

THE AUSTRALIAN ANABAPTIST

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

Vol. 15 No. 9 – SEPTEMBER 2018



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

What Name Do You Use?

In *Romeo & Juliet*, Shakespeare's play, Juliet says "What's in a name? That which we call a rose by any other name would smell as sweet" implying that Romeo's name means nothing because whatever name he had would not change who he is, especially to her.

We all know names are important they identify who we are as a person; it identifies us with familial groups, it can track our ancestry. Then we have descriptive names or titles such as wife, doctor, bricklayer, the list we could say is endless and may describe our place in society or how we view ourselves in relation to the world around us.

In the list of descriptive names there are some that identify ethnicity, some that identify our belief system; our concern is the latter.

In the world there are many faiths or belief systems, Christian and otherwise, whose names are based upon the "founder" of that particular faith. It is obvious to most that Christians are called Christians (Acts 11:26) because they profess to follow Christ. Regrettably divisions and schisms have occurred and continue to occur amongst the followers of Christ leading to many taking the name of the person who led the schism or division (a denominational name) which in turn has led to a "them" and "us" mentality.

When asked "What church do you go to or what religion do you belong to" what is your first response?

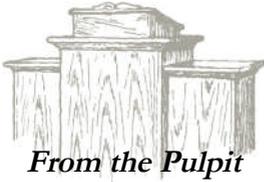
If our response is a denominational name then we are subscribing to a "them and us" mentality which more often than not becomes a barrier to the command of Christ to love our neighbour.

In our personal experience we have observed that denominational names are used at times as an ethnicity indicator to the extent that a person's "right" of belonging to that particular denomination is dependent upon a common ancestry with those in that denomination, this may not necessarily be expressed openly but more subtly through the use of a denigration or rejection without biblical basis of a seeker's culture.

Again the question arises is that loving your neighbour in Christ?

We have noted that our response to those who ask us why we live the way we do that "we have chosen to follow what Christ calls us to in the Bible" opens the door to witnessing in a more meaningful way by showing the requirements to be a Christian not following a particular denomination.

What will you call yourself - a follower of Christ or some mortal man? *JvL*



*Number 6 of 12 expository messages from:
The Book of Ecclesiastes by:
Brother Linford Berry
Calvary Mennonite Fellowship Virginia*

Satisfaction and the Sovereignty of God

Good morning to each of you and a blessing in the name of the Lord, the great God that we sing about, the Holy God of Israel, the God who cares for us, guides us, the God in whom we will find meaning and purpose in life.

I invite you to turn with me to Ecclesiastes chapter 6.

We are making our way through this little book, we are in the middle chapter, chapter 6, it would be good for us to review a few key terms, phrases and ideas that we have discovered as we journey along through this book together.

We find the main character here is the preacher, the searcher, the one who compiles the knowledge and the wisdom and is proclaiming it and he proclaims this message of vanity, futility, emptiness, meaninglessness, and he talks about that in terms of life that is under the sun, so he's talking about an earthly perspective.

If that is all we see, if that is all we are aware of, if that is all we live for it will indeed be meaningless and futile.

But the preacher doesn't just let us stay there in that under the sun perspective he does give us some above the sun perspective, he talks about God and his provision, he talks about God and his Sovereignty, he talks about the need to follow Him, to serve him, to love him.

The overall theme of this book if we could sum it up is the title of my message today "Satisfaction and the Sovereignty of God"

This is a book about satisfaction, this is a book about meaning in life, this is a book about fulfilment, about fullness, about significance, about happiness and blessedness.

And now you are thinking to yourselves well I've been reading along as we've been going through this book and it doesn't seem very blessed or happy to me.

Those aren't words that would stick out in your mind as you first read through Ecclesiastes, it seems like a kind of a bleak book and indeed chapter 6 seems like a pretty bleak chapter and as I read through it a couple of weeks ago in preparation for this message I thought to myself, whoa, what am I going to do with that? And I was tempted with what many preachers do and just lump it in with chapter 7 but that is the beauty of the discipline of exposition it forces you to dig the meat out of the difficult passages as well, so I resisted the temptation.

This chapter seems at first read to be depressing, not much happiness here, but as we dig in a bit and as we look at the context of what he is trying to tell us what the preacher is saying we see that it is about true blessedness and true happiness and true satisfaction and he is attempting to cut us off from pursuing happiness and satisfaction in empty ways, he is demonstrating for us, he is showing us time and time again how you don't want to do that.

