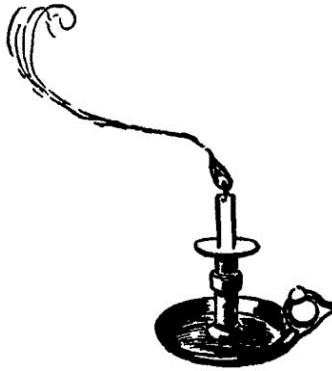


THE AUSTRALIAN ANABAPTIST

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

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

Matthew 5:15

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For A Conservative Anabaptist Perspective

From The Editor's Desk

The Apostles Authority to Teach

Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. ¹⁷ And when they saw him they worshiped him, but some doubted. ¹⁸ And Jesus came and said to them, “**All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”** Matthew 28:16-20 ^(ESV)

1. Should we accept the warnings and advise given by the writers of the epistles – the apostles?

Now I would not call for a vote on this as the conclusion should be a resounding yes – one would be a foolish Christian indeed to ignore their warnings and advise. Of course if you are not a totally committed disciple of Jesus Christ you would probably ignore a substantial part of the epistles if not all of Scripture.

2. Do we need to adhere to the teachings of the apostles in their letters/epistles?

If you agree that we should accept the warnings and advise given by the writers of the epistles then we would be foolish indeed not to heed them as doing so could place you in the position of being on the left hand of God at the final Judgement as foretold by Jesus in Matthew 25:31-33

Is that what you want?

3. Can we pick and choose what to accept or reject based on our likes & dislikes? Pride or Vanity?

Many people do because of peer pressure **or** because in our day and age it is “politically correct” to be seen as tolerant of the non-scriptural ways of living exhibited by many **or** because we are told by some that God is love, He loves everybody – including their sins – and we should therefore accept all manner of conduct even if Scripture calls it sin **or** because our legislators, including those who profess to be Christians, have legislated as legal in man’s eyes what God maintains is sin and will pass judgement on.

It is your choice, it is my choice, what we do with how God through all of Scripture calls us to live today.

J.v.L



From the Pulpit

A SPIRITUAL CHECK-UP.

Brother Merle Ruth

By way of introduction I'm going to renew our acquaintance with a brother named Gaius. In order to meet this brother you will need to open your Bible to the third epistle of John. This is a personal letter of encouragement written by John the Elder, addressed to Gaius.

3 John 1:1-4. "The elder unto the well beloved Gaius, whom I love in the truth. Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth. For I rejoiced greatly, when the brethren came and testified of the truth that is in thee, even as thou walkest in the truth. I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth."

Well that is our introduction to Gaius. Evidently he was known to be a very gracious person because he is described as well-beloved and then John adds a personal note; whom I love in the truth.

Verse three speaks of the good report about Gaius that John received from other faithful brethren, and they told John about the hospitality that Gaius had extended to the faithful preachers and missionaries of that day, this is stated in verses five and six (**3 John 1:5-6**).

The verse that I would like to focus on in particular is verse 2.

Now this verse gives us a clue to what it was that made Gaius so likeable, so gracious, listen carefully now as I reread verse two: "Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth." **3 John 1:2.**

Although we cannot be sure it may be that Gaius was not very prosperous materially and that he was not in the best of physical health. Reading between the lines might lead to that conclusion but there is one thought that comes through very clearly, Gaius was spiritually well, very well. In fact John feels so assured of Gaius' spiritual health that he expresses the wish that Gaius might thrive physically to the same extent that he is thriving spiritually.

Well here I believe is a clue as to why Gaius was so widely loved and appreciated, it was because he was in peak condition spiritually. Though just in passing I would like you to notice that even that kind of person, even the best of Christians, may have enemies, in verse nine we meet one who apparently did not appreciate Gaius, Diotrefes who loveth to have the pre-eminence among them receiveth us not. (*3 John 1:9*). I believe John is including Gaius in that pronoun "us," he did not receive John and he did not receive Gaius.

Now when others dislike us perhaps we ought to ask ourselves why? it may be our fault or it may be the other person's fault, if we are wholly Christ-like as Gaius was and certain individuals still dislike us then it is their fault.

Jesus said: Blessed are ye when men shall revile you, persecute you, say all manner of evil against you falsely for my name's sake. *Matthew 5:11*. Don't mind that, providing they say it falsely. But shame on us if they say it truthfully.

Now that's about all I'm going to say about Gaius. I brought him into focus because he stands before us as an example of one in the best of spiritual health and that is my concern this evening.

