

THE AUSTRALIAN ANABAPTIST

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

Vol. 8 No. 8 – AUGUST 2011



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.org

For A Conservative Mennonite Perspective

From The Editor's Desk.

This month's main message is one on discrimination.

We hear much today in our society about discrimination, many countries have laws that are entitled Anti-discrimination laws and they forbid its citizens to discriminate against certain groups of people or certain religions. Discrimination in the world is focused on many things and is generally based on people's desire to "do their own thing" so to speak in defiance of God's order.

As Christians we too need to discriminate but our discrimination should be one that is weeding out the things of the world in favour of God's way. The message by Bro. Merle is a very timely reminder for the believer that to exercise discrimination in the way that God would have us do will lead us to a final rest with God that will be denied those who discriminate in accordance with the dictates of the prince of the power of the air wherein in time past ye, that is each of us, has walked. Ephesians 2:2.

That prince of the air is satan and he is allied with the flesh, our carnal nature, he entices and allures us through the wantonness of our fallen nature. He is the father of lies. All of his temptations are deceitful. He promises much but delivers only heartache and emptiness. His goals are to steal, kill and destroy (John 10:10). He wants us to discriminate in his favour. He wants to destroy Christian homes and lives. He wants us to accept all lifestyles and not condemn anyone. He wants us to love the sin and the sinner.

How contrary are his ways to God's ways. God wants us to find peace and rest in Him. God wants us to be His followers. God wants to be our Shepherd and the Bishop of our souls. God wants us to be His spotless bride. God wants us at His wedding feast. In fact God wants us so much that He gave His only Son that we might have life eternal with Him.

Should we be a discriminating people? Yes and again Yes. If we fail to be such and fall for anything and everything that the devil serves up then we are bound to hear the words of our Lord on that final day: "Depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity" and what follows is clearly set out in 2 Thessalonians 1:8-9: "Them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power.

May we determine to be a discriminating people!

JvL.



Across the Pulpit.

Discrimination

*Edited from a message by Merle Ruth
Millerstown Mennonite Church, 2008.*

Take heed that no man deceive you. *Matthew 24:4.*

Evidently our Lord wants his people to be a discriminating people.

If you are a non-discriminating person you will be easily deceived,
If you are a discriminating person you will not be easily deceived.

My assigned title is "Christian Discrimination" however I'm taking the liberty to add a two word prefix "Urgently Needed - Christian Discrimination"

Discrimination, what is it?

One of its meanings and the one I am not recommending is racial discrimination or any thing of that nature, also it is not Christian to discriminate against the people of any minority group but I am recommending that you exemplify the other meaning which is that in real simple terms discrimination is the exercise of good sound judgment and you will do that if and as you carefully analyze and weigh everything you hear and read before you act upon it.

Examine closely, look at it from every possible angle, does it harmonize with the Bible?

Now one of the consequences of the fall back in the Garden of Eden was a loss of spiritual insight and perception and because of that until a man is regenerated he is seriously handicapped, especially when it tends to discriminate on the moral and spiritual level. In those areas the Christian who avails himself of his birthright privileges has a greater discriminating potential than the non-Christian, he not only possesses powers of discrimination that are lacking in the non-Christian but he also feels inclined to exer-

cise those powers in areas where the non-Christian feels no need for doing so.

Although Moses lived in pre-Christian times he was exercising the kind of discrimination we are talking about when he esteemed the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt. That decision no doubt left his former associates wondering why would Moses do such a thing?

Hebrews 11:26

The man of the world may have sufficient discrimination to spy an opportunity to make a big financial haul in a quick, sly, easy way but the man of God will deliberately ignore that opportunity because he is discriminating enough to see that as a spiritually dangerous move. That was in fact the difference between Abram and Lot.

Now perhaps I'm making it sound as though all Christians are always a discriminating people, ideally that should be the case but sadly it is not. We Mennonites, along with other groups of plain people do not have a very good record. Unfortunately we gained a reputation for being rather gullible especially in some respects. It is to our shame that some of us have helped to float rumors and stories that were later discovered to be outright fraud.

