

THE AUSTRALIAN ANABAPTIST

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

Vol. 14 No. 11 – NOVEMBER 2017



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

Mention of the word love brings to each of us a particular idea of what it constitutes and if we are honest it is not always the love that God speaks of. What does it mean to truly love someone? How does God expect us to fulfil this in relationship to Him and to others?

God decreed to His people Israel that they were to love Him wholeheartedly, we see that in Deuteronomy 6:5, Deuteronomy 10:12 and Deuteronomy 11:13, in fact the wording is such as to indicate that it is not just a mental assent but rather a very active and ongoing activity in our daily lives.

And just in case some may say “well that’s Old Testament” we have Jesus making the same statement in Mark 12:30 and Luke 10:27 but note that as in other cases where Jesus quoted Old Testament precepts He went even further and said that we are to love our neighbour as well.

Now I don’t know about your experiences but not all our neighbours over the years have been people that we found lovable and yet that is what we are called to do – no we don’t love their sins and neither does God – we are to love them in spite of their appearance, cultural differences, etc.,

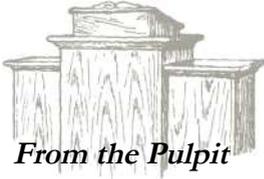
Jesus tells his audience by way of a parable in Luke 10 who our neighbour is and I am sure He did not just mean for us to wait until we come across some accident victim so we can show how neighbourly we are.

Remember we are to love our neighbour as ourselves and how often have we desired help from someone, anyone, and it has not been forthcoming.

We would all agree I’m sure that loving our spouse, our children, our siblings is part of life even though at times we may find the relationships strained and we should ask ourselves the question in those circumstances “am I the one who is causing the unpleasantness?” if so it is my responsibility to be what God calls us to be and that is loving, compassionate, forgiving to that person as He is loving, compassionate and forgiving to me.

This is not always easy as our carnal nature tends at times to drown out God’s call to love but God’s call to love Him and our neighbour as ourselves has not and will not change and in the words of George MacDonald: “To fulfill the very necessities of our being we must be God’s children in brain and heart, in body and soul and spirit, in obedience and hope and gladness and love. Then only is our creation fulfilled – then only shall we be what we were made for – *To love as God commands us to love.*”

J.v.L



From the Pulpit

From Lost Love to Nausea
Paul Emerson
Calvary Mennonite Fellowship

If you would turn to Revelation chapters 2 and 3.

We would like to think about the messages to the churches, this is probably one of the more familiar portions of the book of Revelation, which is not as familiar as it should be to us, we like to theorise some of the prophetic passages but we do not spend much time in Revelation and I do believe that it is at the end of our Bibles for providential purposes which is that you need the rest of the Scripture to understand it very well but we should not neglect it.

So the fact that we are looking at a familiar portion is not necessarily serving that goal because we need to be looking at the whole book, however, I feel drawn to this section because I believe it speaks to Calvary Mennonite Fellowship and we want to look at 2 of these messages or shall I say a portion of 2 of them and just pass through the other 5 rather quickly.

Again our purpose is to make application to ourselves as a church, these messages were given to churches, they addressed the angel of the church, angel simply is the word for messengers, so we variously understand what that means, some would see it as the pastors or the pastor others would see it angelically, the word is simply messenger (*Greek aggelos*) and that is not our focus today because the message is primarily to the church or to each one of these churches. It is not specifically to individuals in the church it is to the church of individuals.

Now these passages have been used as a calendar of prophetic events, I think that may not be the case, however, some of these uses have distracted us from the point of the sections.

For those who use it as a calendar Laodicea probably we will not get it absolutely correct in the present time and so the emphasis is on that passage only which does a disservice to the whole passage.

I would like to read beginning at verse one of chapter 2 and then later we will read the section from chapter 3.

Revelation 2:1-7 “To the angel of the church of Ephesus write: These things says he who holds the seven stars in his right hand, who walks in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks. I know your works, your labour, your patients that you cannot bear those who are evil and you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not and have found them liars. And you have persevered and have patience and have laboured for my name-sake and have not become weary, nevertheless, I have this against you, that you have left your first love.

Remember therefore from where you have fallen, repent, and do the first works or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent.

But this you have that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans which I also hate.

He who has an ear let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him that overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life which is in the midst of the paradise of God.”

