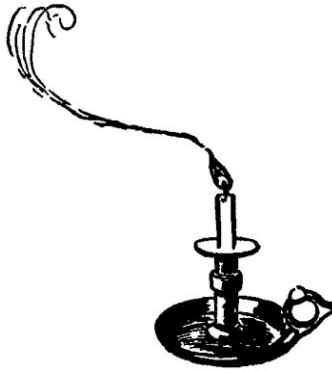


THE AUSTRALIAN ANABAPTIST

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

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

Matthew 5:15

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For A Conservative Anabaptist Perspective

From The Editor's Desk

The Reality of Life

In these troublesome times, which by the way are not without precedent in human history, we all can see that for multitudes the reality is suffering, physical and mentally in both ordinary everyday life of humanity in general and for the disciple of Jesus Christ often that suffering is also because others are enemies of God and in various ways, both subtle and openly, actively seek to destroy the tenets of scripture and try to force people to leave the God they love –Jesus our Saviour.

None of this is new, it has been seen the beginning of creation as we can see from the Old Testament in Israel's experiences as God's people and now since the beginning of the New Testament era, even before the disciples were first called Christian in Antioch (Acts 11:26), suffering was a reality of life – even Christ suffered and died.

Peter wrote this reminder for God's people of this reality: 1 Peter 4:12-19 Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. ¹³ But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed. ¹⁴ If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. ¹⁵ But let none of you suffer as a murderer or a thief or an evildoer or as a meddler. ¹⁶ Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name. ¹⁷ For it is time for judgment to begin at the household of God; and if it begins with us, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God? ¹⁸ And "If the righteous is scarcely saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?" ¹⁹ Therefore let those who suffer according to God's will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good.

Christ who is our example also suffered in the flesh, 1 Peter 3:18 "For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit." The end of all life, no matter our status in society, is as in Hebrews 9:27 "And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment" so let us heed the words of our Saviour and live accordingly: And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell. Matthew 10:28.



From the Pulpit

Developing Christian Character – Living the Truth
Heeding the Lord's Abominations
Joseph van Loon

O Lord, open Thou our eyes, that we may behold wondrous things out of Thy law. Thy Word is a lamp unto our feet, and a light unto our path. AMEN.

Firstly we have 3 readings, and there are many others, from Scripture that give the answer to what God expects our response to be to His Word if we claim to be His followers.

1] Romans 12:2: 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] Ephesians 4:17-24: Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds. ¹⁸ They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart. ¹⁹ They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity. ²⁰ But that is not the way you learned Christ! — ²¹ assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus, ²² to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, ²³ and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, ²⁴ and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.

3] Titus 2:11-15: For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, ¹² Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; ¹³ Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ; ¹⁴ Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar peo-

ple, zealous of good works. ¹⁵ These things speak, and exhort, and rebuke with all authority. Let no man despise thee.

These scripture readings show some of the basic and vitally important building blocks of Christian character – without the renewal of our mind, our thought patterns which influence our actions, we will not get to heaven. The way to achieve that renewal of our mind is to study God’s word, understand what it says, and live it out in obedience to Christ.

Abomination – it is not a word we often hear today, perhaps we have become too complacent and accepting of the behaviour of those who are not disciples of Jesus Christ and perhaps even some who profess to be Christians who may engage in what God calls abomination. What are those abominations and how do we deal with them?

Our focus this morning is to see just what are the things that God considers so revolting that He tells us in Scripture that they are an ABOMINATION to Him? And if they are so to Him so should they be to us. Our main focus will be mainly on the Old Testament where a number of times in the Books of Leviticus, Deuteronomy, Proverbs, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel we are told what is an abomination to God

I will start with a question or two just to get our attention fixed on the subject of the message this morning and here they are:

Do you have moral or ethical standards which you are not prepared to lower? We pray you do. Does God have them as well? He does.

What is it that you would consider so revolting that you would never ever consider doing or approve others of doing? If you profess to be a follower of Christ they should be the same as God’s view of them.

What does God consider so revolting that He forbids His followers to partake of or be involved in or even accept in others? Scripture will show us.

Another question:

Do we have an obligation or duty as followers of Christ to take heed what those abominations are or can we ignore them?

Let me say this now that to ignore what God calls abomination places us in peril of eternal damnation – you may think that a bit too strongly worded but Scripture is very clear as we shall see as we go through this message as

to exactly what those abominations are – I for one will not and cannot ignore them – I value the eternal destiny promised to those who obey God. I pray that you may value that destiny as well.

