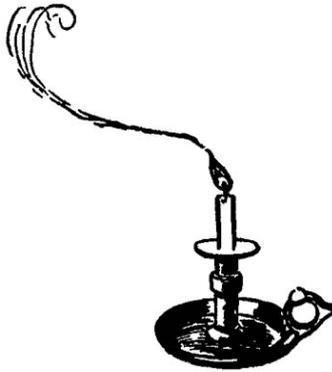


THE AUSTRALIAN ANABAPTIST

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 Mennonite Perspective

From The Editor's Desk

We like all creatures live and breath by the grace of God, we as human beings created by God in the image of God have also been given the breath of life as in Genesis 2:7 and it was only to man that God imparted His own breath of life or spirit we might say – and that sets us apart from all other living beings.

We could meditate on the fact that God has imparted His life into us foreknowing that we are imperfect creatures, that many would rebel against Him and deny Him as being the “life-giver“ and that alone should impact our thinking in regard to whom we owe our existence.

But more than that we also need to realise and meditate on the fact that only in man is there an added dimension, the dimension of the God given breath of life and that makes us beings with a spiritual dimension that is not experienced nor can be ascribed to any other living organism.

From the very beginning of creation God has desired fellowship with His crowning work of His creation – man. Sadly man did not live up to God's requirements and the first indication we have of that is in the disobedience and rebellion we might say of Adam and Eve.

This disobedience and rebellion has been and is today a continuing trait of mankind and, we might even conclude looking at history, that trait growing at an ever increasing rate, nor are we immune from those influences but we can have victory over them through Christ Jesus. How?

The Scripture reveals to us the words of Jesus, the Father's only begotten Son, that from before the beginning of the world a plan had been put in place to offer man a means of restoring that fellowship with God.

The fulfillment of the Old Testament prophesies of that plan culminated at Calvary with the suffering and death of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, those eventful world changing few days that the world today recalls as Good Friday and Easter.

It is indeed a time worthy of our remembrance and contemplation because without that greatest of all sacrifices none of us could ever hope to be free from the burden and guilt of sin that afflicts every person in every age, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. Romans 3:23.

May this Easter period cause each one to ponder on the riches of His grace of which Ephesians 1:7 speaks.

J.v.C



Doctrine of the Blood
 From a message by Donald Nolt
 Bethel Mennonite Church 2003.

For the message this morning let's turn our thoughts to what we have in first Peter chapter 1 and I would invite your attention to this account.

1 Peter 1:13-21 ¹³ Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ; ¹⁴ As obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance: ¹⁵ But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; ¹⁶ Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy. ¹⁷ And if ye call on the Father, who without respect of persons judgeth according to every man's work, pass the time of your sojourning *here* in fear: ¹⁸ Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, *as* silver and gold, from your vain conversation *received* by tradition from your fathers; ¹⁹ But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot: ²⁰ Who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you, ²¹ Who by him do believe in God, that raised him up from the dead, and gave him glory; that your faith and hope might be in God.

In verses 18 and 19 of this reading we have reference of course made to redemption through the blood and it specifies here whose blood it is that we are redeemed by, the blood of Jesus Christ and it also refers to the value of that blood in contrast to the value of silver and gold.

Silver and gold were not valuable enough to redeem us but Peter says that the blood of Christ was and in light of that he refers to it as the precious blood of Christ.

This morning that is what we want to focus on in the message.

The doctrine of the blood is a doctrine that is highlighted in a good many places in both Testaments of our Bible, I did not check this out but I think I

am safe in saying that someone who did said there are something like 700 references in the total Scriptures to the blood.

Sometimes this is referred to as the scarlet cord of the Scriptures that reaches from Genesis to Revelation, sometimes it is referred to as the life-line of the Scriptures.

Very early in time, in fact right at the beginning our heavenly Father indicated that He had something very special in mind as it relates to blood.

One way in which He did this was when He created man He designed him in such a way that his life is in his blood. In [Leviticus 17:11](#) it specifically states that the life of the flesh is in the blood. This would suggest would it not that the blood is an invaluable substance, it is indeed very precious we cannot stay alive without it, our life is in our blood.

Another way in which God indicated that He had something special in mind concerning the blood is that He forbade the human consumption of blood, eating of blood is forbidden in both Testaments of our Bible.

In the Old Testament it clearly states in [Leviticus 17:10](#) that if a person violated this commandment of God he would be cut off from his people. This was also incorporated in the New Testament church discipline that we have in [Acts 15:20, 29](#), and this is at least a part of the reason why we should not eat things that are strangled because they are not properly bled out and we would end up doing what the Bible says we should not do.