In my opinion this can be accounted for by the fact we are taught to be trustful of others rather than suspicious, and it ought to continue to be that way. Suspicion is not a Christian virtue but neither is gullibility. Being discriminating is the narrow road between those two extremes.

Proverbs 14:15 reads as follows: "The simple believeth every word but the prudent man looks well to his going." The person referred to here as simple is the non-discriminating person, such a person will believe even that which turns out to be a lie.

Now as a means of further acquainting us with this subject I propose that we now examine a few Bible recorded incidents where discrimination was either present or absent to a marked degree.

For a starter recall for a moment that courageous young prophet whom the Lord commissioned to go up to Judah, to Bethel, and protest against the idolatry that was being carried on there. He had been told to return promptly but he allowed himself to be deceived by a man who claimed that the Lord had told him to invite him to come back and have a meal with him. Failing to discriminate, the young prophet complied and was thereafter slain by a lion. *1 Kings 13.*

Evidently some otherwise good people may be lacking in discrimination. Discrimination would have told this young prophet not to believe the older man for when God speaks He never contradicts Himself, that young prophet should have recognized something isn't right here, God doesn't give instructions that contradict!

Next for a few moments let's think about the encounter the Israelites had with the Gibeonites, we find this in Joshua chapter 9, before they entered Canaan God told the leaders of Israel not to make any league with any of the Canaanites, let's read now from Joshua nine beginning at verse three:

Joshua 9:3-4: ³ And when the inhabitants of Gibeon heard what Joshua had done unto Jericho and to Ai, ⁴ They did work wilily, and went and made as if they had been ambassadors, and had travelled a long way. Now verse six: *Joshua 9:6* ⁶ And they went to Joshua unto the camp at Gilgal, and said unto him, and to the men of Israel, We be come from a far country: now therefore make ye a league with us.

Now verse 15: *Joshua 9:15-16* ¹⁵ And Joshua made peace with them, and made a league with them, to let them live: and the princes of the congregation sware unto them. ¹⁶ And it came to pass at the end of three days after they had made a league with them, that they heard that they *were* their neighbours, and *that* they dwelt among them.

Why did it happen?

The answer appears in verse 14: And the men of Israel took of their victuals and asked not counsel at the mouth of the Lord. *Joshua 9:14.*

That's why it happened!

Without the help of the Lord we cannot be as discriminating as we ought to be.

Thankfully I can now show you instances where God's people did exercise discrimination; although I'm not turning to it one such occasion appears in first Kings Chapter 3 where the biblical record supplies us with a glimpse of the wisdom of newly anointed King Solomon. You know the story; two women came to Solomon with conflicting stories about their babies, one of which was still living. Solomon's God-given power to discriminate was illustrated in the way that he so easily solves the problem of discovering to whom the living baby belonged. *1 Kings 3:16-28*

Turn with me now to Nehemiah chapter 6, here Nehemiah describes a supposedly friendly measure to which his enemies resorted, *Nehemiah 6:2-3*:
² Sanballat and Geshem sent unto me, saying, Come, let us meet together in *some one* of the villages in the plain of Ono. But they thought to do me mischief. ³ And I sent messengers unto them, saying, I *am* doing a great work, so that I cannot come down: why should the work cease, whilst I leave it, and come down to you?

The ability to discriminate may some day save your life as it no doubt did for Nehemiah on this occasion.

Now let's go to the New Testament, the gospel according to John chapter four, I'm breaking in at verse 16,
John 4:16-19 ¹⁶ Jesus saith unto her, (unto the Samaritan woman) Go, call thy husband, and come hither. ¹⁷ The woman answered and said: I have no husband. Jesus said unto her, Thou hast well said, I have no husband: ¹⁸ For thou hast had five husbands; and he whom thou now hast is not thy husband: in that saidst thou truly. ¹⁹ The woman saith unto him, Sir, I perceive that thou art a prophet.

She on the basis of the evidence she had just received realised that Jesus was more than an ordinary person, that He was in fact a prophet. She was able to discriminate His position by His words.

Discrimination will likewise help you to perceive the real character of that to which you are relating and it is so necessary that we do that, that we perceive the real character of the person or the scene whatever it may be that we are relating to.