Before we delve into the main message we need to satisfy ourselves that what God called an abomination to Him in the Old Testament is still that today – somehow some people seem to have the idea that because it is Old Testament that some things do not apply to us today. Or because Jesus Christ makes no specific reference to something it doesn't count – I am confident that you accept the fact that Jesus Christ is God just as the one we call Father is God and the Holy Spirit is God, we use the names interchangeably, we say Jesus or Holy Spirit or Father but it is one God. Let us also be clear about this fact: God changes not and neither does His view of things. The God of the Old Testament is also God of the New Testament – He has not changed nor will He.

Numbers 23:19 God is not a man, that He should lie; neither the son of man, that He should repent: hath He said, and shall He not do it? or hath He spoken, and shall He not make it good?

Malachi 3:6^(KJV) For I am the LORD, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed. And

James 1:17^(KJV) Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.

In the context of the Old Testament handed down through the ages in Hebrew and translated to us in English the word abomination means something disgusting (moral), or abhorrent whether it be a custom or thing. A dictionary definition of abomination tells us it is something horrible, an object or action of intense disapproval or dislike, something shameful that is immoral, disgusting or shameful.

Now a disclaimer before we proceed further – I am not here with the intention of offending anyone however if you feel offended by what is read from Scripture please go to your prayer closet, meet God in sincere prayer and ask Him to show you what it means for your life. Matthew 6:6

Please open your Bibles starting with the book of Leviticus.

We see in the Old Testament over 140 verses which use the word abomination or abominations, especially chapter 11 of Leviticus which refers to those things that the LORD called the people of Israel to regard as ABOMINATIONS to them BUT God does not say they are an Abomination to him, which is what we are concerned with today. Just to clarify Leviticus 11 is a chapter where God points out what animals the people of Israel were to consider an abomination to them, not to eat them and how to deal hygienically with any contact with them. We will not concern ourselves with those abominations, it appears that God lifted those prohibitions when He spoke to Peter in Acts 10: 9-15, you may recall Peter's vision of a great sheet as it were let down by its four corners containing all kinds of animals and reptiles and birds of the air – many of these were classed as unclean in the Old Testament and Peter knew that, but God commands Peter to rise, kill and eat. Peter refuses and says to God, I am not doing that Lord, I have never eaten anything common or unclean! And then God says to him: "What God has made clean, do not call common." And just to reinforce or emphasise His decision to Peter He allows it to happen three times. The *Amplified Bible* says this in Mark 7:18-19, It is Jesus being quoted here: And He said to them, Then are you also unintelligent and dull and without understanding? Do you not discern and see that whatever goes into a man from the outside cannot make him unhallowed or unclean, ¹⁹ Since it does not reach and enter his heart but [only his] digestive tract, and so passes on [into the place designed to receive waste]? Thus He was making and declaring all foods [ceremonially] clean [that is, abolishing the ceremonial distinctions of the Levitical Law].

I believe we can safely conclude that the prohibitions in Leviticus 11 were lifted and we will not concern ourselves with Israel's dietary restriction as some do yet today.

Now to the Scripture references which do concern us today, ones that are God's moral statutes and of perpetual obligation, they were not destroyed but fulfilled in the ethical teachings of Christ and his Apostles. Christ himself makes it very clear that what He taught was what He received from his Father –Matthew 7:21 "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. And John 10:30 I and the Father are one." That verse alone should be a clear reminder to us that what Jesus teaches is what

God the Father teaches and that includes the Old Testament – remember Paul’s admonition to Timothy in 2 Timothy 3:16. All Scripture is given – you know the verse

Leviticus 18 deals primarily with unlawful marriages and unlawful lusts or desires and in the New Testament we can hear Jesus often referring to the Old Testament teachings on a number of issues – obviously He meant them not just to be taken heed of but to be obeyed.

The first five verses set the tone for what follows:

Leviticus 18:1-5

¹ (KJV) And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, ² Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, I am the LORD your God. ³ After the doings of the land of Egypt, wherein ye dwelt, shall ye not do: and after the doings of the land of Canaan, whither I bring you, shall ye not do: neither shall ye walk in their ordinances. ⁴ Ye shall do my judgments, and keep mine ordinances, to walk therein: I am the LORD your God. ⁵ Ye shall therefore keep my statutes, and my judgments: which if a man do, he shall live in them: I am the LORD.

We then have a number of verses in this chapter from verse 6 through to 23 relating to sexual immorality which show what to God is abomination, Ephesians 5 calls them the unfruitful works of darkness, which we are not to have fellowship with but rather reprove and Verse 12 in Eph. 5 tells us it is a shame to even speak of those things which are done of them in darkness, so in light of that admonition and the presence of children, young people, among us we will not read out verses 6 through 23 of Leviticus 18 but would urge parents to instruct their young people at an appropriate time on those verses.

We pick up at Leviticus 18 verse 24 to the end of the chapter.

