

THE AUSTRALIAN ANABAPTIST

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

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

Matthew 5:15

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For A Conservative Anabaptist Perspective

From The Editor's Desk

There are times in all our lives when we face adversity and hardship and suffering seem to be our lot whilst those around us do not seem to be affected by our plight. Job when beseeching God for favour realizing the shortness of life and the certainty of death and makes this statement: Man that is born of woman is of few days and full of trouble. Job 14:1.

Now all of us fall into that category of being born of a woman and just as inescapable is the fact that we will have troubles – face adversity – at some time in our life on this earth, it has been this way since the beginning and will continue until the end, even Jesus Christ, the Son of God, was not exempt and we acknowledge that He indeed is highly exalted above all and that was God's doing – Philippians 2:9-11.

One of the aspects of adversity is that of reproach which is being criticized or discredited because of our faith in Christ Jesus and living that out in daily life and interaction with those around us who do not share our Christian values. Jesus said it very plainly indeed that this sort of adversity would be our lot and at the same it would be a blessing to us, Luke 6:22-23 “Blessed are you when people hate you and when they exclude you and revile you and spurn your name as evil, on account of the Son of Man!”

Now that at first glance seems somewhat contradictory that we would be blessed because of the adversity we incur for being His disciples but notice what Jesus says in the next verse and what happens to turn that adversity to blessing. Verse 23: “Rejoice in that day, and leap for joy, for behold, your reward is great in heaven; for so their fathers did to the prophets.”

There is a well know song which says “What a friend we have in Jesus” Abraham was called the friend of God (James 2:23) and we know he suffered adversity, Jesus is not ashamed to call us His brethren (Hebrews 2:11) and He calls us brethren also if we hear the word of God and do it (Luke 8:21).

So why would be concerned about or in adversity when we know that we know Jesus Christ will always be faithful not only in times of prosperity but when we need Him most in times of adversity, He is our primary source of help at all times and the Proverb writer seems to have understood this when he says in Proverbs 17:17 A friend loveth at all times, and a brother is born for adversity.

May we be that for those who are facing adversity and so fulfill the law of Christ to love our neighbour as ourselves.

J.v.L



From the Pulpit

Adversity – Blessing or Curse? Part 1 of 2
Daniel Yoder
High Prairie Mennonite Church

We wish to extend Christian greetings this morning to our fellow soldiers in the warfare that is raging.

I invite you to turn with me to Exodus the 15th chapter. I read this account recently in my personal devotional life and I was impressed with the circumstances that were faced and how they dealt with them.

Exodus 15:22-25 So Moses brought Israel from the Red sea, and they went out into the wilderness of Shur; and they went three days in the wilderness, and found no water. And when they came to Marah, they could not drink of the waters of Marah, for they *were* bitter: therefore the name of it was called Marah. And the people murmured against Moses, saying, What shall we drink? And he cried unto the LORD; and the LORD shewed him a tree, *which* when he had cast into the waters, the waters were made sweet: there he made for them a statute and an ordinance, and there he proved them.

To get a little bit of the background to the setting of this back in chapter 14 of Exodus we have God miraculously delivering Israel from the army of the Egyptians, making a way for them through the Red Sea where they went on dry ground that the Egyptians drowned.

And as I contemplated the life of the children of Israel to this point it would seem as if they were going through a real rollercoaster of emotions, up and down and up and down and up and down, there was intense suffering there in Egypt, the slavery and things got worse there for a while instead of better when Moses was there to try and bring the children of Israel out, Pharaoh made things harder and so there was real suffering there.

Then there was that hasty departure and they quickly left, and now they were free from the bonds of Egypt. They were elated for their freedom but

then came the fear and the panic when they realised they were trapped - the Red Sea was dead ahead and the Egyptian army was behind. And there again we have the deliverance by God.

And then chapter 15 the first 21 verses we have the rejoicing that came because of this deliverance. You can see what I mean by the rollercoaster of emotions, it was bondage then there was freedom, then they were trapped then they were delivered, and all this took place within about the first week and a half of their flight including the passage that we can read here this morning from [Exodus 15](#)

They travelled three days into the wilderness with no water and when they finally came to Marah there is water, but it is not fit to drink, it is not something that they can partake of.

Can you imagine the agony of being extremely thirsty and there is water that you can't drink it, it is too bitter.

They were no strangers to adversity but this did not lessen the blow that they felt when it came.

And don't you find that sometimes in our own lives as well? Today the sky of our life may be shining brightly, the sun is warm, our hearts are free and light and there is a calm and a serenity to our lives, things are going well but tomorrow may bring a circumstance that turns things upside down and may bring us to the point where we wonder: How we could ever have felt so happy and so carefree just yesterday or just last week because of what we are facing here and now?

We want to consider this passage this morning, consider our lives, by asking ourselves this question: Adversity, blessing or curse?

Adversity - is it a blessing or is it a curse?

Can it be either one?

How can we make it a blessing?

What is God's purpose for allowing us to face Marah experiences in our life?