I think in these ways that God has indicated that He has something special in mind concerning the blood.

He apparently also used the blood to provide for the needs of Adam and Eve when they became sinful, depraved and shameful. When they became aware of their plight and of their shamefulfulness they attempted to resolve that with fig leaves but we know that God was not satisfied with that and He clothed them with coats of skins, [Genesis 3:21](#).

By implication that would indicate that blood was shed for them so that their shamefulfulness would be taken care off.

We also know from Scripture that God rejected the first bloodless offering that a man attempted to offer unto the Lord, that was Cain's offering.

The Bible says that in the process of time that Cain brought an offering of the fruit of the ground

It would be my opinion that that statement "in the process of time" would infer that there probably was a time in Cain's life when he brought offerings that involved blood but somewhere along the line he decided to test God and to see if God really meant what He said and brought one that had no blood with it and that bloodless offering God rejected. God did not accept that. [Genesis 4:2-5](#).

And that rejection of that bloodless offering corresponds with the divine declaration that we have in Scripture that without the shedding of blood there can be no remission for sin, [Hebrews 9:22](#).

When we come to the institution of the Old Testament Passover, which of course is the forerunner to the service that we are having this morning, again the blood comes into focus and in that ordinance we find that the blood actually became a life or death issue.

The Bible is clear that in every house in Egypt where no blood was applied to the door there was a fatality in every house like that, [Exodus 12:7-13](#).

On the other hand there was not one fatality, not one death that occurred in any house where the blood had been properly applied.

So again we see that blood was really a life or death issue.

If we would take the time this morning to go back to the Old Testament and notice the offerings and sacrifices that God commanded of His people there we find that almost invariably it involves the shedding of blood and also the sprinkling of the blood that was shed.

I think sometimes people come short of understanding that not only was the blood shed but the blood was also sprinkled which I would say for us would mean that it must be applied, it is one thing to have blood shed but it is yet another thing to have the blood that was shed applied.

In the Old Testament we have sin offerings, we have trespass offerings, we have burnt offerings, we have peace offerings and perhaps others and these all involve the shedding of blood. These offerings and the sacrifices of course foreshadowed the precious blood of Christ that we have here in our text and I would want to point out this morning that all of that blood-

shed, even though there was a lot of that, it was not blood shed at random, there was a special criteria that was involved in which blood would be used and would be shed in all of those offerings and sacrifices.

And this is alluded to in our text when it talks about the precious blood of Christ it says; As of a lamb without spot and without blemish. That is referring to the typology and the criteria which involved blood that was acceptable in the Old Testament offerings and sacrifices.

Well I think all of this was to underscore the fact that God from the beginning, that is the beginning as far as we are concerned, made it clear that He had something special in mind concerning the blood.

Now the next consideration would be this:

That Satan is not naive to the significance of the blood.

He knows the importance of this perhaps even a little better yet then you and I do and for this reason he has instigated many heresies and erroneous ideas concerning the blood and it is his way of trying to destroy our lifeline.

The life is in the blood is not only true physically it is also true spiritually and Satan knows that. There is no spiritual life apart from the blood of Christ.

Jesus said: Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood ye have no life in you. [John 6:53](#).

It can't get any plainer than that.

As we think of Satan's efforts to destroy this lifeline maybe for the sake of clarification we could say that these come into three different categories.

1] The first category would be Satan's efforts to minimize the blood and in a very subtle way actually eliminate the blood.

And I will give some examples of this; In some cases the blood has been removed from the Scriptures, there are some modern versions available today that have removed the reference to the blood quite a number of times, I think there is one version like that which in comparison to the standard King James version has removed 15 references to the blood.

You know one of the most subtle ways to lose something is simply not to emphasize it and Satan knows that and we just cannot afford to be without an emphasis on the blood because our life is in the blood, it is our lifeline.

Another way in which the blood is minimized is this idea of child evangelism.

I think that is a strike against the efficacy of the blood Atonement.

We believe the blood Atonement that Jesus Christ made on Calvary provides unconditional safety for innocent children so if we attempt to evangelize innocent children we are lashing out against the efficacy of Christ's blood, we are minimizing the efficacy of His blood and reflecting against that.

Jesus said: Of such is the kingdom of heaven, [Matthew 19:14](#), and if such innocent children are of the kingdom of heaven the only way that can be is through His Atonement and as His Atonement covered them in their innocence why then to subtract from that in any way is to minimize the blood.