I have this for my sermon title: "A Spiritual Check-up"

The society we live in is currently very health-conscious but nearly all the emphasis follows upon physical health, millions of dollars are spent in the pursuit of physical fitness. Now the Christian does not deny that physical health is a valid concern, the very fact that John expressed a wish that Gaius might be in good health gives us ground to assume that good health is for the Christian a legitimate concern, but the thing that should concern us even more is the general lack of concern about spiritual health. That is far more important than physical health and yet it is widely and woefully neglected. Many a person, including some church members, are healthier physically than they are a spiritually.

For some of us John might need to reverse his approach, instead of writing as he did to Gaius and if John wrote to us he might need to put it this way: I wish that your spiritual health would measure up to your physical health.

The one thing that makes spiritual health so important is the influence that it exerts on physical health. Beyond all doubt a lot of physical problems grow out of spiritual problems, not always, but often a sick body is the result of an upset mind.

There are people who would be well physically if they were well spiritually. Do you believe that? I do. I believe there are people who would be well physically if they were well spiritually.

Medical science has been amazed at the correlation that exists between these two conditions. In Psalm 32 David admits the physical effect that unconfessed sin had upon him; When I kept silence my bones waxed old, night and day God's hand was heavy upon me. (*Psalm 32:3-4*).

One young man said this after he had been arrested for his first crime, he said: I felt sick ever since.

What pain is to the body guilt is to the soul, it is a signal that something is wrong, it is a God-given signal that we are to do something about it.

I have here the rather remarkable statement of a Christian doctor who says: "Irrespective of future rewards it would be well for any man or woman to lift the Christ-life just for the mental and moral rewards it affords here in this present life." What a statement!

Well there are other things besides guilt that can upset the mind and affect the body.

A physiologist named John Hunter, evidently a non-Christian, is quoted as having said: "The first scoundrel that gets me angry will kill me!" And that proved to be a correct prediction. Not long afterward that man died in a fit of anger.

Perhaps the apostle John recognized that the hostility of Diotrephes was a potential menace to the health of Gaius, perhaps that was one of the factors motivating him to pray that Gaius might experience good physical health. If we know that an individual is undergoing unusual stress that is an added reason to pray for that individual, because stress, if not properly handled, is injurious to one's health.

Now many people have periodic physical check-ups, they want to know how they are health wise, if there is anything wrong with their health they

want to do all they can to correct that problem, so they go to their doctor or a clinic and they have this periodic examination. For older the people especially this may be a good practice.

I'm not inclined to argue either for it or against it by I will argue for the need of periodic spiritual check-ups, I will argue further that it is biblical that we are to examine ourselves. We ought to go often to the great physician; we ought to go in the attitude of the Psalmist: Search me O God and know my heart, try me and know my thoughts and see if there be any wicked way in me. *Psalm 139:23-24*.

I assure you that when prayed in sincerity that prayer will not go unanswered.

So let's imagine now that the great physician is giving us a spiritual check-up. What might that examination consist of?

Well when a doctor examines you he frequently looks into your mouth, doesn't he? The mouth incidentally is somewhat of an index to the health of the body. I suppose that is because the tongue is located in the mouth and the tongue is a pretty accurate indicator both on the physical level and on the spiritual level, a pretty accurate indicator.

God's Word declares that if any man offend not in word the same is a what? A perfect man. *James 3:2*.

If the Lord finds in your mouth a well bridled tongue that is a mark of spiritual health. I hope He finds it in your mouth and mine. But all too often the examination of the tongue will discover tongue troubles of one kind or another.

Some tongues are prone to exaggerate; they have great difficulty in repeating a report without stretching it.

Some tongues are too sharp and cut and wound the person to whom they are speaking and the person about whom they are speaking.

Some tongues are loud and boastful; they glorify their owner instead of God.

Some tongues, through misuse, have become deformed, persons with this kind of tongue, and incidentally God's name for this deformity is double tongued, double tongued people developed a habit of talking out of both sides of their mouth. When they talk with Brother For-it, well they are wholeheartedly in agreement with him, but when they talk with Brother Against-it, they agree with him too.

And maybe you are not like that but I know some people who have that problem.

Well these are some of the ailments that a mouth examination may uncover and any one of them will prove injurious to one's spiritual health but they may also prove fatal, there are no liars going into heaven. (*Revelation 21:8*)

Well a physical check-up may also involve having one's temperature taken.

If one's body temperature becomes either too high or too low death will follow, spiritually it is the same. Jesus predicted because iniquity would abound the love of many would wax cold, (*Matthew 24:12*). When Peter tried to warm himself at the enemies' fire he got colder spiritually, (*Mark 14:67-68*), it still works that way.

