

THE AUSTRALIAN ANABAPTIST

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

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

Matthew 5:15

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For A Conservative Anabaptist Perspective

From The Editor's Desk

Plebiscite – this can be either a vote by a whole electorate to decide a question of importance **or** a public expression of the will or opinion of a whole community.

In coming weeks the Australian community is to be asked by Parliament to express opposition to or agreement with changing the meaning of marriage as being between a man and a woman as enshrined in God's creation and plan for mankind and the law of the land at this time.

No doubt there will be much debate, some civil, some acrimonious, whatever the outcome it will not change the Law of God on this issue of what is being touted as "same-sex marriage" a term which to God's people is as the dictionary describes it an oxymoron, that is a phrase in which two words of contradictory meaning are used together for special effect, in this case calling something marriage when clearly it is not.

As Christians we may well find ourselves in the position to state our views on this subject by those around us and what should our response be and how should we deliver it?

First of all let us be gentle, love the sinner but not the sin.

Secondly know what God says about opposite gender and same gender relationships here are some references, Genesis 1:27, Matthew 19:3-6, Leviticus 18:22 calls it an abomination, we do not read anywhere in Scripture that what God called an abomination is now acceptable, to the contrary God's word says it still is, Romans 1:26-27, we have the warnings in 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 and 1 Timothy 1:8-11. A literal translation of the Greek to English in these last two references is very specific it says homosexuals a term applying to those who preference same gender for sexual activity.

These and other references represent a body of truth on this subject. We must respect the harmony of them by not giving heed to any interpretation, position or policy that would contradict the clear teaching of Scriptures.

Finally, we must remember, especially in regards to marriage matters, that the civil laws of the land are not that which determine who is bound in marriage. God has decreed universal laws concerning marriage, adultery and other sexual behaviours that are unaffected by the laws and practices of society. God is not a God who changes nor do His commands. Ever!

So why should there be any question about whether the state can do it or not? We will not be able to use the laws of the land as an excuse before God.

J.v.L



From the Pulpit

Sowing And Reaping - Galatians 6:6-10

James Groff

Calvary Mennonite Fellowship

Good morning to each one, please open your Bibles to Galatians 6, we will be focusing primarily on verses 6 through 10 this morning.

I was struck in our songs and in the Matthew passage of the idea of vision, of having Christ before us, and as we think about sowing and reaping the results of our life and the things that we should pursue we must keep in mind that unless Christ is our vision, unless He is in front of us, unless that is what we are seeking for than all of the striving, all our working is fleshy unless we are working toward Christ and for Christ.

This morning's message is based on a simple truth that we are all quite aware of: What you sow you reap.

Our world is based on this, if you hold something up and you drop it, it falls, there are certain laws and things in our natural world that mean if you do this then this will happen, a simple logical argument what you sow you will reap but if we are honest that is also quite a terrifying truth because we all know that we don't always sow well.

So as we consider this let's look at our hearts and what we have sown.

Let's have a word of prayer before we start.

Father this is your word to us, this is your truth, Father this morning we are your people waiting to hear from you to hear your truth to hear your word. May it not be the words of men that are empty but may it be your words that give us life, may we open our hearts to hear and Father may it change us for eternity.

We pray this through Christ.

Galatians 6:6-10 Let the one who is taught the word share all good things with the one who teaches. ⁷ Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap. ⁸ For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life. ⁹ And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up. ¹⁰ So then,

as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.

The first verse there, verse 6, I'm going to defer on that particular verse Brother Paul preached a sermon here previously from 1 Corinthians 9 which is a parallel passage and I encourage you if you haven't heard that to look that up and listen.

It is a simple truth that if we have been taught spiritual things by someone then it is our duty to share with them earthly things. From my experiences this past year I think you have all done that well in caring for the pastors that are here and we appreciate that. I don't think this principle is limited to simply those who are preachers those who are ordained. this should be a principle in our life that any person who speaks to you the Word of God should be honoured, honoured with respect, honoured with earthly goods, these can be the Sunday school teachers, small group leaders, anyone who labours in the spiritual realm for your good as this verse would teach is due the good things that we have.

And then we could qualify this also that it is important that it is teaching the Word of God, many of us have had an experience where we are sitting in a congregation of 100 or 200 people and there is one person upfront speaking and it feels like he is speaking right to you, you hear him talking to you, and that may be in a church service, that might be riding down the road listening to the radio, that might be in many different areas of our life we just have this sense that he has been walking with me for the last month he is talking directly to me. If the person teaching is teaching the Word of God then God himself has been walking with you for the last month or the last years or your entire life and so when that Word is speaking to you it is not necessarily somehow the skill of the person speaking to kind of know what you are going through, it is God who knows what you are going through and it is He who is speaking directly to you.