Leviticus 18:24-30 ²⁴ Defile not ye yourselves in any of these ways: (referring to verses 6 to 23) for in all these the nations are defiled which I cast out before you: ²⁵ And the land is defiled: therefore I do visit the iniquity thereof upon it, and the land itself vomits out her inhabitants. ²⁶ Ye shall therefore keep my statutes and my judgments, and shall not commit any of these ABOMINATIONS; neither any of your own nation, nor any stranger that sojourneth among you: ²⁷ (For all these ABOMINATIONS have the

men of the land done, which were before you, and the land is defiled;) ²⁸ That the land spue not you out also, when ye defile it, as it spued out the nations that were before you. ²⁹ For whosoever shall commit any of these ABOMINATIONS, even the souls that commit them shall be cut off from among their people. ³⁰ Therefore shall ye keep mine ordinance, that ye commit not any one of these abominable customs, which were committed before you, and that ye defile not yourselves therein: I am the LORD your God.

Strong and unequivocal words from God – who of us would even dare to dispute them or ignore them? If you do it is at your own peril.

Chapter 19 is repetition of various laws given to the people of Israel and they are of great value to us today as well – read them sometime and you will see that much of it reappears in the New Testament in the words of Jesus.

Chapter 20 is substantially a repeat of chapter 18 but with some additions as to God's restrictions on the behaviour of Israel.

Now let's continue in the book Deuteronomy (7) and see what is clearly said to be an Abomination to God by God Himself.

Deuteronomy 7:25-26 (KJV) ²⁵ The graven images of their gods shall ye burn with fire: thou shalt not desire the silver or gold that is on them, nor take it unto thee, lest thou be snared therein: for it is an ABOMINATION to the LORD thy God. ²⁶ Neither shalt thou bring an ABOMINATION into thine house, lest thou be a cursed thing like it: but thou shalt utterly detest it, and thou shalt utterly abhor it; for it is a cursed thing.

Deuteronomy 18:9-13 ⁹ (KJV) When thou art come into the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee, thou shalt not learn to do after the abominations of those nations. ¹⁰ There shall not be found among you any one that maketh his son or his daughter to pass through the fire, or that useth divination, or an observer of times, or an enchanter, or a witch, ¹¹ Or a charmer, or a consulter with familiar spirits, or a wizard, or a necromancer. ¹² For all that do these things are an abomination unto the LORD: and because of these abominations the LORD thy God doth drive them out from before thee. ¹³ Thou shalt be perfect with the LORD thy God.

Do you see the standard that God requires here? – it is perfection.

Next we have Deuteronomy 22:5,

This verse applies to both men and women and is one some object to as not being relevant to this day and age, and many who profess Christ object to it as well, I believe one of the reasons for that is that those who set fashion trends, which includes our peers, have changed the terminology of some clothing items to make them more acceptable but it states clearly what is an abomination as God sees it – What you do with it is between you and God, as is all of Scripture, but this is what God says and He includes both men and women in this:

“The woman shall not wear that which pertaineth unto a man, neither shall a man put on a woman's garment: for all that do so are ABOMINATION unto the LORD thy God.”

Chapter 23:18 and chapter 24:4 also describe further abominations unto the LORD which again we leave these to parents to instruct their children in. Deuteronomy 25:13-16 - these deal with dishonesty in its various forms: ¹³ ^(KJV) Thou shalt not have in thy bag diverse weights, (that is inaccurate or false) a great and a small. ¹⁴ Thou shalt not have in thine house diverse measures, a great and a small. ¹⁵ But thou shalt have a perfect and just weight, a perfect and just measure shalt thou have: that thy days may be lengthened in the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee. ¹⁶ For all that do such things, and all that do unrighteously, are an Abomination unto the LORD thy God.

Chapter 27 of Deuteronomy verses 11 through 26 list the curses that God pronounced through Moses on certain behaviours of God's people and when you read through them you will see that they are in general a repeat of those things already called by God to be an abomination to Him in our previous readings.

Chapter 28 contains a record of the blessings for obedience and the curses for disobedience, again we can learn from them, I don't believe we should just ignore them and say they don't apply to us, yes some of them were just for Israel in that age, but the focus for us should be the results of obedience and disobedience to God's requirements of his people then and now.

As we look at the history of Israel in the the Old Testament and how despite the many miracles and warnings and punishments that God visited upon them they continued to be swayed by the world around them – and that led so often to disobedience to God and his ways.

My question today is: Are we any different? Or do we think ourselves a cut above the Israel of old because Christ has made available to us the gift of grace and salvation through his death and resurrection?