The false doctrine of limited Atonement is also a strike against the blood. The idea that Christ's atonement is only for those whom God predestinated to be saved and that it is not necessarily for "whosoever will." and that when the Scripture says that He is able to save them to the uttermost those that come unto God by him, [Hebrews 7:25](#), that is not telling the whole story.

Well we believe that the Atonement that Christ made is for "whosoever will."

A further thing that minimizes the blood would be all the counterfeit, spurious, and humanly concocted salvations that are being peddled in our day, salvation apart from the blood of Christ in one way or another.

The Prophet Isaiah speaking of these kind of so-called salvations, they are not really salvation but so-called salvations, he equates them as he says to a short bed and a narrow cover. [Isaiah 28:20](#). Have you ever tried to get a night's rest on a bed that you had your head against the head board and yet your feet stuck out over the end of the bed quite a distance, did you have a restful night, did you ever try in that kind of the bed then to sleep with a

narrow cover, a cover that would cover you only partly and then when you covered that side that got cold than the other side would get cold. Well it was not a very restful experience.

Salvation is to bring rest. Jesus said: “Come unto me all ye who labour and are heavy laden and I will give you rest,” [Matthew 11:28](#), that rest comes to us through His blood, through the salvation by the blood and any salvation apart from the blood does not bring rest. It is rather like Isaiah said a short bed and a narrow cover.

Well these are some examples I believe of the Satanic effort to minimize the blood and thus destroy this lifeline.

2.] A second category of these things would be the efforts that are put forth to stigmatize the blood and to pollute the blood of Christ. This is done when there is a denial of the miraculous conception and virgin birth of Christ.

If Christ came in to this world through the normal biological processes then we would be forced to admit and acknowledge that He was sinful like you and I are and that His blood was tainted with sin. If His blood was tainted with sin then of course His blood cannot take away sin, it takes sinless blood to take away sin, Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world, [John 1:29](#). Well the Lamb of God can't take away the sin of the world if the Lamb of God is tainted with sin and so any efforts to stigmatize or pollute the blood of Christ is again an attack on that lifeline.

Right closely associated with this is the idea that Christ became sinful to save us.

In the last 30 some years I have heard this thing taught in our circles more than once and that is why God forsook Christ when He was on the cross, because Christ became sinful and God cannot look on sin.

That is erroneous teaching, that is teaching that is against the blood of Christ.

Christ did not become sinful to save us, He became our sin bearer and our sin sacrifice and the proponents of this doctrine use certain proof texts to

try and verify this like in second Corinthians 5 where it says: He became sin for us. [2 Corinthians 5:20-21](#).

We understand that to mean that He became a sin offering for us and when you put all the scriptures together you cannot conclude that Christ became sinful to save us.

If He became sinful then He really could not save us and so the Bible says His offering was a sweet smelling savour to God, [Ephesians 5:2](#), if it was a sinful offering how could that be? He could not be a sweet savour to God.

3.] The third category of Satan's effort to destroy this lifeline is to exaggerate the blood and to credit the blood with something that it does not do.

Unconditional Atonement or what is sometimes called universalism comes into this category, the idea that the blood saves people who do not meet the conditions for salvation.

Well the blood of Jesus Christ is a wonderful thing, but be clear on this this morning, it does not save anyone who does not repent and who does not believe and who does not obey, that is an unconditional type of thing and we believe that in salvation that is conditional.

In such cases really evangelism becomes an effort to go out and inform people that they are saved, the reason that people are lost is because they never found out yet that they are saved but we do not believe that.

The reason people are lost is maybe because they did not learn about salvation but if they had known about it and have not met the gospel conditions for it they are still not saved.

Presumptionism is another one that comes maybe much closer home to us. The idea that the blood of Christ makes it so that one can live in sin and still be saved and because I'm a Christian and because I'm supposedly under the blood it makes it so that my sin does not matter.

In the ordination on Thursday Brother Noah made reference to the fact of a bumper sticker that says "Christians are not different, they are just forgiven."

You know that kind of thing is a very subtle thing but it is not true.

If I am not different neither am I forgiven, it is that simple.

This is presumptionism, the blood of Christ does make a difference.

Also in this category is this thing of retroactive Atonement.

I'm not quite sure if that is the right word but the idea is that if I'm going to do something bad a year from now that it is already forgiven by virtue of Christ's atonement. Well the potential for that to be forgiven is certainly in Christ's atonement but that thing is not forgiven because I have not yet repented off it and departed from it.

So this is all sort of one package we would say.

Another one is that the Atonement guarantees our present physical health and healing, that there is physical healing in the Atonement and some proponents of this have pretty well a health and wealth gospel that they present.

