

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

Nonresistance

"Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God"
Matthew 5:8

For those who come from non-Anabaptist background this teaching of non-resistance is possibly the most challenging one to live out in our daily lives, many of us have been taught that it is o.k. to resist our perceived enemies with physical and destructive force as I was. Looking back at past wars and current conflicts we at times see both sides calling on God to bring them the victory and in the meantime the killing goes on, often times innocents suffer and are killed – politicians call that collateral damage.

And we ask: What do we want most of all? Above all things, peace is the desire of my heart and yours. We want peace in our world, and we want peace in ourselves.

Jesus Christ is the author and giver of peace. Those who accept Him into their hearts as their personal Saviour will have peace.

What is peace? Peace is not merely the absence of conflict or strife. Peace is a positive force. You may clear a plot of ground of all undesirable weeds, but that will not make it a garden. It will only be a bare field. It becomes a garden when flowers or desirable plants are growing there. The prophet of old reminds us that just to break up our swords and spears is not enough. Those swords must become plowshares and the spears pruning hooks (Micah 4:3).

To have peace in the world and in our own souls, hate, suspicion, greed, and fear must be rooted out. Joy, peace, love, patience, and understanding must be planted and cultivated.

"Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth: but I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also" Matthew 5:38-39. To someone who has not experienced the new birth, this scripture seems like an impossibility. However, when we truly have the love of God in our hearts that is the way we want to live. We have no desire to be at variance with our neighbors, friends, or brethren. We have a real longing to be at peace with God and all mankind.

Luke 6:31 must be the motto of every Christian. "And as ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise." *J.V.L*



Jude

A Short Letter – A Very Important Letter

The letter of Jude is the second shortest letter or book in the Bible consisting of some 25 verses 640 words, only the Letter to Philemon is shorter. Who was this writer and was he related to anyone else named in the Scriptures? The name Jude is an abbreviation of the name Judas or Judah and the Jude that is mentioned as the writer of this letter is thought to be a half-brother to Jesus. What confidence can we have that this is so, do we have any scriptural basis for that?

In John chapter 14 we have mention of a Judas asking our Lord a question [John 14:22](#) Judas (not Iscariot) said to him, “Lord, how is it that you will manifest yourself to us, and not to the world?”

In Luke chapter 6 we have Jesus calling his disciples to Him and choosing 12 whom He named Apostles, they are named and among them we find in [Luke 6:16](#)and Judas the son of James, and Judas Iscariot, who became a traitor.

In the gospel of Mark chapter 6 when Jesus was teaching in the synagogue and many hearing him were astonished in verse three says that they said, Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon? And are not his sisters here with us?” And they took offense at him. [Mark 6:3](#).

So we see from this that Jesus did have brothers and sisters and Judas or Jude was one of them.

In [Acts 1:13](#) we have Judas the brother of James being in an upper room with the other Apostles after the ascension of Christ to heaven, Acts 1:13 And when they had entered, they went up to the upper room, where they were staying, Peter and John and James and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot and Judas the son of James.

So from these verses we know that Jude was not Judas the betrayer.

Many Bible commentators also agree that these verses portray that the Judas mentioned is Jude the writer of our text, we also have Jude introducing himself in verse one here first and foremost as the servant of Jesus Christ and then secondly the brother of James.

From these verses I believe we can be confident that he was a brother of Jesus

I have often wondered over the years how many people skip this very brief but very important and informative letter by Jude. Is it because it is so short? Or maybe because it is next to the book of Revelations which usually gets everybody's attention or is it because Jude is not as familiar to us as some of the other writers of the Gospels and epistles?

Do you think because it is such a brief letter that we can overlook it in favour of some of the longer ones? I think not, it is a very powerful message not only to the people of the day in which it is written, but believers throughout the ages and also us here and now. That is true of all scriptures is it not? (2 Timothy 3:16)

It is no different to the rest of Scripture in that it is the timeless and unchanging Word of God.

It is a letter which exhorts or urges us to steadfastness in the faith but more importantly I believe we can see in this letter directions and warnings that will help us to identify and be on guard against false teachers of God's Holy Word, those that pervert and twist its meanings.

As we probably realise from Paul's letters to Timothy false teachers were in the church and affecting the church from its inception right through to today and I believe it will always be so whilst Satan is trying to bring down the Church of Jesus Christ and to draw people away from following God.

Yes we know from Scripture that the Gates of Hell will not prevail against the Church but nevertheless we as a body of believers and as individuals must always be on guard against being deceived because we form the Church and the battle is a spiritual one that each one of us faces daily, we face it individually but also collectively. Ephesians 6:12 says "For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the au-

thorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.”