Next, without turning to it, I would like you to think with me for a few moments about the careful discrimination process that was engaged in when the leaders of the early church came together at Jerusalem for a conference as described in *Acts 15*, they came together to consider and to hopefully resolve a vexing problem. After a session of careful discrimination they announced their solution to the problem in a statement that began with these memorable words: "It seems good to the Holy Ghost and to us to lay no greater burden upon you then these necessary things." *Acts 15:28*, And those necessary things were later refer to as the decrees for to keep., in *Acts 16:4*.

We too must learn to discriminate in order to solve the problems that will inevitably arise in our own individual experience and also in our group experience.

Two chapters later in Acts we read about the good perception that Paul and Silas received when they first preached the Gospel in the synagogue at Berea, I'm reading from *Acts 17:11*: "These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the Scriptures daily, whether those things were so." Those last two lines indicate that those who attended that synagogue service constituted a discriminating audience.

We to need to be discriminating even when we are in the best of company. Remember the devil is a churchgoer too so we cannot take for granted that everything we hear, even in the church setting, is the unadulterated truth we have been told in *Acts 20:30* that of your own self shall men arise speaking perverse things.

Last in this series is an expression of Paul's that appears in first Corinthians chapter 11 verse 18, and I am choosing to read only the latter part of the verse, *1 Corinthians 11:18*, "..... I hear that there be divisions among you and I partly believe it."

Like Paul we need to be discriminating enough to know that the reports we hear may not be totally accurate.

This brief survey has brought to light a few of the many reasons why it is urgent that we become a discriminating people, so much of what we hear and read, even though it has a semblance of truth, is bent way out of shape, much of what appears in newspapers and news magazines is so slanted that the truth is effectively hidden. We must battle with the fact that he who controls this anti-God world system is both a liar and a murderer. *John 8:44*. He and his agents hate, they literally hate God's people so much that they will throw at us all kinds of lies hoping to thereby deceive us and eventually destroy us.

Detecting a liar can sometimes be rather difficult and what makes it really difficult is when you need to sort out a few lies that are mixed in with a large quantity of truth and more often than not that is the way our enemy operates. We also need to reckon with the unique context in which we live, we live in a highly pluralistic and very tolerant society, religious tolerance plus freedom of speech and freedom of the press are indeed blessings but this combination creates a climate highly favourable for the production and spread of propaganda. We are therefore exposed to an unprecedented multiplicity of voices and ideas.

Contributing to this exposure are the vastly multiplying channels of communication. This thing we call propaganda was once a government produced wartime weapon but propaganda has long since become a weapon in the hands of people who are in the business of marketing anything from A to Z.

Being an elderly couple we receive through the mail enormous amounts of health related propaganda and each company makes it appear that they want to help you but to the discriminating person it is quite obvious that their primary purpose is to make as many sales as possible and in order to do so they will not hesitate to smear their competitors. Outright dishonesty is rampant not only in the business world and the political world but also in the religious world.

In my lifetime I have listened to more than one highly persuasive pulpit speaker who seemed very sincere and yet it eventually leaked out that he

was a deliberate deceiver who, before being discovered, had gained a lot of Mennonite support.

Turn with me now to Romans 16. As Paul was writing this epistle he was moved by God to sound a warning that he records here at the beginning of verse 17, *Romans 16:17-18*: "Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which caused divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which you have learned; and avoid them. For they that are such served not our lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the heart of the simple."

These simple ones who are thus deceived could be otherwise described as being indiscriminate and unsuspecting. Unless you thoroughly filter what you see and hear and read you will soon become a very confused person. Some individuals swallow the whole bushel of falsehoods because it contains a few grains of truth; other individuals reject a bushel of truth because it contains a few grains of falsehood.

Personally I'm of the opinion that a discriminating person will avoid both extremes.

The concluding of the portion of this message is entitled: How to Become a Discriminating Christian.

In God's school of training this is a required course of study, we must learn how to use the discriminating equipment that God has given us, we must learn how to use God's microscope.

To begin with learn to pay attention to detail. Galatians chapter 3 verse 16 is a notable example of Paul teaching us to do this as we read the Bible, not as a means of detecting falsehood because there is none there, but as a means of correctly interpreting what is there. I'm reading now *Galatians 3:16*: "Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ."