And so when you know that person who is teaching the Word you are in a sense listening to God.

This principle continues on, we normally kind of separate those 2, but verse 7 says do not be deceived, God is not mocked. When we receive his word and we write it off and we don't return then in a sense we are mock-

ing God we are telling him that what He is telling us really isn't worth that much.

Verses 7 and 8 are going to be the primary focus here.

I think we all live somewhat clearly aware of the principle of sowing and reaping, we all live in a world that is based on those principles and yet we often make excuses for ourselves, you know I can do this and sow a certain thing it may not be the perfect thing but when the time comes and when it is absolutely necessary I'll change and I'll make those things the way they should be.

The phrase God is not mocked is spoken directly to us in that time, in that feeling and understanding.

We may be able to hide many things from our fellow humans but God is not mocked, God knows all, nobody will ever trick God, it is not as if He is going to be caught by surprise by something, He knows all, He understands all.

And so when the apostle Paul says do not be deceived, God is not mocked, he is saying to us you have that tendency to forget this, you have that tendency to be deceived in thinking that you can live in a way that is not perfectly according to what God wants and that somehow you think that's going to be okay sometimes, he says do not be deceived.

We may say I would never mock God, how would I do that, what are the ways in which we can mock God?

The 2 main targets of the book of Galatians have been that people turn to either legalism or licence.

The legalist says I don't need Jesus I can do it on my own, I can work hard enough, I can work harder than everybody else around me and I can figure out what is the best way to live and when I do that God is going to reward my good work.

When we have that attitude we are simply mocking God who says none seek after me, none do my will fully! And so He sent Christ as the propitiation for our unworthiness.

So when we say I can do this on my own we are simply saying that God may be sending Christ but we don't need Him we can do this on our own.

The other says then, thank you Christ for coming and taking care of my sins now I will live in liberty and licence and I'll walk all over the sacrifice you have made, I'll use it to purchase my own personal liberty to do whatever I want.

And both of these make a mockery of Christ.

When we place our trust in anything other than Christ crucified we in small and maybe large ways make a mockery of Christ.

The verse continues then in saying for whatever one sows that will he also reap. And so if we put those together one of the ways that we mock God as well is when we ignore this when we think that we can sow something but reap something else.

The Bible is full of this example of a farmer sowing or someone sowing and I'd like to spend some time in a number of those verses, I'll just read through them quickly you can simply follow along.

[Psalm 126:6](#) He who goes out weeping, bearing the seed for sowing, shall come home with shouts of joy, bringing his sheaves with him.

[Proverbs 11:18](#) The wicked earns deceptive wages, but one who sows righteousness gets a sure reward.

[Proverbs 22:8](#) Whoever sows injustice will reap calamity, and the rod of his fury will fail.

[Hosea 8:7](#) For they sow the wind, and they shall reap the whirlwind. The standing grain has no heads; it shall yield no flour; if it were to yield, strangers would devour it.

[Hosea 10:12](#) Sow for yourselves righteousness; reap steadfast love; break up your fallow ground, for it is the time to seek the LORD, that he may come and rain righteousness upon you.

[James 5:7](#) Be patient, therefore, brothers, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient about it, until it receives the early and the late rains.

So this idea of sowing and reaping is clearly established in the Bible but as I mentioned earlier we don't necessarily need to see that just in the Bible it is not the first place we discover that, it is a universal truth and virtually every experience we have is universal in nature, it is universal in relation-

ships if you sow to good relationships you will normally reap good relationships, if you sow to poor relationships you will normally reap poor relationships.

It is true in parenting, it is not always guaranteed that a parent who does a great job is going to have great children but normally when you see great children you can normally look back and see parents who have invested well and when you see children who maybe aren't doing as well you normally look back and see parents who haven't done as well.

It is in our behaviour, if we attempt to discipline ourselves then normally that will bear fruit.

In our businesses if we sow sloppy business practices we will probably not be successful, if we sow good business practices we will reap that success.

In learning, now if we could just not read a book but learn its contents we think that would be great but unfortunately to learn you have to put in the time.

In eating, one doesn't eat two cheeseburgers and a quart of ice cream a day and lose weight, it doesn't work that way, okay.

So this idea of sowing and reaping is just an everyday part of our life.