We would agree this morning that there is physical healing in the Atonement but we believe that healing is largely reserved for the future.

In Romans eight it talks about the redemption of our body and it tells us that we are waiting for that and we are still waiting for it even though that was written almost 2000 years ago, **Romans 8:23**.

When our body is redeemed then the physical benefits of Atonement will be realized but until then we are subject to sickness, we are subject to injury and even to death.

And so this morning we need to be careful what we believe about the blood because many people believe in it but they believe the wrong thing and therefore the lifeline is really destroyed.

Now in conclusion this morning I would like to think specifically about the precious blood of Christ.

Why it is precious and I am going to use the letters of the word precious as sort of an outline from this point on, taking a point for each letter.

Why is the blood of Christ PRECIOUS?

Taking the first letter **P**.

The blood of Christ is precious because it brings **Peace**, it gives us peace.

The hymn writer refers to this he said: Peace, perfect peace in this dark world of sin.

Is that really possible? Well he comes back and says yes, the blood of Jesus whispers peace within.

Jesus said: My peace I give unto you, [John 14:27](#). How does He give it? He gave it unto us through His blood and I would ask this question this morning:

Is there anything that you have or you would like to have that is more precious than peace?

I cannot think of anything that I have or that I would want to have that I would trade for peace, it is the most precious possession that a person can have on this side of eternity, the peace of knowing that it is well with your soul.

And that peace is ours this morning through the blood and that is one of the things why the blood is so precious, there is no other thing that can afford us that peace, the peace of God which passeth all understanding, [Philippians 4:7](#).

The next letter is the letter **R**.

The blood of Christ is precious because it **Reconciles** us to God.

It is so precious because it affords us such a special relationship with God. The Ephesian writer points out how that we were not close to God, we were not nigh, we were afar off, we were at a distance from God but it says we were made nigh by the blood of Christ, [Ephesians 2:13](#).

And the Bible describes this reconciled relationship as a friendship relationship with God and I have always especially appreciated it how the Bible explains that and describes that. You know those friends we feel comfortable with, we feel at ease with each other and because of the blood of Christ this morning we can actually feel at ease in God's presence and we can feel comfortable with Him and we can walk with Him and talk with Him and work with Him.

When we talk of a friend we think of someone who is on our side and this morning because of the blood of Christ God is on our side. The Scripture says if God be for us, if He is on our side, who can be against us? [Romans 8:31](#).

And I would ask this morning: Who is your best friend? Who actually is your best friend?

Well through the blood of Christ your very best friend is God.

The next letter is the letter **E**.

The blood of Christ is precious because of the **Entrance** that it provides for us.

In Hebrews 10:19 it says this that we have the boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus.

Usually before we enter someone's room, someone's office, someone's residence, we ring the doorbell or we knock, we do not enter those places boldly, we first of all need a reason to enter, we first of all get permission to enter, but it is different in this case.

When I think of the holiest I think of the place where God is, I think of we might say His throne room, His office, and we don't need to knock, we don't need to ring the doorbell because that door is always open to those who have been cleansed by the blood of Christ.

That door is open to us, we can enter boldly in that regard and when we enter that place you know we can immediately approach the One who is on the throne, we don't really need to wait to see if He will hold out His sceptre to us because it is already held out.

We have boldness to enter and boldness to approach to Him and we can draw near the Scripture says in full assurance of faith, **Hebrews 10:22**, because we know that the blood of Christ has given us that kind of entrance and that kind of acceptance and this entrance was opened when Jesus shared His blood.

Most of us here this morning know that, we know that when He shed His blood that veil in the temple was rent from top to bottom, **Mark 15:38**, opening up the entrance, opening up the access to every believer in Christ to all who have applied the blood to their lives.

The next letter is the letter **C**.

The blood of Christ is precious because of its **Cleansing** power.

1 John 1:9 says that: If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

This is a predominant theme in many of our communion songs, the washing by the blood, What can wash away my sins? and O praise the Lord it cleanses me.

And many others could be given in this regard.

Our sins leave us stained, we are stained with sin, very ugly stains and marks left on our lives by sin but the blood of Jesus Christ removes those stains.

I had to think of the account or the story that I heard in my boyhood days, I guess it made a special impression on me as a boy, an evangelist conducting a series of meetings gave this illustration of a situation where a father and a son agreed to an arrangement where they had some kind of board hanging up in their home and they decided that every time the son disobeys and does not do what he is supposed to do they are going to hammer a spike in that board.

Well time went on and after a while the board had a good many spikes in it.