The Apostle John warned the believers of his day that they were not to believe every spirit but to try the spirits whether they are of God because many false prophets are gone out into the world. 1 John 4:1.

The Apostle Paul also warned the Thessalonians that they were to prove all things and hold fast that which is good and I believe that has its application to what we hear today in our churches and from other professing Christians as well.

It seems that the early church, whilst it grew and spread rapidly, also had its opponents and those who were endeavouring to undermine the teachings of the Apostles and to deny Christ. Brothers and sisters, you and I know that it is no different today, in fact if anything, the need to hold fast to prove all things, to try the spirits whether they are of God or not is even greater and more urgent I believe than what it was in the formative years of the church of Jesus Christ.

Let us read the first four verses of this letter of Jude.

Jude ¹ Jude, the servant of Jesus Christ, and brother of James, to them that are sanctified by God the Father, and preserved in Jesus Christ, *and* called: ² Mercy unto you, and peace, and love, be multiplied. ³ Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort *you* that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints. ⁴ For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ.

Jude like the other writers of the epistles introduces himself to his readers as being a servant or follower of Jesus Christ. We have no indication to which particular church or group of people this was written but we do know that it was to believers.

How can we know that? Well Jude says in verse one that he is writing to them that are sanctified by God the Father and preserved in Jesus Christ and called, I believe that is referring to believers of that day and also today of whom Jesus said many are called but few are chosen.

Paul also makes reference to his readers being called to be saints when he was writing to them in Rome, Corinth and Galatia and to the churches at Ephesus, Colossi, and Thessalonica. Peter and John used the same expressions to describe the believers as being those who are called by Christ to follow Him. So we do not need to doubt that this letter is also addressed to believers, the called if you like, including those today and of course we should put ourselves in that category as well.

What are some of the things that Jude desires to impart to his readers of the day and to us here and now? Three things in verse 2 stand out

Verse two says it very plainly: **Mercy** unto you, and **Peace**, and **Love** be multiplied. Those three things that Jude mentions here, mercy, peace and love, I believe are what we can never have enough of especially as we deal and move and mix with people of the world. And should that not be our desire for each other as well to have those three multiplied?

Jude very obviously had a deep burden for the Christians to whom he was writing. We can see that in verse three where he says: Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort *you* that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.

What do you understand the word diligence to mean?

Diligence according to the dictionary has two meanings: one is persistent effort: persistent and hard-working effort in doing something.

The other definition I found for diligence was a legal carefulness: the care or attention expected by the law in doing something, such as fulfilling the terms of a contract. Now we know that Jude would not have had a contract of employment which sets out certain terms, however, I believe that we could liken his and our commitment as is disciples of Jesus Christ as being a covenant or contract which requires us to behave or act in a way that will bring glory and honour to Him and as such we do need to take care and attention to what we do and how we do it so that we can fulfil our covenant or commitment to Jesus Christ.

What is it that Jude reminds his readers of that they have in common, what is it that is the same for all? **Salvation** is the common denominator for all

believers, it is not one type of salvation for one and a different one for someone else, it is common to all as Jude expresses it.

Further his burden to warn and exhort the believers was such that he felt it needful, in other words it was something he felt pressed to do because of the dangers that he could see they were facing and would face and would continue to be faced by all believers until the return of Christ.

Like the other writers of Scripture, especially the epistles in the New Testament Jude was being used by God to warn people of the dangers that they would face in their Christian walk but more specifically Jude was warning against those that would come into their midst pretending to be believers, but in actual fact they were deceivers and agents of Satan we might say.

Jesus spoke of those in His day, Matthew 23:13 “But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you shut the kingdom of heaven in people’s faces. For you neither enter yourselves nor allow those who would enter to go in.

We see this also in verse four where Jude says, For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ.

The word ordained means to be set apart so I wonder if any of you may have an insight into what is meant by Jude when he says that these men crept in unawares who were before of old ordained to this condemnation? Did God choose them for that purpose? Or was God expressing his knowledge from before Creation as to whom would be saved or not, Ephesians 1:4 states even as He chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him in love.

We have many examples in Scripture of what happens when people turn away from God or against God and cause others to do the same. We do know that men who do these things will be condemned because of their behaviour in turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness and denying the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ and we know that will be the case for any of us that do that but I am not sure exactly what Jude means here by being of old ordained to this condemnation. It is not something that I have a completely clear understanding of.

One lesson that we can learn from these four verses we have looked at so far is that we need to stand firm and contend against those who would corrupt or denigrate our faith in Christ Jesus. We need to oppose those who try to creep in unawares and try to deceive the very elect as Jesus said. We need to be ever steadfast and ever vigilant that the Scripture is not presented in a corrupt manner or not presented in its entirety.