The sad tale of Israel and the things that they did that were abomination unto the LORD continues almost unabated in 1st and 2nd Kings, 2nd Chronicles, additionally the books of Ezra, Jeremiah and Ezekiel also contain many verses about that which are abominations in God's eyes.

We have so far looked at what God sees as abomination in mainly moral issues or should we say the intimate carnal aspects of our nature but now it is the book of Proverbs that comes into focus, the verses here are not of an intimate nature but are still very applicable to our day and age when it comes to those things that are called an abomination unto the Lord and over which we have to exercise control as well as those that are moral issues.

The book of Proverbs contains 19 verses which clearly state those things which are an abomination unto the Lord, they reinforce much of what we have already looked at but they make a handy reference list. We will not read all of them, just one sample will suffice.

Proverbs 6:16 These six things doth the LORD hate: yea, seven are an ABOMINATION unto him: and they are: verses 17-19: A proud look, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, ¹⁸ An heart that deviseth wicked imaginations, feet that be swift in running to mischief, ¹⁹ A false witness that speaketh lies, and he that soweth discord among brethren.

In conclusion what we have looked at this morning are behaviours that GOD despises, they are abhorrent to Him, they are revolting to Him, GOD calls them abominations and so should we – let's not soften our language to accommodate the world's way of life or that of our friends, or acquaintances or even family, instead let's be the people that He has called us to be both in public and in private.

The Apostle Peter says it so well in 1 Peter 2:9-12 But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light: ¹⁰ Which in time past were not a people, but are

now the people of God: which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy. ¹¹ Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul; ¹² Having your conversation honest among the Gentiles: that, whereas they speak against you as evildoers, they may by your good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation.

Will you choose this day to be counted among those who will glorify God in the day of visitation when He calls home those that Malachi speaks of in Malachi 3:16-17: Then they that feared the LORD spake often one to another: and the LORD hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the LORD, and that thought upon his name. ¹⁷ And they shall be mine, saith the LORD of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels; and I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him

The challenge for each of us today is this: Is God changing us OR are we trying to change God and his Word by ignoring or misrepresenting His word to suit our preferred lifestyle? Are we trying to fit in with the world, friends and family? Are we ashamed to be called disciples of Jesus out in the public arena, do we behave like chameleons who change their appearance to blend in with their environment?

Or are we just lazy Christians who find it takes too much effort to live as God through His Word calls us?

We do not live in isolation from others and what we do or say, how we live, does influence others and we should not be the cause of having our brother or sister stumble or for that matter cause seekers to turn away because we do not follow God's standards in an observable way, not just in our thoughts – people are not mind readers they need to see.

Let me close with two New Testament references for you to consider as to what you will do with the abominations we have shown from Scripture – this is how God sees them, please take special notice of the word abomination.

Jesus speaking to the Pharisees in Luke 16:15 ^{KJV} And he said unto them, Ye are they which justify yourselves before men; but God knoweth your

hearts: for that which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God.

The second is God's own standard as to who will be allowed into the holy city, New Jerusalem, heaven, Revelation 21:27^(KJV) And there shall in no wise enter into it anything that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie: but they which are written in the Lamb's book of life. Note the word abomination there.

What it all comes down to brothers and sisters, friends, is whether or not you believe what the Scripture says, God is the author and that only by surrendering to His will and living in daily obedience to Him can we have an assurance of salvation and so therefore let each of us choose to do as Hebrews 10:22 calls us and let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water.

A Closing Prayer:

Father in heaven, you have given us so much, the miracle of life is beyond our understanding, the opportunity to know You is a gift beyond comprehension. Your word handed down to us by faithful saints is a guide to us, it lights our path and directs our feet into your paths of righteousness leading to life everlasting with You.

Father the people around us are priceless in your sight, it is why you paid the price for our sin and waywardness. Forgive us for ignoring You, forgive us for ignoring your word when it is put before us.

Forgive us Father for losing sight of what is most important in our earthly sojourn as pilgrims and strangers in a world that is increasingly rejecting You.

May today be the day that we realise our shortcomings, Father and turn to you in sackcloth and ashes and cry out Abba, Father, help us to do your will whilst we await your return.

And all the people said: Amen.

A list of the references used with additional references is set out below so that you may study them in your own time and draw your own conclusions as to what your behaviour ought to be in light of them when you claim to be followers of Christ. It really comes down to obedience or disobedience – it is your choice - God has given us the free will to choose our destiny.

