

THE AUSTRALIAN ANABAPTIST

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

Vol. 13 No. 9 – SEPTEMBER 2016



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

www.anabaptistmennonites.net

For A Conservative Anabaptist Perspective

From The Editor's Desk

Can science and technology help us to see more of the glory of God and His creation?

Some think that science has or will find all the answers to God's creation and we all realise that technology plays a great part in this as man continues to develop the tools to further his interest in scientific discoveries.

We would have to admit, even if many do not, that science has discovered and laid open for us many of what were considered by previous generations as mysteries of the Creation, we also hear of changing theories as to the development of life and may we always keep in mind that the definition of theory is "an idea of or belief about something arrived at through speculation or conjecture, a set of circumstances or principles that is hypothetical" and when it comes to scientific principles to explain phenomena it is "a set of facts, propositions, or principles analysed in their relation to one another and used, especially in science, to explain phenomena."

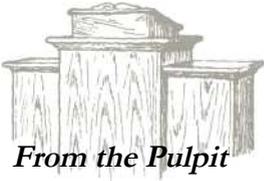
It is interesting to explore those statements further and see how it is that so often scientists have to change their assumptions regarding things of God's creation because their theories were just that – a theory not based on all the facts that are known to God and neither can anyone ever know them all, just read Job chapters 38 to 41 and Romans 11:33 and believe.

Now back to the question of can science and technology help us to see more of the glory of God and His creation?

Over the past 12 plus years we have been using a voice recognition program on our computer to allow the conversion of voice recordings to typed documents, we can either listen to the recording and speak into the computer or more recently have the computer convert direct from the recording. Law enforcement for many years has recognized and used electronic voice recognition as a means of identification, some institutions now use that technology for clients to access their accounts instead of a typed in password and why is that?

Well it is because with the rapid advance of science and technology it has now been found through many years of research that every person irrespective of age, ethnicity, language or even physical wellbeing apparently has a distinct and unique voice pattern just like fingerprints.

Only God can and did create such a masterpiece of unique characteristics. Again read Romans 11:33 and also Job 9:10 about God's ability and marvel at His wondrous works without number! Praise God. J.V.L



From the Pulpit

Protecting Our Reputation
From a message by Joseph Sensenig

We do want to extend a greeting in Jesus name tonight it is He who we want to exalt. It is indeed a privilege to be able to gather together in spite of circumstances to think about the word of God.

For a message I would like to turn to Ecclesiastes chapter 10 verse one, I will read the first three verses Ecclesiastes 10:1–3 “Dead flies cause the ointment of the apothecary to send forth a stinking savour: so doth a little folly him that is in reputation for wisdom and honour. ²A wise man’s heart is at his right hand; but a fool’s heart at his left. ³Yea also, when he that is a fool walketh by the way, his wisdom faileth him, and he saith to every one that he is a fool.”

Perfume is intended to give off a good smell but that pleasant odour can be spoiled by some little things, if flies are allowed to get caught in this ointment with a good smell they will die and if they stay there they will begin to putrefy and their bad smell will overpower the good smell of this ointment and the whole will become repulsive to man.

The wise man uses this illustration to impress upon us how foolish acts, may I say one foolish act even, can do damage, almost untold damage to a person’s good reputation, there is a sense in which that almost seems to be unfair, just a few little things spoiling someone’s reputation especially if it is not characteristic to the person. You know this is a principle of life and we see it in some other things as well.

I think of an illustration that was used by a teacher. She showed her students a piece of white paper with a black dot in the middle and the students were asked to write what they saw. Some wrote that they saw a little black dot, some said a big black dot, some even wrote that they saw a piece of paper with a black dot on it but there was not a one of those students that simply wrote “a sheet of white paper.” Why was it that everyone’s attention was drawn to that dot? It was because it marred the paper it was something that did not seem to belong there.

Just as that black dot seen through the eyes of every student so it is with one little bit of indiscretion, one indiscreet act of ours will draw the atten-

tion of others to that part of our character that is not what it should be. It is absurd but that is a principle of life.

If you have a glass of clear sparkling water how much dirt does it take to spoil the water to make it repulsive to the man who wishes to take a drink? Not very much does it?

Of a fool we do expect foolish acts.

Verse three talks about a fool as he walks by the way, it is obvious to everyone that he is a fool because of the things that he does but someone that we consider to have good judgment, someone that we think of as a wise man we do not expect him to act in those ways. A little folly will spoil the reputation of someone, it will spoil the reputation of someone as a wise and honourable person.

D) *I just would like to think a little bit on reputation.* *What is reputation,* what is being spoiled here? We will have one we will have reputation. The Scriptures tell us that “Even a child is known by his doings” Proverbs 20:11, and that is what a reputation is. It is what we are known by, how we are known because of how we act and the things that we say. The idea here in this verse of reputation is the idea of valuable, something costly or precious and a person’s reputation is his value to influence others for good, reputation could also influence for evil. We could say it is like this as the dead flies cause the ointment of the apothecary to send forth a stinking savour so does a little folly outweigh the value of a man’s wisdom and honour. All the good you are able to do or much of the good you are able to do can be spoiled and destroyed by acting foolishly.