Why was it that He allowed that the children of Israel to come to this point in their experience?

We want to consider this morning: How?

First of all some facts about adversity so that one can finally conclude how adversity can be a blessing rather than a curse.

Some facts about adversity that may come our way.

One thing that I have noticed and that is that adversity can come at any juncture in life. It doesn't matter if we are young or old, it makes no difference if we are rich or poor, it makes no difference if we have just begun the Christian life or if we have spent years following Christ.

Adversity could come at any juncture. It makes no difference either where we live, whether we are back East, whether we are out in the West, whether we are in a foreign mission field or wherever we find ourselves, adversity will find us there as well. It may come at any juncture in life, the children of Israel faced it in Egypt, they faced it in their wilderness journey, they even faced it over in Canaan.

The second thing that I see about adversity is that it often comes when we are least expecting it. The children of Israel had just experienced a marvelous victory and they were rejoicing because of the deliverance that God had given them just three days before. God had demonstrated His power in a mighty way, something they had never seen before - but there it was - God made a way for them.

And notice here in chapter 15 back up to verse 11, notice the words of praise: "Who *is* like unto thee, O Lord, among the gods? who *is* like thee, glorious in holiness, fearful *in* praises, doing wonders? Thou stretchedst out thy right hand, the earth swallowed them. Thou in thy mercy hast led forth the people which thou hast redeemed: thou hast guided *them* in thy strength unto thy holy habitation." [Exodus 15:11-13](#).

They go on and it is just a rejoicing, it has been a blessing, it is a highlight, a high point in their life and experience - just three days before. And no doubt they were reassured of what God could do, there was nothing too great for their God to take care of, they were confident, they were trusting, there was no worry. But it was then that God allowed another test to come.

It was then that adversity came knocking at the door and does it not often seem that way with us as well today? We can just about count on it when we experience a mountaintop experience there is a valley ahead, adversity comes.

Maybe that should help us to be prepared but the tendency is to live in the here and now and we are not on guard when adversity comes.

The third thing I see about adversity and that is that adversity often comes when we feel we are already at the end of our endurance. We have been tested just about to the limit.

Have you ever felt that way? Life seems difficult in the road seems hard and you wonder how you would have come through it, perhaps you've really been struggling with knowing how to relate rightly to some of the issues that were standing before you, issues that already loomed like a big mountain ahead of you and you weren't sure how you are going to overcome it and then this adversity came right on top of it and we begin to feel like this just, it is just too much.

And perhaps you even tried to remind yourself that God won't bring anything into my life but that He will help me through it, He has promised me that, He will never ask any more of me than what it is possible to endure it through His help, but you know we are just about wondering about it because of what we have been faced with.

Adversity may come when we already feel that we are at the end of our endurance and the devil may even tempt us at this point with the thought: "See what happens when you are a Christian? You see what happens to you now? What is the use of keeping on, look at the difficulties you have to put up with, why bother any more?"

I have to wonder what all went through the Israelites minds when they found this undrinkable water? I am told that the water of the Nile River back there in Egypt is really good water, better than average, they were used to some nice things and it was good water. But what they said in chapter 16 of Exodus I had to wonder perhaps in their mind they thought back to their time in Egypt and began to think: "Well at least back there we had good water, that's one blessing we had back then. Maybe things were not quite so bad like we thought they were."

That's the way the devil wants us to respond to adversity and when we do that it becomes a curse rather than a blessing.

My mind went to an individual in the scriptures who faced seemingly one thing after the next after the next, Job had that experience, over in Job chapter 1, I would just like to read a view of verses, Satan comes before the Lord and says: "Doth Job fear God for nought?"

Job 1:9-20. "Hast not thou made an hedge about him, and about his house, and about all that he hath on every side? thou hast blessed the work of his hands, and his substance is increased in the land."

It was a mountaintop experience, things were going well but Satan says to God: But put forth thine hand now, and touch all that he hath, and he will curse thee to thy face. And the LORD said unto Satan, Behold, all that he hath *is* in thy power; only upon himself put not forth thine hand. So Satan went forth from the presence of the LORD. And there was a day when his sons and his daughters *were* eating and drinking wine in their eldest brother's house: And there came a messenger unto Job, and said, The oxen were plowing, and the asses feeding beside them: And the Sabeans fell *upon them*, and took them away; yea, they have slain the servants with the edge of the sword; and I only am escaped alone to tell thee. While he *was* yet speaking, there came also another, and said, The fire of God is fallen from heaven, and hath burned up the sheep, and the servants, and consumed them; and I only am escaped alone to tell thee. While he *was* yet speaking, there came also another, and said, The Chaldeans made out three bands, and fell upon the camels, and have carried them away, yea, and slain the servants with the edge of the sword; and I only am escaped alone to tell thee. While he *was* yet speaking, there came also another, and said, Thy sons and thy daughters *were* eating and drinking wine in their eldest brother's house: And, behold, there came a great wind from the wilderness, and smote the four corners of the house, and it fell upon the young men, and they are dead; and I only am escaped alone to tell thee. Then Job arose, and rent his mantle, and shaved his head, and fell down upon the ground, and worshipped,

In just a few minutes time Job went from being a rich and wealthy man, one who was richly blessed by the Lord, one who had a hedge round about him till suddenly he suffered drastic losses and it was one right on top of the other. And I suppose that as blow after blow came in it nearly left him reeling finally the devil brought that the capstone at the end - even your children are gone!