Now, the father said to his son, we are going to turn this around and when you obey and when you do the things that you are supposed to do we are going to pull a spike out.

So they did that for a while and after while all the spikes were out of the board but the son as he looked at that board made this comment: Yes, the spikes are all out but the holes are still there, the holes are still there!

Well I'm thankful this morning that the precious blood of Christ does not leave the holes there. The stains of sin are removed and removed to the point that you will never know that there were any there. Though your sins be as scarlet they shall be as white as snow, though they be red like crimson they shall be as wool. [Isaiah 1:18](#).

Certainly the blood of Christ is precious because of its cleansing power.

The next letter the letter **I**.

The blood of Christ is precious because of the **Instant** forgiveness that we can have when we meet the conditions for forgiveness.

The experience of the thief on the cross would certainly bring that into focus, the instant forgiveness that he received there. [Luke 23:40-43](#).

The account in [John 1:8](#) of the woman who was caught in sin and her accusers when Jesus was down there stooping on the ground and writing

things you know her accusers from the oldest to the youngest walked away.

I often wondered now why didn't she slip away too. Well the reason that she did not slip away is because she wanted the forgiveness that only Jesus could offer her.

His forgiveness is instant, He does not have to think it over, He does not have to check things out further, He does not say I will have to sleep on this. We do not have to be waiting in apprehension for His forgiveness - will He forgive us or won't He forgive us? That is already decided through the blood if you meet the conditions for it.

The next letter is **O**.

And the blood of Christ is precious because it enables us to **Overcome**.

There is power in the blood and the blood does cleanse us from sin, not only from its guilt but also from its power.

In **Revelation 12:11** it says they overcame him by the blood. And this focuses on the strength, remember that in the background we are saying that the life is in the blood and more than that your strength is in your blood, your blood carries the nourishment that you eat to all parts of your body and strengthens your body and this brings into focus the strength that we receive through the blood, the strength to live the overcoming life.

The next letter is **U**.

The blood of Christ is precious because of the **Unique** life that it gives us.

The life is in the blood. In John six verse 54 says: Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life. **John 6:54**. Jesus did not say hath life, He said hath eternal life.

And eternal life is not only life that never ends, eternal life is a special quality of life and quantity of life, in one place Jesus refers to it as abundant life, John 10:10. It is a special calibre of life and it is a life as the hymn writer says that is now worth living.

It is a life that is worthwhile, it is a life that is purposeful, it is a life that is hopeful.

You know when Jesus said whoso eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood hath eternal life and then He said, And I will raise him up at the last day, and that is the hope aspect, that is the unique part of our life and it is very unique. If you relate to people who are in distress and who have no hope in Jesus it just certainly makes your own hope all that more the precious. Well it is this unique life that we have through the blood.

The last letter, the letter **S**.

The blood of Christ is precious because it **Saves** us from God's wrath.

I find it difficult this morning to elaborate on this point because I am up against something, the wrath of God has been played down and played down and played down to the point where I don't think that any of us here this morning are very understanding of it.

I thought of what the Apostle Paul said, he said it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God, **Hebrews 10:31**.

And in another place he said knowing therefore the terror of the Lord we persuade men, **2 Corinthians 5:11**.

You know I personally feel that if people understood the wrath of God as it is, it would not be very hard to persuade people to begin the Christian life and it would not be very hard to persuade ourselves to do the right thing and to live according to God's word.

But the blood of Christ is so precious because it saves us from that wrath.

Presently in my devotional I'm reading through the last book of the Bible and I had to think of this again and again, you know it gets to the place where people would prefer to die rather than be the recipients of God's wrath according to what I've read in Revelation.

And I've read in there about them trying to have the rocks and mountains fall on them to somehow hide them from the wrath of the Lamb, **Revelation 6:16**.

The blood of Christ is precious because it spares us from that wrath.

Romans 5:9 says being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him.

You know when the Israelites, I try to imagine what that must have been like when the Israelites heard that cry that went up from all those Egyptian houses when they discovered one dead in every house, you know I think the blood came pretty precious to them at that point and a little later on when they saw the bodies of those Egyptians lying on the shore of the Red Sea I think the blood that they had applied to the doorposts became exceedingly precious to them.

I would like to think this morning that the blood of Christ is precious to you and me but I expect that when we get on the other side and we actually see what we have been spared from and when we think of being spared from the wrath of God I believe the blood of Christ is going to become exceedingly more precious even than to what it is today.

And so this morning may these thoughts inspire us and challenge us in regard to preciousness of the blood of Christ.



Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.