Jude in these four verses urges us to contend for this doctrine of salvation earnestly and that includes opposing those who try to creep in unawares and deceive the very elect as Jesus said, we need to be ever steadfast and ever vigilant that the gospel is presented without misrepresentation so that people will not be presented with another gospel as the Apostle Paul speaks of in 2 Corinthians 11:4: For if someone comes and proclaims another Jesus than the one we proclaimed, or if you receive a different spirit from the one you received, or if you accept a different gospel from the one you accepted, you put up with it readily enough.

And Galatians 1:6-7: I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel—not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ.

Matthew 24:24-25 call us to be mindful of the words of Jesus when He said: For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if *it were* possible, they shall deceive the very elect. Behold, I have told you before.

And we have Paul's warning also in Timothy 4:1-3 Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons,² through the insincerity of liars whose consciences are seared,³ who forbid marriage and require abstinence from foods that God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth.

May each of us apply that yardstick to ourselves first of all as we share the Gospel of Jesus Christ with others - we must present the full Gospel of Jesus Christ otherwise it becomes that other gospel spoken of by Paul 2 Corinthian and Galatians 6 which we just read.

In these first four verses of Jude is speaking to us Christians, the called as he expresses it. The question that arises then is what are we called from and what are we called to?

Well we are called out of the world away from the evil that is in it, and called to set ourselves apart from it, to separate ourselves to a higher and better calling in Christ Jesus, called from a life lived in vanity and pride but instead called to a life of seriousness and humility in following Jesus, called from uncleanness to holiness. Romans 12:2 comes to mind here, Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

2 Corinthians 6:14-18 should familiar verses we should have before us constantly in these last days as we seek to follow Him who is holy, they certainly are verses that true believers ought to take to heart and live out in their daily life of taking up their cross and following Christ.

Verse 14: Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness? ¹⁵ What accord has Christ with Belial? Or what portion does a believer share with an unbeliever? ¹⁶ What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; as God said, "I will make my dwelling among them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. ¹⁷ Therefore go out from their midst, and be separate from them, says the Lord, and touch no unclean thing; then I will welcome you, ¹⁸ and I will be a father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to me, says the Lord Almighty."

How can we achieve this?

We can only do this through the grace of God and faith in His son Jesus Christ. None of that happens by our own effort it is God who begins a work of grace and it is He who carries it on and perfects it, Romans 3:24: Being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus and Ephesians 2:8: For by grace are ye saved through faith and that not of yourselves it is the gift of God.

God's mercy is the wellspring of everlasting life, God's grace and mercy is available to all and the remarkable thing is that no one is shut out from the

Gospel and what it offers it offers to all who hear the invitation and are willing to accept it.

Now a brief look at Jude verses 5 to 7

Jude 5-7: Now I want to remind you, although you once fully knew it, that Jesus, who saved a people out of the land of Egypt, afterward destroyed those who did not believe. ⁶ And the angels who did not stay within their own position of authority, but left their proper dwelling, he has kept in eternal chains under gloomy darkness until the judgment of the great day—⁷ just as Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding cities, which likewise indulged in sexual immorality and pursued unnatural desire, serve as an example by undergoing a punishment of eternal fire.

What are two things that we can see in these three verses that can cause separation from God? What are some things that Jude is putting them in remembrance of?

One thing that causes separation from God is: Unbelief. Scripture is clear that we will not enter into eternal rest if we allow unbelief in our life when it comes to the Word of God and we have very clear references to that particularly in Hebrews 3 verses 12 and 19, Hebrews 4 verses 6 and 11.

The second thing is: Disobedience. We see here that disobedience is not just a human trait or characteristic, the angels were also prone to disobedience and they were in the very presence of God, Matthew 25:41, 2 Peter 2:4, the Scripture is very clear that we too are prone to that same disobedience to God, Romans 1:30, Romans 10:21, 1 Timothy 1:9, Titus 1:6, Titus 3:3. And it is what Jude is warning us about here in verse 6. Our proper dwelling is with Jesus Christ and his word not with the world.

There is a reward, if one can call it that, for both unbelief and disobedience, perhaps “consequence” would be a better term, for Israel when they came out of Egypt the result of unbelief and disobedience was to perish in the wilderness without entering the Promised Land.

What will be the result of our unbelief and disobedience in this life?

In a sense the world that we live in is our wilderness and we are, as it were, on a journey through it on our way to the Promised Land - the heavenly Jerusalem and so our unbelief and disobedience will prevent us not entering the Promised Land – Heaven.

Let's remember that God makes no exceptions, (Acts 10:34) He treated the angels the same way when they fell into disobedience and they together with all others who do not believe God and His directions for our lives will be held accountable on the day of judgement.