Adversity, when we feel we've come to the end of our endurance, yes that is what he experienced.

Job's wife told him to curse God and die. Basically putting the blame back on Him and saying look at what God is doing for you, what is the value of

continuing on with Him, what is the use of serving Him any further? Curse God and die. [Job 2:9](#).

And again if we face our adversities in this manner they will be a curse and not a blessing. Job's response is rather different - I was challenged by that - when this happened Job worshipped and he recognised that through this God was still in control.

But adversities may come when we feel we are really at the end of our endurance.

Fourthly these adversities that come are varied and not all the same.

The Israelites went three days without water and I am sure to us that would be an adversity if you had to go three days without water, but then they found water, now they thought the trial was over but no, it had only changed for water was there but it wasn't fit to drink.

You see adversities come and they are varied, they are not all the same.

I suppose we could question which would be worse than no water in sight or only having bad water to drink but that is what was before them.

The point I want to make this morning is the adversity that comes my way may not be the same that comes your way. An our tendency is to feel sometimes that the present trial, the present adversity we find ourselves in is worse than any we have had before - this is really bad, and usually we feel that our adversity is worse than what someone else is facing, my problem is bigger and worse than theirs.

We would probably be pretty slow to voice that, to say that, but have you ever thought when you looked upon the life of someone else and maybe they were facing a struggle, have you ever had this thought go through your mind: "If that is all I had to deal with, if that is all I had to suffer it wouldn't be hard for me to be happy. That's pretty minor."

That is our human tendency to look at it from that perspective but we need to realise that while our adversities may not be the same they are very real to those who face it.

Fifthly the thing I see about these adversities is that they often touch very vital areas of our life.

The Israelites didn't have water, at least not water that they could drink. It wasn't simply that they had to do without their favourite beverage for a while, it wasn't that suddenly for a week or two they had to do without milk but it was water that they were doing without, something that was absolutely essential for maintaining life itself. It was a very vital area that they were struggling with. They were travelling through the wilderness with that hot burning sand reflecting the intense heat of the sun and they were thirsty and needed water. That was a life-threatening situation.

This morning God may allow adversities to touch us in some very vital area or what we feel are very vital areas of life.

You know it's not that much of a problem is it when we simply have to give up some incidentals, you know the extra things of life, maybe the trip we were planning and because something happened we didn't take the trip we thought we wanted to, or maybe there was some incidental we hoped to purchase but because it's a rough time we can't.

That is more on the minor side but when it comes down to the essentials of life, maybe we are not sure where the money is coming from to put food on the table, or maybe we are not certain where the money is coming from to meet our bills. There are adversities such as severe loss of health and strength, and that usually brings large bills and further reduces the possibility of earning income and it seems like things mount up and we wonder: Now what is going to happen?

How was it when God took Abraham up on the mountain and told him to sacrifice his son? This was the one of whom He had said your descendants will come from him. And here he was being asked to offer him up. [Genesis 22:2](#)

It touches vital areas of their lives.

One other aspect about adversities if we are going to be honest we must admit that we may at times bring adversity upon ourselves. We call that the law of sowing and reaping, there are times when that will happen.

Joseph's brothers experienced that. Why did they face the things they did when they came in front of Joseph? It was because of choices and decisions that were made years before.

I think we need to be cautious with this, we don't go around pointing fingers and losing our compassion for someone because we feel they are just suffering their just desserts. That is not our place to respond that way, the compassion, the care, the love all that needs to be there but on the other

hand if we are suffering because of our own errors in the past then we need to recognise that maybe we brought it upon ourselves.

You know if we impulsively made a large financial decision without the counsel of our brethren or maybe we got counsel or got advice and ignored it and went ahead anyway and everything started turning bad and suddenly we were in dire straits we need to be honest enough to recognise that we brought it on ourselves because of our course of action.

So there is a place where we at times may bring adversity upon ourselves.

Lastly though considering this, behind every adversity that may come our way there is a God who has a purpose for it.

This is true regardless of the kind of adversity that we face whether we have even brought it on ourselves or not, behind it is a God who has a purpose, there is something that He wants to accomplish in our life and experience. We will touch on this a little more than a little later, but it is one of the keys as to whether adversity will be a blessing or a curse to us, if we could look at it and behind it there is still God.

To be concluded in the November Issue.