This passage of Scripture is addressed to the church in Ephesus, the church that was planted by the Apostle Paul and others, the church that the missionary pastor Paul pastored for 3 years during which time he states in **Acts 20** that he warned them night and day for 3 years, warned them about apostasy, about false doctrine and so on.

This is the church that this letter is written to by Jesus Christ the head of the Church.

One generation we believe had passed since Ephesus was planted and we find something different now then was present in the beginning of the church.

This church is referred to as the loveless church because of what verse 4 says; “I have this against you that you have left your first love.”

The language requires us to understand that there has been a complete departing from the love relationship with Christ.

The church is commended for its faithfulness to doctrine, it is commended for ferreting out false apostles and false teaching, the teaching of the Nicolaitans is also mentioned in verse 6.

And so the church would pride itself likely in considering itself a pure church, pure in terms of the teachings of the Scripture with the major exception that they missed the main thing and we need to remember that we

can take a good and right biblical stand against false doctrine as the church at Ephesus apparently had done, that we can ferret out the false teachers identify them, we can ferret out those who do not practice truth as the Nicolaitans did not and still miss it.

So they were orthodox in doctrine but in essence the Lord says their life in Christ built upon the foundation of love for Christ had diminished, it was missing. And again they had had a complete departure from that.

I want us to understand what the Lord is saying to them here, they had things right in terms of a belief system but the core had become rotten in one generation and if you look at verse 7 the promise to the one who would overcome, that is the one who would respond to this message in following what the Lord called upon them to do basically to repent and the promise is that they will be given to eat of the tree of life.

Think about the corollary too that those who did not repent would not eat of the tree of life.

So the Lord was not merely giving some corrective comments here for the church it was not merely a course correction that was in view, it was not a course correction for those headed to heaven it was that the church had turned away in such a way that they were lost and not headed to heaven at all.

I believe that has to be the deduction from reading the promise of verse 7.

So what are we talking about when we talk about this lost love or this departure from a love relationship with Christ?

It is I believe illustrated by all appropriate love relationships, if you are in love, you are a man and you are in love with a woman or you are a woman in love with a man there are certain things that are fairly obvious, one you want to please that person. If you men are in love with your wife and she prefers that you wear chequered shirts if you love her you will likely wear chequered shirts, and you can go on with the illustration over and over again, if you don't do, again we're not talking about sin issues here I particularly hope you don't think a chequered shirt is sin, but anyway if you don't do what the person of your love enjoys and likes then you are selfish, you are pig headed in the wrong way, to those of you who were at the

meeting the other night, you are self-centred. For if what the person you love asks is not in and of itself compromise you would want to do it to demonstrate your love to that person, it is not dissimilar in dealing with our love life with Christ.

It is advertised, our love for Christ is advertised by our lives of compliance, joyful compliance with his will.

And that seems to be the sort of thing that the Lord Jesus is saying to the Ephesian church, your love life is gone, your love life for Christ is gone.

A corollary to that would be our love for one another advertises our love for Christ, that is something He asks us to do, to love one another, but that is not the central focus here it is that they have lost they've turned away they have departed from their love life with Christ.

And you see in verse 5 there is this statement do the first works, and that is why I have attempted to emphasise doing what the person you love would want because that does seem to be a measurement of one's love.

That is what has happened to this church, orthodox, their doctrinal statement would be accurate and good, they are busy dealing with false doctrine and false teachers, they are doing some very good things but the Lord says you have left your first love.

This results in the next generation not following the teaching, in other words there is an ongoing result you have these people one generation or approximately a generation after the church was planted having turned away from their genuine love life for Christ, the position of the church is still accurate biblically but there is this diminishing this turning away and the next generation will not follow even the teachings.

This has been repeated throughout Church history and the Lord gives a solution to it and I want us to carefully look at the solution because I believe that we as a church may in fact be guilty of the same thing that the Ephesian church was guilty of.

Notice what the Lord says to the Ephesian church, verse 5, there are actually 3 things here one is repeated, first of all remember, remember from where you have fallen.

I want us for a few moments here this morning to think back not only in the history of this church but in your personal history of your relationship with Jesus Christ when you were deeply in love with Him and nothing was too great a sacrifice in following Him, reading His word was a joy, spending time in prayer satisfying, it was exciting to be a Christian, you had been saved from the depths of sin and your whole life was a joy and loving and serving Jesus.