Where can we find confirmation of this day of judgement in Scripture?

In the Old Testament we see it in Ecclesiastes 3:16, And moreover I saw under the sun the place of judgment, *that* wickedness *was* there; and the place of righteousness, *that* iniquity *was* there.

In the New Testament Paul makes this statement speaking to Timothy that it is God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at His appearing and his kingdom; 2 Timothy 4:1

Also John in Revelation 20:12-13, And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done.¹³ And the sea gave up the dead who were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them, and they were judged, each one of them, according to what they had done.

The God that led the people out of Egypt from bondage into the promised land is the same God that leads us from the bondage of sin, our Egypt, into our promised land, we are pilgrims and strangers just like those spoken of in Hebrews 11 who desire a better country that is an heavenly kingdom and God is not ashamed to be called our God and has prepared a city for us, but let us also remember the words of Jesus in Matthew 10:33: Whosoever shall deny me before men, and that is speaking of unbelief and rebellion, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven.

Yes, God's grace and mercy will cover all our sins, but it does not give us an excuse to sin and sin in whatever form it comes is an expression of disobedience and unbelief. Let's read a little further in Jude, listen to the very direct and clear language of the writer, it leaves little if anything to our imagination or conjecture.

Jude 1:7-16, just as Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding cities, which likewise indulged in sexual immorality and pursued unnatural desire, serve as an example by undergoing a punishment of eternal fire.⁸ Yet

in like manner these people also, relying on their dreams, defile the flesh, reject authority, and blaspheme the glorious ones.⁹ But when the archangel Michael, contending with the devil, was disputing about the body of Moses, he did not presume to pronounce a blasphemous judgment, but said, "The Lord rebuke you."¹⁰ But these people blaspheme all that they do not understand, and they are destroyed by all that they, like unreasoning animals, understand instinctively.¹¹ Woe to them! For they walked in the way of Cain and abandoned themselves for the sake of gain to Balaam's error and perished in Korah's rebellion.¹² These are hidden reefs at your love feasts, as they feast with you without fear, shepherds feeding themselves; waterless clouds, swept along by winds; fruitless trees in late autumn, twice dead, uprooted;¹³ wild waves of the sea, casting up the foam of their own shame; wandering stars, for whom the gloom of utter darkness has been reserved forever.¹⁴ It was also about these that Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied, saying, "Behold, the Lord comes with ten thousands of his holy ones,¹⁵ to execute judgment on all and to convict all the ungodly of all their deeds of ungodliness that they have committed in such an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things that ungodly sinners have spoken against him."¹⁶ These are grumblers, malcontents, following their own sinful desires; they are loud-mouthed boasters, showing favouritism to gain advantage.

What are your first impressions or thoughts when you read this passage? Jude gives a vivid description of false teachers and as one writer put it "their deplorable end" Another writer said that these were people with a disturbed mind and a seditious spirit, in other words people that are always trying to undermine that which is good or wholesome or truthful. They have lost sight of Romans 13:1-2 which tell us that every soul should be subject unto the higher powers, there is no power but of God, the powers that be are ordained of God and those to resist the power resist the ordinance of God and shall receive to themselves damnation.

What is it that stands out to you? What are these people doing? In these verses we see the sort of people that false teachers and deceivers are and Jude doesn't mince his words nor does he soften his language when it comes to describing their end. They teach things we cannot apply as Christians to our life in Christ.

Their behaviour contradicts scriptures. Verse 7

They walk according to their own fleshly lusts and desires. Verses 7 & 8

They do not respect authority - often reject established authority. Verse 8

Money is their focus. Verse 11

They are not concerned about your welfare but only their own. Verse 12

They grumble. They complain.

They speak with great eloquence flowing words that flattery and impress

Verse 16 but verse 12 says there is nothing there. Clouds without rain etc. windbags in other words, useless and futile.

Do you think that there are people like that today?

How do we recognise and deal with them?

Well Acts 17 and 1 John 4 contains some words of wisdom for us today.

Acts 17:11, Now these Jews were more noble than those in Thessalonica; they received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so.

1 John 4:1, Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world.

What advice or lessons can we draw from these verses?

These verses tell us what sort of people they are so we need to be observant of people's behaviour -their lifestyle and their manner of speech - what do they talk about and how do they talk about it? If it does not line up with the Christian life as Jesus and the Apostles show it to us then we need firstly, if at all possible, to address the issues with the person and if not avoid being in their company alone nor associate for social gatherings, especially we must not allow our children to be influenced by such people.

I'm sure you can think of other ways in which you could lessen the input such people may have into your life, the life of your family, the life of our brothers and sisters in our community of faith.