RELIGION VERSUS SALVATION

Many people are aware of religion, but most of mankind is unaware of salvation, that is, many have a way of relating to their god or gods, as the case might be. But in terms of salvation, the true God secures a relationship with the soul of man through Jesus Christ His Son who came down to this earth for this purpose. We should understand by this that Jesus Christ did not bring religion to this earth. He brought salvation. This is why the Christian religion is not an end in itself but a means to an end.

There is no salvation in a false religion, because it does not pave the way for a relationship with what one claims to worship. We know that idols (other gods) are inanimate; they cannot relate with anybody. It is only that those who are worshipping them claim a relationship with them. This is not so with the true Christian faith, where God secures a relationship with man and man with Him. This makes the great difference between salvation and religion. Religion is a form while salvation is a reality!

Even though Christian religion has salvation as the ultimate goal, too many professors of Christian religion come short of the reality of salvation. Their Christianity ends up on the religion level. Such persons often have much to say of their religious life, but they come short of a personal relationship with and devotion to God. Such have much to say about their relationship with their church, but not much spiritual life is seen in their lives.

One of the Bible accounts that impresses this subject on my heart is the account of the rich young man in Matthew 19:16-22. According to the testimony of his life, he was quite religious. He had this to say about himself in relation to the commandments of God: "All these things have I kept from my youth up: what lack I yet?" (v. 20).

This young man claimed that he kept all the commandments of God. In spite of this, he realized that there was something lacking in his life. One would say that he was religious but lacked God's relationship with him, which is the index of salvation of our souls. His could be compared to an eye-service relationship with God without the sense of satisfaction of God's relationship with his own soul hence he asked, "What lack I yet?"

To this pathetic question, Jesus replied, "If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me" Matthew 19:21. Before this time, this young man was relating with God on his own terms and conditions. This is what religiosity does in the lives of many people. But in order for our religion to reach the desired end, which is God's relationship with our soul, we have to be willing for God's terms and conditions. This was the context of Jesus' reply to the rich young man. This is the junction where the greater population of professors of Christian religion is found today. Many, according to the Scriptures, are in the valley of decision (Joel 3:14). Most people are finding it easier to relate with God on their own terms than being willing to surrender to God's terms.

This is where some people have problems with the church and others are using the church as a cover-up. The church as a body does not relate to God for anyone. But she does have the responsibility to define, maintain, and sustain the spiritual standard of God's relationship with us, and it is up to the members of the church to comply or reject this standard.

I am reminded of when God came down to prove the people of Israel in the days of Moses. These people were not ready to meet with God, and they shifted the responsibility of meeting God unto Moses. Why were they

not willing to measure up with Moses so that they could also stand behind him as God came to prove them? "And all the people saw the thunderings, and the lightnings, and the noise of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking: and when the people saw it, they removed, and stood afar off. And they said unto Moses, Speak thou with us, and we will hear: but let not God speak with us, lest we die" Exodus. 20:18-19. This is how many people are doing eye-service in the church, using her as a covering of their unwillingness to meet up with what God requires of them. With this they come short of enjoying the fullness of salvation of their souls.

Let us also consider the account of the Pharisee and publican as recorded in Luke 18:9-14. The prayer of the Pharisee is a prayer of a religious person. It was a prayer that draws attention to oneself. It was a prayer of eye-service contrariwise; the prayer of the publican was a prayer of salvation. He looked beyond himself and desired God's relationship with him, hence he asked for the forgiveness of his sins. He realized his need for God in his life.

After one has experienced salvation, he or she protects the interest of God's relationship with him more than his relationship with the physical aspects of this life and where they may run counter he prefers to allow the will of God to prevail in his life. This is the emphasis of salvation in our relationship with Jesus Christ and He with us.

When the apostle Paul saw the forms of devotion of the worshipers on Mars Hill in Athens, he said to them, "Ye men of Athens, I perceive that in all things ye are too superstitious. For as I passed by, and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription, TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you" Acts 17:22-23. These worshipers were superstitious, which is being otherwise religious. They were, in their own effort, trying to impress God or draw His attention to their religiousness. This was more a sort of devotion to their religion than a devotion to God. Similarly, a situation where one is so devoted to the tenets of his faith or church without corresponding spiritual life amounts to being religious more than being in a state of being saved, or salvation. Spiritual life is an index of God being in communication with us and we with Him.

Religion that is devoid of salvation in those who profess it is as the Scriptures say: "And they come unto thee as the people cometh, and they sit before thee as my people, and they hear thy words, but they will not do

them: for with their mouth they shew much love, but their heart goeth after their covetousness" Ezekiel 33:31. "Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away" 2 Timothy 3:5. "They profess that they know God; but in works they deny him, being abominable, and disobedient, and unto every good work reprobate" Titus 1:16

Jesus also left a warning according to Matthew 7:21-23: "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity." This is very true today, as there is much profession of Christian religion. But the people fall below expectation in terms of being spiritual when looking underneath. These people claimed how much they knew Jesus Christ. They had done many wonderful works in His name. Yet, Jesus said that He will reject all those who are only religious and come short of salvation and spiritual life.

