embodies himself in his people they become as a dew and as a lion, their influence upon the nations will be as refreshing dew but they would also be as a lion, that is they would be strong in indignation towards wrong wherever found. Ye that love the Lord hate evil. A complete character is not all lamb nor all lion but both combined, we find our Lord himself being characterised as both the Lamb of God and the lion of the tribe of Judah.

Now the remaining section depicts a cleansing of that kingdom over which Christ was destined to rule. [Micah 5:9-15](#): "Thine hand shall be lifted up upon thine adversaries, and all thine enemies shall be cut off. And it shall come to pass in that day, saith the LORD, that I will cut off thy horses out of the midst of thee, and I will destroy thy chariots: And I will cut off the cities of thy land, and throw down all thy strong holds: And I will cut off witchcrafts out of thine hand; and thou shalt have no more soothsayers: Thy graven images also will I cut off, and thy standing images out of the midst of thee; and thou shalt no more worship the work of thine hands. And I will pluck up thy groves out of the midst of thee: so will I destroy thy cities. And I will execute vengeance in anger and fury upon the heathen, such as they have not heard."

Here is an account of the purification of Israel in the days of the new king. It is depicted in a pictorial way using the terminology of Micah's day. Those things in which ancient Israel so frequently but wrongfully trusted would need to be removed in order that she might truly and holy trust in her new king and the spiritual resources that he would provide. Horses and chariots were the things most used in those days for both defence and attack but God had all along forbade their use by his people because they portrayed distrust in his providence.

Also in the coming kingdom there would be no place for pomp and pride and so cities are mentioned in verse 11 because they were viewed as the abode of luxury and pride, that is what a rich proud people in Micah's day had gravitated to.

A close look at this list brings to light the fact that two categories of things in view. There is the category of the temporal valuable things, horses, chariots and so on. And then there is the category of the morally vile, this would correspond to various forms of idolatry he mentioned in the concluding verses.

It is often well for us to be stripped of the temporary goods, the temporal goods, it is always necessary to be stripped of the morally wrong. Someone has expressed the opinion that there is more mercy in God's depriving providences than in his bestowed providences. And that may well be. That same writer adds these further remarks; God takes away temporal property from a man in order that he may get spiritual wealth and often does a man's secular fall lead to his spiritual life. He takes away physical health from a man in order that he may get spiritual health and often do the diseases of the body lead to the cure of the soul.

That is what we mean by the depriving providences of God. They show every bit as much mercy if not more than the bestowing providences of God.

So then this final section the cleansing of the kingdom of Christ shows us God in the business of shattering men's idols so that they will return to Him and trust holy in his conquering Christ and enlist under his banner.

In closing I wish to read a hymn that in my opinion captures well the heartbeat of this chapter's graphic preview of this glorious gospel era in which we are privileged to live and serve.

The son of God goes forth to war, a kingly crown to gain.
His blood red banner streams afar, who follows in His train?
Who best can drink his cup of woe, triumphant over pain,
Who patient bears his cross below, he follows in His train.

The martyr first, whose eagle I could pierce the
Who saw his Master in the sky and called on him to save.
Like Him with pardon on his tongue in midst of mortal pain
He prayed for them that did the wrong.
Who follows in His train?

A glorious band, the chosen few on whom the Spirit came,
Twelve valiant saints, their hope they knew and mocked the cross and
flame,
They met the tyrants brandished steel, the lions gory mane,
They bowed their necks their death to feel.
Who follows in their train?

A noble army, men and boys, the matron and the maid,
Around the Saviour's throne rejoice in robes of light arrayed,
They climbed the steep ascent to heaven through peril, toil and pain.
Oh God to us may grace be given to follow in their train.

Let us pray.



FREEDOM IN THE GOSPEL

And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free – John 8:32

There is something in man that yearns to be free. When men cry for freedom, for what are they crying? How many have looked at the sky in their times of oppression and have had the heart language of David the psalmist when he said, "Oh that I had wings like a dove! for then would I fly away, and be at rest" (Psalm 55:6)? Men throughout history have yearned for freedom from the oppression of others, but how many have realized they needed freedom from their own selfish ambitions? "Freedom from Self!" is the battle cry of the Christian, for he knows that is the only way to true freedom. Only when man surrenders his will to the One who created him does he begin to experience true freedom. Then the heart sings and free-

dom rings in the lives of those men whom God's Son has set free. "If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed" (John 8:36).