Paul wants his readers to recognize that in God's promise to Abraham a big difference in meaning hinged on God's choice of a noun in the singular form as opposed to the plural form. Details are important and we dare not overlook them. Unlike the Bible the songs we sing and listen to are man made productions and therefore should not be regarded as 100% infallible.

For example: One songwriter has Job saying: I know that my Redeemer liveth and on the earth again shall dwell. Unfortunately that songwriter inserted a word that does not appear in the passage from which he drew. A little detail, just one word again, and yet it alters the meaning of what Job said. *Job 19:25*

Even more misleading is that song that has in it this line: "He took my place on Calvary now I don't have to go." But did He really take my place? No! He took His place. I had no place on Calvary for my blood would have availed nothing. Jesus for us, not instead of us. If indeed He died instead of us why are we all still dying?

Discrimination is needed to detect such erroneous concepts. Don't assume that because an individual teaches correctly on one domain that he is there for a reliable guide and every other field. Take for example Henry Morris in his vindication of creationism over evolution he has done very well but his other writings show a leading toward both dispensationalism and Calvinism. You need to discriminate, to discriminate to keep from being misled by persons who have won your confidence in a field where they may be reliable but that is no guarantee that they could be followed in every field.

In this course of study another rather elementary lesson is learning to distinguish between statements of fact and statements of opinion.

That is sometimes difficult to do because some speakers and writers deliberately and cleverly present their opinions as though they were facts.

Another dishonest tactic that we need to learn to spot is this practice of a speaker making a theory sound as though it is a widely accepted orthodox doctrine so that he can more readily sell the theory to his audience.

Still another commonly resorted to practice is that of making an exception appear as though it is the general rule. So when you observe the speaker or writer citing a few exceptions and blowing them up way out of proportion you had better watch out, he is setting the stage to deceive you into believing that it is normally that way when in fact it is not.

Again examine closely the logic people use to promote their arguments and conclusions. Very often faulty logic is employed to ensnare the unsuspecting victim, for example; In a typical advertisement you may come upon a statement like this: 80% of those questioned replied thus and thus which proved so and so. No it doesn't. That doesn't prove anything, the assumption that it does is a false assumption. Truth cannot be decided by a show of hands, on a lot of issues the majority is wrong.

We must learn to detect poorly grounded deductions.

Another lesson we must learn is that that the person who wants to manipulate our thinking will more than likely resort to the use of words that are heavily loaded with emotion.

Visualize for a few moments two people who are living in the same frugal manner. Suppose you describe the one as thrifty and the other one as miserly.

See what you have done? You have not necessarily falsified the facts but nevertheless you have made the one appear more likeable than the other by your choice of terms.

Discrimination demands that we be alert to the methodology resorted to by those who make it their business to try to manipulate our thinking.

In your learning hopefully you will also discover that persuaders frequently delve into history in order to convince you to think as they do.

I'm going to warn you right now that by using cleverly selected historical data persons with different objectives can lead you to conclusions directly opposite each other. We must learn that distorted history will say whatever it is made to say.

As already implied don't be in a hurry to believe what you hear and read even though it comes from a supposedly Christian source, especially if the report or story is in anyway sensational. In Matthew 24 Jesus describes

precisely this kind of scenario and what does He tell us what to do upon receiving such a report? Believe it not! Those are the very words of our Lord's, believe it not, that sensational story, believe it not! (*Matthew 24:23 & 26*). Put very little stock in any report that comes to you by way of the grapevine.

I have here in front of me a Mennonite written article dated 1990 entitled "Don't Believe Everything You Hear" I will read from it a few lines: "Recently I received an article that reportedly has received publicity in church circles, the article had been translated from Finnish, it reported on a drilling project in Siberia that left the drilling crew of scientists shaken and unnerved. At a depth of about 9 miles to drill bit reportedly hit a cavity, as the crew inserted a thermometer and an amplifier they discovered a temperature of 2000° Fahrenheit and human voices of anguish coming from the depths. The story says that the group promptly decided that they had discovered hell and the drilling was abruptly abandoned."