During the celebration of Christmas, there is much religiousness displayed. This suffices on a religious level. But sad to say, Jesus Christ is not being celebrated in the lives of many people on a daily basis, which would be an evidence of salvation in their souls. The experience of salvation helps us to hold our lives before God and continually abide in His perfect will through the leading of the Holy Spirit.

Salvation, which is God's relationship with us, was lost in the Garden of Eden. God was conversing with man in the Garden but after they disobeyed God, that relationship was lost. Then Adam and Eve could not stand before God. They went into hiding. Upon this, Jesus Christ was promised to restore that relationship that is salvation. By salvation, therefore, we are delivered from the forces that are opposed to God's relationship with us and we with Him. That is why Jesus does not give us religion but salvation, which is abundant life in Him. "The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly" (John 10:10).

Man's misconception of the religion and salvation concept is as the common experience in a telephone conversation. Sometimes one may have a reason to call someone to share some information. As soon as the call goes through, the other party wants to do all the talking at the expense of

the caller. And the caller might have little or no credit left to fulfill the purpose of his or her calling.

This compares to what happens in a religion setting. God sent His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, to pave the way for His relationship with us. But what is happening in the religious world is that man is doing all his religious activities to win God's attention without being willing to give attention to what God wants to say. Man finds it a lot easier to give physical sacrifices than to live a spiritual life. Take for example how many may find it easier to part with a good amount of money than to lay down his right and take Jesus' way in a matter that infringes on his personal rights. Some people might also find it a lot easier to go to church to praise and worship God than to humble themselves and be reconciled with their enemy.

According to the Scriptures, we are given this charge: "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling" (Phil. 2:12). This is not a charge to work out our religion. Neither is it to work out our church relationship. Our relationship with God and His church must go beyond the point of being religious. We should endeavour to maintain a spiritual relationship with God, which is far and above human dictation. With a relationship with God, we relate in a more spiritual way than depending only on rules and regulations of the church. And once we are in good relationship with God, we will be in harmony with the church.

In terms of a spiritual relationship with the Lord, our lives must be true to the context of these scriptures and such like: "And now, Israel, what doth the Lord thy God require of thee, but to fear the Lord thy God, to walk in all his ways, and to love him, and to serve the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul" (Deuteronomy 10:12). "And to love him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the soul, and with all the strength, and to love his neighbour as himself, is more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices" (Mark 12:33).

Brother Patrick, Nigeria.

Courtesy Messenger of Truth Gospel Publishers Kansas



Christian Discrimination

Brother Merle Ruth

We greet you in the name of Him who said: Take heed that no man deceive you. [Matthew 24:4](#). Evidently our Lord wants his people to be a discriminating people.

I'm going to begin with a page drawn from history. After World War I officials of the Allied countries found that the bodies of many soldiers killed in the war could not be identified, this led to an agreement that each government would choose a symbolic unknown soldier and bury his remains near the national capital. This accounts for the fact that the Arlington National Cemetery in Virginia contains a monument called "The Tomb of the Unknown Soldier" This has been for long a widely known fact but what you may not have known is that on one occasion a man went out on a busy street corner and appealed for funds to aid the widow of the Unknown Soldier, within one half-hour he had already collected \$15.

However whatever the motive there may have been those who responded to that plea were not using their God given powers of discrimination, they should have realized since the identity of the soldier himself was unknown no one could possibly know who his widow was. That collector was a clever deceiver.

My title is "Christian Discrimination" however I'm taking the liberty to add a two word prefix "Urgently Needed - Christian Discrimination" We are looking at a big word, discrimination, what is it?

One of its meanings I am not recommending, I am not recommending racial discrimination or anything of that nature, it is not Christian to discriminate against the people of any minority group but I am recommending that you exemplify the other meaning and you will do that if and as you carefully analyze and weigh everything you hear and read before you act upon it. Examine closely, look at it from every possible angle, does it harmonize with the Bible?

In real simple terms discrimination is the exercise of good sound judgment. If you are a non-discriminating person you will be easily deceived, if you are a discriminating person you will not be easily deceived.

Now one of the consequences of the fall back in the Garden of Eden was a loss of spiritual insight and perception and because of that until a man is regenerated he is seriously handicapped, especially when he tends to discriminate on the moral and spiritual level. In those areas the Christian who avails himself of his birthright privileges has a greater discriminating potential than the non-Christian, he not only possesses powers of discrimination that are lacking in the non-Christian but he also feels inclined to exercise those powers in areas where the non-Christian feels no need for doing so.

Although Moses lived in pre-Christian times he was exercising the kind of discrimination we are talking about when he esteemed the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt. That decision no doubt left his former associates wondering why would Moses do such a thing? (Hebrews 11:26)

The man of the world may have sufficient discrimination to spy an opportunity to make a big financial haul in a quick, sly, easy way but the man of God will deliberately ignore that opportunity because he is discriminating enough to see that as a spiritually dangerous move. That was in fact the difference between Abram and Lot.