What is the one word that stands out for us to take home from these verses when Jude is describing what sort of people they are? UNGODLY.

Ungodly, it is mentioned half a dozen times to describe them and their deeds and that should give us a clue as to their character.

I'm sure none of us would want to be influenced or our families influenced by the ungodly people as described here in Jude. Let's remember often

these people are clever and smooth with words and speak with flattering lips and often justify their actions by misquoting and taking out of context scriptural passages to support their views.

I am reminded of some words spoken by David in regard to flattering lips and what will happen to those who speak with such. Psalm 12:2-4 Everyone utters lies to his neighbour; with flattering lips and a double heart they speak. ³ May the LORD cut off all flattering lips, the tongue that makes great boasts, ⁴ those who say, “With our tongue we will prevail, our lips are with us; who is master over us?”

True men and women of God, have from the beginning of the world declared doom on them, faithful spirit led Christians should and must be doing the same and we are to follow men only as they follow God if we want to arrive safely in that haven of rest that the hymn writer speaks of.

Ponder these final words of Jude’s letter as it sums up all he has been saying, I believe it needs no further explanation, let the Holy Spirit guide and direct your thoughts as promised by Jesus (John 14:26) as you read this.

Jude 1:17-25: But you must remember, beloved, the predictions of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ. ¹⁸ They said to you, “In the last time there will be scoffers, following their own ungodly passions.” ¹⁹ It is these who cause divisions, worldly people, devoid of the Spirit. ²⁰ But you, beloved, building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit, ²¹ keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life. ²² And have mercy on those who doubt; ²³ save others by snatching them out of the fire; to others show mercy with fear, hating even the garment stained by the flesh. ²⁴ Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy, ²⁵ to the only God, our Saviour, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen.

J.v.L.

Ψ Ψ Ψ

THE GOVERNMENT OF CHRIST – *Isaiah 9:6*

Government. "The act or process of governing: authoritative direction or control." This is the first of many definitions Webster's dictionary gives for the word government. For the purpose of this writing, this is probably sufficient.

No kingdom in the history of man has existed without a form of government. They have fallen under various classifications, depending on the structure, or manner, in which rule is administered. Following is a brief description of some of the more common forms:

Democracy: Government by the people. A government in which the supreme power is vested in the people and exercised by them directly or indirectly through a system of representation, usually involving periodically held free elections.

Monarchy: Undivided rule, or absolute sovereignty, by a single person with life tenure and who can choose his successor.

Dictatorship: A form of government in which absolute power is concentrated in a dictator or a small clique; autocratic rule, control, or leadership.

Republic. A government having a chief of state who is not a monarch and who, in modern times, is usually a president. This form of government can closely resemble a democracy.

There are pluses and minuses in all these types of government. For instance, a democracy or a republic which supports freedom, justice, and liberty will operate best when the majority of the people seek the welfare of their fellowman. If the majority of the people are self-serving, it will collapse. Monarchy is the system by which the kings of the Old Testament ruled, and the nation prospered or fell depending upon the uprightness of the king. A dictatorship, if led by an upright man, can bring order to a chaotic country, but a despotic ruler can be very oppressive. One thing is common to all of these systems: they are political in nature.

The government of Christ is none of the above. That it is a government with authority is without question, but there is nothing political about it. Politics is defined as: "The art or science concerned with winning and holding control over a government; competition between competing interest groups or individuals for power and leadership." There are winners, and there are losers.

So how does Christ's government operate? In a limited sense, it is more like a theocracy (a theocratic earthly government can also be political) than the others. Here is the definition of a theocracy: "A government of a state by immediate divine guidance or by officials who are regarded as divinely guided."

While Christ's government shares some of the same principles of authority as earthly kingdoms, there are major differences. Primarily, the focus of Christ's government is the eternal salvation of the souls of men, to the glory of God's grace. The head of this government is not a man. "Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power. For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet" (1 Cor. 15:24-25). Christ is the head of this kingdom, and He communicates His will to His subjects by His Word and by His Spirit. This is divine guidance.

It is marvelous how this happens. Seldom, if ever, is Christ's will completely revealed to one man, lest he be lifted up. But as brethren share their convictions and inspirations, the Spirit moves upon them with light and direction. This is discerning the Spirit and proving His will, to which the body submits. The more light shed on a matter, the more all can feel this is God's leading. There are no winners or losers, because no one is pushing his own agenda. Only divine guidance is being sought.

We are not perfect, though, and sometimes we feel like the other side "won," or that we did. Perhaps there are feelings of conservatism and liberalism. Or maybe we feel like we need to try and convince others to our way of thinking. When this happens, it reveals our spirit, which has become political. This has no place in the government of Christ. It can happen that the Spirit of God is misunderstood, but this will correct itself in time since Christ is still the head.