However much one might wish that this was true it turned out to be a totally made up story submitted to a newspaper by a man from Norway as an experiment for the purpose of seeing if the publishers of that paper would properly verify materials before publishing them, their failure to verify the factuality of that article resulted in a rumor being circulated internationally. (*Editor's note: This story was still circulating some 15 years on!*)

The same person who made that discovery investigated also the often reported story of the hitchhiker who would tell his driver that Jesus is coming soon and then mysteriously disappear. That investigator followed every possible lead without ever finding one person who had such an experience first-hand.

We too would do well to investigate before we circulate the reports we hear.

Finally it is inevitable that in some way or other you will eventually hear some sort of conspiracy story, the hearing of such a report will put your powers of discrimination to a severe test.

Back in April 2000 the Christian Contender carried an article entitled "Christians and Conspiracies" I have such high regard for that article that I think it ought to be required reading for everyone in our circles, I think it ought to be re-read about every five years.

Right now I'm taking the time to read from that article the following lines:

"In the 1970s a man named John Todd, you may be very familiar with this scenario, a man named John Todd made news headlines by touring the continent wearing a revolver and preaching about Bible prophecy. He claimed to have been delivered from Satan worship and the "Illuminati", a new-age group that was intending to take over the world at the end of that decade. Many Christians fell for Todd's message of conspiracy and believed him until finally someone found out the truth about him. Todd, a confidence man with a police record vanished from the scene as quickly as he had arrived and the conspiracy he preached against evidently disappeared with him since we are now about 20 years past his deadline.

The number of Christians included Conservative Mennonites who swallowed Todd's story is very revealing.

Conspiracies have a way of attracting people but most conspiracies turn out to be false alarms."

When God's people jump on the latest conspiracy theory and promote it heavily only to have it fall flat, they give the ungodly an excuse to slander both Christians and God.

In our time Christianity is increasingly looked upon as a belief for the naive and uneducated or for radicals or revolutionaries. When we promote conspiracy theories we simply prove this contention and thus harm the kingdom of God.

I close with this thought and challenge you be the kind of Christian that is:

Too good to deceive others ——— Too wise to be deceived by others.



*THE IMPLICATIONS OF ONE'S BELIEF ABOUT THE
INCARNATION*

"And the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God" Luke 1:35.

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God ... And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth" (John 1:1-2 &14).

"For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh" (Romans 8:3).

"And so it is written, The first man Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam was made a quickening spirit ... The first man is of the earth, earthy: the second man is the Lord from heaven" (1 Corinthians 15:45, 47)

"Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people" (Hebrews 2:17).

People throughout history have realized that there are forces at work, in the universe and in their own lives, beyond their ability to control or even understand. Man has attempted to penetrate this unknown by a bewildering variety of means: rituals, sacrifices, meditation, mysticism, asceticism, philosophies, and technology. All have fallen short of providing a real answer to the instinctive craving of the soul of man to be reconciled with his Creator. Denying the very existence of a Creator does not give relief from the inner foreboding. Trying to propitiate the lesser gods or spirits only increases their power to oppress.

The cause of this catastrophe is very simple: man has disobeyed his Creator. We have sinned, and we cannot undo the consequences of our sin. The initiative to be reconciled to the eternal, all-righteous God had to come

from God Himself.

The Holy Bible teaches that God became man in order to provide the means whereby our sins could be forgiven and we could be fully restored into fellowship with Him. The whole foundation of our salvation rests upon this truth. The eternal Son of God, the Logos, by whom God spoke the creation into being, became our brother and took upon Himself all aspects of humanity. But He did so in perfect purity and sinlessness in order that we could become children of God.

Nothing in the Bible can be construed to teach that man became God. There is no hint that our Savior was born of a carnal union between God and Mary, as the Koran charges Christians with believing. Neither does the Bible lead us to believe that our Savior only appeared to be a man, as others have theorized. He was of God and with God, yet became fully man, but not sinful man.

Throughout history, the most prevalent error concerning the nature of Christ has been that He obtained His humanity through Mary. The religion of ancient Rome had many accounts of men becoming gods and also the story, more ancient than the Roman Church, of a woman known as the Mother of God.