Mercy

Let not mercy and truth forsake thee: bind them about thy neck; write them upon the table of thine heart: So shalt thou find favour and good understanding in the sight of God and man. Proverbs 3:3-4.

God decreed in the beginning that sin's penalty would be death. Judgment Day will reveal what we have done about our sin. As we accept our accountability, we must turn to Jesus and experience justification in Him through faith. By His blood the penitent sinner who comes confessing and begging for mercy is cleared of all guilt. When we realize that we deserve God's judgments, we begin to fully appreciate His mercy. Is this not the true essence of mercy? What a wonderful part of God's plan! In this condition our hearts are warm and easily touched; ready to extend mercy to others. We dare not harbour an unforgiving spirit toward our erring brother but rather have an empathizing spirit so we can bring about his quick recovery.

May we grasp anew what the quality of mercy means for us. Someday we will be judged according to how we have judged others - Matthew 7:2. Jesus teaches us well on this topic, and the practical examples He gives contain answers for us today.

Let's read what Jesus said in reply to Peter's question about forgiving Matthew 18:21-35 ²¹ Then came Peter to him, and said, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times? ²² Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven. ²³ Therefore is the kingdom of heaven likened unto a certain king, which would take account of his servants. ²⁴ And when he had begun to reckon, one was brought unto him, which owed him ten thousand talents. ²⁵ But forasmuch as he had not to pay, his lord commanded him to be sold, and his wife, and children, and all that he had, and payment to be made. ²⁶ The servant therefore fell down, and worshipped him, saying, Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay thee all. ²⁷ Then the lord of that servant was moved with compassion, and loosed him, and forgave him the debt. ²⁸ But the same servant went out, and found one of his fellowservants, which owed him an hundred pence: and he laid hands on him, and took *him* by the throat, saying, Pay me that thou owest. ²⁹ And his fellowservant fell down at his feet, and besought him, saying, Have patience with me, and I will pay thee all. ³⁰ And he would not: but went and cast him into prison, till he should pay the debt. ³¹ So when his fellowservants saw what was done, they were very sorry, and came and told unto their lord all that was done. ³² Then his lord, after that he had called him, said unto him, O thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all that debt, because thou desiredst me: ³³ Shouldest not thou also have had compassion on thy fellowservant, even as I had pity on thee? ³⁴ And his lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him. ³⁵ So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses.

The question of how often to forgive a brother was more than a casual matter to Peter. The Jews had a maxim that they should forgive three times. Peter may have thought seven times was already more than required. Verses 15 through 20 in this same chapter relates how Jesus addresses the matter of brotherly admonition and the process of helping one who has

trespassed against us. Each of the three steps is motivated by a hope that the offending one will hear the concern and return to the right way.

Where in all of this does mercy fit in? How often shall I forgive my brother? Jesus says seventy times seven. In Luke 17:4 we read of forgiving our brother seven times in one day. This could translate to offering mercy to someone every two hours, not counting night time. To keep up this rate for seventy days, we readily see Jesus' point of unlimited forgiveness.

In the parable, Jesus mentions two aspects of mercy so the truth may be better understood. First, He mentions the servant's debt to the great king and secondly, his fellow servant's debt to him. The one owed the king ten thousand talents, or about ten million dollars. This was the highest number in Greek arithmetic. The fellow servant owed him a hundred pence, or about seventeen dollars.

Looking at the first part of the parable, we envision a wealthy king with many servants. As he managed his affairs, a time came to settle some accounts. One man owed him an excessive amount, so much like our indebtedness to God. This poor servant was bankrupt. The king would have taken all he had, even his wife and children, turning every possible asset into cash. This teaches that no part of our lives remains untouched when we come before God. As the servant begged for time to pay, he was graciously forgiven, and the king compassionately erased the record. The Christian today also recalls a time when the load of sin was heavy. Then, upon acknowledging a dire need within, Jesus forgave all sin and filled his heart with peace.

Next, let us consider the second part, showing mercy to our fellowmen. Upon finding one who owed just a trivial sum, the servant grew angry and actually cast him into prison. It pains us to see how pitiless he was. Matthew 7:5 says we must first recognize the beam in our own eye before we consider the mote in our brother's eye. We can feign a certain type of love, but can we feign mercy? To forgive is to have compassion. To forgive is to forget others' past mistakes and failings. In mercy we build on the present with good hope for the future. May we not be as the one who was delivered to the tormentors, but rather practice a mercy that forgives and forgives again.