Now there may be various flavours of all of that but that is likely quite true of all of us here and we joined together as a church in that flavour but time has gone on and while we have been faithful I believe in attempting to maintain pure doctrine could it be that we have missed the essential thing of maintaining a love relationship with Jesus Christ?

And there is a conversion that takes place here and it is a bad conversion not the redemptive one.

When we are in a love relationship with Jesus Christ to serve Him is a joy, when that love relationship grows cold to serve Him becomes a chore and the chore leads away from serving Him to simply minding our membership responsibilities in the church and eventually not even doing that.

There is a process that takes place I suggest that at least in part it has taken place here and so when we are asked to do something by our congregation we do so grudgingly rather than being excited because we love Christ to have an opportunity to serve Him and in the process of serving Him serving the church.

So the first thing that Jesus says to the church at Ephesus in terms of correction is “remember”

Remember from where you have fallen, remember how it used to be when you were deeply in love with Jesus and you would go anywhere, do anything, say anything for him.

Secondly He calls upon them to repent.

He calls upon them to repent which as we have recently studied in the gospel is an about face, it is a total opposite state of mind, it is a changing of one's mind going in the opposite direction, and so He calls upon them to remember where they came from and to repent with that memory which

means that they turn around from the direction that they are going and go back to the memory, go back to that love relationship with Jesus Christ.

Now often as we study a passage like this we simply respond I want to do better, I really need to do better. That is not repentance! That is the language of the self-help people and it is sadly wrong. Repentance is an about face in the opposite direction in this case go back to the Christian life you enjoyed in the beginning. That is repentance.

He calls upon them to repent and then He says repent if you want to go back to your first love, He says do the first works.

Remember, Repent and do the first works.

In other words remember where you came from in your Christian life, repent turn in that direction and go all the way in that direction to do what you did in following Jesus in joy.

And of course the verse ends with a condemnation if they don't do what He commands them to do here the removal of the lampstand when as far as Jesus the head of the Church is concerned this is no longer a church. That is where Ephesus was headed.

Interestingly enough in the end, though perhaps not at this particular time frame, that is what happened and Ephesus became no longer a church.

He says He will do that unless they repent and so the word to repent is repeated, 3 things, remember, repent, do the first works and then He says repent.

So apart from repenting there is no hope for Ephesus and if our assessment has been correct of ourselves here today apart from repenting there is no hope for Calvary, just to say that we are going to do better is fooling ourselves there must be repentance, there must be a remembering of how it was in the joy of fresh salvation there must be a return to that.

No amount of regulation can substitute for that, though we manifest a sincere need for regulation no amount of regulation can change the heart, it keeps order and that is all, but a change of heart before God will provide a life that supersedes all regulation.

So the church at Ephesus should speak, the message to the church at Ephesus should speak to the church at Calvary.

Following the message to the church at Ephesus there is a message to the persecuted church, Smyrna, the only church that does not have strong condemnation.

There is a message to the compromising church, the church at Pergamum.

There is a message to the corrupt church, the church at Thyatira.

There is a message to the dead church, the church in Sardis.

There is a message to the faithful church, the church in Philadelphia.

And then we come to the last message that to the church at Laodicea.

It would be true to say that all of these messages have applications to churches today and to our church here at Calvary as well, however, we are going to look at the last church which is a message to the so called lukewarm church, it is the final message of these seven.

And again it is the Lord, speaking to the church at Laodicea, a generation or so after the church was started and it has essentially no commendation, no approval, it is a message we often refer to in our conversation because of the graphic use of the word lukewarm and the subsequent nausea of God over that.

I will read the message then would like to comment briefly.

[Revelation 3:14-22.](#)

“And to the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write: These things says the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God. I know your works that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot. So then because you are lukewarm and neither cold or hot I will vomit you out of my mouth.

Because you say I am rich have become wealthy and have need of nothing and do not know that you are wretched miserable not poor, blind and naked, I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire that you may be rich and white garments that you may close that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed and anoint your eyes with eye salve that you may see.

As many as I love I rebuke and chasten therefore be zealous and repent. Behold I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears my voice and opens the door I will come in to him and dine with him and he with me. To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with me on my throne as I also overcame and sat down with my Father on his throne. He who has an ear let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.” This is the lukewarm church.

It is a final warning to the church of the Laodiceans, they have said by the way that they live that they do not need God that they can do these things, this religious thing, they can do quite well by themselves thank you and they do not need God.