The trouble with some of us is that the heat that we do manage to maintain is not evenly distributed, we lose our warmth of heart and we get hot under the collar.

Well when we are in that condition we are liable to make the kind of mistake that Peter made when he cut off a man's ear. (*John 18:10*) When we are in that condition we are liable to make the kind of blunder that will put a blot on the name Christian. God's Word declares the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God, *James 1:20*. In the kingdom of God you cannot get things across by getting cross, it is when we get too hot we get cross and bring reproach on the name of Christ.

If there is any variation at all in our spiritual temperature it ought to be in the direction of a cool head and a warm heart.

One of the major items on the checklist is the heart.

Physically some people have a bad heart, spiritually we all start out with that kind of heart, it is deceitful and desperately wicked, *Jeremiah 17:9*, without exception that is the state of the natural heart, but when one becomes a Christian God performs that operation that He promised to perform back in *Ezekiel 36:26*, He gives one a new heart like He once did to Saul. We then become responsible for the care of that heart, even it can become hard, it can become divided and polluted with sin. One of the hardest

things one can try to do is to try to be good with a sin polluted heart, you cannot do it, no one can.

Without the use of any instruments what soever the Lord looks upon your heart and my heart, He is a heart specialist. He can even discern the thoughts and intents of your heart, *Hebrews 4:12*.

A certain people once tried to deceive Him by drawing near to him with their mouth but their heart was far from Him, *Isaiah 29:13*. No one can deceive him. It is sobering to realize that He knows all about my heart.

How is your appetite?

That is another question that needs to be included in this check-up. A poor appetite for good solid soul food is a sure sign of poor health spiritually. On the other hand blessed are they who hunger and thirst after righteousness, *Matthew 5:6*, but do we? Can we say as Job did: I have esteemed the words of my mouth more than my necessary food. *Job 23:12*. I confess to you that I cannot yet make that claim.

We look at the Israelites and wonder how could they prefer the leeks and onions of Egypt over the milk and honey of Canaan? (*Numbers 11:5*) How could they get tired of that good tasting manna, direct God given food? But really don't we need to contend with that same tendency? Did you ever discover other reading matter was threatening to crowd out your reading of the Bible? Isn't that a reflection of the very thing that the Israelites were troubled with?

Why do you so easily settle for the back seats in the church service? I hope you don't do that habitually but some people do. Doesn't that say something about one's appetite? I think it does.

It is dreadfully easy to develop a perverted appetite, feeding at the lunch counters of this world will quickly debase our once good appetite. The snack bars of the false church offer all kinds of spiritual junk food. On what am I really feeding?

If I am to be spiritually healthy the bread of life must be more than a once a week snack. You cannot grow strong if that is your spiritual diet.

Next we come to the eyes.

The eye test is a standard part of the physical check-up. Spiritually we are all somewhat blind until God in conversion opens our eyes to the world that we were blind to before, but that does not guarantee 20/20 vision for the rest of one's life. Disorders of various kinds can interfere with one's vision.

Some people are troubled with being nearsighted spiritually. Peter writes about those who cannot see afar-off, *2 Peter 1:9*, such persons can't see the long range consequences of their daily decisions and so they move in the wrong direction.

Others are troubled with being farsighted, an example of this is the person who can see himself serving in a mission program on the other side of the world but here at home he shows no concern for his next-door neighbour. That is being farsighted spiritually.

The people in Jeremiah's day had a hearing problem too, among the writings of Jeremiah I find this plea, "O earth, earth, earth, hear the word of the Lord," *Jeremiah 22:29*, Jeremiah was lamenting that God could not get their attention.

Jesus in his very last communication to Christians repeated over and over again this warning: He that hath ears to hear let him hear. (*Luke 8:8, Luke 14:35, Revelation 2:7, 11, 17, 29, Revelation 3:6, 13, 22*). Are you my friend hearing the word of the Lord?

Elihu made this observation: God speaketh once, yea twice but man perceiveth it not. *Job 33:14*

Are you, my friend, hearing what God is trying to tell you? Or don't you perceive that God is trying to get through to you?

The Bible also mentions a disorder called itching ears (*2 Timothy 4:3*). It is not very nice to say but really, really some of us have an itch to hear bad things and consequently we turn our ears into a garbage pail and that is a sign of spiritual sickness.

Another thing that the doctor commonly checks on is your complexion. Spiritual health, even more than physical health, will be evident in one's facial expression. The Psalmist acknowledged that God was the health of his countenance (*Psalms 43:5*).

After being in the presence of God the face of Moses literally shone (*Exodus 34:29-35*) and Stephen was so filled with God that his face shone as the face of an angel, (*Acts 6:15*).