We look at people who may have achieved great things, a very successful business person or a professional athlete or somebody like that who has done something far and above what the average person does and we may look up at them and just admire their abilities and we may think, well, you know I could do that! But what we don't realise is that most of those people have spent an entire lifetime of careful particular discipline to get to the place that they are.

Even among our own church family there are some who are very talented in specific areas, most of the time all of us have a particular place or talent and when we see that particular talent we don't see the hours and hours and hours and hours of time that it has taken to develop that particular talent, the sowing that has then been reaped in the experience.

Unless we ourselves put in that same time and effort then we probably won't reach the level of proficiency that that person may have.

And this principle applies to our Christian life; a Christian doesn't simply wake up one day and be the Christian that they always wished they could

be. We cannot coast along through life thinking that well when I'm 50 it will all come together, it will all work. And when you're 50 it's going to be you know we just keep moving that date out because if we do not sow then we will not reap.

If you are waiting to be serious until the Day of Judgement then you have waited too long.

The fruit of the Spirit does not grow without careful gardening. All the longing and the admiring in the world will never replace the daily sowing and the work in that garden. And so the effort and dedication we place in our spiritual growth will be evidenced by the fruit that is showing in our life.

Now all of us know people who are more active than ourselves, we all have seen that, we may look at those people and wonder how it is that they can do all of the things that we wish we could, how is it that they control themselves so well that they are so committed to their personal devotional life or many of the aspects that we see in a mature Christian. But we must realise that they are not there because there was a lightning strike sometime, they have lived a life of careful discipline, we cannot be there quickly and when we hope for that when we wish for this kind of immediate perfection then I think we get tired, it makes us wear out and we lose heart.

I think specifically in the area of daily intentional pursuit of God we all wish for more, I think that would be to testimony of all of us, a person who struggles to make it happen once a day, the person who struggles to make it happen 20 minutes a day, the person who struggles to make it more than an hour a day and in different levels each of those wish for more because that is the way it is with Christ, the more we know, the more we experience the more we wish and desire for more.

And I think that balance of wanting more should always exist we should never be satisfied and say well now I'm at 2 hours a day I've got this one figured out!

At that point there will be still more that we won't know there will still be more that we will want, Christ is infinite, his goodness is infinite, unless we see him fully, unless we understand him as that infinite being then we will limit the amount that we are able to devote.

If we kind of place him in a box if I get this far then I will have known Christ! But He is not that knowable to us we will be continually pursuing into that.

And so our response should be to willingly take the next step.

The one who struggles with daily interaction with God should not be attempting to jump into 2 hours a day, no, your resolution should be I'm going to spend 2 hours a day I'm going to spend an hour reading the Bible and I'm going to spend an hour praying.

It's a great goal but realistically you most likely will not achieve that in your first year of pursuing that.

Something as little as 20 minutes a day equals 100 hours a year and so pursue that and always be pursuing to the next step.

So we move to verse 8, verse 8 actually places eternity in the balance.

If we find ourselves at a place where we are not chasing after God we are not hungry for more then we should question our eternal destination.

For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life.

[Philippians 3:18-19](#) is a comparable passage to the first part, For many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, walk as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things.

That is a hard verse but it is the result of one who sows to the flesh, one who sows to what is here and now and thinks not about what is future.

[Romans 8:18-25](#) then is the parallel.

For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. ¹⁹ For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. ²⁰ For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope ²¹ that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. ²² For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. ²³ And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who

have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.²⁴ For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees?²⁵ But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

The last 2 verses there I think are the key. If we sow to that hope, if we wait for that hope, if we bank our life on that hope not one that we can see here on earth, not some burden of perfect Christianity but we hope for that which we cannot see.

Now let's be clear that the apostle Paul is not equating diligent action with salvation. It is entirely possible that a person could pursue a discipline of Bible study and never meet the God of that Bible, so let's try to pull back from saying well I need to set this plan I need to make everything work. That is definitely a part of what we do and we must discipline ourselves we must work hard but we don't do it to gain our salvation, we don't do it to secure it but we do it because of salvation, as a result of our salvation. Again if Christ is our vision and our salvation is real and we see him for who He is then we will walk in that vision. The one who is redeemed will be in the practice of ordering his life around the realities of the Gospel.

The sowing to the flesh and the sowing to the Spirit are direct references to Galatians chapter 5 where we see the fruit of the Spirit, the fruit of sowing to the Spirit and the fruit of sowing to the flesh. And we have the instructions there again to walk by the Spirit.