Jesus says to them I know your works they are neither cold nor hot, this is another set of expressions that speaks to some of the same truths as the message to the Ephesians, in other words they left their first love they had completely departed from their love relationship with Jesus.

Here the Laodiceans hadn't necessarily denied huge blocks of doctrine but they were what would be cold I suppose, but they were not warm to God at all, they were not tender to His call, they were not open to the life changing grace of God and so He calls them lukewarm.

If you want to paraphrase what Jesus says to the Laodicean church in modern language, you make me sick! is in essence what He said to them. Instead of the vibrancy that comes from a love relationship with Jesus, a desire to serve him with all our heart, mind, soul, it was this blah.

Are you a Christian? Yes, I think so.

Are you doing anything for Jesus? Don't have time.

It's that sort of attitude, I can't actually put words in their mouths of course, but that sort of attitude, I'm busy with my stuff, God will have to make room for Himself.

And then the Lord enlarges on their stuff.

They were apparently materially wealthy and He talks to them, verse 17, you're self-sufficient and you have made yourself independent from me says Jesus.

I have need of nothing, I'm willing to accept the creed but I really don't need God everything is going fine with me!

He says you think you are self-sufficient, you think that you can operate independent from me but what you don't know, verse 17, is that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind and naked.

And so the message applied to our church here and now: Are we living a life or lives apart from or independent from the gracious supply of God?

Do we feel we need God, do we feel that we must talk to Him every day, do we feel that we must read His word every day or do we sort of take it or leave it, we are getting along pretty well!

That is the Laodicean attitude and Jesus is not gentle here, He said you don't know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind and naked, you folks are a mess, you make me sick in essence is what the Lord Jesus Christ says to the church of the Laodiceans.

Now He also says when they say they don't need anything by the way they live He tells them that they do most definitely need something and again the inference is that these are not converted people, whatever they may have been in the past the Lord speaks to them now as unconverted people.

He said you need to recognise your need, you need to recognise that before God you are wretched, miserable, blind, poor, no clothes.

That's how God sees it and He says you need to buy from me gold refined in the fire.

It speaks of trial, purging, you need to get over this idea that you have it all together because you don't have it all together and you need some purging, you need to buy from me what a life of trial brings, He says that you are wretched because you are poor and you need to buy from me white garments that you may be clothed that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed.

White speaks of purity, it speaks of holiness, come to me says Jesus take my righteousness, your righteousness stinks. And He says anoint your eyes with eye salve so that you may see.

The business of the Saviour illustrated physically in his earthly sojourn and continuing to this very day is to cause the blind to see, this is a spiritual

sight to understand things as He sees them not as men see. You know as men see our church is doing great, as God sees it may be nauseous to Him. Anoint your eyes with eye salve from the Saviour that you may see.

He calls upon them to be zealous about this and to repent.

So there is this call to come to Jesus to receive what we really need not just what we think we need. This call to repent and the emphasis of the Saviour is “I’m still calling”, we know scripturally that He will not always still be calling, that may vary from individual to individual. Hebrews tells us that Esau wanted to repent and he found no repentance though he sought it with tears ([Hebrews 12:17](#)) Esau had crossed the line.

Apparently Laodicea hadn’t quite crossed that line yet but they were nearing it so the Saviour was still calling them and you will notice that He goes on in this vein in verse 20, Behold I stand at the door and knock if anyone hears my voice and opens the door I will come into him and dine with him and he with me.

And again reflecting quite literally on the language here Jesus says I have taken my stand on your threshold and am continually knocking.

The Saviour calls the church or those from the church of the Laodiceans, He calls those from the church here at Harrisonburg, I’m standing on the threshold I’m continually knocking if you will open the door, if you will open the door and let me come in I will come in and dine and you will know gold refined in the fire, you will know white raiment, you will see as you are seen.

That’s the call to us today.

Well you may say: Preacher your painting a pretty dark picture of our church!

Well you tell me how far off is it?

This is the word of God, not mine, to actual churches and by application to this church.

The call is there, if we go on in our stubborn way or ways there will come a day when there is no more call, now is the day, this is the hour, hear Him, remember, repent and do the first works.

Adversity – Blessing or Curse? *Conclusion from the October issue.*
Daniel Yoder High Prairie Mennonite Church

Why does God allow adversity to come? What is the purpose of adversity?

Wouldn't life be nice if we could live it without it? Wouldn't it be enjoyable if we could be free from troubles? And we do need to recognise in the land in which we live we are largely free from those kind of adversities as compared to some other countries and things of suffering in other lands, but why is it that God allows adversity?