As a Christian you have a good reputation. A good reputation to maintain in a number of ways, personally for your own benefit, the benefit of others around you. A bad odour goes forth when you profess to be a Christian and yet do not act like one. People around you basically know how you should act, whether they are Christians themselves or not, they basically will know how a Christian should act and your reputation your personal reputation can be destroyed. But also the name and the honour of Christ Himself is at stake by the things that you are doing. As a Christian you are bearing Christ’s name and His honour is at stake.

Also your reputation before God, it is personal as well, it is not like we’re just trying to hold a mask over our face like we might do to those who do not know us really well, God knows us through and through, it is not like we are trying to impress God but certainly He sees every foolish

act that we do. It is said that a man is known by the company that he keeps and if you were the owner of a business and turned that around then a company must be known by it by the men it keeps, and that is true.

I think it is true as well of the church, the church is known by its members by those it keeps, those who are a part of it and those who know you will judge the church, they will judge the congregation here at Valley View at least in part by what they know of you. I think we should keep that in mind. Dead flies that they see in your experience are going to turn them away, we do not want to do that, we want to point men to God, to Christ our perfect example the one in whom there are no flaws or blots.

I would also like to think of some examples of those who have good reputations to them from the Scriptures. Take the example of Moses he was a man whom the Lord knew face-to-face like no other old testament Prophet. He had a good reputation, he is known as the meekest man on earth but at one time “he spake unadvisedly with his lips” (Psalm 106:33) and it put a blot upon his reputation.

I think we can also see how these things can be overcome through our lives as we continue on being faithful to the Lord, but this is serious. This failure of Moses the Lord labelled as unbelief, Moses smote the rock that was to give them water when the Lord had said: Speak to the rock. And because of this the Lord did need to bring some things into his life that were not so pleasant, Moses was not allowed to lead the people into the land of Canaan because of this one indiscreet act (Numbers 20:7–12).

King David is also an example of a man who had a good reputation, he is known as “a man after [God’s] own heart” (1 Samuel 13:14; Acts 13:22), a man that followed perfectly the will of God and turned aside only in one thing, only in the matter of Bathsheba and Uriah the Hittite (2 Samuel 11). But it was that one blot in his life, those little flies that gave forth a stench. It was a prophet Nathan that told him that this would give “great occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme” (2 Samuel 12:14). So you see the reputation again.

What we are seeking to maintain is not only our own reputation but in a sense the reputation of the Lord and the reputation of His people.

What is folly? I think that is pretty clear in our minds, folly, foolish acts, an act that indicates our lack of good sense and judgment [or a lack of normal prudence] and foresight, called common-sense sometimes, it shows

a lack of that. I think the definition that Strong's gave was "silliness, lack of sobriety, lack of sense, lack of proper judgment."

II) I would like to look at a number of characteristics of folly as given in the Scripture, a number of the verses that tell us that a certain thing is folly or foolishness or this is how a fool acts and then we would like to draw a number of applications from each one of these Scriptures. All of these things might apply to our lives and these little flies that we are trying to keep out of our lives these flies that spoil the good smell that should come forth from our lives. In doing so of course it is not our intention to label others or think how this might apply to someone else but is an attempt to see some of the weaknesses in ourselves the weaknesses of man in general.

1) Psalm 53:1 says: "The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God."

So one characteristic of folly would be atheism. Now I realise I am speaking to a group that confesses to believe in the Lord and I am sure we do that. James gives some insight of the same sort, we all believe in God but we wonder sometimes how many practical atheists there might be among us, not believing that there is a God or that the Lord might not come again, living as though we do not believe it

James 4:13–15 "Go to now, ye that say, Today or tomorrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain:¹⁴ Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away.¹⁵ For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that."

There are plans to the future that we do need to make, we do need supplies for our own physical needs, the buying and selling and getting gain, but we do have to remember that it is: If the Lord wills that we live. God is in heaven He has control of our lives, that is shown many times by our attitude. We plan sometimes, businesses need to expand for various reasons and we need to be careful of our attitude, is it something that does not leave us time for the Lord's work? Certainly we do not want to fall into this trap, the Lord must have first place, He is the only number one in our lives.

2) The second characteristic of a fool, we already looked at in Matthew 7:26, the parable of the wise man and the foolish man. It is foolish, it is folly, a blot to us if we build without having a good foundation. It is a foolish carpenter that does not make sure that his house is built on a solid

footing. What will happen if he goes out and builds on the sand and the storm comes, the sand will wash away, the house will collapse. Maybe the ground that we build on is not quite that easily swept away but a house that is not built on something solid will certainly show signs through sagging and cracks and things of that nature.

How might we liken this to our own lives? As it says right there in that parable: Those who hear the word and do not obey. We show folly in our lives by not taking heed to the word of God. It might be to disregarding the teaching that we hear, preaching that we hear, the teachings, the plain teachings of the Scriptures that we read for ourselves. It might be by resisting the truth. 2 Timothy 3:8-9 Jannes and Jambres are spoken of there as those that resisted the truth, it says that those who are like these men their folly shall be revealed. It is foolish, it is a blot to our lives to resist the truth.

It might be simply by not putting good intentions to action. We can have ever so many good intentions for doing what is right and obeying the Bible and unless we get beyond that we are not building on a good foundation.

It might be through despising the instruction of parents. Proverbs 15:5 there it tells us that it is foolishness. Going over fools' hill is a very poor way to begin life, to begin our adult or our responsible life and many who have gone over fools' hill have never come back and many who have come back have come back with scars. And it is sad indeed when this is the accepted practice or the thing that we might even expect of our youth. Certainly the time of youth is not one we think of as in general as characterised by a lot of wisdom, experience does teach us many things but it is foolishness to allow a blot like that in our lives.