Now perhaps I'm making it sound as though all Christians are always a discriminating people, ideally that should be the case but sadly it is not. We Mennonites, along with other groups of plain people do not have a very good record. Unfortunately we gained a reputation for being rather gullible in especially some respects. It is to our shame that some of us have helped to float rumours and stories that were later discovered to be outright fraud.

In my opinion this can be accounted for by the fact we are taught to be trustful of others rather than suspicious and it ought to continue to be that way. Suspicion is not a Christian virtue but neither is gullibility. Being discriminating is the narrow road between those two extremes.

[Proverbs 14:15](#) reads as follows: "The simple believeth every word but the prudent man look as well to his going." The person referred to here as simple is the non-discriminating person, such a person will be leave even that turns out to be a lie.

Now as a means of further acquainting us with this subject I propose that we now examine a few Bible recorded incidents where discrimination was either present or absent to a marked degree.

For a starter recall for a moment that courageous young prophet whom the Lord commissioned to go up to Judah, to Bethel and protest against the idolatry that was being carried on there. He had been told to return promptly but he allowed himself to be deceived by a man who claimed that the Lord had told him to invite him to come back and have a meal with him. Failing to discriminate the young prophet complied and was thereafter slain by a lion. [1 Kings 13](#). Evidently some otherwise good people may be lacking in discrimination. Discrimination would have told this young prophet not to believe the older man for when God speaks he never contradicts himself, that young prophet should have recognized something isn't right here, God doesn't give instructions that contradict!

Next for a few moments let's think about the encounter the Israelites had with the Gibeonites, we find this in Joshua chapter 9, before they entered Canaan God told the leaders of Israel not to make any league with any of the Canaanites, let's read now from Joshua:

[Joshua 9:3-4](#) And when the inhabitants of Gibeon heard what Joshua had done unto Jericho and to Ai, They did work wilily, and went and made as if they had been ambassadors, and took old sacks upon their asses, and wine bottles, old, and rent, and bound up;

[Joshua 9:6](#) And they went to Joshua unto the camp at Gilgal, and said unto him, and to the men of Israel, We be come from a far country: now therefore make ye a league with us.

[Joshua 9:15-16](#) And Joshua made peace with them, and made a league with them, to let them live: and the princes of the congregation sware unto them. And it came to pass at the end of three days after they had made a league with them, that they heard that they *were* their neighbours, and *that* they dwelt among them.

Why did it happen?

The answer appears in verse 14: And the men of Israel took of their victuals and asked not counsel at the mouth of the Lord. [Joshua 9:14](#). That's why it happened! Without the help of the Lord we cannot be as discriminating as we ought to be.

Thankfully I can now show you instances where God's people did exercise discrimination; although I'm not turning to it, one such occasion appears in first Kings Chapter 3 where the biblical record supplies us with a glimpse of the wisdom of newly anointed King Solomon. You know the story, two women came to Solomon with conflicting stories about their babies one of which was still living. Solomon's God-given power to discriminate was illustrated in the way that he so easily solved the problem of discovering to whom the living baby belonged. [1 Kings 3:16-28](#)

Turn with me now to Nehemiah chapter 6, here Nehemiah describes as supposedly friendly measure to which his enemies resorted, Nehemiah 6 verse two: [Nehemiah 6:2-3](#) Then Sanballat and Geshem sent unto me, saying, Come, let us meet together in *some one of* the villages in the plain of Ono. But they thought to do me mischief. And I sent messengers unto them, saying, I *am* doing a great work, so that I cannot come down: why should the work cease, whilst I leave it, and come down to you? The ability to discriminate may someday save your life as it no doubt did for Nehemiah on this occasion.

Now let's go to the New Testament, the gospel according to John, chapter four, I'm breaking in at verse 16, [John 4:16-19](#) Jesus saith unto her, (the Samaritan woman) Go, call thy husband, and come hither. The woman answered and said, I have no husband. Jesus said unto her, Thou hast well said, I have no husband: For thou hast had five husbands; and he whom thou now hast is not thy husband: in that saidst thou truly. The woman saith unto him, Sir, I perceive that thou art a prophet.

She on the basis of the evidence she had just received realised that Jesus was more than an ordinary person, that He was in fact a prophet. Discrimination will likewise help you to perceive the real character of that to which you are relating and it is so necessary that we do that, that we perceive it the real character of the person or the scene whatever it may be that we are relating to.

Next, without turning to it, I would like you to think with me for a few moments about the careful discrimination process that was engaged in when the leaders of the early church came together at Jerusalem for a conference as described in [Acts 15](#), they came together to consider and to hopefully resolve a vexing problem. After a session of careful discrimina-

tion they announced their solution to the problem in a statement that began with these memorable words: "It seems good to the Holy Ghost and to us to lay no greater burden upon you then these necessary things." [Acts 15:28](#), [Acts 16:4](#) And those necessary things were later referred to as the decrees for to keep.

We too must learn to discriminate in order to solve the problems that will inevitably arise in our own individual experience and also in our group experience.