This is what the Apostle Paul said by way of encouragement and instruction to the Galatian church and applies just as much to us today in the 21st century

Galatians 5:1-6 ¹ Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage. ² Behold, I Paul say unto you, that if ye be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing. ³ For I testify again to every man that is circumcised, that he is a debtor to do the whole law. ⁴ Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace. ⁵ For we through the Spirit wait for the hope of righteousness by faith. ⁶ For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love.

Galatians 5:13-18 ¹³ For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only *use* not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another. ¹⁴ For all the law is fulfilled in one word, *even* in this; Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. ¹⁵ But if ye bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one of another. ¹⁶ *This* I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh. ¹⁷ For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would. ¹⁸ But if ye be led of the Spirit, ye are not under the law.

Galatia was a region of Asia Minor that the apostle Paul and Barnabas had traveled through and in which they had founded some churches. Lystra and Derbe were some cities in the center of this region. The people of Lystra first thought Paul and Barnabas were gods come down in the likeness of men (Acts 14:11), but after a time some unbelieving Jews turned them against Paul and Barnabas to such an extent that they stoned Paul and left him outside the city for dead. However, the gospel Paul and Barnabas had preached in this region took root and grew.

Paul said he had been chosen to preach the unsearchable riches of Christ to the gentiles. How it must have thrilled his heart to see God's grace reach out to mankind without respect of persons. Knowing salvation was for all men put a zeal in Paul's message and life. This was a time of adjustment, though, for the Jews in that day. They had been given a law many years

ago that separated them from the rest of the world. Now Jesus, the Christ, had come, died, resurrected, and ascended. Upon returning to His Father, Jesus had promised to send them the Comforter, God's Holy Spirit, to lead them in the path of truth. One of the results of Jesus' gospel was the removing of barriers between the Jews and gentiles. The Holy Spirit was beginning to show them that God's plan of salvation included all people.

This was difficult for some of the Jews to accept. Some among them believed they should teach and adhere to the ceremonial laws of Moses. Some of these Jews went to Galatia with this teaching. In their zeal they also attacked the authenticity of Paul's apostleship. Some of the believers at Galatia must have given ear to this teaching, and these two points were at the root of Paul's concern for the church at Galatia. In his letter to the Galatians we begin to feel Paul's burden for this church. He told them, "I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel: Which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ" (Galatians 1:6-7). "But now, after that ye have known God, or rather are known of God, how turn ye again to the weak and beggarly elements, whereunto ye desire again to be in bondage? Ye observe days, and months, and times, and years. I am afraid of you, lest I have bestowed upon you labour in vain" (Gal. 4:9-11). "Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace" (Galatians 5:4).

Paul had been given a revelation of Jesus and His finished work at Calvary. There was a reason Jesus cried, "It is finished!" when He died. All the types and shadows of the ceremonial law had been fulfilled in Him. He was the final sacrifice for sin, and now only faith in Christ and obedience to His Word would bring salvation. No man could earn his salvation by works! One can almost hear Paul echoing Jesus' cry, "it is finished," as he tried to warn the Galatians not to fall into this trap!

"But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed" (Galatians 1:8-9).

"For I through the law am dead to the law, that I might live unto God. I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live: yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me. I do not frustrate the grace

of God: for if righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain" (Galatians 2:19-21).

"Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hash made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage" (Galatians 5:1).

Then what was the purpose of the law? Paul said it was given because of transgressions and as a teacher to bring us to Christ. Man found he could not truly keep the law, and therefore he was guilty. Man needed someone to set him free from his guilt. Jesus is that one who sets man free, and those who understood that reached out in faith and claimed Him as their Saviour. Then they were free; their faith, like Abraham's, had grasped the promise.