3) *And the next foolishness if we make it through that many times*, Proverbs 14:9 tells us that fools make a mock at sin. Many times I was involved with those who do not accept the instructions of their parents. This can also be done by those who are older and looking back on some of their past foolishness and speaking about it with enjoyment with their parents or possibly even with younger people, that certainly indicates an attitude that we might have toward those things that should have been repented off and it puts a blot upon our lives, but not only upon our lives but the lives of the following generation and it will make it very difficult to pass the faith on to them because that creates a thirst in them for some of those things as well.

Another way of making a mock at sin is through immoral or suggestive speech or stories, also it is prevalent in many places that we might even have contact with at times, we need to do our best to avoid those places because we cannot allow those blots, those little flies, to be in our lives.

4) *Another Scripture from Ecclesiastes that tells us of foolishness*, chapter 5, I would like to read three verses especially the end of verse three, a fool's voice is known by the multitude of words and some of the other verses speak to that as well:

Ecclesiastes 5:1–3 “Keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God, and be more ready to hear, than to give the sacrifice of fools: for they consider not that they do evil. ²Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thine heart be hasty to utter any thing before God: for God is in heaven, and thou upon earth: therefore let thy words be few. ³For a dream cometh through the multitude of business; a fool's voice is known by multitude of words.”

Some people by nature do have more to say than others and we do enjoy out talkative friends, I do not intend to reflect upon those who are that by nature but I would just like to remind each one of us that there are many snares to a person that is gifted with a lot of speech, it can be a blessing as well, there are many Proverbs that speak to speech and I would just like to read briefly a few of them.

Proverbs 10:19 “In the multitude of words there wanteth not sin: but he that refraineth his lips is wise.”

Proverbs 13:3 “He that keepeth his mouth keepeth his life: but he that openeth wide his lips shall have destruction.”

Proverbs 18:13 “He that answereth a matter before he heareth it, it is folly and shame unto him.”

Proverbs 29:11 “A fool uttereth all his mind: but a wise man keepeth it in till afterwards.”

I would also like to remind you of the words of Jesus in Matthew 12:36 “But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment.”

Words they can be a blot to us and a cross to us but they can also be a blessing, and I do want to speak to that side of it in just a bit, it is not only talkative people that have a problem with idle words or foolish words or even a multitude of words but it is certainly a snare to those who are naturally gifted in that area. There are others who talk much when they should not for various reasons generally to draw attention to themselves, able to

speak well. There are many people that are gifted at saying the right thing at just the right time but I would certainly encourage each one of us to cultivate this for good. Cultivate this so that we might be able to comfort others and build them up rather than cultivating attempts or abilities to be funny or to draw attention to ourselves. “A word spoken in due season how good it is” (Proverbs 15:23). May our words be that, may they be the ointment of the apothecary, may they be perfume, a good smell rather than a stinking savour.

5) *Proverbs 28:26 there we have another characteristic of folly that we want to avoid:* “He that trusteth in his own heart is a fool.” That is only a part of the verse, self-confidence or possibly we should say too much self-confidence is actually a characteristic of a fool. A certain amount of self-confidence is needed to help us function productively, someone who has no self-confidence is not able to function very well but it is the fool that has too much confidence in his own self and in his own abilities, it might be confidence in his intellect, he might be impressed by all the things that he knows, or even that his father knows, his parents know, and he might be trying to impress that up on others as well.

I suppose you have heard arguments already over non-essentials or even arguments against things that are proven facts, I am not here to judge all that and yet someone who is continually involved in that type of thing is not really showing his intelligence but it is a fly of folly to him.

It could be self-confidence also in business decisions. Again it is decisions that we need to make ourselves we need to have enough confidence to do that but it is the mark of a wise person that asks counsel of others rather than taking all these things upon himself.

Another mark here of this self-confidence that we want to avoid is shown sometimes by our driving on the highway or operating equipment that type of thing and there are some people that are very well able, they just seem to have the gift of being able to handle their machine, but even a person like that it is folly to him to take chances, driving at excessive speeds, passing other vehicles it might even be a slow moving vehicle, the horse and buggy, they just want to get around and there is a curve and they cannot see round the curve it is a mark of folly to take chances like that whatever your motive might be behind that.

Another mark might be again one somewhat similar to this of flirting with danger at heights. There are stories told of people who did this or

even those who do it as entertainment but really is that not the mark of a fool to endanger our life, the lives of others, the well-being of others for such things. Another one that might come somewhat in this category is acting on impulse, being rash, anger often goes along with these things and then we are told that “anger resteth in the bosom of fools” (Ecclesiastes 7:9).

I am sure we have all seen and possibly all done some foolish things on impulse or because we were angry. We do want to be careful that these things might not be a blot in our lives.

6) Another mark of folly another characteristic of folly I believe is having a light view of life. Life in general expressed by the thought “let us eat and drink for tomorrow we die” (Isaiah 22:13). Life is short so we might as well live it up. It is noted in people who never seem to have serious things to say, serious things to think about, light and frivolous speech.

But life is serious, we are here for a cause, we are here to work the Lord, we are here for a time of testing and proving and the Lord wants something from our lives and we should not have a light view of life.