The book of Ecclesiastes makes it very clear that every man, every woman, every person does desire some kind of satisfaction, some kind of significance and fullness and meaning in life, the problem is that we tend to seek it in the wrong way so we look to the wrong things to give us that joy, that satisfaction, and what we end up with is something that is so shallow, that is so insignificant, so temporary, and so the preacher begins this chapter and continues the theme throughout the book that everything under the sun in this life ultimately is futile, it is vanity, there is no satisfaction under the sun not because the desire for meaning in life is wrong but because we find that satisfaction here, our satisfaction must be found in God and God alone. The aim here is not for us to live a meaningless life, the aim is for us to live a life of fullness and joy trusting in our Father to provide for us.

Chapter 6 is a commentary on the last few verses of chapter 5 so I will start reading at chapter 5 verse 18,

[Ecclesiastes 5:18-20](#)¹⁸ Behold, what I have seen to be good and fitting is to eat and drink and find enjoyment in all the toil with which one toils under

the sun the few days of his life that God has given him, for this is his lot.¹⁹ Everyone also to whom God has given wealth and possessions and power to enjoy them, and to accept his lot and rejoice in his toil—this is the gift of God.²⁰ For he will not much remember the days of his life because God keeps him occupied with joy in his heart.

Ecclesiastes 6:1-12 There is an evil that I have seen under the sun, and it lies heavy on mankind:² a man to whom God gives wealth, possessions, and honour, so that he lacks nothing of all that he desires, yet God does not give him power to enjoy them, but a stranger enjoys them. This is vanity; it is a grievous evil.³ If a man fathers a hundred children and lives many years, so that the days of his years are many, but his soul is not satisfied with life's good things, and he also has no burial, I say that a stillborn child is better off than he.⁴ For it comes in vanity and goes in darkness, and in darkness its name is covered.⁵ Moreover, it has not seen the sun or known anything, yet it finds rest rather than he.⁶ Even though he should live a thousand years twice over, yet enjoy no good—do not all go to the one place?⁷ All the toil of man is for his mouth, yet his appetite is not satisfied.⁸ For what advantage has the wise man over the fool? And what does the poor man have who knows how to conduct himself before the living?⁹ Better is the sight of the eyes than the wandering of the appetite: this also is vanity and a striving after wind.¹⁰ Whatever has come to be has already been named, and it is known what man is, and that he is not able to dispute with one stronger than he.¹¹ The more words, the more vanity, and what is the advantage to man?¹² For who knows what is good for man while he lives the few days of his vain life, which he passes like a shadow? For who can tell man what will be after him under the sun?

Let's pray.

Father God we come to this portion of your word, it is difficult, it is heavy, it is somewhat dark and yet we trust you and trust that even in this apparent heaviness and darkness is light, that there is joy to be found, and so direct us as we study this passage together, may we find true meaning and satisfaction and purpose in you.

In Jesus name, Amen.

What is it going to take to make you happy?

Answer that for yourself, what is it going to take to make you happy? And still seek for even today? Finish this sentence in your mind, I would be happy if.....*insert here whatever you think will make you happy*.....
Where are you looking for significance, what do you long for, what do you think you truly need in order to be fully satisfied? What is it?

Well the preacher here has been down the list already, we have walked with him through that in chapters 1, 2 and 3, he has talked about wealth and pleasure, possessions, work, wisdom, philosophy, family, here he deals with long life so the question come to us, What does really satisfy?

The first few verses here talk about wealth and possessions and honour and secondly we see a description of family and long life and then work and toil and then the answer comes in the last few verses of this chapter what does really satisfy.

So in this first section Solomon discusses kind of 3 measuring sticks of success, at least in the Hebrew society, and to a lesser extent in our society, wealth, possessions, honour, fame, those are things that people still long for, still seek for even today. Then he talks about long life and family and perhaps these are measurements that don't quite fit in our culture today, today people dread getting old, some people even want to take their life early so they don't have to live with the consequences of being old, today people don't really value children very much, children are seen as a hindrance, as a problem, something that holds us back from finding meaning and purpose in life but in the Hebrew society children were a blessing, long life was a measure of success in favour and honour and so the preacher looks at these things in the first section and tells us that as wonderful as these things are unless God is in the midst of it, unless God is giving us the power to enjoy these good things it will be nothing but vanity and futility.

The vanity is when we have these things and God does not give us power to enjoy them, so even the ability to enjoy the good things that God gives comes from God himself, we are dependent on Him, we are at his mercy, He is Sovereign.