First of all I believe He allows it adversity to come to us to prove what is in our hearts.

Again my mind went to Abraham and Isaac and when God sent him there and he went and he was ready to slay his son and God stopped him, His response, God's response was: "Now I know that thou fearest God. Seeing that thou has not withheld thine son, thine only son from me." [Genesis 22:12](#).

Now I know God says.

Moses told the children of Israel in [Deuteronomy 8:2](#) as he was looking back over the life in the wilderness he said:

"And thou shalt remember all the way which the Lord thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness, to humble thee, *and* to prove thee, to know what *was* in thine heart, whether thou wouldest keep his commandments, or no."

You know we get a true glimpse of ourselves and what we really are when we face adversity. It has somewhat stripped the veneer off and leaves us exposed for what we really are when we face those times. We get a clear picture of where our weaknesses are, where we need to grow, what God is trying to do with us.

It also gives us a clearer picture of where our trust and confidence is when suddenly we face adversity that may take away even some of the material things of life that we enjoy.

Again I am impressed with Job, his confidence was not in his possessions, though those were taken away he bowed his head and worshipped.

It shows where our confidence and trust really is.

Secondly I believe the purpose of God in bringing adversity into our lives is simply to bring God glory. That's the purpose.

Back here in Exodus 15 the children of Israel faced a circumstance that was beyond human ability. Had these people been left to themselves they would have perished, there was no way that they themselves could change the circumstance to bring about salvation of life, it would have been impossible.

God loves to show His power in the midst of our adversities, it brings Him glory when we are faced with something that is beyond us and we see God working to accomplish His purposes. You know there is not much glory for God when things are going well and prosperous for the Christian, the world looks on that and says: "So what? It doesn't take too much to be happy and cheerful when things are going well, we can do that. If things are going the way we enjoy it then we would be happy too."

But when they see the child of God going through a *Marah* experience ([Exodus 15:23](#)) and they see a rest in God's will and see a life exhibition of faith in God that He is working, He is in control, they see a trust in the power and provision of God in the midst of that adversity, they see a joy and a peace shining through that child of God's face that will leave a powerful testimony beyond almost anything else of material wealth or prosperity, it brings God glory.

Now it is possible to deprive God of that glory if we face our adversity with a long face and complaining about how rough we have had it and how difficult our lot in life has been, how bad we feel, if we respond with those kind of attitudes then our adversity has become a curse rather than a blessing, it becomes a curse rather than a blessing and we lose the benefit that God has planned for us through that adversity.

In saying that I don't mean to imply that it is an easy thing, we can just calmly say: Yes, God is in control and we will let Him work it out.

No, adversity brings us to a soul searching many times as we lay ourselves bare before God but as we do that we come away from that experience with the joy, with a peace, with a rest in the trust and provisions of God and that brings God glory.

The third purpose of adversity I simply called it: The purpose of chastisement.

Job said in [Job 5:17](#): "Behold, happy is the man whom God correcteth: therefore despise not thou the chastening of the Almighty:"

The Proverbs writer says: My son despise not the chastening of the Lord need to be weary of his correction. [Proverbs 3:11](#)

Over in Hebrews [12:5-7](#) we have further admonition. "And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children, My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him: For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not?"

Drop down to verse 11: "Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby." [Hebrews 12:11](#).

I believe we can testify this morning to the fact that chastening is not pleasant.

We remember as children when we were chastened by our parents, that wasn't pleasant, and yet behind it there was a purpose that of teaching and training us in the issues of right and wrong, that of establishing a course for our lives. God does that with His children.

I am not saying this morning that the adversity that comes as chastisement to us because we have been turning away or because we have been wayward but there have been times where God has allowed chastisement, He has allowed adversity in the life of His children simply to bring them closer and that is His purpose for that adversity.

Well I believe another purpose for adversity is: To better enable us to minister to others needs.

We are in Hebrews, go back up to second Corinthians the first chapter verse three: "Blessed *be* God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort; Who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God. For as the

sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ." [2 Corinthians 1:3-5](#).

When we face adversity and we are comforted that in turn enables us to comfort others who go through that adversity.

I was impressed with this some years ago. My brother lost his companion and that was a real adversity, they had only been married about three years, and we endeavoured to comfort him but the ones that he received the most comfort from were those who had gone through the same experience of losing a companion. They understood that emptiness, they understood that grief and that heartache and he knew that they understood and they were able to comfort and minister to him.