Also involved in this light view of life would be not considering the sacredness of life, a game that would be related to a number of things that we spoke off in being overconfident in ourselves and whether we endanger our own lives, our own health, sometimes it is through some very small things and yet it is the mark of a fool.

Well we do want the Lord to be glorified by our lives, not just part of our lives, not just when we come to church, not even just when we are away from home but in all of life and I would like to think yet briefly of some things we need to do in order to purge the folly from our lives.

I may have alluded to a number of these things before but just briefly say:

➤ We need to take heed to ourselves, take diligent heed to ourselves every moment of every hour of every day, if we live most of the time as a wise man and yet a few times if you in unguarded moments act in a foolish manner that little bit of folly can actually outweigh the good that our reputation might do.

➤ We need to realize that life is serious, we are not just here to please ourselves, we are not just here to have a good time but we are here on business for our King.

Another very needful thing for our lives to purge forth the folly is to fear the Lord. “The fear of the Lord . . .” is what? It “is the beginning of wis-

dom" (Proverbs 9:10). We need to fear the Lord because no matter how much diligence we take to our lives how careful we try to live unless we have the help of some higher power we will not be able to do it. There will be those dead flies in our lives that will send forth a stinking savour.

It is not in man that walkers to direct his steps (Jeremiah 10:23). He needs the help of his God and we do well to pray daily: Put a watch before my lips, put a watch before my actions, before my thoughts, O Lord I would do nothing that would shame You or the cause of the Kingdom. I would do nothing that would send forth a stinking savour from my life. I want only a sweet smell ascend with those about me and to my God. May the Lord help us each to do that.

THE NEED FOR CHARITY

The Charity Chapter of the Bible, 1 Corinthians 13, is acknowledged as one of the most beautiful portions of the Scriptures. It is also one of the most searching of the human mind and spirit. That in itself indicates that charity and the unction of the Spirit are closely related. While possible distinctions between love and charity are sometimes discussed, the importance and dependability of charity is the focus here. The apostle Peter surely describes charity when he says, "Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently" (1 Pet. 1:22).

In the broad range of human relationships, something is needed to "oil" the interaction of individuals. The nature of man is selfish, and his inborn insistence on the worth of his ideas and aims does not readily make for harmonious relationships. Nevertheless, in the everyday realm of life, a common respect among people usually serves society quite well.

In the close-knit, spiritual relationships of the brotherhood, the "live and let live" code falls short of the mark. The shortcoming of this mode is that it relies on a certain "no trespassing" zone, which is contrary to the tenor of the gospel. The inborn nature of man remains after one becomes a Christian, but he does receive a beautiful grace through the Spirit that fosters a selfless manner of relating to each other. Sincere Christians are open to one another and yet are careful to not abuse that vulnerability. This is the grace of charity.

"And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these

is charity" (v. 13). Faith in its various aspects is surely the foundation of the Christian religion. Without faith one has no hope of salvation. "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 5:1). "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God" (Ephesians 2:8). By faith a believer is "begotten ... unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead" (1 Peter 1:3). What greater principles of the gospel are there than faith and hope, one may ask? The Apostle says that of the three, the greatest is charity.

Charity is not in the forefront in the doctrine of redemption; paramount are repentance, confession, and faith in the atoning sacrifice of Christ Jesus. Charity comes into prominence upon a group of such redeemed being incorporated into an assembly of believers, or a congregation, or a conference of congregations. If this is to be and remain a viable, functioning body, then charity is of greatest need. There may be ever so much experience, knowledge, or a clear claim of hope, but charity supersedes it all.

It should not need to be said that charity is distinct from the "live and let live" code by which the world's society operates. Charity does that which the world says is off limits: it lets fellow believers get right into one another's hearts and truly know each other in the Spirit. There are no "do not trespass" limitations on one hand, and on the other there is plenty of respect, consideration, and heartfelt feeling for each other. Charity in brotherhood relationships is a two-way street. This is the foundation of spiritual care in the church of God.

"Charity never faileth" (v. 8). This statement is understood in the same sense as 1 John 3:9, which says, "Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God." As long as the seed of God, which is the Word, 1 Peter 1:23, remains in a believer, he does not sin, because there is no potential for evil in that Word. The Word is purity and holiness, "full of grace and truth" through and through (John 1:14). So it is with charity. Within charity there is no program of the self-nature. It always seeks the other person's highest will spiritual welfare. That working nature of charity never ceases or fails. Such is the dependability of charity.

The Apostle Peter also understood the need of charity. "But the end of all things is at hand: be ye therefore sober, and watch unto prayer. And above all things have fervent charity among yourselves: for charity shall cover the

multitude of sins" (1 Peter 4:7-8). One notices again the importance that is assigned to charity: "And above all things have fervent charity among yourselves."

The Apostle comments that "charity shall cover a multitude of sins." Perhaps some read out of this that overlooking faults and failures is charity. That is not necessarily true rather solicitous concern for the spiritual well-being of one another issues from charity. Charity does withhold quick personal, critical judgment of a brother or sister's fault, thus preventing an immediate breach in fellowship and confidence. Should there be a break in fellowship through a lack of charity, the spiritual footing needed to reach the erring one is lost. Charity knows that many times things may not be like they appear on the surface or are told. What a multitude of "sins" may go uncovered because of a lack of charity!