Every good gift that God gives can only be truly and ultimately be enjoyed if God empowers us.

Riches, wealth, honour these things don't automatically bring happiness, we've already seen that, we know that by experience and by observation, sometimes the most miserable people are the most wealthy, just because you have a lot doesn't mean you're going to be happy in fact it might actually mean the opposite.

Wealth, honour, fame, riches these things don't automatically bring us contentment or satisfaction rather they often bring unhappiness, they often bring ingratitude, restlessness, grief, and we see this in verses 1 and 2 this is what happens when God is left out of the equation, this is what happens when we have an under the sun perspective rather than a Godward perspective. It can all be vanity; everything the world has to offer by itself at face value is ultimately vain.

George Bernard Shaw said it well I believe when he said, "There are two tragedies in life, one is to not get your heart's desire the other is to get it." If your heart's desire is not God's desire it will be a tragedy when you get it.

Secondly we see in verses 3 through 6 this exploration of what happens with family and long life and as I've suggested we might need to step back a bit from our American culture, modern culture, and we might think about this in a little different way because in ancient Israel in the Hebrew world children were not an inconvenience rather they were considered a great blessing from God and furthermore children were not a financial burden they were actually an economic asset to the family and it was the goal for many, for most, to have lots of children.

And secondly growing old was not looked down on in the same way that it is today.

In the book of Proverbs Solomon says the honour of old men is their grey hair.

Today people dye their hair to cover it up.

He says also in Proverbs a grey head is a crown of glory.

It is good for something.

He doesn't say much about what happens if you don't have any hair at all, but that can also be part of the ageing process.

But long life was a blessing, long life was an honour, old people, elderly people were honoured and respected unlike our world today and yet all of these gifts, the gifts of family and children, grandchildren, the gifts of long life and honour because of maturity and wisdom, all of these things and good as they are by themselves provide no lasting benefit.

Solomon offers us kind of an eye opening illustration here, a comparison between a stillborn child and a 2000 year old man, a man who fathers a hundred children, the latter enjoys a full rich feast of life and he goes back for about twenty five 2nd helpings, he lives a long life.

The other one doesn't even make it to the table.

Now Solomon is exaggerating to make his point, we get that, the longest lifespan recorded in Scripture is Methuselah; Methuselah lived to be an old man by any measure, some 969 years old it says in Genesis, that's old! Imagine a man who lived more than twice that long, it says here what if he lived 1000 years twice over, what if he lived to be 2000 years old will he find any more meaning or purpose in life?

Maybe he has 100 children in the process but Solomon's point here is also obvious, you could live twice as long as anyone else, you can have more children than anyone else but if God is not involved, if God is not at the centre of your life it will end up being meaningless and futile, it's all worthless because he says in verse 6 we are all going to suffer the same fate in this under the sun life, eventually we are going to die and then what is it worth?

If we are wealthy when we die it says in verse 2 that somebody else is going to enjoy that wealth, somebody else is going to enjoy that stuff that we have accumulated, what good is it to us you can't take it with you when you go!

In fact Solomon says that miscarriage is better than such a person.

Now that's pretty hard language and we need to be careful that we do not misread what the preacher is trying to tell us, he is not arguing that a miscarriage of a child is a good thing, he is not saying that, it isn't a good thing, it's a tragedy, his concerns here are more philosophical than literal and it is kind of tempting to dance around this issue but we need to face it head on as difficult as it is.

We all know people who have suffered through this grief of miscarriage, some of you have and it is a tragedy, it's a terrible thing, we would not wish it on anyone and yet in spite of that great pain and that loss I want you to hear the weight of Solomon's point here, the gravity of it, it is more tragic for someone to be given life and possession and honour and riches and not to enjoy them that it is for there to be a tragedy of miscarriage.

You see for Solomon he recognises both of them as a tragedy, both are tragic, he is just saying that it is more tragic for life to be granted and for us not to honour God in this life than it is for a person not to enjoy life at all.

You feel that, do you understand the emphasis here?

You know we are on this side of life so we can't really look at it fairly, without bias, but Solomon is saying that if your life is not marked by the enjoyment of life in what God has provided than it is better off that you were not even born at all.

It is better he says in a sense it is better to miscarry at birth that it is to miscarry throughout life.

That is the weight of this.

If Solomon were alive today I think he would urge us just to stop worshipping our families, our children, and stop worshipping our health and long lives. You see all too often our life revolves around stuff that has no eternal value, stuff of life, stuff of possessions, we get all wrapped up in it and some of us reject that and we say that's wrong and so we retreat to a different place, we retreat or we seek a retreat from the materialistic culture and instead we make family our God or we make our health our God.