Paul also told them that God's love fulfilled the law. As God's Spirit would abide in them, they would love others in a godly way and so fulfill the law. What a wonderful teaching that was! God's love inside would set them free from the awful works of the flesh, works that had the potential to destroy mankind. But not only would God's love set them free from the bondage of sin, it would take their affections off themselves and put them on God. When God is the center of a man's affection, that man's life will contain kindness, love, peace, gentleness, and self-control. Paul said there was no law against such things, therefore there is no more condemnation. Those who have this fruit in their lives fulfill the law.

Part of the Law of Moses had to do with rites and ceremonies. The Jews had found security in performing these things, for that was obedience to the law. Now Christ, to whom the rites and ceremonies pointed, had come and fulfilled God's plan. These rituals were no longer needed. Some found this difficult to accept. Perhaps they began to understand that to follow God's Holy Spirit would require more self-denial than the law would require, and they were not willing for that. There is also a desire in man to earn his salvation. If salvation could be obtained by accomplishing certain tasks, most people would put forth their best effort to perform them. It is humbling to realize that the only way to obtain something desperately needed is by the mercy and goodwill of another. Gifts are often given because the receiver has obtained the favor of the giver. How do we obtain God's favor? A good understanding of the law and some experience in the school of life will teach man that his sinful flesh makes it impossible to fulfill the law. Did some believe they could live good enough to be justified by the law? God's law was to teach man he was unable to meet God's

standard of holiness. Man needed help to become acceptable to God.

God loves us more than we understand. In that sense we already have His favor. But there is a condition upon which God gives His gift of salvation. That condition is a whole-hearted yielding to Christ and His plan for our lives. God said a broken and contrite heart He would not despise. As we come to God in this way with nothing, He gives the gift of salvation. Then we are free from the burdens we have carried, free from oppression and guilt, free from ill-will and offense, and free from hate and unforgiving attitudes. This is not a freedom that seeks to abolish laws and rules of conduct, nor is its call to obedience oppressive to them. Indeed, the man with this freedom begins to understand the only way for him to remain free is to obey the One who set him free. The truth of what Jesus said becomes alive to this man. "Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:31-32).

And that is how it will be for us if we believe on Him live His word.



BEARING BURDENS

*We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak,
And not to please ourselves*

Romans 15:1

The words, "Every man shall bear his own burden" used in Galatians 6:5 suggest that burdens are universal and every person carries some. Life has taught us that some individuals carry more and heavier burdens than others. The scripture, "Bear ye one another's burdens" (Galatians 6:2), applies to all of us. Even though each person has his own burden to carry, he should be concerned about the needs of those around him and be willing to help. As we bear our own burdens, we are more likely to be touched by the difficulties others endure. As we endeavor to lift the burden of a neighbor, we often find someone is helping us with ours. This dependence on one another is for our humility and unity.

Let us have a closer look at Paul's words in his letter to the Galatians on this subject:

Galatians 5:22-26 ²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, ²³ Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law. ²⁴ And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts. ²⁵ If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit. ²⁶ Let us not be desirous of vain glory, provoking one another, envying one another.

Galatians 6:1-10 ¹ Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted. ² Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ. ³ For if a man think himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceiveth himself. ⁴ But let every man prove his own work, and then shall he have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another. ⁵ For every man shall bear his own burden. ⁶ Let him that is taught in the word communicate unto him that teacheth in all good things. ⁷ Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. ⁸ For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting. ⁹ And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not. ¹⁰ As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all *men*, especially unto them who are of the household of faith.

It is interesting that the text about bearing burdens begins with a description of the fruit of the Spirit. (Galatians 5:22-23) Then Galatians 6:2 tells us that bearing another's burdens fulfills the law of Christ. The kind of law spoken of here is not statute law ("thou shalt" and "thou shalt not"). Rather, this kind of law is that of unchangeable characteristic; for example, the law of gravity which never fails and is always the same. The fruit of the Spirit, who is the Spirit of Jesus Christ, describes the unchangeable characteristics of Jesus. According to the law of Christ, He never comes short of the complete fullness of each of the attributes listed. We often consider whether we are bearing this fruit sufficiently to claim the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives. Let us not forget, though, that this scripture is a description of the law of Christ, and we can bear this fruit and fulfill this law only as we are partakers of the divine nature (2 Peter 1:4). The fruit of the Spirit of Christ has much to say about bearing one another's burdens.