Now perhaps our face need not glow like that but there ought to be a glow about us, how shall we put it, there ought to be, our faces ought to glow with a beauty of character that is very noticeable. I was once in a Hutterite colony, and although I have heard a great deal of criticism of the Hutterites, I must say that in that Hutterite colony I saw sisters with faces that glowed in such a way that I was convinced that they were children of God.

The Christian walk requires good feet so they too need to be examined. When we are spiritually healthy our feet are sharing in the preparation of the gospel of peace (*Ephesians 6:15*) but if we don't engage in the right kind of spiritual exercise we become spiritually lame, when that condition overtakes us one is unable to stand for what he ought to stand for and he is unable to walk the strait and narrow way and it begins to look like an impossibility to him (*Matthew 7:14*).

God needs Christians with good feet because the man who walks straight himself keeps a good many other people from walking crookedly right? The Bible implies that: Lift up the hands that hang down and make straight paths for your feet lest that which is lame be turned out of the way (*Hebrews 12:13*).

The great physician will be interested too in your breathing.

Breathing speaks of prayer because prayer is the Christian's vital breath. Do you love to be alone with God? Do you pray with regularity or do you pray only when you are in trouble

Seven days without prayer makes one weak - and that is spelt w.e.a.k. Allow me to ask this question: Is prayer your steering wheel or is prayer your spare tyre?

An honest answer to that question will tell a great deal about the state of your spiritual health, a great deal.

A thorough check-up might also include this question: Do you have any sores? Many do, they have a sore spot here and they have a sore spot there, they cannot forgive wrongs that were committed against them perhaps years ago.

This underscores the need for good elimination. One of the secrets of good physical health is good elimination and that is no less essential for spiritual health. So do not allow in your system any build-up of waste matter. This was one of the rules are observed by Paul: Forgetting those things which are behind (*Philippians 3:13*).

In the life of every healthy Christian there will be a good size waste tank and it will be emptied frequently, that is one way to keep healthy spiritually. How is it in your life?

One more thing: Are you bothered with stiffness of the neck? To the great physician that is a matter of real concern. He has had a lot of disappointing experiences with stiff-necked people and He knows that the yoke of Christ will not fit a stiff neck. (*Exodus 32:9, Exodus 33:3, 5, Exodus 34:9, Deuteronomy 9:6, 13, Deuteronomy 10:16, 2 Chronicles 30:8, Acts 7:51*).

Well that is the end of the check-up.

What has it brought to light? What will be the report of the great physician? There is one thing that we can be sure of His diagnosis, unlike that of other doctors, it is never wrong, it is accurate, it is precise just as we have it in *Revelation chapters 2 and 3*.

There is another respect in which He is different. In our efforts to help one another because of our limitations we too often become concerned only about the symptoms and we fail to get to the real problem. Now please don't misunderstand me symptoms should not be ignored, they are important, neither the doctor nor the believer should ignore symptoms, symptoms are observable they should create alarm.

Losing interest in one's church, adopting the fads of the world, those are symptoms and better than anyone else Jesus, the great physician, can read the meaning of those symptoms and so when He gives a prescription it will do more than simply treat the symptom, it will get down to the root of one's problem. Rather than simply cut off the branches He puts the axe to the root of the tree (*Luke 3:9*).

In the gospel account we come upon this marvellous line: As many as touched him were made whole. (*Matthew 14:36, Mark 6:56*). There was no exception.

He was able to heal all, as many as touched Him were made whole. Why then was not everyone made whole? As many as touched him! They were required to reach out and touch him with the hand of faith as is every individual in every age who desires Jesus Christ in their life.



TAKING IT FOR GRANTED

There is hardly a more common inclination of mankind than to take things for granted. Man assumes and presumes many things about life and eternity, often to his hurt. A clear example of this trait is found in a prophecy of the apostle Peter. He says that in the last days men shall ask, "Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation" 2 Peter 3:4. They took it for granted that time would go on and on.

Speaking of our natural lives, who hasn't, at one time or another, taken life for granted? Only knowledge of what the Word of God says about life and attention arresting experiences awaken one from this complacency. The reality is that life is in God's hands, and due to the curse of sin, it is uncertain. Acknowledging this by word and conduct indicates one of the clearest insights that wisdom gives. James says it, we know it with the intellect, but we often ignore the truth: "Go to now, ye that say, Today or tomorrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain: Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away. For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that" James 4:13-15.

A certain amount of planning, preparation, and anticipation are good and necessary in the natural affairs of life. But the propositions of life should be as a prayer of petition presented to God, properly ending with, "If the

Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that." This lacking, someone has said, is like burning the candle of life in the service of self and then in the end blowing the smoke in God's face.