We get married, we think the marriage is going to be the place where we find satisfaction in life and suddenly we find out, oh wait a minute she recognises all my weaknesses and I am not as nice as her dad was. And it's hard work and it is rough going and there is days that we don't get along very well.

And then you think well maybe if we just had children if we bring children into this mix then we would find meaning and purpose and satisfaction in life. But then the children start squabbling and then the children break your heart when they go their own way. And suddenly the thing that was going to provide you satisfaction is the source of your greatest heartbreak.

That's what Solomon is saying.

And I'm not trying to make fun of families, I'm not trying to make light of family or even of health or long life but we have to see it in its proper context, we have to see that family and children, as great as they are, are not the source of satisfaction, a hundred children won't make you any more satisfied than one or none.

100 years of life will not bring you any more satisfaction than one or none. Solomon is not just being pessimistic here he is saying that if wealth is the place you are seeking for true satisfaction, if family is the place you are seeking true satisfaction, if long life and health is the place you are seeking true satisfaction then you are in for a deep, deep disappointment, you are going to be let down, you're going to be heartbroken.

Family and children and grandchildren these are a great blessing but they are not the source of satisfaction.

And similarly many of us want to live long and prosperous lives we have dreams and visions of all the stuff we want to do before we die. Some of us have a bucket list, you know what that is? It is a list of stuff that you think you really want to accomplish, you really want to go see, you really want to do before you kick the bucket! But what is that and what satisfaction will they give us?

Sure it will give us some momentary satisfaction, some joy, some pleasure, we try to eat right, we want to make sure we look good, we exercise maybe, but the truth is that many people who have been given long life don't use it wisely, don't worship God with it.

And so the issue is not long life per se but how you live the life you have, how you live the life that God has given you.

Someone has said it is not the years in life that counts but the life in the years.

Our health, our children, our grandchildren, all these things can be taken away so quickly, sickness, bacteria, an accident, all of these things can rob us of long life, rob us of our children, can rob us of our wealth and therefore we need to enjoy what God has given us while we have it but not to seek for satisfaction in it, there is no guarantee that we will have any, there is no guarantee that we will have loved ones tomorrow therefore live your life today full of joy, enjoying what God has given you and remember satisfaction in life is found in God's blessings.

So some of us we realise that family and health and wealth are not going to suffice, they are not going to satisfy ultimately and so we try other means.

Verses 7 through 9 it tells us about another thing that won't satisfy us, we toil and we labour to satisfy our appetites we think well we might as well live it up this fleeting life is going to be over we might as well enjoy it, we might as well indulge the flesh with whatever pleasure whatever appetite seems right to us, eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow we die.

That doesn't work either because if we labour in that way we labour for an appetite that will never be satisfied, we might drink, we might eat, we might be merry but tomorrow we will wake up with a hangover, tomorrow we will wake up hungry, tomorrow we will have to labour some more.

He says all man's labour is for his mouth and yet the appetite is not satisfied.

And while the immediate reference here is to food Solomon's intention seems to speak to something beyond that, something beyond even the material, whatever it is we choose, whatever it is we seek after to attempt to satisfy our hunger, our hunger of soul will ultimately leave us hungry again. Stuff doesn't satisfy, physical things can only satisfy physical needs and that which we hunger for on the inside is a hunger of the soul and this is seen very vividly here in this passage because in the Hebrew text the word translated appetite is the same word that is translated soul in verses 2 and 3, it's the same word this appetite, it is a grievous thing, the appetite of the soul, we will never be satisfied.

Our work, our labour fails to satisfy our temporary needs, it fails to satisfy our deep soul needs, the satisfaction that we seek comes only from God, it can come only from God, He is the one who enables us to enjoy the fruit of our labours.

So somebody out there might say, okay I get it, what we really need then what we really need is to go back to the simple life, let's just go back to the simple life, we don't need all of this wealth and possessions, we don't need to eat and drink and be merry we just need a simple life. And if there weren't so many things out there that are a big draw to me, enticements, then we could just enjoy things more, simpler is better.

It's kind of a romantic notion is in it? Let's just give up the rat race let's just go back to the simple farming of the ground with hand tools.

How many of you farmers would like to do that? I didn't think so. It is a romantic notion for sure but it is not very real.

Solomon blows all that apart, he says do you think that the poor man has a better handle on this than the rich man, you think the poor man has got it together here because he doesn't have all this stuff?