A government without the means to administrate authority is the same as no government at all. God is a God of order, and He has an established manner for His kingdom to operate. There are Christian-professing people today who reject an expression of Christ's governmental authority now (2 Pet. 2:10). Let us make one thing clear: the authority in the church does not spring from any mortals. But Christ has given the administration of His authority to His servants, or to an office, much the same as the rulers of earthly kingdoms have done. The king or president or prime minister does not administer the law himself, but his servants do.

These people are referred to as public servants because in reality that is whom they serve, even though they receive their orders from the heads of state. In the church of God, Christ has given the administration of that authority to the ministry, as His servants, and to challenge or disregard that is the same as defying God Himself. It is then very important that these agents conduct themselves as true servants of God, lest confidence in God's government is destroyed. Again we will say, the ministry is not the authority, but the agents thereof.

A government exercises dominion only over its citizens. There are rights and privileges that a government guarantees, but only to those who are citizens of that country. The church is the most visible and organized form of Christ's government on earth. There are many in the broader scope of the kingdom of Christ who perhaps will never become members of His church. The administration of the authority with which the church has been entrusted does not apply to them, neither do they enjoy the rights and blessings of the church, since they are not dwelling within its borders. But this does not reflect on their standing in the heavenly kingdom. Christ is the head of that realm, with no visible and organized representation.

Just as a democracy can only function properly when the majority of the people seek the well-being of their fellowmen, so the church of God functions properly as long as the majority of the members are led by the Spirit. I am a hindrance to the order of the government of Christ if I am a member of the church but am not spiritual. If it should happen that too many of the members are Christians in name only, the established process of discovering the will of God by proving matters spiritually is threatened. Then there arises the very real danger of Christ's divine government being replaced by a democracy and governed by people. If this would happen, the church no longer has Christ as its head and can no longer administrate the government of Christ's kingdom.

Courtesy Gospel Publishers Moundridge Kansas.

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SHUT THE BACK DOOR

After the Son of God "had fasted forty days and forty nights" while being tempted in the wilderness of temptation (Matthew 4:2), the devil made one last mighty thrust against the Christ. There came a point in that hour of

testing that, humanly speaking, Jesus “had enough.” Can one not sense the Lord’s resoluteness in the rebuke, “Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve” (Matthew 4:10)? Our Lord decisively closed the door on Satan! And results followed.

Scripture says, “Then the devil left him, and, behold, angels came and ministered unto him” (v. 11). The word then is so significant, indicating a result at a specific time, or a consequence of something foregoing. “Then the devil left him.” What does that refer to other than that upon Christ “shutting the door,” Satan knew his scheme was finished! There was nothing to be gained by continuing. Then he left Jesus alone. Luke says “he departed from him for a season” (Luke 4:13). Harried and weary of constantly fighting temptations, many long for such a remission or respite. Indeed, every member of the church once testified that they had “remission of sins.” But let us not miss the point that such blessed relief from strong enticement comes only upon “shutting the door” so decisively that the devil knows the game is over. Such resolve, of course, is not of self-effort but by the grace in Christ Jesus. Christ shares His victory over Satan with us.

Too many Christians today are in a protracted strength-sapping battle with temptations. In such cases, the door into the mind and heart is obviously not closed all the way, and the devil continually tries to force it open. Some people seldom pull the door shut so the passage lock gives a resounding “click.” Someone else may ask, “Did you shut the door?” The reply may well be in the affirmative, but was the door really closed? In northern regions of winter cold and blasts of wind, people are conscious of keeping the outside doors closed. The “front door” may not be left ajar, but the “back door,” the one facing the storm, the door with the most traffic in and out, is the critical one. Should the door be thought to be “closed” but the bolt of the lock didn’t actually “click shut,” the probability exists that a sudden, powerful gust of wind will open the door wide. The back door to the hearts of unbelievers is, in reality, open to the devil’s whims. The “front door” is the impression people have of the individual.

There are many good, moral people in society; at least they appear that way as they present themselves to the public, this may at times be due to a

form of pride that causes some people, church-goers or not, to pull the door behind them. But in the secret place of the heart, they loathe hearing the “click” that says, “It’s finished.” The religion practiced in Christendom gives lip service to shutting the door to vice and self, but its abstract definition of sin leaves the door unlatched. Let a strong, popular sensation relating to fashion, fad, status, or entertainment come along appealing to the flesh, and the door will swing open. Many churches of the land know that to shut the back door resolutely will reduce the membership rolls. The hired preacher realizes all too well what he may and may not preach about the door of strife, pride, worldly lusts, moral purity, etc. Scarcely will he preach a gospel that “clicks the door shut,” lest his position be jeopardized. Why are some Christians so sensitive to pulling the door shut with decisiveness? It is almost as if there is a fear that to think of a sanctification involving “shutting the door” on our besetting sins (Hebrews 12:1) is being “righteous over much” (Ecclesiastes 7:16).