This particular sowing I think as I mentioned earlier has a specific connotation towards physical goods and our physical being, the things that we live within the physical world, it is not simply a spiritual understanding but it is one that encompasses the kind of house that we live in, the giving that we do, the car we drive, those things enter into this idea. There is also a spiritual side to this and that warning is directed to all of us, especially I think to those who are young, those who are young in the faith.

If you think of a garden the person plants the seeds and those seeds begin to grow and over the course of the growing season they continue to grow, if a third of the way through the person who sows it says I meant to sow corn and somehow I put pumpkin seeds in, okay, he probably could do

something about that but he would have been much better to sow the corn seeds first.

And so I want to speak specifically to those who are young, establish now the pursuit of God, establish now the pursuit of God. If you are living under an assumption that one day you will, one day in the future you will do this you are making a dangerous, dangerous gamble.

The Philippians 3 passage earlier stated that once you pursue your own pleasure, once you sow seeds in that direction you will reap the results of that sowing. If you think you can dabble just a little bit remember God is not mocked what you sow you will reap.

If today you sow seeds of indifference to the Gospel of Christ the reality is that in the future you will also reap plants and trees of indifference to the Gospel of Christ.

If today you decide to pursue your own pleasure rather than pursuing pleasure in Christ there will come a day when you will find no pleasure, no enjoyment in the things that once brought pleasure and you will seek for larger and bigger pleasures and the seeds will grow into plants and trees.

This passage says that the harvest of fleshly things leads to corruption and the corruption that we are talking about is not a simple you know get a little bit of awesome cleaner and clean it off, it is not the corruption we are talking about, this is a dead hard drive type corruption, this is dead, gone, no return, this is rusting away to the point of no repair.

So I ask all of us, what are you sowing?

Is it to the flesh, is it to the things that you think will bring you pleasure and joy now?

Or are you sowing to the eternal pleasure?

Well that's not always the easy way to be sowing to the eternal pleasure, it doesn't make sense to our world, it doesn't make sense to our world to not pursue the bigger and better and the greater and the larger, to pursue the things that the earth offers, it doesn't make sense to our world when we put our hand out and say no I am not going to go there.

And so verse 9 says and let us not grow weary of doing good.

The apostle Paul understands that it will be a temptation to us, the push of the world is so strong, and we will at times grow weary but the reason that he says to not grow weary is that in due season we will reap if we do not

give up again bringing up that this does have eternal consequences if we do not give up, you cannot go halfway.

2nd Thessalonians 3 says but as for you brothers do not grow weary of doing good. There is a weariness that comes with the labouring and the waiting.

As I thought about waiting the image that came to my mind was if you have small children they are not really the most wonderful things to take into a store, it is just the nature of them, they haven't learnt yet, so what is common for us is we will pull up to a store and one of us will jump out and run in quick, that's the plan run in quick.

Well to the person in the store 5 minutes might be looking at 2 things, 5 minutes in the car with one child jumping, one child crying and the other one telling the others something gets old real fast, okay, so that waiting and that tension, that waiting not knowing exactly when the person in the store is going to be coming out, okay, so you don't have a, your understanding was 5 minutes but it's been 15 now and my wife, I'm not just talking about my wife she is on the other end of this I'm sure half the time, but there is a sort of weariness that comes in that situation and the same is for us, we continue to push back against the assaults of the world, we continue to attempt to reject the pulls of materialism of all of the things that come against us and while in reality our life is but this much of eternity it does seem like a long, long, long time.

The apostle says in due season we will reap.

Again the latter part of that Romans 8 passage, if we hope for what we do not see we wait for it in patience.

Is Christ real in front of us, again is that vision there? It is the only way that we will be able to persevere knowing that in the end there is a real sure hope.

As you consider your state of perseverance and each of us are going to find ourselves at different levels in that, again don't consider those areas that may be the ones that are causing you to become weary, don't see those areas of falling short as simply a place that you just need to buck up and make it happen, but consider it a place that your faith needs strengthening, it is a place you are not placing Christ in the centre do that and then the actions

and the steps will follow. It is our trust in the Gospel that must fuel our obedience; it is our trust in the hope that must fuel our working.

And then as a result of this verse 10 says that we are to do good to everyone especially those who are of the household of faith. We are to have a special place for those who are in the same journey as us, those who are experiencing the same weariness, those who were walking the same path; we are to do this together to share each other's loads.

So the three questions that I would like you to consider as we conclude.

1] Are your earthly resources inclined to fleshly or to spiritual purposes? Is what God has given you being returned to him or is the temptation to lavish it on yourself strong?

And I admit in my own life that there are so many things that just make my life so wonderful and so happy and it happens sort of without thinking about it that we place our trust and our joy in those things and we spend on those only to find that for the most part they leave us wanting.