No, he doesn't have it any better.

What does the poor man have? He doesn't have it any better than the rich man if he is not seeking his satisfaction in God.

And so getting back to the simple life is not necessarily going to be the answer either.

So what is the answer, what does satisfy?

Well what we need is something that is adequate for every day, for our whole life, something that is not passing, something that can cope with the futility of this earthly realm under the sun, what we need cannot be found here under the sun, what we need can only be found in God.

And the key is found here in verse 10 where we have this description of the sovereignty of God.

The sovereignty of God is what we must come to rest in, to trust in, to find our satisfaction in. How do we know about this, what do we know about this sovereignty of God?

Well first we see that God decreed before man was ever created whatever has come to be has already been named, He has already said it, it was already His idea before it was ours, it was already His idea before we were, man did not come to be before he was named in the mind and thought of God. God created this life, He created this world and the way things would work.

Secondly it is decreed in view of what man is, it is known what man is.

God has made us He knows what we're like, He knows how we function, He knows what makes us tick, He knows what gets us ticked off, He knows, He knows everything about us and He set up this decree that enjoyment cannot be found in the possession of things, satisfaction cannot be found there.

Jesus stated very plainly a man's life does not consist of the abundance of things which he possesses. That is not where life is to be found. So God named us, named us before we were created, God knows us.

And thirdly the preacher here says that it was decreed in spite of man, he is not able to dispute with one stronger than he.

God made us, He named us first and then He made us and He made us in such a way that we are not able to argue, we cannot change it.

How are you going to change the laws of God, how are you going to change the decrees of God?

How are you going to change the way the world works? You are not!

God set these things up and it would do us good to come to rest with that, to come to peace with that and to live within that sphere of God's work in the world and to surrender ourselves to that God, to surrender ourselves to the way He has made things to be.

It won't do us any good to argue about this, verse 11, the more words the more vanity, the more we try to push back against God and his will and his way the more vain it becomes, the more we argue the more we bury ourselves in a hole out of which we can never come out.

It is futile to fight with God, He always wins.

James Johnson said it well, your arms are too short to box with God, you can't reach him if you try. He is going to get you first because your arms are too short.

Or CS Lewis said this, "to argue with God is to argue with the very power that makes it possible to argue at all. Disputing is a waste of time, so long as I fight the hand of God I do not learn lessons that He is attempting to teach me."

And too often we do that, in more common vernacular we bite the hand that feeds us.

We dispute with the God who gives us everything as it says in 1st Timothy 6 all things richly to enjoy.

And to further drive this point home the preacher asks two questions in verse 12.

First of all who knows the value of life, who knows what is good for man while he lives the few days of his life?

The implication is that we don't know really what is good for us. We see this in our children they often don't know what is good for them, they know what they want, they know what they think will make them happy.

I asked the children downstairs this morning, how many of them felt like they would be happy if they had a happy meal from McDonald's. A brilliant piece of marketing that is by the way, and they thought that would make them happy or most of them did.

I asked them how long that would make them happy, be kind of like this appetite he talks about here, they consume the food and play with the toys for about 5 minutes and then it goes in the trash and tomorrow they need another happy meal to make them happy and another and another and so on and the only people that are really happy about this situation is McDonald's. Billions and billions served, right!

So we don't even know what is good for us, we think we know.
God is Sovereign God knows what is good for us.

Did you ever wish for something you thought was just right, just perfectly what you wanted, it would make you happy and you get it and you find out that it's making you miserable.

Surely that's happened to somebody besides me, that's the way life is, so who knows what is good for man?

And 2nd question who knows what's coming in the future?

Who can tell man what will be after him, how many of us can predict what will happen tomorrow? None of us really.

Who knows even what the result of my choices today will be?

Yes we are given some direction by God but we have a very narrow and limited view of life, a very small perspective, so what business do we have complaining to God about how our life is run, we don't even know what is good for us, we don't even know what is coming tomorrow.

The text here in Ecclesiastes 6 tells us that prosperity is not all good.

In Ecclesiastes 7, which we will look at later, we will find that adversity or trouble is not always bad either.

Suppose the hard times do come, suppose the blessings are withheld is that going to affect our happiness, our satisfaction, our joy?

Sometimes very good things come through hardship and adversity but we don't know what is good for us and therefore we need to learn to be submissive, submissive to our great God, He alone knows the end from the beginning, He alone is Sovereign, God is the Potter, we are the clay.