The truth is that the familiar refrain of “we’re just human” has frustrated the grace of God and aborted consecration time and again. That we are human is obvious, and we must not be exacting of one another. But there is a great difference between excusing our failures because “we’re just human” or lamenting them. The first one never produces holiness and will always leave the door open just a crack, while the second mind-set tends to “shut the door” and gives “fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life” (Romans 6:22). Sad to say, our present day of many innovations and inventions has presented particular challenges for Christians. But we must remember that the Scriptures clearly say these are deceptive time, meaning that Christians will need to keep a guard on how they think about sin and an evil environment. It is easily overlooked that deception takes place in one’s own heart and mind, not “out there in all the world’s offerings. “Every man is tempted when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed” (James 1:14). Our day is revealing that too many doors have been slightly ajar, and sometimes a sudden blast of powerful temptation opens the door wide. If our thinking does not fully credit the grace of the Lord Jesus “to save [us] to the uttermost”; (Hebrews 7:25), we excuse our sins on the basis of being so “human.” So the door remains open just a bit, and that does not go unnoticed by the devil.

We warn against the evils of Internet misuse, and with very good reason. There might be an understandable tendency to blame technology for some spiritual tragedies. But from another perspective the devil has so revealed his corrupt plan by now that no one can plead ignorance of his devices' (2 Corinthians 2:11). In that sense, the issue is not of devices and advertisement. No, the problem is that doors are being left slightly ajar, and Satan will not pass by an opportunity. What did the young man Joseph, down in Egypt, "all alone," have that any believer cannot have today? Somewhere along the way, Joseph "shut the back door" so decisively that the most powerful blast of temptation for a man could not open it. The outcome was concluded beforehand. May God give us more decisiveness in dealing with temptation!

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THE PRIVILEGE OF PRAYER

"And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us. ¹⁵ And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests that we have asked of him." 1 John 5:14-15(ESV)

Prayer is a most important aspect of Christian life, a time when the human heart communicates with God through Jesus, our mediator. Prayer is the language of the soul responding to the call of a loving heavenly Father. Christians will experience a great variety of circumstances and conditions which will call for much time in prayer. "Men ought always to pray and not to faint" (Luke 18:1). Maintaining honesty and simplicity in prayer is a challenge for every Christian.

Jesus himself gave us instructions on how we ought to pray in that very well know and universally used prayer we call the Lord's Prayer in Matthew 6:5-13 ESV "And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. ⁶ But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you. ⁷ "And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words. ⁸ Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need

before you ask him. ⁹ Pray then like this: “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. ¹⁰ Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. ¹¹ Give us this day our daily bread, ¹² and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. ¹³ And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. (Some translations add “for thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.”)

These words of Jesus do not mean that there is no other prayer format or words we can use because Jesus has other or additional directions or advise as well as we read further in Matthew’s gospel in chapters 7 and 21.

Matthew 7:7-11: “Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. ⁸ For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened. ⁹ Or which one of you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone? ¹⁰ Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a serpent? ¹¹ If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him!

Matthew 21:21-22: “And Jesus answered them, “Truly, I say to you, if you have faith and do not doubt, you will not only do what has been done to the fig tree, but even if you say to this mountain, ‘Be taken up and thrown into the sea,’ it will happen. ²² And whatever you ask in prayer, you will receive, if you have faith.”

We see just from these verses that Jesus gave clear direction both on how to pray and how not to pray. Some people, especially the religious leaders, wanted to be seen as holy, and public prayer was one way to promote this image. Jesus saw through their self-righteousness and pride. He taught that prayer is private communication with God rather than public speech. Praying, like giving, is to be done to the Lord, not to man. It should be done in humility and with a pure heart.

Our prayer life can be a fertile field for the spirit of hypocrisy. When secret prayers are neglected, lives become lukewarm, and prayers may become long and repetitious. The model prayer, usually called the Lord’s Prayer, as recorded in Matthew 6:9-13 can be a pattern for our prayers. We should praise God, pray for His work in the world, pray for our daily needs, and pray for help in our daily struggles.

The opening, "Our Father which art in heaven," implies that God is majestic, holy, personal, and loving. Then follows a statement of praise and a commitment to honor and hallow God's holy name.