It is the unchangeable characteristic of Jesus to bear our burdens because of His love and compassion for us. "Surely he hath borne our griefs, and

carried our sorrows" Isaiah 53:4. "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" Matthew 11:28. "Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you" 1 Peter 5:7. First of all, He has borne the tremendous burden of our sins to the cross. Then He delights to help us with whatever cross we must bear or whatever responsibility we must fulfill. Does He relieve us of our burdens by miraculously dissolving them? No, it is only that He carries them for us, fulfilling His promise that "My grace is sufficient for thee" (2 Corinthians 12:9).

In crucifying the flesh, with the affections and lusts, we are relieved of the burden of our own selfish nature and sin. This enables us to bear the burdens of our fellowmen. By living and walking in the Spirit, bearing the burdens of others becomes our unchangeable characteristic, too.

The vainglory, provoking of one another, and envy spoken of in verse 26 are self-serving spirits that blind us to everyone's burdens but our own. In this condition, we are so consumed with our own cares that we cannot bear the burdens of anyone else. Also, as we compare others' burdens with our own, we conclude that ours is the greatest of all. In this envy and self-pity, we disqualify ourselves from bearing anyone else's burden because we are already carrying all we can. It is an interesting paradox that when we reach for another's burden, our own becomes much lighter than we had thought it to be.

The scripture admonishes us to bear our own burden. We must shoulder our own cross, not expecting others' charity and sympathy to relieve us of that which God has asked us to bear with His help. Jesus has comforted us with the promise that if we will take His yoke upon us, we will find it to be an easy yoke, and the burden light. Whatever responsibility God asks, or whatever circumstance He allows is accompanied by sufficient grace so that we can bear it with courage.

What are the burdens we are asked to bear? As we take our places in the kingdom of God, there is a weight of responsibility and obligation that God places upon each of us. Also, some are asked to bear burdens of ill health, infirmity, grief, loneliness, financial hardship, or disappointment.

These can be a tremendous burden but it is important that cares about the future not overshadow the joys of the present day.

Let us take to heart the words of scripture in 2 Corinthians 4:17 For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding *and* eternal weight of glory;

Contentment is a beautiful virtue. Too many times we can trace our discontentment back to our thought patterns. It is for this reason we are admonished to guard our thoughts. As we fill our minds with wholesome thoughts, envious and critical thoughts can be judged. It is not in reforming but in dying to self that we find power to overcome. What a comfort to know that "God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus" Philippians 4:19.

The letter to the Philippian church was written by the apostle Paul from Rome, where he had been in prison for some time. It is apparent from his greeting and his fervent wish for them that they had a special place in his heart. This is very typical of the bond that is formed between those who have experienced transformation through Jesus Christ.

In Philippi, Paul and Silas visited several women and shared the gospel with them. Upon hearing the story, Lydia, a seller of purple, was converted, together with those of her household. In the same city, Paul, through the power of God, cast an evil spirit out of a girl who made a lot of trouble for them. They were thrust into prison by the officials and put in stocks. In the night, in the most undesirable circumstances, they began to sing.

It is often when we least expect it that trouble comes. We may feel that we have done our best and find it hard to understand why things suddenly changed. It may be the loss of a loved one, a financial crisis, or a wayward child. It is in these circumstances that God's children look heavenward. As the song says, "Earth holds no treasures but perish with using however precious they be" (*"Heaven Holds All to Me,"*)

Nothing on earth can comfort the hurt that is so keenly felt inside. It is only God, who knows the heart's deepest cry. Many people can testify that they have found solace and peace in those dark hours. Not only did they experience temporary relief until circumstances changed, but an abiding presence of comfort and security.

Many have experienced imprisonment, persecution, fire, and sword and found peace in the midst of these storms. By faith they claimed the promise, "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee" Isaiah 26:3. When we accept our inability to deal with the trials we face in life, we can look expectantly to our Father in heaven to help us.