More arguing only results in more futility, we don't know what is best for us, we don't know what our future holds, we are somewhat ignorant of our place in God's big plan.

Human life is fleeting, human life is like a shadow so when we find ourselves becoming anxious, anxious about life it is usually because we don't trust God enough, we don't trust his sovereignty, his power, his goodness.

So the question comes back to us in conclusion:

Do you enjoy your life?

Are you happy?

Are you satisfied?

Do you enjoy your spouse?

Do you enjoy your children?

Do you enjoy your work?

If not pray to God that He would change your perspective.

You may have believed the lie that you can be whatever you want to be, I'm telling you you cannot!

But if you are what God wants you to be then you will find joy and satisfaction.

And what about when things go badly?

There are some of you here who are facing difficulty, trouble, troubling family situations, disease, illness, sickness, loss of loved ones, change of career, job, do you in the midst of these things do you know beyond a shadow of a doubt that God is good, that God is sovereign?

Do you know deep contentment and satisfaction and meaning and blessedness?

Or are you going to try to find satisfaction in the things that you have in your family and in your long life and health.

Can you say with the Apostle Paul for I have learned in whatever situation I'm in to be content knowing that whatever we have comes from God.

Paul goes on to say I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need, I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.

The only way you can have that testimony, the only way you can have that confidence, that assurance, that peace, that satisfaction is by trusting and trust in confidence in the sovereign will and purposes of God.

It's the only way you are going to get it because you will know that whatever God brings to you is ultimately for your good and His glory and in this we can find true satisfaction.

Grant O God that we would trust and rest in you today.

Let's pray.

May grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord. His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence and my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.

To our sovereign God and Father be glory forever and ever. Amen.



EVIDENCES OF LOVE

“Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart” 1 Peter 1:22
Have we and are we doing what this text verse says?

This subject should be approached with sobriety. We are examining ourselves for evidences of love. It will be evident if the love of God is warm in our hearts. Conversely, if our lives do not demonstrate visibly the love of God, then we must conclude that it is not there. And if we do not have love, we do not have God.

It is human nature to draw conclusions based on assumptions. For instance, one might first assume that since he is a Christian, it naturally follows that his heart is filled with love. After all, isn't love second nature to a Christian? This is reverse logic. Since genuine love is the acid test of a Christian, and since love produces tangible fruit, it makes sense that we

must scrutinize the fruit we are producing for evidence of love, and, from that fruit determine our level of Christian dedication. This is the purpose of this subject and this is some of what Jesus has to say about this love that we ought to have and exercise toward not only our brothers and sisters in Christ but to all, after all who is the neighbour that Jesus speaks of when He gives His new commandment in John 13:34-35: "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

Again He reminds us in John 14:15 "If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And then later He says: "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. John 15:12-14

The Old Testament commandment was to love one's neighbor as oneself. The New Testament commandment is to love others as Jesus has loved us. How did Jesus love? His love went out equally to all men, both friends and enemies. He was kind to those who mistreated Him. He held to the truth and spoke sternly when it was necessary. He willingly endured unjust punishment and abuse. Is this the way our love is supposed to be? This is obviously a giant leap upward from the Old Testament standard of morality and, in this sense, was indeed a new commandment. Furthermore, possession of this kind of love is the one undeniable proof to onlookers that we are disciples of Christ.

Jesus gave us a test that, without fail, reveals whether or not we love Him. The test is simple: If we love Him, we will keep His commandments. If we do not keep His commandments, it simply means that we do not love Him. The Apostle John adds this thought: "And his commandments are not grievous" 1 John 5:3. How true! If we find it anything other than a joy to obey the commandments of Jesus, it can only be because we still love ourselves and earthly things. When we have truly forsaken our love of self and the world and placed our love completely on Jesus, we will find it our greatest joy and pleasure to know, love, and obey Him.

This test also draws the dividing line between those who have the indwelling and abiding presence of the Holy Spirit and those who do not. God abides only in the heart of those who prove their love to Him by humble obedience.

Jesus labels as friends those who walk in obedience to all of His teachings. These are admitted into a most intimate and joyous fellowship with Him in which He makes known to them the will of the Father. He promises that He will answer the prayers of those who ask of the Father in His name. So may we continue to pray earnestly that His will be done in His kingdom and that we may understand His direction for our life.

Dear Christian brothers and sisters, is your heart full of the love of God?

Let us imagine that you have been arrested and charged with harboring the love of God in your heart. You are standing before the judge and jury. The prosecuting attorney has had ways of investigating your life and is able to discern accurately your inner thoughts, motives, and feelings. Would he be able to accuse you in the following manner?