Two chapters later, Acts 17, we read about the good reception that Paul and Silas received when they first preached the Gospel in the synagogue at Berea, I'll read from [Acts 17:11](#): "These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the Scriptures daily, whether those things were so." Those last two lines indicate that those who attended that synagogue service constituted a discriminating audience.

We to need to be discriminating even when we are in the best of company. Remember the devil is a churchgoer too so we cannot take for granted that everything we hear, even in the church setting, is the unadulterated truth for we have been told that off your own self shall men arise speaking perverse things. [Acts 20:30](#). Last in this series is an expression of Paul's that appears in first Corinthians chapter 11 verse 18, and I am choosing to read only the latter part of the verse, [1 Corinthians 11:18](#), "..... I hear that there be divisions among you and I partly believe it."

Like Paul we need to be discriminating enough to know that the reports we hear may not be totally accurate.

This brief survey has brought to light a few of the many reasons why it is urgent that we become a discriminating people, so much of what we hear and read, even though it has a semblance of truth, is bent way out of shape, much of what appears in newspapers and news magazines is so slanted that the truth is effectively hidden. We must battle with the fact that he who controls this anti-God world system is both a liar and a murderer. He and his agents hate, they literally hate God's people so much that they will throw at us all kinds of lies hoping to thereby deceive us and eventually destroy us.

Detecting a liar can sometimes be rather difficult and what makes it really difficult is when you need to sort out a few lies that are mixed in with a large quantity of truth and more often than not that is the way our enemy

operates. We also need to reckon with the unique context in which we live, we live in a highly pluralistic and very tolerant society, religious tolerance plus freedom of speech and freedom of the press are indeed blessings but this combination creates a climate highly favourable for the production and spread of propaganda. We are therefore exposed to an unprecedented multiplicity of voices and ideas.

Contributing to this exposure are the vastly multiplying channels of communication. This thing we call propaganda was once a government produced wartime weapon but propaganda has long since become a weapon in the hands of people who are in the business of marketing anything from A to Z.

Being an elderly couple we receive through the mail enormous amounts of health related propaganda. Each company makes it appear that they want to help you but to the discriminating person it is quite obvious that their primary purpose is to make as many sales as possible and in order to do so they will not hesitate to smear their competitors. Outright dishonesty is rampant not only in the business world and the political world but also in the religious world.

In my lifetime I have listened to more than one highly persuasive pulpit speaker who seemed very sincere and yet it eventually leaked out that he was a deliberate deceiver who before being discovered had gained a lot of Mennonite support.

Turn with me now to Romans 16. As Paul was writing this epistle is he was moved by God to sound a warning that his record here at the beginning of verse 17, [Romans 16:17-18](#): "Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which caused divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which you have learned; and avoid them. For they that are such served not our lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the heart of the simple."

These simple ones who are thus deceived could be otherwise described as being indiscriminate and unsuspecting. Unless you thoroughly filter what you see, hear and read you will soon become a very confused person. Some individuals swallowed the whole bushel of falsehoods because it contains a few grains of truth; other individuals reject a bushel of truth because it contains a few grains of falsehood.

Personally I'm of the opinion that a discriminating person will avoid both extremes.

The concluding of the portion of this message is entitled: How to Become a Discriminating Christian. In God's school of training this is a requirement a course of study, we must learn how to use the discriminating equipment that God has given us, we must learn how to use God's microscope.

To begin with learn to pay attention to detail. Galatians chapter 3 verse 16 is a notable example of Paul teaching us to do this as we read the Bible, not as a means of detecting falsehood because there is none there, but as a means of correctly interpreting what is there. I'm reading now [Galatians 3:16](#): "Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He said not, And two seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ."

Paul wants his readers to recognize that in God's promise to Abraham a big difference in meaning hinged on God's choice of a noun in the singular form as opposed to the plural form. Details are important and we dare not overlook them. Unlike the Bible the songs we sing and listen to they are men's productions and therefore should not be regarded as 100% fallible.

For example: One songwriter has Job saying: I know that my Redeemer liveth and on the earth again shall dwell. Unfortunately that songwriter inserted a word that does not appear in the passage from which he drew. A little detail, just one word again, and yet it alters the meaning of what Job said. [Job 19:25](#) For I know *that* my redeemer liveth, and *that* he shall stand at the latter *day* upon the earth:

Even more misleading is that song that has in it this line: "He took my place on Calvary now I don't have to go." But did He really take my place? No! He took his place. I had no place on Calvary for my blood would have availed nothing. Jesus died for us not instead of us. If indeed He died instead of us why are we all still dying?

Discrimination is needed to detect such erroneous concepts. Don't assume that because an individual teaches correctly on one domain that he is there for a reliable guide in every other field. Take for example Henry Morris, in his vindication of creationism over evolution he has done very well but his other writings show a leading toward both dispensationalism and Calvinism. You need to discriminate, to discriminate to keep from being mess left

by persons who have won your confidence in a field where they may be reliable but that is no guarantee that they could be followed in every field.