The apostle Paul told the philosophers on Mars Hill about the "God that made the world and all things therein" Acts 17:24. Then he brought God even closer, saying, "For in him we live, and move, and have our being" (v. 28). True Christians are mindful of and rejoice in this fact. The Apostle's teaching being true, though, the person who takes his or her life for granted is also taking God for granted. "To take God for granted" means to unthinkingly expect that He owes us good, pleasantness, and the fulfillment of dreams. Often there is little or no consideration of God's plan and purpose. This mind-set makes God a servant to the interests of man. It's as though man puts God on a shelf and tells Him to stay put until He might be needed. This is an ingredient of the sin of presumptuousness.

Presumptuousness: "Rude or arrogant: inconsiderate, disrespectful, or overconfident, especially in doing something when not entitled or qualified to do it." The Scriptures are not silent on how God looks at presumptuousness or taking life into one's own hands. "But the soul that doeth ought presumptuously, whether he be born in the land, or a stranger, the same reproacheth the Lord; and that soul shall be cut off from among his people. Because he hath despised the word of the Lord" Numbers 15:30-31. The reproach is against the sovereignty of God, but whatever He does or wills is righteous and good and therefore worthy of man's respect and obedience. Many are guilty of this sin in regards to salvation and serving the Lord.

A multitude of people know they do not want to die the way they are living, but they put repentance off until another day. Under the convicting power of Paul's reasoning, "Felix trembled, and answered, Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee" Acts 24:25. He took it for granted that a more convenient season would come. Where did that place God? As far as is known, this mightily troubled man died in his presumptuousness, and many today will die in that same condition.

Taking it for granted is a near kin, if not the forerunner, of procrastination. Its implications reach into almost every area of life, and only Judg-

ment Day will yield the full tally. As it applies to the kingdom of God, the following may be considered.

The new and young Christians among us should not be taken for granted. They may or may not have grown up in Christian homes, but they will all need to be nurtured in the faith. This may be easily overlooked. As they add a year or two to their Christian walk, it is often taken for granted that they know the faith. Experience is showing that this is not necessarily true. Many may know the outward rote of religion but not that vital, personal relationship with the Lord. They may not have the vision of bearing the cross in obedience to His doctrine.

Neither should we take one another as older brothers and sisters for granted. Because we know quite well the prescribed manner of living, when this is more or less in order, we assume that our brother or sister is of good courage. This assumption proves to be mistaken at times, and sometimes tragically. It could be said that if a congregation is spiritually vibrant, the devil will not be able to spring such surprises. The apostle Peter says, "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour" 1 Peter 5:8. We must be one another's keepers.

One wonders how many youth and young married couples in the church today are taking it for granted that there will be time and conviction to consecrate their lives later. The loss that the church of God is incurring through spiritual gifts and service not being made available because of this presumption is not small. It may be that some are deliberately putting off consecration because they are not willing for the burden of the cross of service. They presume that they can walk a fine line of staying out of trouble and evade the call to service today. "Tomorrow" they will yield themselves, presuming that God will bear with them until they get ready. Some may take it for granted that if they thus get past the call of the church they are free. But "What then shall I do when God riseth up? and when he visiteth, what shall I answer him?" Job 31:14.

By all evidence many are taking the church of God itself for granted. The religious and social life of the church is all they have known from child-

hood. There is decreased knowledge and feeling for the cost that has been paid by believers of former times to preserve this faith. Little thought may be given that sacrifice and effort are required today to ensure the blessing of the true faith for tomorrow. It may be assumed by individuals, or an age group, or a congregation that their neglect in Biblical principles is of no consequence to the church. This is not so. Indeed, one sure indicator of taking it for granted is the lack of a sense of responsibility and accountability for blessings received.

The king of Nineveh gives us a good example of not taking things for granted or of presuming on the grace and mercy of God. He heard Jonah's message and believed it wholeheartedly. He told his people to fast and pray. He didn't presume that God would spare them but said, "Who can tell if God will turn and repent, and turn away from his fierce anger, that we perish not?" Jonah 3:9. That attitude of not taking it for granted touched God's heart. "And God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God repented of the evil, that He had said that He would do unto them; and He did it not" Jonah 3:10.

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The Freedom of Truth

"For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death." Romans 8:2

"What is truth?" These words were spoken by a cynical Roman official nearly two thousand years ago. It is a question that penetrates to the heart of man, and it is on the lips of many today. Truth can make man uncomfortable, and sometimes, like Pontius Pilate, we would like to ignore it or sidestep it. What is freedom? Freedom is a universal desire of man, but does fallen man really understand that desire? Let us examine the link between freedom and truth. One we desire, and one we sometimes fear, but in the eyes of God we cannot have one without the other. May this study increase our understanding and appreciation of truth and of the freedom it brings.