We are prone to forget the importance of mercy. In daily interaction with our fellowmen, there are many occasions for little misunderstandings. Our proud natures would react to even small failings by allowing an unwillingness to forgive to slip in. This leads to hasty judgments and blaming others. May we take a closer look at the matter of blaming others. Neither we nor our brother gain by focusing on faults. When the woman poured precious ointment on Jesus' head the disciples criticized her, but Jesus did not. In His mercy He knew it was not a time to find fault. The disciples thought it wasteful and possibly were embarrassed for their Master. Quickly they passed judgment on the woman who so sincerely brought the best she could obtain. Jesus, however, sympathized with her. He knew her heart's language and admonished the disciples for troubling her. His tenderness toward both sides is a lesson for us today. The account of this woman's deed, Jesus said, should be related wherever the gospel would be preached Matthew 26:13.

Often the blessings of mercy are available right in our homes. The greatest tests are often with the ones we hold dearest. Young parents find that raising children is challenging. The question of when or how to discipline a child can be overwhelming. Sometimes family relations have been stressful for a time, but we do not understand why. Then God tenderly reveals that we have become harsh toward our children. We need to recognize again that we, too, have many failings, and need to allow God to cleanse us.

All of us need to rise to the challenge of being merciful. Think of it as a privilege, something you personally can do. Do not become losers by holding a grudge against someone for what he did. Only when we are tenderly sorry at the mistakes of others can we hope to reach them. May we, like Jesus, be willing to humble ourselves and identify with others around us.

It might be helpful to think that God could have created us all with identical natures and with no need to be subject to one another. This was obviously not His plan. Rather, we are to exercise forgiveness and mercy among ourselves. As we do this, by God's love and grace we are drawn together. Our own identity is lost, and there is a blending that is wonderful to experience.

The Old Testament account of Joseph is a touching example of mercy. During the years of famine, his family joined him in Egypt. He forgave his brothers there, and they lived happily together. However, when Jacob died, Joseph's brothers remembered their former wrongdoing. They thought perhaps Joseph would now take revenge. They were so afraid they sent messengers to beg pardon. Later, coming themselves, they knelt humbly before their brother. Joseph wept at their predicament. Again he laid no blame. He simply said, "Ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good.... Now therefore fear ye not: I will nourish you, and your little ones. And he comforted them, and spake kindly unto them" Genesis 50:20-21.

To Joseph, God's purpose was paramount. As long as good could come forth, it mattered not what his brothers had done to him. How easily their evil deeds could have paralysed him. On the contrary, God could use him in a great work and He can and does want to use each one us in His work as well of being a light to the world and drawing others to Him, not only will it bring glory to God and save otherwise lost souls but it will help us to grow in our Christian faith as we live out His Word and example daily.

*Mercy and truth are met together;
righteousness and peace have kissed each other.*
Psalm 85:10



Thy word *is* a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.

Judgment and Separation

And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment
Hebrews 9:2

We cannot fully comprehend the reality and finality of Judgment Day. The poet writes of "the crashing of ages, When time and eternity meet" ("Eternity," Christian Hymnal, No. 296). Every eye shall see the Judge, and all will receive their just and eternal portion. What a day that will be! Then, as Jesus said, He will separate the tares from the wheat and the sheep

from the goats.

We try to remove such thoughts from our minds. Yet, they are too insistent to ignore and too powerful to deny. For many, the temptation is to procrastinate rather than squarely face the facts, and so they reason away the absoluteness of God's Word.

With the passing of each day, this event comes closer. Its coming is inevitable and imminent. "And when these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh" (Luke 21:28).

Matthew 24:42-51 ⁴² Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come. ⁴³ But know this, that if the goodman of the house had known in what watch the thief would come, he would have watched, and would not have suffered his house to be broken up. ⁴⁴ Therefore be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh. ⁴⁵ Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his lord hath made ruler over his household, to give them meat in due season? ⁴⁶ Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing. ⁴⁷ Verily I say unto you, That he shall make him ruler over all his goods. ⁴⁸ But and if that evil servant shall say in his heart, My lord delayeth his coming; ⁴⁹ And shall begin to smite *his* fellowservants, and to eat and drink with the drunken; ⁵⁰ The lord of that servant shall come in a day when he looketh not for *him*, and in an hour that he is not aware of, ⁵¹ And shall cut him asunder, and appoint *him* his portion with the hypocrites: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Matthew 13:37-43 ³⁷ He answered and said unto them, He that soweth the good seed is the Son of man; ³⁸ The field is the world; the good seed are the children of the kingdom; but the tares are the children of the wicked *one*; ³⁹ The enemy that sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the world; and the reapers are the angels. ⁴⁰ As therefore the tares are gathered and burned in the fire; so shall it be in the end of this world. ⁴¹ The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity; ⁴² And shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth. ⁴³ Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Who hath ears to hear, let him hear.