Your prosecutor stands before the judge and states, "Your Honour, we believe the defendant is guilty.

"It is very evident that this man loves God with all his heart. He is often found in prayer, sometimes on his knees. It is frequently noticed that he communes with God as he works. It is as if he is going through the day with his best friend.

"He generally carries a burden for those who are not Christians. He seldom meets one without experiencing a yearning in his heart for that person to know Jesus. He often speaks to them about it. We have discovered him many times on his knees praying for lost souls and pleading with God to open doors so that he might share the gospel of Jesus Christ with them.

"We also know that he has a special burden for his spiritual brethren who are not walking close to Jesus as they ought, and we have often found him in fervent prayer for them. He has been known to earnestly plead with such a person to repent of his lax life and seek Jesus with his whole heart.

"We have seen him on numerous occasions endure criticism and scorn because of his spiritual fervor, and this sometimes from his own brethren, but he does not react in any other way than with longsuffering and forgiveness.

"He does not criticize other people, nor have we even observed critical feelings toward others whose opinions differ from his own. Rather we find him viewing their opinions as worthy of consideration.

"He is compassionate to the underprivileged and handicapped. He is also diligent to guide his children in this principle both by example and teaching.

"Even though he has numerous gifts and talents, we find him invariably esteeming others better than himself. We have yet to see him manifest envy at the prosperity of another or when he hears someone being praised.

"He is not known to repeat uncomplimentary facts or rumors about people. However, we have seen him on numerous occasions going to the individuals themselves to investigate whether the things he heard others say were true.

"Now in order to be completely honest, we grudgingly admit that the defendant has not totally followed the standard of love set by his God and has at times failed in some of the things we have spoken about. But whenever this has happened, we have later found him on his knees repenting before God. He then goes back to the person he may have hurt and humbly confesses his fault. We feel this qualifies us to accuse him as though he had not failed the standard at all.

"Your Honour, there are numerous other evidences that could be used against him, but we feel this is enough to prove conclusively that he is guilty as charged."

How many of us if thus accused would hear the ultimate tribute, "Guilty as charged"?

What do you suppose we will see in a congregation when all the members are experiencing the warmth of God's love and are, in reality, genuinely bearing its fruit?

First, the fellowship among the brethren of this congregation is going to be a deep, rich, and satisfying spiritual fellowship. "And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers" Acts 2:42. Do you suppose that the fellowship spoken about in this scripture included very much conversation in that day's equivalent about corn, beans, cattle, cabinet making, dress patterns, and shopping trips etc.?

Secondly, this congregation is going to radiate an inviting warmth to the community. It will be said of these people as was often said of the Anabaptists, "See how they love one another!"

Wouldn't this be a good time to admit that at times there is talebearing, envy, and criticism among us? One minister's opinion went something like this, "If we could eradicate envy from our ranks, we would eliminate ninety percent of our problems." While this may not be literally accurate, it does illustrate the point. These things are indicators of missing charity.

Perhaps this is hindering our outreach to lost souls much more than we are willing to admit.

These thoughts about true Christian charity are not just nice thoughts for the day. This is not merely something we should "try to improve in." Charity lies at the very core of Christian living and is the very essence of the presence of the Holy Spirit in our hearts. Lack of love, simply put, means a lack of the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, if we find ourselves short, the solution lies not in trying to produce the above-mentioned fruits of love, nor even in striving to acquire more love, but rather in repenting of self-love and seeking the face of God earnestly for an infilling of His Holy Spirit.

Some points for us to ponder especially in our world today where people from many different cultures and ethnic backgrounds interact

- 1] How does real love react or respond to cultural differences or varying opinions on nonessential issues?
- 2] Is it possible to live in a substandard level of charity so long that it becomes the accepted standard of Christian living?
- 3] How much is our outreach hindered by lack of fervent charity among us and to those around us who may not be Christians?

Can we, will we love our neighbour as ourselves and thus fulfill the commandment of Jesus Christ or will we put limitations on that love?



Temple Building.

I do not know if any of you are familiar with the poetry of Percy Shelley, an English poet, who in 1818 penned this brief piece of poetry on the inevitable decline of all leaders, empires and the monuments they built however mighty those monuments were in their time.

The poem is called Ozymandias.