Jesus taught us to ask forgiveness for our many sins, which are referred to as debts. God made man to glorify his Creator, and He gave man laws to live by; when man does anything that does not glorify God, he contracts a debt with divine justice. Man has nothing with which to pay. If his debts are not forgiven, they will stand against him when he faces the almighty Judge on that last great day.

Forgiveness, therefore, issues forth from the free mercy of God in Christ. The ancient Jews also believed that no man should lie down in his bed at night without first forgiving those who had offended him. That man condemns himself to eternal punishment who uses this prayer with revenge and hate in his heart.

"And lead us not into temptation" is often misinterpreted by people who blame God for their tests and trials. God allows Satan to tempt us, but ultimately it is our decision whether we will allow God's grace to lead us to victory.

Many Bible readers have puzzled over Jesus' statements that if we have faith and do not doubt, we can move mountains. Jesus was not suggesting that His followers use prayer to perform mountain-moving acts; rather, He was saying that if we have faith we will find answers for every difficulty and perplexity. Mountains will become molehills or plains before us as we trust them to the Lord. What kinds of mountains do we face? Have we talked to the Lord about them? How strong is our faith?

God loves His children and wants them to direct their requests to Him. Accordingly, He has made a way for His children to bring their burdens, requests, and offerings of thanksgiving and praise to Him in prayer. Many blessings are experienced as individuals learn to lean on the Lord.

The early church continued with one accord in prayer (Acts 1:14). This was, and still is today, a characteristic of the church of God. Her needs are provided through the ministry of prayer either on an individual basis or when we come together as brothers and sisters in Christ.

If anyone has a need, spiritually or physically, the church has the privilege of bringing this request to God and seeking a healing or restoration. Through the confession of faults and offering of prayers the church's steadfastness is preserved and God's mercy is extended to erring souls. By fasting and praying, the bondage of Satan can be broken (Matthew 17:21). "Be careful for nothing; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God" Philippians 4:6. Supplication means to ask earnestly and humbly, to beg. Is there supplication in our prayers? Do we plead to God for help day by day so we can live in His will? Can we pray consistently for our wayward ones, even if we see no change, and still trust that the Lord is doing His part? There are many decisions to make, seemingly many more than in the past. Sometimes we hesitate to pray because of the complex situations we face. This may be because of our weaknesses, lack of understanding, or uncertainty as to how God looks upon certain situations. Is the motive of my request earthly or eternal? Too often because we lack fervency or because of some disobedience in our lives we do not pray at all.

The history of God's people in the Old Testament tells of victories when they stayed close to the Lord and many tragic defeats when they disobeyed. When they truly repented and asked God for help, He always forgave them. God's mercy is still available for His children today. It is of vital importance that we have a simple, trusting faith in our heavenly Father.

Because God has created us, He knows our thoughts and our needs before we ask Him. God is interested in every aspect of our lives, but we need to realize there will be times when God wants us to wait. If that is the answer, let us be willing to wait patiently, in faith, and not run ahead of God.

One of the most effective ways of combating Satan is by "Praying always with all prayer and supplication" Ephesians 6:18. Surely the greatest needs we have are spiritual. Often our concerns in prayer begin with those things closest to our hearts: our needs, our loved ones, the prodigals, and those who should be saved. "The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much" James 5:16.

Courtesy Gospel Publishers Moundridge Kansas

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A prayer to start our day gleaned from a booklet of Puritan Prayers.

Almighty God, as I cross the threshold of this day I commit myself, soul, body, affairs, friends, to Thy care. Watch over, keep, guide, direct, sanctify, bless me. Incline my heart to thy ways. Mould me wholly into the image of Jesus, as a potter forms clay.

May my lips be a well-tuned harp to sound Thy praise. Let those around see me living by Thy Spirit, trampling the world underfoot, un-conformed to lying vanities, transformed by a renewed mind, clad in the entire armour of God, shining as a never-dimmed light, showing holiness in all my doings. Let no evil this day soil my thoughts, words, hands.

May I travel miry paths with a life pure from spot or stain. In needful transactions let my affection be in heaven, and my love soar upwards in flames of fire, my gaze fixed on unseen things, my eyes open to the emptiness, fragility, mockery of earth and its vanities. May I view all things in the mirror of eternity, waiting for the coming of my Lord, listening for the last trumpet call, hastening unto the new heaven and earth.

Order this day all my communications according to Thy wisdom, and to the gain of mutual good. Forbid that I should not be profited or made profitable. May I speak each word as my last word, and walk each step as my final one.

If my life should end today, let this be my best day.

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Compiled & Edited by: J van Loon
E-mail: shimaracourier@gmail.com
Web: www.anabaptistmennonites.net