2] Are your earthly resources being sown for spiritual good?

3] Are you keenly aware that what you do now and what you value now will determine what you do and what you value in the future?

Again we play this mind game with ourselves, you know I can do this for a little bit and then I'll stop, I can place value here or there but when it really matters I'll put value where it needs to be.

If we do that we are fooling ourselves, what we value now and what we do now will be what we value and determine in the future.

My wife had the privilege of teaching the same students twice, once when they were 2nd and 3rd graders and once when they were high schoolers, she said they were the same exact people, they were bigger but they were the same. The same is true for us what you do and what you value now will be what you do and value later.

And then are you growing weary, has weakness of faith dimmed your hope?

And to us, and this is all of us at a certain time, this passage says take heart, trust in the good sovereignty of God, trust in the hope that he has given, plant your life there and the eternal reaping is sure.

Shall we pray.

Father this morning we thank you for this word, Father we all have areas in our lives where we realise we have not sown well, areas where we have not placed our eternal confidence in what you have promised and not placed our joy in the joy that you give, Father may you forgive us of those and may you by your grace give us the strength to begin to sow that which is good, that which is eternal, that which is lasting.

This momentary life seems so real and so significant and so present.

Father may we continue to inform our present with what we know eternity will bring and may we sow and order our lives according to that truth, may we trust only in Christ and his sacrifice.

We pray this is through Christ. Amen.



FATHER'S DAY

Many Australians observe Father's Day on the first Sunday of September. It is a day for people to show their appreciation for fathers and father figures. Father figures may include stepfathers, fathers-in-law, guardians (e.g. foster parents), and family friends. Father's Day celebrates the contribution that fathers and father figures make to their children's lives.

There are some suggestions that the idea of Father's Day may originate in pagan sun worship. Some branches of paganism see the sun as the father of the universe. Father's Day in Australia occurs on the first Sunday of September. Father's Day in some countries is on the third Sunday of June, which is close to the June solstice.

The idea of a special day to honour fathers and celebrate fatherhood was introduced from the United States. A woman called Sonora Smart Dodd was inspired by the American Mother's Day celebrations and planned a day to honor fathers early in the 20th century. The first Father's Day was celebrated in Spokane, Washington on June 19, 1910. Father's Day has become increasingly popular throughout North America and other parts of the world over the years.

Whatever the reason or its origin all of us who are fathers and those who have fathers still living would do well to consider the role of father in the home - if you are a father how can you improve your family function and build solid trusting lasting loving relationships with your children and their mother and how can we as sons and daughters show that we value their role in our lives.

We should also consider the position of those children who through no fault of their own do not have a father in the home whether that be through separation, death or perhaps long periods of absence for one reason or another. But as Christians we do have God's word that He will be our father if we have no other and that we realise is not something that is easily grasped by those who have not yet reached maturity of understanding especially if there is no Christian aspect to their lives and those they live with.

Children can be fatherless through death or through irresponsibility and lack of caring on the part of their parent. There is a condition of such neglect and denial of responsibility that it could be said the children are fatherless. In that case, selfishness is of such a degree that even the natural instincts of fatherhood are suppressed. Considering the words of David that God is "a father of the fatherless, and a judge of the widows" (Ps. 68:5), one wonders about the course of the lives of those children.

How many fatherless children are there in today's world?

In the context of homes thought of as Christian, there are some fatherless children even though both parents are living. This void is tragic and will have long-term consequences for the individuals and for the church.

Reading the Old Testament references to fatherless (of which there are thirty some) tells one quickly that God feels deeply about the plight of such children. In many of these scriptures, the fatherless are mentioned along with the widows and the strangers in a way that reveals God's deep feeling for them. Mindfulness and caring for the fatherless is of such virtue in the sight of God that in the New Testament James says, "Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction" (James 1:27).

It surely is significant that there is not a single reference in the Scriptures

to the motherless. No doubt, God cares about the motherless, also, leaving one to ponder why the emphasis on the fatherless. One may not have the complete answer, but it seems unmistakable that a father's absence, actual or in spirit, greatly impacts children in particular ways. This effect obviously touches the heart of God; He cares for the disadvantaged ones. One could infer from the content of scripture references that God desires earthly fathers to be a small picture of His solicitous love, care, and spiritual provision for His children. God's sensitivity on this point is inescapable.

It is not outside the realm of probability that of those little children gathered around Jesus when He spoke of becoming as little children (Matthew 18:1-6), there could have been a child longing for a father.