The following episode in John chapter 8 took place in the temple at Jerusalem. Jesus had gone there for the Feast of Tabernacles, a Jewish holy day, and, while there, He preached to the people.

John 8:30-47^(ESV) As he was saying these things, many believed in him. ³¹ So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed him, “If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, ³² and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” ³³ They answered him, “We are offspring of Abraham and have never been enslaved to anyone. How is it that you say, ‘You will become free’?” ³⁴ Jesus answered them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin. ³⁵ The slave does not remain in the house forever; the son remains forever. ³⁶ So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed. ³⁷ I know that you are offspring of Abraham; yet you seek to kill me because my word finds no place in you. ³⁸ I speak of what I have seen with my Father, and you do what you have heard from your father.” ³⁹ They answered him, “Abraham is our father.” Jesus said to them, “If you were Abraham’s children, you would be doing the works Abraham did, ⁴⁰ but now you seek to kill me, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God. This is not what Abraham did. ⁴¹ You are doing the works your father did.” They said to him, “We were not born of sexual immorality. We have one Father—even God.” ⁴² Jesus said to them, “If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God and I am here. I came not of my own accord, but he sent me. ⁴³ Why do you not understand what I say? It is because you cannot bear to hear my word. ⁴⁴ You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father’s desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies. ⁴⁵ But because I tell the truth, you do not believe me. ⁴⁶ Which one of you convicts me of sin? If I tell the truth, why do you not believe me? ⁴⁷ Whoever is of God hears the words of God. The reason why you do not hear them is that you are not of God.”

Is that us or do we just think it is only the people who have not committed themselves to follow Jesus?

Our Lord's public ministry lasted only three years. Toward the end of that short time, in spite of all the wondrous works which Jesus had performed, a resistance to Him and His teachings grew and became more open. Many

of those listening to Him began to believe Jesus encouraged them to be faithful, and He offered to lead them into freedom. If His disciples would live in freedom they must continue in His Word. This is more than a one-time acceptance of the Word; it means a daily walk, an abiding, and a continuing. This brings truth, and truth brings freedom.

It seems evident that the Jews who began to answer Jesus were not believers, but rather opposed Him. They were not really trying to understand Him better. Their statements were a challenge, a rejection of what Jesus was trying to teach. They were telling Jesus that He was wrong. Their opposition was rooted in an unwillingness to acknowledge their need. Their heritage, their way of life, was their bedrock as it can so easily become ours today. Their confidence was in themselves, in their own spirituality, their own understanding, in town religiousness. The truth about the real condition of their souls was something they were not willing to face.

As Jesus spoke to them, He revealed to them true freedom. The ones questioning Him were not truly free, but they did not know it. That is bondage of the mind as well as bondage of the soul! Jesus finally had to speak quite bluntly to the doubters and sometimes we need to do the same. This was because their hearts were so hardened. He had to tell them they were the exact opposite of what they thought they were. They presented themselves as followers of God. In fact, they were followers of the devil and did his work.

Although Jesus' enemies hardened their hearts even more when they heard His words, yet we, today, benefit from His teaching. His words help us to a better understanding of the devil, the foe of our soul. Jesus' words also help us to discern true godliness.

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

The rebellious heart of fallen man desires freedom of the will. It defines freedom as being able to do what I want and go wherever I want. No one is going to tell me what to do. I am the boss, and I am in control of my own life. This is a self-centered view of life. This self-centeredness leads to difficulty in relationships, loneliness because of selfishness, broken marriages, broken homes, broken hearts. In short, this road leads to bondage. The mind of man may desire intellectual freedom, deciding for myself what truth is. I will decide for myself what is right, and what is wrong. I will choose my own morality.

This is the so-called freedom that was first offered by Satan in the Garden of Eden: "And ye shall be as gods" (Genesis 3:5). This desire often refuses to take into account that eternity is coming, an eternity that is created by and filled with an all-knowing, all-powerful God. This God created us, we are accountable to Him, and He will measure us by His standards and not ours. This so-called freedom will also end in bondage, the eternal bondage of hell.

What is that freedom that Christ is offering? John 8:34-36 states that Jesus answered them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin. The slave does not remain in the house forever; the son remains forever. So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed." Christ offers freedom from sin and its eternal consequences. The servant of sin will have no place with God in eternity, but those who possess the Spirit of the Son will abide with God forever. That is the truth, recorded in the Word of God.