We have often heard that peace is not a feeling but a fact. It is important that we understand the difference. Sometimes we feel moved by an emo-

tional experience and misinterpret it as the peace of God. While emotions fill an important place in our lives, they may be as changeable as the wind. The peace of God serves as a witness to what the Lord has done in our heart. It will not remain in a divided heart. It comes as a gift, bestowed upon those who are in agreement with Jesus Christ. The fruits of righteousness will be evident in their lives as well as a love for God's people.

Someone may ask, "What can I do to maintain the peace of God in my heart?" or "Is it possible for me to live my entire life without losing it?" Yes, it is possible through Jesus Christ our Lord! His provisions are sufficient for every need. We read in Romans 8:38-39 that nothing shall be able to separate us from the love of God. "In all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us" (v. 37). Where we often fail is following through in obedience to fill our minds and hearts with the precious Word of God. We become sidetracked in our commitment, and our love for truth grows cold. The only way to brave the storms of life is by keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus.



Spiritual Discernment

Prove all things; hold fast that which is good – 1 Thessalonians 5:21

In these last times when deceptive spirits abound, how urgent it is that we are able to tell the true from the false. Our permissive age would say that spiritual absolutes are a thing of the past and that every man can be saved by being true to his own view. On the other side of the road is the ditch of formalism and salvation by works. Christian bookstores abound with titles proclaiming new insights into spiritual realms. How is the faithful Christian to find his way?

The apostle Paul expressed the foundation of spiritual understanding when he cried out, "That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death" Philippians 3:10.

The Apostle John wrote this in 1 John 4:1-6:

Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world. ² Hereby

know ye the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God: ³ And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that *spirit* of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world. ⁴ Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world. ⁵ They are of the world: therefore speak they of the world, and the world heareth them. ⁶ We are of God: he that knoweth God heareth us; he that is not of God heareth not us. Hereby know we the spirit of truth, and the spirit of error.

And in 1 John 4:13-19:

¹³ Hereby know we that we dwell in him, and he in us, because he hath given us of his Spirit. ¹⁴ And we have seen and do testify that the Father sent the Son *to be* the Saviour of the world. ¹⁵ Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God. 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. ¹⁷ Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment: because as he is, so are we in this world. ¹⁸ There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love. ¹⁹ We love him, because he first loved us.

Jesus said we should not marvel if the world does not understand us, because it did not understand Him. It did not understand Jesus because He was not of this world. He was fully a spiritual man. His whole aim was salvation for man and the purchase of the church. When the same can be said of us, we, too, will be out of step with the world.

The world, on the contrary, will always be interested in material things. Their unbelief makes eternal things seem vague and vain. They seek after things they can see, taste, and feel. They want pleasure, pleasantness, and freedom from restraint. Christ, with His cross and self-denial, is odious to them. The spirit that is in them hates His ways. That spirit is the implacable antichrist. As one of Satan's unrelenting demons, he will always seek to undermine true faith and the practice of the gospel.

Many Christian religions today are expecting a literal reign of the antichrist. Our text tells us that even in the first century the antichrist was already in the world. He has not ceased to work. We should never underestimate his treachery. It is essential to discern his workings and influence.

On a personal basis, he usually begins in a subtle way and becomes progressively bolder. First he will question minor issues of the simple practice of the faith but will inevitably end with resistance, rebellion, and independence.

One notable difference between the Spirit of God and the antichrist is true love. Consistent, unfeigned, practical love will always be the mark of true Christians. Nominal Christians will speak of love and demonstrate some fine virtue in fair weather. When it comes, however, to matters such as brotherly reproof, effective church discipline, and consistent self-sacrifice, they will come up short.

Jesus' coming in the flesh has great significance to us. It makes our religion practical. Our Lord demonstrated loving service. He showed how to live without seeking man's favor and glory. He stood against Satan's wiles in severe temptation. He fearlessly taught the whole truth in the face of furious adversaries. In every way He showed that even in the flesh we can be victorious against our enemy and be faithful to the law of God. It is the greatest of miracles that our sinless Savior was able to be tested in all points like as we are, yet be without sin. In that miracle He brought true religion to where we live.