On Mother's Day, it is often said that motherhood is a high calling, and one would be hard put to not say the same about fatherhood. The broadest definition of a father is any male who has an offspring, but there is much more included in filling the place of godly fatherhood. If one accepts that the New Testament scripture is inspired by the Holy Ghost, then God directly addresses fathers, saying, "And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord" (Ephesians 6:4). Nowhere in the Scriptures, to the writer's knowledge, are mothers so directly addressed. For a father to fulfill his duty takes time and his presence in body and spirit. Hear the call for fathers!

It is said that a young couple is not qualified to come to the marriage altar until they are prepared for the responsibility of rearing children. They should have sufficient maturity and a sense of commitment to God's general plan for a Christian marriage, which includes the gift of children. In most cases, there is something instinctive, sometimes called the "nesting instinct," that develops in a new marriage. They want children. However, in more recent years, it is known, that for selfish reasons, a husband may reject those yearnings, causing distress. If in this case a child should be born, there is a strong possibility that the child may grow up yearning for a true father.

To avoid the tragedy of fatherless children, consecration is needed. Laying one's all on the altar, dedicating one's life and all he is or hopes to be to God, brings love for God's plan. The salvation of the fruit of one's own flesh and blood becomes paramount. And when that is a burden that has

been chosen, it is not heavy (grievous to be borne), even though it does drive one to his knees. Such consecration and dedication will help one to set his priorities with heavenly values.

The apostle Paul said that "when I became a man, I put away childish things" 1 Corinthians 13:11. When does one become a man? Is that a man coming to the marriage altar, or is it a boy? God bless the church with men who, according to the Apostle's testimony, have put away the things of childhood and boyhood. It is a commendable part of fatherhood for Dad to play with his young sons and daughters, but it is something else when the children must sit and watch Dad play. The things of playing and fun (outside of a family context) must have been left behind if the children are to know the security of a true father.

There are things said of fathers that could also apply to mothers, just as things said of mothers might apply to fathers. Certainly, what Lemuel wrote concerning how children rise up and call a faithful mother blessed and her husband praises her is also true of fathers (Proverbs. 31:28). Many fathers are subject to self-doubt and feelings of inadequacy, but if they are humble and confess their faults to God and the family, the children will hold such a father in reverence. Young fathers should not despair. The formula to successful fatherhood is simple: consecration, maturity, and sincerely doing the best one can do. With that God is pleased.

"I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep"
John 10:11.

Are we that sort of a father? Do we want to be that sort of a father?



Godly Sincerity As Living Epistles

In general I suppose all of us could say that we would want to our conduct to be seen by the world and by Christ as being worthy of His name.

Paul in his second letter to the Corinthian church says that they could witness to the sincerity of his ministry because of the way he conducted himself and he rejoices in this testimony of his conscience that he serves in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but he does it by the grace of God, and goes on to explain that it is by this grace of God that we have our conversation or our conduct or way of life in the world, and more abundantly to you-ward. 2 Corinthians 1:12

We see from this that God not only wants our lives characterized with godly sincerity toward His word, He desires to mark our lives with godly sincerity in general. "We conducted ourselves in the world in simplicity and godly sincerity . . . and more abundantly toward you." As the Apostle Paul and the others evangelized throughout the known world as they ministered among the churches they functioned in all areas with simple Christ-like genuineness.

The world is filled with pretence and attention to outward appearances. Many within the Lord's Church have yielded to temptation in these directions. The flesh of each of us is tempted at times to develop an exterior image that does not match what is going on inside. And that is or can be called hypocrisy.

Jesus rebuked the religious leaders of His day for such an attitude and His words were direct and to the point when He says: "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you devour widows' houses, and for a pretence make long prayers. Therefore you will receive greater condemnation" Matthew 23:14. These men were actually taking advantage of the helpless widows. Yet, they stood in public and made long prayers, hoping to be considered as godly in the eyes of the people.

Their blatant hypocrisy was not only a matter of observable, contradictory behaviours that was visible to those around them but the very core of their being was drastically different from what they appeared to be outwardly. "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like white-washed tombs, which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness. Even so you also outwardly appear righteous to men, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness" Matthew 23:26-27.

Our Lord loves sincerity and hates hypocrisy. However, it takes a working of God's grace to effect the sincerity that God desires. "We conducted ourselves in the world in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom but by the grace of God." Human ingenuity or effort cannot produce the genuineness that God wants to see in our lives. We are not able to do it in our own strength. God's grace is the only sufficient resource to bring about this godly characteristic of life. God's grace works within our hearts, where true sincerity must be formed. "First cleanse the inside of the cup and dish, that the outside of them may be clean also" Matthew 23:26. And may we also add here what Jesus said to the Pharisees in Matthew 12:34 "O generation of vipers, how can ye, being evil, speak good things? for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh." And it is not just speech that comes out of the abundance of our heart, it says in another place as a man thinketh so is he, Proverb 23:7.