There is something about charity working in the unction of the Spirit that prevents sin. Charity has a lot of motivation. It moves one, in conjunction with the prompting of the Spirit, to visit personally with the individual to understand a matter more perfectly. A brotherhood having fervent charity among their number is a brotherhood fervent in the Spirit. Herein is the spiritual potential to sense a developing need or weakness before it breaks into an open defilement. A multitude of "sins" has been covered, or prevented, in this manner.

Throughout the Church spread around the world, there will of course be some differences of practice. At times there may even be some deficiencies. These matters can become stress points. When variations of practice stay within the boundaries of Bible doctrines, there is no disturbance of fellowship when charity rules. Within the bonds of love (see Ephesians 4:1-6) is the recognition that "there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are differences of administrations, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all" (1 Corinthians 12:4-6). Deficiencies in keeping the faith have another dimension, and charity must govern all the more in Christian fellowships, particularly those areas that share to a great degree a common background, endeavors to come to more obedience in the practice of nonconformity, the grace of charity will serve us well.

Something can be gleaned about brotherly relationships from an account found in Judges 12:1-7. Stress and trouble between two family lines among the children of Israel arose. In this the Jordan River crossings became cru-

cial points. Those crossings aptly illustrate the tests that maintaining fellowship often entail. When the issues require of us to say "Shibboleth," we try to pronounce it rightly, but we may say, "Sibboleth." Just one syllable short, but what a difference! Without the grace of charity, this is the way it is.

Jesus said, "A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another" (John 13:3-35). The "new" part was, "as I have loved you, that ye also love one another." Jesus gave His life for us, and charity requires the crucifying of oneself for others.

OBEDIENCE

Obedience has a very simple definition. It means to be submissive to the restraint or command of authority (Webster). Obedience is vital for a Christian who has become a follower of Jesus. If He is Master of our lives, as He wants to be, and we are consecrated to Him, obedience is not an option, nor should it be a question.

The law given to Moses required obedience in total. One Sabbath day a man was found picking up sticks. When this was reported to Moses and Aaron, they didn't know what to do. When inquiry was made of the Lord, the command was that he should be stoned (Numbers 15:32-36). The Old Testament records various other incidents where what seemed a small disobedience incurred God's wrath. Later Peter stated that neither they nor their fathers were able to keep the Law in perfection (Acts 15:10). Nevertheless, the Old Testament saints were required to keep this law to be saved. The Law is our schoolmaster to bring us to Christ by causing us to see our lost and hopeless condition. This, in turn, causes us to seek Christ, who alone can take us out from under the curse of the Law. As we receive Christ, we are privileged to look into the perfect law of liberty (James 1:25).

Paul also writes of liberty, saying that we must not use it to please ourselves (Gal. 5:13). Some questions need to be asked. Do Christians have rules to follow? Are there commandments to obey? Is our liberty such that the Bible is only a book of guidelines that are good to follow, but not compulsory?

Since contemporary Christendom has cast off the "shackles" of doctrine, she is reluctant to have rules. The specifics of doctrine as laid out in the Walden-sign confessions of faith and "The Thirty-three Articles of Faith" would be distasteful to much of Christendom today, should they be acquainted with them. This fear of rules, preferring only general guidelines, wants to influence the practice of the true faith in our day.

A rule is a prescribed guide of conduct or action; a regulation or bylaw governing procedure or controlling conduct (Webster). Most certainly, today's Christian needs to understand that his conduct must be controlled, and, therefore, he does have rules to follow. Jesus is the gospel rule maker. As we read the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5, 6, and 7, we find detailed rules of conduct on numerous issues. There are specific instructions relating to divorce, nonresistance, giving, praying, and forgiveness, to name a few. Christ teaches in Matthew 18 how to reach out to a brother who is being unfaithful, instructing the church how to carry out further discipline when necessary. If excommunication becomes necessary, He instructs how the faithful are to avoid such apostates.

Jesus also gave clear instructions about the communion service. He did not give a rule as to how often it should be practiced, but He did say that a common cup should be used, commanding the twelve to all drink of it. He also broke the bread and gave to each one a portion, telling them what the symbols of bread and wine meant. In the book of John, chapter 13, the Lord taught by word and example how the church was to practice feet washing. This was not given as only a guideline one could choose to follow, but it was a command to be obeyed. A blessing of happiness would follow obedience.

Before Jesus left, He commissioned the apostles to carry on the work. They were inspired by the Holy Ghost to write many more detailed instructions as rules to follow in establishing the churches. From them we have received a clear rule of practice for the Christian woman to wear a veil or head covering to indicate her acceptance of a position of submission in the home and church. There are also clear rules on how a Christian woman should dress to please the Lord and bear witness to her feminine purity.

The apostles taught us by the example of the Jerusalem council, recorded in Acts 15, how the church is to make further decisions.

Willing submission and obedience to the Master has a wonderful way of uniting His followers. The more detailed instructions make it possible that

churches throughout the world are able to "walk by the same rule" and mind the same thing (Phil 3:16). In 1 Corinthians 1:10, Paul uses this thought: "that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and the same judgment."

Guidelines, compared with rules, are only an indication or outline of policy or conduct (Webster). Within this framework, the flesh would be able to pick and choose, somewhat like a spiritual smorgasbord. This would not work toward unity but would rather promote the pietistic spirit of each doing what seems right in his own eyes and being independent.

Our congregations and their schools need rules of conduct. We do not want to, or should not, make more rules than needed for order and security. When they are made, we need to embrace them as our own and teach them to our children and the young Christians following us.