We need to be careful that we don't just push in on someone who is facing difficulty because we faced something just about like that but if we see someone going through a valley that we ourselves also have gone through let's be ready to reach out and offer comfort and consolation.

Many times we get wrapped up in our own problems and difficulties to the extent that we hardly even notice that others are suffering. And on the other side we sometimes get so wrapped up in a joyous and delight in life that we don't recognise their suffering either.

I believe 1 Corinthians 12 comes in focus here, we heard it also this morning in our devotional meditation in [Romans 12:10](#), And be kindly affectioned one toward another.

Paul said that there are various gifts in the church that there should be no schism within the body but that the members should have the same care one for another and where one member suffer, all the members suffer with them; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with them. [1 Corinthians 12:25-26](#). Ministering one to another.

Fifth and lastly.

I believe God allows these adversities to come our way to keep us focused on our heavenly Father and our heavenly home.

You know when the Israelites got water from the rock, when Moses smote the rock and water came out it wasn't bitter, it was good, it was nourishing ([Numbers 20:11](#)) but this water [at Marah [Exodus 15:23](#)] came out of sand. And I'm told that in desert areas where water comes up from the sand beds

it is so bitter that animals will refuse to drink it. You see the flavour of the earth has tainted it and it is no longer acceptable.

Today we are travelling as it were through the wilderness of this world and it is true that the devil has many things to offer that on the surface appear very appealing, it appears as though it could be something that could really satisfy, this would really meet the need, this is just what I am looking for but he tries to hide the bitterness that it brings and the poison and death that come at the end.

That is what would have happened had they simply drank that water but this morning that is really all the world has to offer, that which brings bitterness, pain, suffering and finally death.

And as we realise this, as we realise that in this life will suffer adversity, will suffer trouble, it should cause us to change our focus back to our heavenly Father and to the recognition that someday there is a promised land awaiting us as well and adversity will be left behind.

I believe God allows adversities here in this life lest we get too comfortable and lose our vision of eternity.

You know the prisoner who suffers being deprived from his home, his being deprived from social life, he faces perhaps harsh treatments and restrictions that come from being imprisoned, he longs for freedom again, he longs to get out but there are times when prison life gets comfortable enough that that longing is not so much there any more as what it had been. I personally have heard individual prisoners at their work in various prisons express to me: "You know it's not too bad here, I don't mind if I stay just right here. They feed me good, things go well, we are treated good here, I guess I'll stay right here, I don't mind it a bit."

They like it where they are.

I believe that same potential exists for you and I today. The devil wants us to get so comfortable in this wilderness of this world in which we live that we lose that fervent desire for heaven and the longing for home.

He wants us to get so comfortable that we lose the vision of the awfulness of hell that is awaiting the unprepared and so God allows adversities to come to us to help us to refocus back on Him.

How do we face these adversities so that they are a blessing and not a curse?

As I pondered this I see that there are basically three responses that come when the individual faces adversity.

The first response: I see individuals that face adversity and they respond to it by becoming bitter and blaming God and blaming others. Demanding why did this have to happen to me, what did I do to deserve this?
Blaming God.

Secondly: Another response that I have seen: That of simply enduring the adversity that comes our way.

Just somewhat putting up with it you know, it is not what I like, it is not what I want but it is what is being asked of me and others have their adversities too and so that's just fine.

Somewhat the thought of just putting up with it, tolerating it.

Now you may be thinking: Wait a minute, you mean I need to enjoy this adversity? I am supposed to find joy and pleasure in this trouble that is coming our way?

This morning we are not saying that adversity is to be a pleasure trip but if we are just tolerating it and if we are just enduring it we are missing the blessing that God has intended for us through it.

Yes maybe we say yes it is better than being bitter, that may be true, but is still not allowing God to accomplish His purpose through it when we just endure it and just tolerate it, there is still a better way, and we find that in [Hebrews 12:11](#) where it says: "Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby."

That is how adversity can become a blessing instead of a curse is when we allow ourselves to be exercised by it. That's how it becomes a blessing.

How do we do this? How can we be exercised by the adversity that comes our way?

We need to first of all refocus from the adversity back to God. We have touched on that already and looking back in our text here in Exodus all that complaining of the children of Israel about the problem didn't help anything, all the blaming of Moses, why did you bring us out here?; didn't help

anything either, that only led to more despondency and despair on their part and it will finally lead to defeat.