The mystery of godliness is hidden to the carnal mind. The freedoms that the world dangles in front of us lead into bondage. The gospel leads in the opposite direction. It teaches us to deny our fleshly lusts. We then become masters over our appetites and desires, instead of slaves to them. That is real freedom. The gospel teaches us to surrender our wills to the will of God and to become His servants. We receive the salvation of our souls and eternal life instead of eternal death. That is real freedom. The gospel in our heart causes us to give up our ideas and accept God's judgments and His church's proving of the issues in our lives. Our loving Father then makes us His sons through adoption, and we become "partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light" Colossians 1:12. That is real freedom.

The way to obtain real freedom, freedom in Christ, is to face the truth. In order to be able to face God, we must accept the truth about ourselves and others. God is truth and cannot abide where untruth is. This is not only the way to find God, but it is also the way to walk with Him.

We say that the truth hurts. It does. It hurts our pride and our self-exaltation. We prefer to blame others for the troubles in our lives. Perhaps I struggle with bad feelings because of what my brother or sister said or did. If my neighbors would do differently, then I could truly love them. I have a hard time being a successful Christian because of my parents' failures. What do people expect from someone who was raised like I was? People do not really understand me. If they did, they'd know I'm not so bad. The ministers didn't treat me right and the list could go on and on.

Thoughts like these lead into a very real bondage, even for those who want to live a Christian life. By blaming others for our troubles, we become bound to those people's actions. We cannot be free in our spirit until others acknowledge their wrongs and make confession to us. We make ourselves to be victims, and we cannot be delivered from our hurt feelings and habitual failings because we think they are not really our fault. We like to think that we are innocent and others are guilty.

What is truth?

The truth is that we are responsible for our actions, our thoughts, words, and feelings. Accepting this responsibility brings freedom. Repentance and self-denial are necessary. Is true freedom worth it?

It is true that unwanted thoughts and feelings come to us unbidden.

It is true that there are real hurts in life where we have been treated wrongly.

It is true that some of the circumstances of life are beyond our control. But, by the grace of God, with the indwelling Spirit, we can control how we react to the circumstances. We can, like Jesus, refuse the tempting thoughts and resist them, or we can harbor them. We can label our unwholesome feelings as sinful and deny them, or we can nurse our hurts and our grudges. We can feed them or starve them.

These are some of the truths that are difficult for us to accept. We choose self-pity. We choose to continue in pride. We choose to be offended. We choose to be self-righteous.

In spite of all our best intentions and efforts, we may fail. We may stumble or be overtaken in a fault. However, with God's help we can repent and rise again. Both Samson and Peter did so. When we quit justifying ourselves and accept our responsibility, we call these things our besetting sins and come to Christ for deliverance. This is the freedom that Jesus offers. The servant of sin will not abide in God's house forever, but the Son will and all those who have the Son in their hearts.

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

J.v.L



"Life is made up of 10% of what happens to us and 90% of how we react or respond to that!"

There is a lot of truth to that and as God's children we have a God that is very close in those times and will help us, He is ready to help us and will help us to respond right to the disappointments in life.

Anonymous



RICHES UNTOLD

The Christian, being born a child of the King, is highly favoured and blessed. God gives him the privilege of accessing His treasures and riches through Christ Jesus. The child of God can live in assurance that all his needs can be satisfied in the possessions of his Father. No Christian need languish in want and deprivation. May this message encourage us to reach out for these untold riches and experience all that God has provided for us.

In the Old Testament we read of God's dealing with Solomon.

Solomon was born to David and Bathsheba and is remembered most for his wisdom, his building program, and his wealth generated through trade and administrative reorganization. The Bible clearly notes that Solomon had faults as well as elements of greatness and his moral values were not always compatible with God's values and one may have genuine doubts as to his ultimate eternal destination, for instance the "seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines" came from many of the kingdoms with which Solomon had treaties (1 Kings 11:1). He apparently allowed his wives to worship their native gods and even had altars to these gods constructed in Jerusalem (1 Kings 11:7-8). This kind of compromise indicated a weakness in Solomon and is one all mankind can and does suffer from but we can through God's saving grace overcome all weaknesses.

In the New Testament Jesus noted that the queen of Sheba came a long way to see Solomon and "behold, a greater than Solomon is here" (Luke 11:31). In this Jesus is referring to himself and it is He we must emulate in this life not the worldly achievements of Solomon and others like him through the ages who start out well with God but are deceived by the desires of the flesh and the gods of this world

When we read about the life and achievements of Solomon we must remember that it was God's hand that permitted them all and we can take comfort from the words of Scripture of God's everlasting love and provision for us today.