I met a traveller from an antique land
 Who said: Two vast and trunkless legs of stone
 Stand in the desert. Near them, on the sand
 Half sunk, a shattered visage lies, whose frown,
 And wrinkled lip, and sneer of cold command,
 Tell that its sculptor well those passions read

Which yet survive, stamped on these lifeless things,
The hand that mocked them and the heart that fed:
And on the pedestal these words appear
"My name is Ozymandias, king of kings:
Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair!"

Now please note these last three lines!

Nothing beside remains. Round the decay
Of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare
The lone and level sands stretch far away.

It is in man's nature to worship some power or being that he perceives to be in control of the things around him and as part of that worship he has established places where he can carry out rites and rituals which in his mind will somehow honour the gods which he worships.

Throughout the history of mankind we find temple building and around the world today many ruins exist which ancient civilisations such as the Mayans and Aztecs in southern America built, there are ancient Hindu and Buddhist temples scattered around Asia, in the Mediterranean area of Europe there are the remains of Roman and Greek temples and the remarkable thing about all of these is that they are just that, remains, ruins.

In more recent history however and especially from the Middle Ages there was a resurgence of temple building, these temples however were known as cathedrals built with the intent to glorify God and meant to provide a place to carry out the rites and rituals associated with the religion of the day. Those buildings were built using not only contributions by the rich and wealthy but also the oftentimes forced contributions from those who could least afford it.

Many of those buildings took many decades to complete, many are still standing today, some still not complete, and all of these temples built by the early civilisations I mentioned earlier and these cathedrals of more recent vintage were all built I believe by a people of whom Paul speaks in second Timothy chapter 3 verses 1 through 9 being particularly mindful of

verse 7 which says, Ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth.

May we as we continue in this life professing to follow Christ come to the knowledge of the truth which is Christ Jesus and part of that knowledge of the truth is contained in 1 Corinthians 3:16 Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?

The New Testament speaks of Jesus being greater than any temple, that He is the temple that He will raise up three days after it is destroyed, John 3:19, Matthew 12:6, we also have other verses in Paul's Epistles which portray us as being the temple of God and then in Revelation 21:22 after that description of the heavenly city it says: And I saw no temple therein: for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it.

Even Solomon in all his wisdom and even though he was led and directed by God to build a temple recognised the inadequacy of a temple or physical place for God to occupy, he said this: 2 Chronicles 2:5-6 And the house which I build *is* great: for great *is* our God above all gods. ⁶ But who is able to build him an house, seeing the heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain him? who *am* I then, that I should build him an house, save only to burn sacrifice before him?

As we go through each day and week and the rest of our lives that God has ordained for us let us not defile that temple not made with hands, Acts 7:48 Yet the Most High does not dwell in houses (temples) made by hands, as the prophet says, and in Acts 17:24 The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man,

I do not know the author's name of the poem "Building a Temple" but it is my prayer that we may take it to heart, all of us who are born again, that we are not only that temple made without hands that God dwells in but each of us is either a teacher by way of example or a parent or both. We are here in part I believe to make sure that the next generation will be the people spoken of in Paul's letter to the Ephesians. We are temple builders

J.v.L.

Ephesians 2:19-22: So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God,²⁰ built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone,²¹ in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord.²² In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.

Building a Temple

A builder builded a temple,
He wrought it with grace and skill,
Pillars and groins and arches,
All fashioned to do his will.

Men said, as they saw its beauty,
'It shall never know decay.
Great is thy skill O builder,
Thy fame shall endure for aye.'

The teacher [parent] builded a temple,
With loving and infinite care,
Planning each arch with patience,
Laying each stone with prayer.

None praised her unceasing efforts,
None knew of his wondrous plan,
For the temple the teacher [parent] builded,
Was unseen by the eyes of man.

Gone is the builder's temple,
Crumbled into dust.
Low lieth each stately pillar,
Food for consuming rust.

But the temple, the teacher [parent] builded,
Will last while the ages roll,
For the beautiful unseen temple,
Lives forever in man's soul

BLESSED ARE THE POOR IN SPIRIT

for theirs is the kingdom heaven.

OUR Father, hear our longing prayer,
And help this prayer to flow,
That humble thoughts, which are Thy care,
May live in us and grow.

For lowly hearts shall understand
The peace, the calm delight
Of dwelling in Thy heavenly land,
A pleasure in Thy sight.

Give us humility, that so
Thy reign may come within,
And when Thy children homeward go,
We too may enter in.

Hear us Our Saviour: ours Thou art,
Though we are not like Thee;
Give us Thy spirit in our heart,
Large, lowly, trusting, free.

George MacDonald 1824-1905

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