When we respond in that way we will begin to sink as Peter did when he began walking across the water when he took his eyes off Christ and began to notice the wind and boisterous waves around them he began to sink. What was his salvation? He refocused away from the storm back to God, back to Christ, Lord save me! Refocusing from the adversity back to God. (Matthew 14:29-30).

For the children of Israel they were still at the same place in life, water was still coming from the same location that it had before and water was still a necessity of life. Things haven't really changed that much but what made the difference? Moses cried to God, God was brought into the picture, that's what made the difference.

When we put God into proper perspective it changes our outlook on life and brethren and sisters this morning I don't fully understand this but we serve a God who is big enough to allow a wicked people to make evil decisions that affect the lives of His children, He is big enough to allow them to do that still accomplish His purposes in the lives of His children.

That boggles my mind but that is the God we serve.

We may say that the difficulties we face are because of evil men and we can look back on the history of the church and we see many times that happens, the persecution that raged was because of evil wicked men but God was able to take that and still accomplish His purposes.

He is able to do the same for us today but we need to refocus from the adversity back to God.

How do we do this?

We do it through prayer to God.

Moses didn't drive the children of Israel back in Exodus 15 but he turned to God in prayer, he went to the right source, he didn't blame God rather he brought his trouble to God and allowed Him to work out His will and way.

You know that even though our heavenly Father knows of the affliction, the adversity you and I may be facing or that we will maybe face in the future, He knows that, He is all knowing but He still desires that we come to Him, that we bring it to Him and that He can direct.

We also in turn if we are going to make this adversity a blessing instead of a curse we need to follow God's leading and direction.

We call that submission.

We don't have the record of Moses when he cried to the Lord coming to God with a lot of suggestions, a lot of ideas of how this would all work out, he didn't come with a ready-made plan for God to just rubberstamp it, Lord I would like to have done this way, if this and this would happen I could see how it would work out, if You would just please work it this way I'd be happy.

That wasn't his response, he brought the need, he left it there before God, he waited for God's direction and then he followed it. He was willing to follow it.

That takes faith on our part.

Naturally speaking it was impossible for that tree that he cut down and thrown into the water to change that water, that quantity of water that was needed for that multitude of people and animals.

Moses could have said: Lord what are you trying to do? This doesn't make sense, what benefit is this going to be?

But that wasn't the issue, God had spoken and Moses complied. He stepped out in faith and obedience following God's leading and direction.

Fourthly if we are going to make adversities a blessing we need to cultivate contentment in God's leading and provisions.

You know we stress to our children sometimes that they need to be satisfied with what mummy and daddy decide, they need to be satisfied with mummy and daddy's plans for the day or for the week or for the trip. You know the times when a young person the youth may feel strongly that his or her away would be much better than what the parents would prescribe and sometimes that brings difficulties, and it is not hard for us as parents to

look at and see where our young people should come out, they should learn to be content with the direction and provision of the parents.

But the question before us is: Are we setting that kind of an example for our young people? Do they see us content with God's direction and provision in our lives? Do they sense that?

What about when God's leading or plan for us is different from what we would have chosen or would have liked to have come to pass?

We need to cultivate contentment in God's leading and provisions.

Lastly: We need seek to learn the lessons God would have us learn through this experience.

This adversity may be because of things we need to learn, it may come because simply it will be a help for someone else. But let's seek to learn the lessons that God has for us through this experience.

Again this morning we raise the question: Adversity - is it a blessing or a curse?

This morning I don't know most of your lives, I don't know what you are facing or maybe will face but I do know the God that we serve and as we focus on Him adversities can become a stepping stone rather than a stumbling block and can lift us up higher and draw us close to God.

May that be our experience and we can then look back and see God was at work and He was accomplishing his purposes in your life and my life.



If God's forgiveness is total
Can our forgiveness toward one another be less?

THE UNITY OF THE SPIRIT

The Scriptures enjoin believers to endeavour "to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" Ephesians 4:3. This unity relates to the believing and practicing of the faith.

The true Christian faith reflects the nature, and the unity, of the Godhead—one only God known in three Persons. Our Mennonite forefathers said, "We believe with the heart, and confess with the mouth, that there is one only, eternal, incomprehensible, spiritual being, which in Scripture is called God ... who in the New Testament is called by three distinct names—God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost ... although differing in name, are nevertheless in their divine nature and attributes, one only, undivided God, according to the testimony of the apostle, `for there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one" 1 John 5:7 ("Eighteen Articles of Faith," 1630).