Ephesians 4:17-24
 Romans 12:2
 Numbers 23:19
 Malachi 3:6
 James 1:17
 Acts 10: 9-15
 Leviticus 11
 Matthew 7:21
 John 10:30
 Leviticus 18:1-5
 Leviticus 18:6-23
 Leviticus 18:24-30
 Ephesians 5:3-12
 Deuteronomy 7:25-26
 Deuteronomy 18:9-13
 Deuteronomy 19 & 20
 Deuteronomy 22:5
 Deuteronomy 23:18, 24:4
 Deuteronomy 25:13-16
 Deuteronomy 27:11-26
 Deuteronomy 28
 1st and 2nd Kings,

2nd Chronicles, Ezra, Jeremiah
 and Ezekiel contain many verses on
 abomination also.
 Proverbs 6:16
 Proverbs 3:32
 Proverbs 8:7
 Proverbs 11:1, 20
 Proverbs 12:22
 Proverbs 13:19
 Proverbs 15:8-9, 26
 Proverbs 16:5
 Proverbs 16:12
 Proverbs 17:15
 Proverbs 20:10, 23
 Proverbs 21:27
 Proverbs 24:9
 Proverbs 28:9
 Proverbs 29:27
 1 Peter 2:9-12
 Malachi 3:16-17
 Luke 16:15
 Revelation 21:27



ETERNAL SECURITY – Conditional or Unconditional?

Compiled from various Anabaptist resources by J.v.L

Jesus said, “Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God” (John 3:5). Thus when anyone, by true repentance and faith, comes to Christ and is washed of water by the Word (Ephesians 5:26) and renewed of the Holy Ghost (Titus 3:5), we say he is born again, regenerated, converted, or saved.

The question before us is this: Can someone thus saved lose that gift and again be lost, or is the person who is thus saved, always saved? Upon the answer to this question hangs the eternal destiny of many souls. For if, as some claim, a person can by sin and disobedience lose the salvation that

God has wrought in his heart, then many will be lost forever who are trusting in that first experience to save them, regardless of how they live or die! If, on the other hand, it is impossible to lose that salvation, it ought to be heralded abroad for the consolation and assurance of all who believe. Especially so, since some hesitate to come to Christ for fear that they will not be able to continue faithful!

But what does the Bible say? In John 10:27–29, we read: “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: and I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father’s hand.”

Two truths immediately stand out. First, the sheep hear and follow Christ (presently and continuously), not have heard and have followed! Second, God is so great that no one can remove such sheep from His hand. So we see that no wolf or thief can harm those sheep. However, Jesus did not say that we could not jump out of His hand, or leave the fold, by ceasing to hear and follow, thereby losing our right to the Father’s protection!

We have many like promises, exceedingly great and precious, assuring us of God’s power and ability to keep us unto the end, making us partakers of His divine nature, and delivering us from the corruption of this present world (2 Peter 1:3, 4, 11; Hebrews 7:25; 1 John 4:4; 5:4, 5; Jude 24). In these we rejoice, and praise God for the assurance that neither man, nor the world, nor the devil himself will be able to overcome us as we abide in Jesus Christ.

However, we dare not make such verses contradict their setting and other Scripture passages that clearly teach us that we must continue faithfully to the end, or we will lose our salvation.

The Word tells us:

John 8:31 “If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed”

2 Corinthians 13:5 “Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates [rejected by God; excluded from salvation and lost in sin]?”

2 Peter 1:9-10 “But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins. Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall” It seems quite clear that by not doing “these things,” mentioned in verses 5–7, one can fall.

Romans 8:13 “For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live” Some say that once we are born, we cannot be unborn, but we see that we can die!

James 5:9 “Grudge not one against another, brethren, lest ye be condemned: behold, the judge standeth before the door”

The Book of Hebrews, written to Christians (holy brethren — Chapter 3:1) is full of warnings on this point, which would be a foolish waste of space if there is no possibility or danger of losing salvation! And these warnings are in the plainest speech possible. Notice just a few: Hebrews 2:1 “Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip”

Hebrews 3:12 “Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God”

Hebrews 3:13-14 But exhort one another daily, while it is called To day; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.¹⁴ For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast unto the end;

Hebrews 10:25 “Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching”

Hebrews 10:24–29 “For if we sin willfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries. He that despised Moses’ law died without mercy under two or three witnesses: of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace?”

Impossible to fall away? Hardly! Will those who do fall away always return before they die? Hardly! In fact, the above passage tells us that they

can get to the point where they cannot return! Read also Hebrews 4:11; 6:4–8; 11:15; 12:14–17 and 25.

Let us take heed!

2 Peter 2:20 “For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning”

It sounds as though they lose more than just the present joy of their salvation! Further, some would say that they were not saved in the first place, but Peter says, “after they have escaped. . . through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.” How could language be clearer?

Examples

Although some who backslide and live in sin for a time do return, yet the Bible gives us many examples of those who did not.

1. 1 Corinthians 10:1–12, tells us that the Israelites were all delivered from Egypt and shared spiritual blessings, but some were overthrown. “Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall” (verse 12).