We all know what the word epistle means and we are called to become and live like Living Letters or Epistles of Christ, open for anyone to read. Paul speaking to the Corinthians said to them and of them: "You are manifestly an epistle of Christ, ministered by us, written not with ink but by the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of flesh, that is, of the heart." 2 Corinthians 3:3
That word manifestly means clear to see or understand, make something evident by showing or demonstrating it very clearly.

Another significant characteristic resulting from living by grace is that we become living letters of Christ. "You are manifestly an epistle of Christ." The Lord wants to turn our lives into a "walking talking letter of Him." You no doubt have heard the saying that we must not only talk the talk but walk the walk, and any of us, and I include myself, can so easily talk in a way that sounds very pious and right and scriptural but the question remains then are we living it?
One dictionary definition of that word pious I read said it very well it said this: Acting in falsely moralizing way, talking or acting in a falsely, hypocritically or affectedly moralizing way.
I am sure that none of us would want to be seen or recognised as those sorts of pious people, we would be a disgrace to God and bring shame on His word which teaches us to walk in truth.

This is what the Scripture calls us to in 2 Corinthians 4:2. Paul is speaking of himself but it applies to each true believer with equal force and it says: That he has renounced, and we could add, have we renounced, the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully; but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God.

And then the Apostle John in 2 John 1:4 expresses his delight in those followers of his whom he was ministering to, he says: I rejoiced greatly that I found thy children walking in truth, as we have received a commandment from the Father.

Can you think of what a blessing, what a privilege it will be when we can hear our Lord say that to us and about us that we are walking in truth?

But what about the here and now?

Can our brothers and sisters say that about us?

Can our neighbours say that about us?

Christ through the Holy Spirit and with our willing cooperation wants to make us a living explanation of who Christ is and all that He offers. God has given us a free will and so we must choose to let the Holy Spirit work in us and what a great opportunity this presents.

As we go about our daily responsibilities, others are often "reading our lives." While they are observing us, they can actually be learning of the truth and love of our Lord Jesus, as He is working in and through our lives. Although this may sound like too much to hope for, the Lord declares in His word that this process can become very clear to those who are watching us: "You are manifestly [that is, "to be plainly recognized as"] an epistle of Christ." We read that in 2 Corinthians 3:3

Remember, this is what is available for "servants of the new covenant" as 2 Corinthians 3:5-6 tells us: Firstly not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think anything as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God; and then it is God who also hath made us able ministers of the New Testament; not of the letter, but of the spirit: for the letter killeth, but the Spirit giveth life.

This is what happens in those who live by the grace of God. This is something that God does in us, not something we manufacture for Him. Certainly, people are involved in the process. We become fully engaged by hum-

bly and dependently seeking after the Lord who wants to work in us. Others also get involved by ministering to us and we together to each other.

"You are manifestly an epistle of Christ, ministered by us." Paul had ministered God's truth to these saints at Corinth. Yet, these living letters of Christ were not being written by ink, as ordinary letters would be. "You are manifestly an epistle of Christ, ministered by us, written not with ink but by the Spirit of the living God." God's Holy Spirit was at work writing the letters that their lives were becoming.

Notice where the Lord was inscribing these living letters: "not on tablets of stone but on tablets of flesh, that is, of the heart." The old covenant message of law was written on stones. The new covenant message of grace is written on the hearts of all who will walk in humble dependence upon God. This heavenly work changes us from the inside out, making us living letters, living epistles of Christ!

We cannot achieve that outcome with the fleshly wisdom of man, our own carnal nature which has other goals in life which are not compatible with God's word.

We must be influenced by the Spirit of God and by the grace of God which alone can produce the simplicity and godly sincerity and inspires the wisdom that comes from above as we have mentioned in James 3:17 which says: 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.

A couple of chapters before that we have direction as to how to obtain that wisdom: James 1:5: 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.

The Apostle Paul reminded his readers at Corinth of his example and he is giving it for us today as an example to follow also so that we can say this as a witness of our Christian walk: We have given the fullest proof of this in our conduct towards you; You have witnessed the holy manner in which we have always acted; and God is witness of the purity of the motives by which we have been motivated and our conscience tells us that we have lived in uprightness before him.