It is inconceivable that such a God would devise a way of discipleship that would contradict His oneness. God is the "author and finisher of our faith" and of "the faith which was once delivered unto the saints" (Hebrews 12:2; Jude v. 3). The entire scope of God's working bears the hallmark of the unity of His triune being. In one sense, the essence of the Christian brotherhood is oneness in experience, spirit, and conviction. Jesus prayed, "And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one" (John 17:22).

There is a deep divine truth here, and Paul refers to "the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God ... To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God" (Ephesians 3:9-10). The fellowship of this mystery is found in the unity that the Spirit promotes and effects on the basis of the Word in the church of God.

Jesus said, "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you" (John 14:27). Our Lord made a clear distinction between something the world gave and that which He would give. The same is true of the unity of the Spirit: it is of a far different composition than the unity that man may negotiate. Much of the world's unity eventually ends in dissension, which scatters and frustrates purpose. The unity of the Spirit binds together, because it works by sanctifying the spirits of believers and thus gathers divine strength to fulfill Godly purposes.

"Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together

in unity... for there the Lord commanded the blessing, even life for evermore" (Psalm 133). There is something about the unity of the Spirit that is convincing and convicting. It is an undeniable demonstration of heavenly power and grace. Paul wrote words that highlight the integral part of the "unity of the faith" in Christian maturity: "Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ" (Ephesians 4:13). The number of seeking souls who were convinced of God's leading when they perceived the unity of the Spirit in the church of God is great. Much as Jesus said about brotherly love, "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another" (John 13:35), so is the unity of the Spirit. Indeed, where the unity of the Spirit is, the love Jesus referred to ("as I have loved you"—v.34) will not be wanting.

There is that about the unity of the Spirit that does not just happen. Sometimes it must be sought after, especially in times of stress and differences. This entails the exercise of Christian virtues and denial of the true essence of self. The apostle Paul beseeches us to endeavour "to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Ephesians 4:2). The "endeavouring" the Apostle mentions here is first and foremost in yielding our spirit to God for sanctification. The varied elements of self-will and pride, the seeking of the notice of men and wanting to prove one's point must be recognized as detrimental and stepped on. The more this is done the more pronounced the unity of the Spirit becomes. In truth, only as this is done can the fear of God be upon us and can the Holy Ghost have full sway in our hearts and minds.

The unity of the Spirit never hangs on thin air; it rests solidly and firmly on the eternal truth, the Word of God. It will never settle on anything less. Unity that infringes on the doctrine and principles set forth in the Word is a product of a false spirit—a spirit of unity. Such a spirit can never produce the holiness that the unifying work of the Holy Ghost does. Agreement of minds that minimize or ignore the counsels of the church is not the unity of the Spirit, but of man. The tantalizing snare in appeasing subtle elements of the flesh at the expense of Scriptural and traditional principles (2 Thessalonians 2:15) presents itself in our day. Appeasement of the flesh has never fostered the unity of the Spirit.

The need of our day is not to give in to fleshly considerations in order to keep unity. The need is for prayerful and careful consideration of the Scrip-

tures in order to allow the Spirit to give us a proper application for our day. That may well mean bearing the cross, but "the way of cross leads home." This is the ground of the unity of the Spirit. Part of the working of the Spirit in bringing us to His unity is to impart a "love for the truth" in our hearts (2 Thessalonians 2:10; 1 Peter 1:22).

Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of love is often an arduous effort. Keeping the faith and resisting the pressures of our day tax our commitment and endurance. Facing the constant reality of the world's encroachment can wear on our spirits. At this juncture, it may be appealing to us to let go for a little while and "feel good about ourselves." Yes, there are many positive things, and God's grace is sufficient for every day and time. We claim God's promises to never forsake us, and we rejoice in Jesus' assurance that the true faith will endure until the end. But one searches the Scriptures in vain to find merit in "feeling good about ourselves" at the expense of the battle. It is the approbation of God that is our comfort and strength.

**"People don't care how much you know—
But they do know how much you care."**



Many think that the price of discipleship is too costly and too burdensome.

For some, it involves giving up too much.

But the cross is not as heavy as it appears to be.

Through obedience, we acquire much greater strength to carry it.

—J E F —

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