In 2 Kings 6, the story is recorded of when Israel's enemy had surrounded the city where the prophet Elisha was, hoping to capture him. Elisha's servant was alarmed at what he saw until God opened his eyes and he was able to see the multitude of the host of the Lord. When our spiritual eyes are anointed by the Holy Spirit, we see what the natural man does not see. We see the influence of unholy attitudes as they attack us and our brethren. We see spiritual dangers in many activities the unbelievers regard as innocent and even wholesome. We see blessing and fulfillment in that which the world regards as boring, unpleasant, and humiliating.

Many governments today have laws against false advertising. They know that the citizens need to be protected from unscrupulous businesses that prey on the innocent. Satan will not be subject to false advertising laws. The Scriptures tell us that "he is a liar, and the father of it" (John 8:44) and that he "shall go out to deceive the nations" (Revelation 20:8). His full intention is to destroy the work of God. For this reason we are repeatedly warned to watch and be vigilant.

Spiritual people have the gift of spiritual discernment. Paul put it very clearly in 1 Corinthians 2:14 when he said, "But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." There is a vast difference between mental abilities and spiritual insight. Until the Holy Spirit illuminates the understanding, the most intelligent person in the world only sees a garbled picture of spiritual things. Even though a Christian has understood in times past, when offense or some other kind of sin is tolerated in his heart, his vision becomes impaired.

The Scriptures speak of the deceitfulness of sin (Hebrews 3:13). The spirit of offense at times wants to pass as defense of the truth. Self-righteousness will parade as piety. Materialism and avarice want to be known as good stewardship. Many other sins will likewise put on a cloak of righteousness. These need to be discerned. In every case the false spirit will not harmonize with the spirit of the humble Christian.

When one goes to the optometrist, his vision is checked against the standard of the normal. Millions of tests have confirmed the degree of clarity with which healthy eyes see. Sometimes one begins to wonder if he or others are understanding correctly. At such a time we should ask ourselves whether our light is conforming to the vision of the saints through the ages. Does it agree with the tenor of the Scriptures? Am I perceiving what my spiritually healthy brethren are seeing?

Most people feel they have proper spiritual understanding. The truth is that many do not. Even the disciples who walked daily with Jesus were at peril. One time the Master told them, "Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of (Luke 9:55). Pride and ignorance will cause us to close our minds to further enlightenment and correction. A childlike spirit will open the door for our brethren and the Holy Spirit to help us.

As a Christian becomes carnally minded, he takes on the world's values. Immediately his understanding is affected. His priorities begin to change. For example, instead of the insatiable desire for spiritual things he formerly had, he now wants to familiarize himself with worldly things such as sports, vacation spots, and other pleasures. In some it creates a curiosity and desire for the vast store of knowledge the world has to offer at the expense of a hunger for spiritual truths. As with illness in our physical bodies the earlier the symptoms can be detected and the condition treated the less the damage to our spiritual man.

True spiritual vision sees the value of souls, the glory of God's church, the horror of sin, and the imminence of judgment. It energizes us to service and puts fervency in our testimony. A fervent prayer life is the direct result of godly spiritual discernment.



Where Do I Fit In?

While the pagan dances to the drum for the Christian there is a burden for that soul. While the unbeliever dashes off into dreams and dissipation the Christian stands in sober contemplation and mourns with concern. While the world reaches for prestige and power the disciple sees the end of such ambition and mourns. To stand aside and witness the world's indulgence of sin gives the Christian a deeper burden.

The disciple of Christ bears the marks of the Master, when reproached he holds his peace, when treated violently he endures with patience, [and I would say that is more than just clenching one's fist and biting one's tongue] when driven back he holds his position, when his rights are threatened he offers no defence, when he suffers injustice he accepts it quietly, when he is misrepresented he leaves his right with God.

A meek person remains calm in the midst of confusion, he is gentle in the midst of agitation, he is silent under the force of provocation, he is unruffled with reverses, he accepts insult without a resolution, to him these are as fires in the furnace of God to refine his soul."

Brother Wilmer Eshbach Versailles MO



Compiled & Edited by: J van Loon

E-mail: shimara2@iprimus.com.au

Web: www.anabaptistmennonites.net