2. Saul of the Old Testament was a man whom God had given another heart (1 Samuel 10:9). But at the end of his life, God had left him and was his enemy (1 Samuel 28:16).

3. In the New Testament Jesus said, “No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God” (Luke 9:62).

4. Also, we have the example of Judas, one of the Twelve, of whom Peter said that he “by transgression fell” (Acts 1:25). Strange, indeed, if it is impossible to fall away! Judas fell from his relationship with Christ by his transgression.

5. In 2 Peter 2:15 we are told of some “which have forsaken the right way, and are gone astray. “These clearly were once following the right way, but left it, even though God was able to keep them, had they continued in His grace. Nor were they just temporarily straying but still saved, for we read further that “these are wells without water, clouds that are carried with a tempest; to whom the mist of darkness is reserved for ever” (verse 17).

Parables:

Let us now consider the parables of Jesus, which some twist and pervert.

1. Matthew 13:24–30 and 36–43 gives the parable of the good seed and the tares, which Jesus said should grow together until the harvest. Some people tell us that tares can be developed into wheat (converted), but that wheat cannot degenerate into tares (apostatize). This is contrary to other Scripture passages, as we have seen, and also to the setting here. This parable is given to teach the truth that evil and good shall both continue in the world until God separates them, and not to teach the possibility or the impossibility of falling away. Further, if spiritual wheat cannot change into tares, how did Adam and Eve, created pure and holy, receive a fallen nature and pass it on to their descendants?

2. In Matthew 13:47–50, Jesus says, “The kingdom of heaven is like unto a net, that was cast into the sea, and gathered of every kind: which, when it was full, they drew to shore, and sat down, and gathered the good into vessels, but cast the bad away.”

Some have said that just as good fish never change into crayfish and salamanders, so Christians never change into non-Christians. If this were true, the same parable would also teach us the impossibility of converting sinners into saints, since in nature neither kind of fish ever changes into the other. But notice in verse 49 that Jesus says this is an explanation of how it will be at the end of the world. It will be too late then for any changing either way, of course!

3. Notice the parable in Matthew 25:1–13 concerning the ten virgins who were awaiting the bridegroom. The lamps of the five foolish virgins had gone out, implying that they had oil and their lamps were burning, but by failure to watch, they failed to enter in with the bridegroom. Jesus’ conclusion was, “Watch therefore . . .”

4. Consider also the parable of the sower in Matthew 13:1–8 and 18–23. Some received the Word, and it took root, but due to such things as persecution, trouble, cares, riches, and pleasures, they did not remain faithful, and lost the eternal reward.

From these Scripture passages and others, we can come to no other conclusion than this: We are eternally secure, so long as we abide in the vine; but if any man abide not in the vine, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered, and cast into the fire and burned (John 15:6). We cannot expect to disobey God’s Word, live in sin, serve the flesh, and still be saved, no matter how glorious and real our past experience may have been.

Ezekiel 33:13-15 To the prophet of old, God put it like this: “When I shall say to the righteous, that he shall surely live; if he trust to his own righteousness and commit iniquity, all his righteousnesses shall not be remembered; but for his iniquity that he hath committed, he shall die for it. Again, when I say unto the wicked, Thou shalt surely die; if he turn from his sin, and do that which is lawful and right . . . he shall surely live, he shall not die”

Remember the Lord promise in Matthew 24:13 “But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved”



THE WORD AT WORK

For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. Hebrews 4:12

A mustard seed is very small, yet there is life in it. As long as the seed is kept dry, it remains dormant. But plant it in the ground, give it warmth and moisture, and it germinates, grows, and blossoms according to the laws of nature. It grows into a great tree in which the birds take refuge.

Jesus said that the Word of God is like a seed. Taking it from storage, the sower casts it forth upon the field. With proper nurturing, it springs to life in a receptive heart. The Word produces powerful results and is life-changing. These effects are what we can see in our lives when surrendered to Christ. Although the effects are evident, the work of the Word remains somewhat mysterious.

The only credible explanation to the mystery is that God gives the increase 1 Corinthians 3:7

Jeremiah was prophesying at a time when Judah and Jerusalem were facing a hostile invasion because of their disobedience to God’s Word, he boldly delivered the message from the Lord. Even while he spoke false prophets in Judah, claiming God’s approval, were brazenly proclaiming victory over the enemy and a pleasant life ahead. They offered false hope and security and we can see manifestations of that in some who proclaim to be committed to the cause of Christ leading nations today. The difference between a false and a true prophet is as vast as chaff from wheat. The

worthless chaff blows away with the wind, but the wheat nourishes many people.