Paul writes in Romans 13 that if we resist the civil rules of our land, we resist God. How much more so if we resist the rules and authority of the church and her leaders? We should periodically read Numbers 12 and 16 to get a better understanding of how God looks at such resistance.

A consecrated, Spirit-led Christian will seldom bump into the rules of the church. The law of the Spirit is in harmony with the body of Christ. Conversely, one who has lost the keen touch of the Spirit is likely to find comfort in more rules, which could become his righteousness. The more diligent his keeping of the rules, the more righteous he would feel. His inclination would be to live by the letter and hold his brethren to his standard of righteousness.

Obedience has always had the blessing of God. The heroes of faith of Bible times and past centuries were men and women who were obedient. We will be today's heroes of faith as we live our everyday lives by the rule of the Word of God. Jesus said, "If ye love Me, keep My commandments" (John 14:2-23). John states it in another way in his First Epistle: "For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous" (1 John 5:3).

Many of the scriptural commands are made plain today in the preaching of the Word as well as the general instructions in members' meetings. Ezra did this for the children of Israel, first reading the Law distinctly and then the "sense" was explained (Nehemiah 8:1-9).

Willing obedience to God and the church has a great blessing, with an eternal reward awaiting the faithful.

(NOTE, Merriam Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, Eleventh Edition, was used for definitions.)

Brother Robert J

TRUE FAITH

Voices From Yesteryear Selected Quotes Of The Faithful

O my kind reader, it never fails that where true faith is, there, also is the righteousness of faith; where there is unfeigned, Christian love, there also is obedience to the holy word, and where there is true, sincere repentance there also is an unblameable life, according to the truth; this is incontrovertible...

"Where there is such a faith which brings forth a new, converted and changed mind; which makes us dead unto sin and leads us into a new life; changes us from Adam to Christ; puts off the old man with all his works and puts on the new man with his works and thus conforms all his thoughts, words and works to the Spirit, word and ways of the Lord, behold, there is true repentance to which the holy prophets, John the Baptist, Christ Jesus, together with all the apostles and pious servants have so earnestly pointed us and so faithfully admonished us" (*Menno Simons Complete Works, second part, pp. 27-28*).

"Faith is manifested by works, even though we are justified only through grace. Man can have many outward godly works, and yet no living faith; but it is impossible for anyone to have a living faith without godly works. For as the body is dead without spirit, so faith without works is dead. We have not been created anew to stand there as fruitless trees, nor to be found by God without good works. "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them" (Ephesians 2:10). Fire produces flames; water causes dampness; the good sap of a good tree brings forth good fruit; out of a good spring sweet and good water issues forth; so also does living faith bring forth good fruit and godlike works. Whatever man sincerely believes, that he will also do. Abraham believed that God bade him, and for that reason he did as he was bidden; and though he became justified by faith without the assistance of works, he received the sign of circumcision, "a seal of the righteousness of faith which he had being yet uncircumcised" (Rom. 4:1-11). And then, when his son Isaac was already twenty or more years

old (according to Josephus) he believed God, and by doing so, his faith was made perfect (James 2:18-26). Abraham had lived by faith many years before he was asked to sacrifice his son; but nevertheless, he had to be tried to prove whether he actually believed God" (*John Holdeman, Mirror of Truth, pp. 43-44*).

"This faith yields a holy life because it is of the heart and consists of the committal of body, soul, and spirit to God. A man's life will correspond with this faith. Of course, it includes repentance toward God and a turning from sin unto righteousness.

"This faith produces peace of soul, for in this the soul finds justification, which produces pardon and acceptance. In this the soul finds sanctification or grace to deliverance from the power of sin. It has ceased to war with God and has found a resting place in Christ. As this total committal to Christ is made, it will mean true obedience to Christ. This is why faith is the only condition of salvation" (Selected Editorials, p. 550).

These quotes were selected by Brother Robert

THE RELIGION OF JESUS—AN IDEAL OR PRACTICAL?

True Christianity is the practicing of the religion of Jesus. Those who, in spirit and in truth, embrace the religion of believing in Christ Jesus, the Son of God crucified for their sins and the sin of the whole world (1 John 2:2), are known as Christians. Furthermore, adherents of the religion of Jesus sincerely and conscientiously endeavor to walk in His footsteps. They are commonly thought of as disciples of Jesus, which means they are under the discipline of His example and teaching.

The question is whether this religion is an ideal only, or is it practical?

Ideal: (noun) a standard or principle to which people aspire; a concept that exists in the imagination only; (adjective) perfect but existing only in a mental image—broadly, not practical.

A typical expression that would illustrate this definition is: "Ideally, John shouldn't have become so upset, but everybody is human!" The implication is that patience and self-control are idealistic and not really to be expected in fallible creatures.

Practical: plain, functional, and suitable for everyday use; useful and sensible, and likely to be effective.

Anything that is practical is not just a theory, but it is do-able. It is useful

and serves a purpose. Given today's world of stress and strain, of noise and much ado, one should stop from time to time for a short period of serious reflection and question himself, "Is the religion of Jesus a mere ideal for me, or do I see it as a practical creed for life? Is it useful and do-able in today's social and economic climate?"

If one answers that it is a practical religion, then he is under obligation to live it. The result will be the life of Christ being manifested in his daily living (2 Corinthians 4:10-11). This is not by self-effort or mental determination but by being born again and the consequent filling of the Spirit.