In this course of study another rather elementary lesson is learning to distinguish between statements of fact and statements of opinion.

That is sometimes difficult to do because some speakers and writers deliberately and cleverly present their opinions as though they were facts.

Another dishonest tactic that we need to learn to spot is this practice of a speaker making a theory sound as though it is a widely accepted orthodox doctrine so that he can more readily sell the theory to his audience.

Still another commonly resorted to practice instead of making an exception appear as though it is the general rule. So when you observe the speaker or writer citing a few exceptions and blowing them up way out of proportion you had better watch out, he is setting the stage to deceive you into believing that it is normally that way when it fact it is not.

Again examined closely the logic people use to promote their arguments and conclusions. Very often faulty logic is employed to ensnare the unsuspecting victim, for example; In a typical advertisement you make come upon a statement like this: 80% of those questioned replied thus and thus which proved so and so. No it doesn't. That doesn't prove anything, the assumption that it does is a false assumption. Truth cannot be decided by a show of hands, on a lot of issues the majority is wrong.

We must learn to detect poorly grounded deductions.

Another lesson we must learn is that that the person who wants to manipulate our thinking will more than likely resort to the use of words that are heavily loaded with emotion.

Visualize for a few moments two people who are living in the same frugal manner. Suppose you describe the one as thrifty and the other one as miserly.

See what you have done? You have not necessarily falsified the facts nevertheless you have made the one appear more likeable than the other by your choice of terms.

Discrimination demands that we be alert to the methodology resorted to by those who make it their business to try to manipulate our thinking.

In your learning hopefully you will also discover that persuaders frequently delve into history in order to convince you to think as they do. I'm going to warn you right now that by using cleverly selected historical data persons with different objectives can lead you to conclusions directly opposite each other. We must learn that distorted history will say whatever it is made to say.

As already implied don't be in a hurry to believe what you hear and read even though it comes from a supposedly Christian source, especially if the report or story is in anyway sensational, in Matthew 24 Jesus precisely warns us of this kind of scenario and what does He tell us what to do upon receiving such a report? Believe it not! Those are the very words of our Lord's, believe it not, that sensational story believe it not. [Matthew 24:23, 26](#). Put very little stock in any report that comes to you by way of the grapevine.

I have here in front of me a Mennonite written article dated 1990 entitled "Don't Believe Everything You Hear" I will read from it a few lines: "Recently I received an article that reportedly has received publicity in church circles, the article had been translated from Finnish, if reported on a drilling project in Siberia that left the drilling crew of scientists shaken and unnerved. At a depth of about 9 miles to drill bit reportedly hit a cavity, as the crew inserted a thermometer and an amplifier they discovered a temperature of 2000° Fahrenheit and human voices of anguish coming from the depths." The story says that the group promptly decided that they had discovered hell, the drilling was abruptly abandoned.

However much one might wish that was true this turned out to be a totally made up story submitted to a newspaper by a man from Norway as an experiment for the purpose of seeing if the publishers of that paper would properly verify materials before publishing them, their failure to verify the factuality of that article resulted in a rumour being circulated internationally.

The same person who made that discovery investigated also the oft reported story of the hitchhiker who would tell his driver that Jesus is coming soon and then mysteriously disappear. That investigator followed every possible lead without ever finding one person who had such an experience first-hand.

We would do well to investigate before we circulate the reports we hear. Finally it is inevitable that in some way or other you will eventually hear some sort of conspiracy story, the hearing of such a report will put your powers of discrimination to a severe test. Back in April of 2000 the Christian Contender carried an article entitled "Christians and Conspiracies" I have such high regard for that article that I think it ought to be required reading for everyone in our circles, I think it ought to be re-read about every five years. Right now I'm taking the time to read from that article the following lines:

"In the 1970s a man named John Todd, you're very familiar with this scenario, a man named John Todd made news headlines by touring the continent wearing a revolver and preaching about the Bible prophecy. He claimed to have been delivered from Satan worship and the Illuminati, a new-age group that was intending to take over the world at the end of that decade. Many Christians fell for Todd's message of conspiracy and believed him until finally someone found out the truth about him. Todd, a confidence man with a police record vanished from the scene as quickly as he had arrived and the conspiracy he preached against evidently disappeared with him since we are now about 20 years past his deadline. The number of Christians included Conservative Mennonites who swallowed Todd's story is very revealing.

Conspiracies have a way of attracting people but most conspiracies turn out to be false alarms. When God's people jump on the latest conspiracy theory and promoted heavily only to have it fall flat they give the ungodly an excuse to slander both Christians and God.

In our time Christianity is increasingly looked upon as a belief for the naive and uneducated or for radicals, revolutionaries. When we promote conspiracy theories we simply prove this contention and thus harm the kingdom of God.

I close with this thought: A Christian ought to be too good to deceive others and too wise to be deceived by others. I challenge you to be that kind of Christian:

Too good to deceive others and too wise to be deceived by others.

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