Psalm 36:5-12^(ESV) Your steadfast love, O LORD, extends to the heavens, your faithfulness to the clouds. ⁶ Your righteousness is like the mountains of God; your judgments are like the great deep; man and beast you save, O LORD. ⁷ How precious is your steadfast love, O God! The children of mankind take refuge in the shadow of your wings. ⁸ They feast on the abundance of your house, and you give them drink from the river of your delights. ⁹ For with you is the fountain of life; in your light do we see light. ¹⁰ Oh, continue your steadfast love to those who know you, and your righteousness to the upright of heart! ¹¹ Let not the foot of arrogance come upon me, nor the hand of the wicked drive me away. ¹² There the evildoers lie fallen; they are thrust down, unable to rise.

Philippians 4:19^(ESV)

And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.

In the world, riches and honour are greatly sought after. The few who attain their desires often find them fleeting and hollow. It is disappointing to have striven for temporal things or fame only to find that they bring very little satisfaction. The truth of this world's attractions is often untold because Satan seeks to hide it. After tasting and experiencing the kingdom of darkness, many lament that the half of its bitterness was not told them. No one need be disappointed in the kingdom of God. It is all that people say it is, and more!

In our homes and churches we hear much about Christian living and its abundance. Parents show by their words and actions that it is good to live for God, and they hope their children will choose to serve Him. Christians should encourage one another to live faithful and rewarding lives. Based on what we hear, we believe the kingdom of God is the best of places, and life within will bring joy and peace. However, words cannot adequately describe all that the kingdom holds for the believer. There is the half that is not found in hearing but must be experienced to be believed. Have we not found that forgiveness of sins and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit are better than what we had heard?

The daily companionship of Christ and His sufficient grace become our personal experience and not only a testimony heard from others. The acquaintance we have made with Christ and the love that rules between us as brothers and sister in Christ should be fully satisfying. These untold riches in Christ are not gained by our work or effort. We come to Christ in our poverty, and we remain poor in what we possess or can produce. We claim the riches of salvation through faith. "But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus . . . For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast" Ephesians 2:4-9. This produces equality among God's children.

All of us are equally poor with nothing of our own of which we might boast. In Christ we become equally rich and favoured and dwell together with Him. “Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: But in every nation he that fears him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him” Acts 10:34:-35. The human spirit in us is inclined to believe that we have some wealth of our own, and Satan suggests the same. Herein lies a constant danger for the Christian. “Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked: I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire” Revelation 8:17-18. Holding onto our perceived wealth or goodness will always limit or prevent our access to the eternal riches. The untold riches are offered to those who have nothing of themselves and realize their pressing need of grace and salvation.

Even while living in great riches, the Christian never acquires any merit that will lessen his need for the saving and keeping grace of God. Contrariwise, the more he experiences of God’s riches, the more clearly he understands and feels his depravity and poverty. With such riches comes additional responsibility. To be entrusted by God with heaven’s treasure is no light matter. “For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more” Luke 12:48. God trusts us with His goods and has in mind that we will use them to His honour. It is not His will that we misuse or despise them. We dare not handle these riches carelessly or neglect their potential. God surely must be grieved when He gives so much and sees so little return or profit. Solomon’s servants were happy and satisfied. Servants of Christ find fulfillment and blessing in doing His will, there is no greater pleasure than that which is found in serving God and others. Earthly ambitions and accomplishments are not to be compared to the joy found in realizing the Lord’s purpose for our lives. This must be experienced to be believed!

In humble Christian living we are nurtured by God’s rich provisions. We depend upon Him and that which He provides. What He provides satisfies the soul and leaves no want for something else. We make full use of that which He gives us. Our daily prayer is for grace sufficient in the present

need. God never withholds His help from contrite souls. It is possible that many of us have grown accustomed to living with less than what God has reserved for us. In looking around and comparing ourselves with others we might conclude that our Christian life is about average. In reality we could be enjoying so much more and bearing more fruit for the Master. When we observe the fervency and spirituality in others we wish for more for ourselves but wonder if it would be possible to achieve. In focusing on ourselves and not on Christ, we deprive ourselves of the more abundant life.

May our desire and faith enable us to step forward and experience the riches found in Christ Jesus. What we have been told of Christian living is good. Now let us go on to live in that dimension that cannot be told.



“I would rather be what God chose to make me than the most glorious creature I could think of; for to have been thought about, born in God’s thought and then made by God is the dearest, grandest and most precious thing in all thinking.” *George MacDonald 1824-1905*

“I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of wickedness.”

Psalm 84:10

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