Christendom quite universally recognizes the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew Chapters 5, 6 & 7) as a beautiful exposition of Christian virtues. But to the greater share of those identifying themselves as "Christian," the blessed words of the Lord are an ideal only. They see them as a perfect standard that exists only in a mental image, not as being practical in today's world. Consequently, many have placed the actual living of Jesus' teaching in some future setting. There is no single more defining line between true and false religion than the question: Are the tenets of the Sermon on the Mouth actually livable? To the true, willing-to-bear-the-cross disciple of Jesus, all His doctrine is practical and useful.

True believers have found the Lord to be reasonable and understanding. They believe that whatever Christ taught is not just an ideal, but it is practical and "down to earth." This includes the teaching of His apostles, because they taught under a special unction of the Spirit. All the truth of the Scriptures is applicable to life (2 Timothy 3:16). Jesus confirms this, saying, "Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock" (Matthew 7:24-25). The Lord would have been unreasonable to ask His hearers to give attention and do what He said if the application was not practical.

As of now, the early twenty-first century, Christendom includes 2.2 billion adherents, about one-third of the world's population. God alone knows how many of these are Christian in name only. It is trusted that no one will object when we say that the Bible is Christendom's book of definition. What other book authoritatively defines what true Christianity is and what false profession is? It records the immortal words of Jesus, including, "Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them. Not every one that saith un-

to me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven" (Matthew 7:20-21). That has practical applications.

The Holy Scripture presents God's view of sin: what it is, its consequences, its judgment, and its blessed remedy in Christ Jesus. The Bible outlines the Christian walk, telling us plainly of the strait gate and narrow way that leads to heaven (Matthew 7:13-14). It says that the way is so contrary to the flesh, and the flesh so perverse, that only a comparatively few find it and enter therein. It tells of an abundant spiritual life (John 10:10) and of joy in serving Jesus (Romans 14:17). All these are not just ideals; they are practical points in the Christian faith.

That which is practical is sensible. The religion of Jesus is so applicable to everyday life that it makes sense to reasonable people. The apostle Paul did pray "that we may be delivered from unreasonable and wicked men: for all men have not faith" (2 Thessalonians 3:2). But usually when a disciple of Jesus lives in all sincerity and truth, walking consistently, even the world has no charge against the Christian doctrine. Men see the cohesion of one's profession of faith and the living thereof; in that degree it makes sense to them, even if they don't espouse it themselves.

When individuals or groups begin viewing the doctrines of the Word as not being practical, it is often because of unwillingness to bear the cross of suffering in order to practice them. There is a cross of suffering entailed in following Jesus (Matthew 16:24), and to many people this seems impractical. It is then that the "ideal" thought presents itself: "Yes, ideally, that is the way it should be, but..." This allows for paying a certain lip service to the Word, while permitting one to minimize falling short of living the faith. A different mind-set, or conviction, is needed. The apostle Peter said, "Forasmuch then as Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves likewise with the same mind: for he that hath suffered in the flesh hath ceased from sin" (1 Peter 4:1).

If the Christian way of self-denial and suffering in the flesh seems impractical, is heaven then only an ideal?

"We seem to know what manner of persons we ought to be, but we do not seem to accomplish it. Let the love of God rule in our hearts, and we will enjoy a controlled life."

HUMILITY BRINGS WISDOM

Who is a wise man and endued with knowledge among you? let him shew out of a good conversation his works with meekness of wisdom James 3:13

Man was created with a living soul but also with a mind to think, reason, and discern. Webster defines wisdom as knowledge, the ability to discern, insight, and judgment. Godly wisdom would be unction and direction from the Word and the Holy Spirit. "But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy" (James 3:17).

Perhaps one of the most important parts in the foundation of godly wisdom is humility. Our title tells us that humility precedes godly wisdom. "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom: and the knowledge of the holy is understanding" (Proverbs 9:10). How true the words of the poet, "Humility, thou secret vale, unknown to proud in heart; ... Humility, how pure thy place! Thou seat of holiness! Thou door of entrance into grace and everlasting bliss!" (Christian Hymnal, No. 431).

A very good example of humility is set by Daniel whilst in captivity under the reign of King Nebuchadnezzar and as we read some of the verses from the Book of Daniel we get a picture of a humble spirit.

Daniel 1:8-9 But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's meat, nor with the wine which he drank: therefore he requested of the prince of the eunuchs that he might not defile himself. ⁹ Now God had brought Daniel into favour and tender love with the prince of the eunuchs.

Daniel 1:17 As for these four children, God gave them knowledge and skill in all learning and wisdom: and Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams.

Daniel 2:1-4 In the second year of the reign of Nebuchadnezzar Nebuchadnezzar dreamed dreams, wherewith his spirit was troubled, and his sleep brake from him. ² Then the king commanded to call the magicians, and the astrologers, and the sorcerers, and the Chaldeans, for to shew the king his dreams. So they came and stood before the king. ³ And the king said unto them, I have dreamed a dream, and my spirit was troubled to know the dream. ⁴ Then spake the Chaldeans to the king in Syriack, O king, live for ever tell thy servants the dream and we will shew the interpretation

Daniel 2:10-11 The Chaldeans answered before the king, and said, There is not a man upon the earth that can shew the king's matter: therefore *there is no king, lord, nor ruler, that* asked such things at any magician, or astrologer, or Chaldean. ¹¹ And *it is* a rare thing that the king requireth, and there is none other that can shew it before the king, except the gods, whose dwelling is not with flesh.