We often think of the law as a list of rules that deny us the pleasurable things of life. It may seem to be a negative and forbidding presence, and we may feel it is nearly impossible to keep the law however is able to keep us from evil if we obey it. The Word warns us of many dangers and converts us from our evil desires. It gives us wisdom and saves us from foolish decisions. It causes the heart to rejoice and renews spiritual vision. God's laws are safe guidelines and shine a light upon an unknown path as we journey through life.

While witnessing or teaching, endeavouring to lead others to God, our words will not be wasted or fall fruitlessly to the ground. Though many may scoff at the message of the Word and ignore it, the words of Scripture will not return void. (Isaiah 55:11). The message carries the power of God and will either redeem those who hear it or cause their condemnation to be evident. Its radiant light uncovers the unfruitful works of darkness and causes evil to tremble; it reveals truth with purity and simplicity. It points to repentance as the remedy for sin and leads us to a saving faith in Christ Jesus.

It would be a serious matter to omit the crucial factor of repentance. It may seem appealing to stress the importance of faith rather than repentance in order to avoid self—denial and the rigors of the cross. If we do not present the complete truth when we witness, we expose our hearers and ourselves to the peril of heresy that has brought many to a destructive end. Heresy feeds on fallacy, offering false interpretations in place of true doctrine. Every false teaching undermines a scriptural principle. False teachers live in a state of delusion and are not realistic in their profession or practice of Christian virtues. Lacking true knowledge of God's Word, they twist the scriptures to their advantage. Often their messages offer false hope to sinners or confuse and misguide the hearers. Assuming false authority will bring condemnation to the hypocritical message bearer.

We must not underestimate the power of the written or spoken Word.

The individual who carries it may feel weak and insignificant, but the word spoken by God's humble messenger can cause a substantial impact upon the hearer. There is a hidden element in the message that has often brought surprising and unexpected results in the lives of those who receive it. Like the small mustard seed that sprouts and then grows into a large

tree, the Word delivered in a humble way can result in the miracle of a regenerated heart.

Another interesting quality of the power of God's Word is that it can convey to the hearer an interpretation of which the bearer had not thought. God knows every heart and its desires; therefore, He can intensify or diminish a particular portion of the message to fit the need of the recipient. If the Word of God is to be effective in our lives, we must study it and live by it. We need to use it for its intended purpose. Although the Bible contains a lot of information, its main goal is to transform our lives. Reading it only will not bring the desired effect; it must be obeyed. Memorized scriptures are an instrument which the Holy Spirit can use to good effect when we are called to witness.

True interpretation of any scripture will never contradict any other statement of the Bible. Sceptics have justified their unbelief by pointing out scripture verses that appear, at first view, to be paradoxical or even contradictory. However, when these scriptures are studied carefully, it will be found that they reveal the same truth, only from different viewpoints. Paul writes, "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness" 2 Tim. 3:16. Therefore, when we use the Word, we must avoid omitting portions of it or using scriptures out of context to support our position or idea. We must remember that scriptural truths never change to support prevailing, modern thought. The proclamations of God and Jesus Christ contain the same values and have the same unchanging application as they have had in previous millenniums. It is always safe to look for biblical examples in order to discern God's will for our time.

Let us be careful and diligent in interpreting and using the Word of God, and may these verses be a constant reminder and determination for us: Psalm 19:7-14 ^(ESV) The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple; ⁸ the precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes; ⁹ the fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever; the rules of the LORD are true, and righteous altogether. ¹⁰ More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb. ¹¹ Moreover, by them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward. ¹² Who can discern his er-

rors? Declare me innocent from hidden faults. ¹³ Keep back your servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me! Then I shall be blameless, and innocent of great transgression. ¹⁴ Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O LORD, my rock and my redeemer.



THE COST OF FOLLOWING GOD

And he said to all, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. Luke 9:23 ^(ESV)

So therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple. Luke 14:33 ^(ESV)

When we want to become converted, Satan tries to dissuade us from relinquishing our whole will into the hands of God, telling us that the cost will be too great. If we allow this fear to influence us, we will be unable to come to a clear experience of the new birth.

There is a cost to the flesh when we obey and follow God’s direction explicitly. As Christians, we must be like Jeremiah, willing to deny our flesh and to take up our cross. Total abandonment of self-will assures the release of God’s power in and through us. We should settle for nothing less. The cost is temporal, the reward celestial.

As we study Scripture, we may marvel at the stubbornly rebellious nature of the Jewish people in the Old Testament. Their unwillingness to listen to the truth God’s prophets were urging upon them resulted in the wrath of God being poured out upon them. Is our time much different? The world pursues the same pattern of self-serving, dishonest, and carnal living. We are in danger of being enticed into a casual way of life and, finally, to follow the example that is prevalent in society today. To some extent we become inured or immune to the evil with which we daily rub shoulders. In endeavouring to stem this tide of wickedness, we find that there is a cost attached to living for God.