Jesus said, "Watch." Do we understand what that means? Our apathy can be a result of thinking that we will receive a clearer warning of His coming than we already have.

In life it is often said, "Had I only known." Who of us will be saying this on Judgment Day? The faith that pleases God is believing Him because He said it, not having to know when and why. Such faith produces constant vigilance and obedience.

The Lord expects His children to be good stewards. They are required to be faithful, for they must give account. A vibrant church has faithful homes where fathers and mothers fill their God-given places. Not only are the temporal needs met, but spiritual nurturing is of utmost importance. The eternal goal is kept in view. This, of course, is done by attending to the Word of God and to prayer. Family devotions are consistent and warm. Respect for authority and for each other is taught. There is a season of opportunity and then it is gone. Too many parents live with regret for their past indifference. Young parents, take heed! The eternal destiny of our children is at stake. By word and example, let us be diligent in this day of grace.

May our lives never resemble that of the evil servant. When we become self-centred and proud, we lose the vision to fulfill our duties properly. This holds true for ordained servants as well. All will give an account of their stewardship. The time is known only to God. We must be ready, lest our end be with the unfaithful!

In the parable of the wheat and tares, Jesus obviously was not speaking about the church's authority to discipline. He certainly would not have minimized His teachings as stated in Matthew 18:17. We know the church is a visible body and is to be kept pure and biblically sound with her doctrine intact. The field is identified as the world, meaning the world in which we live. It is not the church.

"The tares are the children of the wicked one" Matthew 13:38. Originally, God planned only one kingdom for this world. Satan is responsible for planting another one. It has always been Satan's scheme to copy the true kingdom that he might deceive mankind. Tares could be false Christians,

void of the Holy Spirit, yet possibly having many good works. Self-righteous people, or those who speak much about love but lack godly works, also could be likened to tares.

The weeds and the wheat share the same soil, sunshine, and rain. Sometimes they are in the same family or religious group. In many respects, they interact in everyday living and commerce. They will not be separated, except in a spiritual sense, until the judgment when that which offends and is not of God will be cast into a furnace of fire. "Every plant, which my heavenly Father hath not planted, shall be rooted up" Matthew 15:13. Then the righteous will shine as the sun in that eternal, heavenly kingdom. Fellow pilgrim, we cannot miss it! May we hear with spiritual ears.

The New Testament has much to say about Christ's return. The subject of His second coming is addressed on an average of every twenty-seven verses. Jesus gave many warnings and insights. The words "watch" and "be ready" stand out above the rest.

At the judgment bar, Christ will be the judge. He said, "The word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day" John 12:48. His eyes, like a flame of fire, will pierce the heart and reveal its contents. No sin will remain hidden, every thought will be known, and every word will be brought into account. Imagine all of the unsolved mysteries of crime and sin that will come to light. All liars will be revealed, for there is nothing hid that shall not be made known. No advocate will be there to defend the sinner. It will be forever too late to turn. The tares will be separated from the wheat!

The Word of God, which we can know today, is His revealed will. By this same Word we will be judged. Now, His judgments are mixed with mercy, but then mercy will be forever past. God is true, and His judgments are righteous and impartial. There will be no excuses for ignorance and disobedience.

How terrible is the thought of being eternally separated from God and all that is good. Talent, money, or name will mean nothing on that day. Having our sins covered with the blood of Jesus is all that will matter. You will either be saved or lost, and that for all eternity!

The authority to loose and bind in a disciplinary way as outlined in Matthew 18:15-18 has been committed to the church. May she be true to this doctrine, for it is a redemptive work. Without it the church would become defiled and lose her identity. May we praise God for His wonderful grace.

Let us allow the Word to judge our lives, having our sins "open beforehand, going before to judgment" 1 Timothy 5:24. Otherwise, tragically, they will follow us to the final judgment.

Dear brothers and sisters may we all heed the warnings of this lesson from the Word of God. The testimony of our faithful life wherever we go could make the difference between someone being saved or lost. Also, as Psalm 19:9-11 states, in the keeping of God's judgments there is a great reward.

It is imperative that we be ready. Always remember that God earnestly desires our salvation, but it is up to us. Let us respond to His love.

Let us heed the biblical warnings and act accordingly so that the blessing will be ours. Instead of fear we will live in the joy of the promises of what this unparalleled event will bring.



Thy word *is* a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.

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