Daniel 2:27-30 Daniel answered in the presence of the king, and said, The secret which the king hath demanded cannot the wise *men*, the astrologers, the magicians, the soothsayers, shew unto the king; ²⁸ But there is a God in heaven that revealeth secrets, and maketh known to the king Nebuchadnezzar what shall be in the latter days. Thy dream, and the visions of thy head upon thy bed, are these; ²⁹ As for thee, O king, thy thoughts came *into thy mind* upon thy bed, what should come to pass hereafter: and he that revealeth secrets maketh known to thee what shall come to pass. ³⁰ But as for me, this secret is not revealed to me for *any* wisdom that I have more than any living, but for *their* sakes that shall make known the interpretation to the king, and that thou mightest know the thoughts of thy heart.

Daniel was a captive in Babylon with other Israelite friends. He was of the tribe of Judah, of a royal family, famous for wisdom and piety. He is considered to be one of the greatest of the prophets. History tells us nothing about Daniel's parental home, but no doubt his father and mother left an indelible example of their obedience and devotion to God. Self-denial is essential to success in any life. "But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's meat, nor with the wine which he drank: therefore he requested of the prince of the eunuchs that he might not defile himself" (Daniel 1:8).

Not all of Judah was carried away captive when Nebuchadnezzar besieged Jerusalem. However, the young and noble were taken, and Daniel and his three Hebrew friends were among that number. Let us not forget these four Hebrew children were in a foreign land, in heathen surroundings, and separated from their parents. In these formidable circumstances they denied themselves and put their complete trust and confidence in God, who "brought Daniel into favour and tender love with the prince of the eunuchs" (v. 9). God gave these young men special knowledge, and in the end the king found Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego ten times better in all matters of wisdom and understanding than the other youth of

Babylon.

Nebuchadnezzar not only wanted to know the meaning of his dream but Daniel was to tell him what he had dreamed, for the dream was gone from him. Daniel sought the help of his three Hebrew companions, and these four united in prayer to seek God's mercy and wisdom concerning Nebuchadnezzar's dream. If it had not been for Daniel's intervention in discerning Nebuchadnezzar's dream, the Hebrew and Chaldean youth would have been cut into pieces.

Another important virtue in the life of Daniel was his thankfulness to God and recognizing that God gave the wisdom and understanding. "Blessed be the name of God for ever and ever: for wisdom and might are his" (Daniel 2:20). It is so important, as we endeavour to be of service to our fellowmen, that our feeble efforts be motivated by love and that we then give God the honor and glory for blessing us with these virtues. "Except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it" (Psalm 127:1).

Some Practical Truths for Today

Parents have a big responsibility in moulding and shaping the hearts and lives of their children, teaching them submission, honesty, fear, respect, obedience, and love for God and their parents. Humility allows us to teach and be taught. May the Lord grant godly wisdom to us as parents to teach and discipline our children. Our example is of utmost importance.

"And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom: and the grace of God was upon him" (Luke 2:40). "And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man" (Luke 2:52). As our children grow and develop through childhood and reach the years of accountability, we trust they will give their hearts to God when He calls them and that they will experience the new birth. "And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus" (2 Timothy 3:15).

This message is for all of us not just for young people but if you want to enjoy God's blessings upon your life you must consecrate yourself to God, even as Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself. There is no better time to acquaint yourself with God's Word and the doctrines of the church than when you are young and your mind is apt to learn and retain new things. If in doubt about how to study or where to read in the Word, ask a teacher or your parents or a brother or sister in the Lord for help in acquiring godly wisdom. Many young people need to spend more

time at home with their parents and have fewer social engagements and recreational activities. This will produce young brothers and sisters who are Daniels—prayerful, content, humble, teachable, and wanting to be of service to God and our fellowmen. As youth think of their future, there is no better place to find direction than on your knees, imploring God's leading in choosing a life's companion, vocation, and place of service.

If we as parents and grandparents are to be blessed with godly wisdom, we will have to recognize our depraved natures and our complete dependence on God. He is able to bestow upon all of His children godly wisdom if they will pray as James instructs us. "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him" (James 1:5).

This world is full of wisdom and knowledge, but little godly wisdom can be found because of the pride and wickedness of men's hearts. God's storehouse is full of godly wisdom. "Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need" (Hebrews 4:16).

In our day, education is highly esteemed among men the world over. This is completely contrary to the way of the cross. "Just as the stream finds a bed that is lowly, So Jesus walks with the pure and the holy; Cast out thy pride, and in heart-felt contrition Humble thyself to walk with God"

Daniel realized he needed wisdom and knowledge to unlock the secret of Nebuchadnezzar's dream. This wisdom did not appear overnight, but through Daniel's perseverance in prayer and his immovable trust, God was there to give understanding in the hour of need. Daniel did not take any credit for his interpretation of the dream but gave thanks and complete honour to God (Daniel 2:19-23). A new birth experience is a must if one is to be a recipient of the wisdom the Holy Spirit gives. The choices and decisions we make in life mirror our trust and confidence in the Lord. As we study this lesson, may it create within each one a deeper desire for a humility that nurtures godly wisdom.

Compiled & Edited by: J van Loon

E-mail: shimara2@iprimus.com.au

Web: www.anabaptistmennonites.net