Is your conscience, is my conscience clear on this matter of being found to live uprightly before God and man in this present life?

In closing two proverbs to encourage us to live uprightly before God.
 Proverbs 16:17 The highway of the upright turns aside from evil; whoever guards his way preserves his life.
 Proverbs 11:20 Those of crooked heart are an abomination to the LORD, but those of blameless ways are his delight.

May each of us be His delight, may we be His delight.
 J.v.L



CHOICE OR COMMAND

The truest form of love is by choice. We who are married love our wives and children because we choose to. If we "had to," it would not be love; it would be slavery. Therefore to truly love God we must choose to. God gave man the freedom of choice to allow us to prove our love to Him by walking in His ways. The angels that remain in heaven are "locked" into loving God. In other words, they no longer need a choice. However, God does not want to be loved by slaves. He wants to be loved by choice, and He knows true love is a choice. After the war in heaven, there remained no choice for the angels who chose God. Those who left heaven in the rebellion have no choice but to hate God and all things connected to Him. Hell was created for the devil and his angels, not for us!

God does not offer an "obey if you wish" option to His commands. However, He does not demand obedience! We choose to obey to avoid going to hell. Some may say that they obey because heaven has such a drawing, and I believe that is true as we mature in our Christian experience. In our younger years, and thinking back to your own conversion, you will likely agree that it was often the fear of hell that "drove" us to the Lord. God commands us to obey, but He leaves us to choose our destiny by obeying or not. He says, "Choose to obey if you want to avoid the coming eternal punishment!" That "if" is up to us. God says, "Choose your destination, if you choose to go to heaven, you will need to obey Me to get there."

Our free will tries to lift us above, or out, of God's control. This is exactly why God hates pride, and this is why pride is the cardinal sin. This is exactly why Satan is where he is. He wanted to be equal to or more than God. This is the never-ending battle with our free will, which Paul writes about in Romans 7. We must keep our free will under subjection and not let it "run away with us," or it becomes the very tool we use to take ourselves away from Him.

The very fact that Jesus says hell was prepared for the devil and his angels shows us that we are all chosen to be saved. God's will is that not any should perish. "The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is long-suffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." 2 Peter 3:9. In that sense, we are all predestined to be saved, but our free will works in us what Paul writes in Romans 7 and does exactly what the previous paragraph talks about it runs away with us, and therefore we choose to "sell" or give away the predestination to salvation that God desires for us to hold on to.

God chose to save mankind after they were predestined to be lost because our first parents fell in sin. As an example, we do not fall into sin; we are born there. All sinners are in a "hole" from which it is impossible to escape by human effort. We are called by the Holy Spirit to accept justification in the sacrifice of Christ by faith, which is the only way out of the hole. Justification comes only by the blood of Christ. Only the blood of Christ can lift us out of the hole of sin. In a way, every sin we commit is a new coat of grease on the sides of hole, which has no handholds and is smaller at the top than at the bottom. We are, thus, predisposed to falling back, no matter how hard we try to get out by our own efforts. A foundation for these thoughts is Romans 7 and 8.

Again, it is our choice to ask God to redeem us from the hole, and He does so because we voluntarily say we will serve Him if He will save us. There is no "have to" in Christian living and no "have to" to belonging to the church. The option is to lose membership in God's kingdom, but we do not have to obey. We do not obey because the church says we "have to." We do not obey because our leaders tell us we "have to." If we say "they tell us we have to obey," we are hearing wrong. If we leave that impression with

someone who asks us about a doctrine or teaching, we are wrong.

God commands us to obey, but it is for our good. We as parents command our children to obey, and when they choose not to they suffer the consequences. We will suffer the consequences, too if we choose not to obey God. When our children obey us because they want to we feel a bit of what God feels when we obey Him because we want to. How many times have you and I as parents, "demanded" obedience only to have it bear "sour" fruit? I believe it is better to command obedience from our children and then administer the needed consequences when they choose to disobey. Just like being born in the hole of sin our children have the sin nature in them which predisposes them to disobey us.

The only way to true happiness is to "choose the destination, and accept the way." In this situation, the "way" is to voluntarily obey God's commands. If we "choose the way, and accept the destination," we will be sadly mistaken in the end. To true, born-again submitted Christians God's commands are obeyed because we want to, not because they are commands. Therefore if we obey because we want to they are no more commands but desires of our hearts. This desire to please God comes by choice, not by command.

I have heard a minister say the following numerous times: "When you get to where you are going, are you going to be where you want to be?"

Each one of us will need to answer this question for ourselves.

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