The question before us today is are we emulating the world in our speech, dress, outward appearance, in the vehicles and houses we own and are they providing an “easy way out” for us, reducing the cost of following God to our flesh?

The rich young ruler who came to Jesus seemed eager to inherit eternal life, Mark 10:17. The young man, however, must have felt there was still a lack in his life. Kneeling before Jesus, he asked for direction and Jesus answered by quoting some of the commandments to him. He quickly replied that he had kept these commandments from his youth. When Jesus pointed out his need of selling out completely and distributing his wealth, his eagerness for eternal life dimmed and he turned away sorrowfully. For him that cost was just too great.

Ridicule hurts, but it did not stop God's prophets of old from speaking up nor should it stop us. As we are willing to speak up for the truth, telling others of the miracle of deliverance God has worked in our hearts and lives, we begin, in a small measure, to realize that there is a cost attached to discipleship. It may come in the form of ridicule. In the eyes of the world our belief and profession appears foolish.

We like to think that we shall never be called to suffer for our faith the way

The prophets of old or any of the martyrs of the present or bygone eras have. We have no assurance of this for the Bible says, "Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution" 2 Timothy 3:12. We can and should draw strength from the example of those who were faithful in the past and also those today, men and woman who held firmly to their God-given conviction and divine calling regardless of the cost.

We, too, must not stop short of a complete surrender of self and an undivided allegiance to God. As we stop to consider the cost of building for eternity, Luke 14:28, let us not grow discouraged. Satan will seek to inflate the cost in our eyes. God is able to more than cover all the costs. To retain our discipleship, we must forsake all. "So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsakes not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple" Luke 14:33.

Yes there will be some suffering involved, some sacrifices that hurt the flesh, our carnal nature but remember God's words to Paul in his afflictions as he followed Christ "My grace is sufficient for thee" 2 Corinthians 12:9

God has given us the power of choice. Do we choose how much we suffer for God? Perhaps we ask ourselves is the cost of being completely faithful to God ever too great? If those are questions we ask ourselves then remember the reward if we persevere – an eternity in heaven with God.

Revelation 21:4 “He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.”



Forgiveness — Faith — Trust — Discipline — Prayer.

Do these five words have anything in common?

At first glance most would likely say; "probably not." Nevertheless they are indispensable in our daily Christian walk. Each one of those words with the exception of 'disciplined' is one that Jesus used in relation to our journey with Him — He did however use the word 'disciple' from which the word 'disciplined' stems.

Do we walk in each of those areas on separate days, Monday to Friday, one area per day? And have weekends off for a break from the daily routine? I would suspect that most would not — even though we may not walk in all of the five areas all day every day. We are human beings with our faults and failings, sometimes we forget to trust or pray, sometimes we don't really want to forgive, sometimes our faith is shaken by circumstances, sometimes we have not maintained the discipline needed to live the victorious Christian life of a disciple of Christ Jesus.

Life's burdens come down upon us, we forget to take them to Calvary where the burdens are lifted, Jesus has made an offer to us all: "Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you, and learn of Me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For My yoke is easy, and My burden is light." Matthew 11:28-30

We all need help, encouragement and determination to exercise ourselves in these areas which are controlled by our will. When we subdue our will to God's directives we then can start to see ourselves as overcomers. That too is a scriptural requirement and when we overcome our will and submit to God's will then we are able to have the confidence that; "He is the rewarder of those that diligently seek Him!" Hebrews 11:6

Scripture encourages us to live in each of these areas on a daily ongoing basis with this aim: "Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ: " Ephesians 4:13

May the Lord bless you as you seek to be an overcomer in the Kingdom of God and be an encouragement to others who struggle in this life. J.v.L.

HAVE YOU BEEN ON THE ROAD TO DAMASCUS?

Have you been on the road to Damascus?
Have you met our dear Lord on your way?
Did you hear when the Master called to you?
Did you heed what He had to say?

Stricken down on the road to Damascus,
My sight became blind just like Saul.
Then I said, "What would You have of me, Lord?
I am weak; I am frail; I am small."

"Son, arise, and go forward and serve Me" --
It was my dear Master's command.
"I will lead thee, and I will now guide thee,
Be it here or throughout the land."

Forward I go now, my Saviour to serve,
Simply clay in the Potter's own hand.
I question not the will of my Maker,
For time passes soon, as the sand.

When my hourglass shall be still and empty,
And my time has all passed away,
I'll go then to meet my blessed Saviour
In that land of eternal day.

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