The church at Rome suffered much persecution and eventually divided over the proper means to respond to persecution. One group determined to maintain the purity of the apostolic faith, cost what it may. The other attempted to gain toleration by demonstrating how Christianity was a truer revelation of things depicted imperfectly by the old pagan religion. They went so far as to apply the old Mother of God mythology to Mary. Thus they lost the sinless Savior, the spotless Lamb of God. Realizing this, they formulated a new doctrine of the atonement, whereby they said our Savior descended into hell and suffered the full punishment of the eternal torment of hell for everyone who would be saved.

It is noteworthy that the Apostles' Creed, as it appears in the Martyrs Mirror, does not contain the phrase, "descended into hell." That concept has never been part of the faith of the true church of God. There is no word of such an abomination in the Bible, but such a notion is required if one believes that our Savior was born of the flesh of Adam, through Mary. Historians tell us that the Apostles' Creed appears to have been formulated from the questions asked at baptism in the early church and that the phrase "de-

scended into hell" was not added until the Fourth Century.

Behold what evil implications such a doctrine brings with it! If Jesus has already suffered our eternal punishment in hell, then our salvation is assured, no matter how we live. And those who hold to the "descended into hell" doctrine boldly affirm that the salvation of a person for whom Christ died cannot be forfeited by his or her evil life and conduct. We must also conclude that either all humanity then will be saved (being Christ died and descended into hell for everyone), including such as Hitler and Stalin, or that our destiny is determined before we are born, some being predestined by God for salvation and some for damnation. Those who believe the latter say that Christ died only for those predestined to be saved. And this is also boldly trumpeted as evangelical doctrine!

The doctrine of once saved, always saved, which is also given the titles of "Eternal Security" or "Perseverance of the Saints," purports to provide enormous comfort to believers. But it does not deliver on this promise. In reality, those who would believe this doctrine labor under a continual dread that they may not really be among the elect. Calvin taught that good works are evidence of election, but has anyone ever felt certain that his good works were a sufficient positive proof of election?

The Bible teaches that when Christ died, the heavenly mercy seat was sprinkled with His blood, thus opening the way for every man to draw near to God and obtain forgiveness upon faith in Christ's sacrifice. This is evidenced by the rending of the temple's veil at the very moment of Christ's death upon the cross. The election, or being saved or lost, hinges on one's faith, whether he genuinely believes in the sacrifice of Christ in his behalf. The Bible teaches that our assurance is based on God's sending His Spirit into our hearts, whereby we are adopted as His children and cry, "Abba, Father" (Romans 8:15).

Those who would mingle the Son of God and the son of Adam in the incarnation of Christ would also mingle the children of God with the children of Adam in the body of Christ today. It is impossible, they say, to conceive of a pure, organized, visible church containing only those who have had their sins forgiven and their consciences sprinkled by the blood of Christ. This is the nub of the whole matter. Those who accept an impure Christ, born of the literal flesh of Mary, must of necessity also accept an impure

church. Those who see the organized and visible church as an imperfect body also believe in an impure Christ.

When we speak of a perfect church, some people view this as tantamount to blasphemy. Yet the Bible does speak of a perfect church, without spot or blemish (Ephesians 5:27). The point that is being missed is that the church is not a man-made body and that it is more than the sum of its earthly members. The church is portrayed under various symbols in the Scriptures, but always with Jesus Christ being the builder, the foundation, the cornerstone, and the head. His righteousness is the key to its very existence and pervades the whole. It is not mortal men who are building the church, and we bring nothing good of ourselves into it when we are added to the church. The carnal man does not become part of the body of Christ.

That which qualifies us to enter into the church of God is true repentance and regeneration, bringing the evidence of His Spirit ruling in our hearts. There is the witness that we have denied our carnal natures, by the grace of Calvary, and taken up our cross to follow Jesus.

Brother Robert.



How We Are to Respond to God's Promises

“For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, The just shall live by faith.” Romans 1:16-17.

How are we to respond to the promises of God? His promises are not automatically at work in every life that hears them. Some respond correctly, while others respond improperly. Some enjoy the benefits of God's promises, whereas others do not. In these two verses, we are given the fundamental response to all that pertains to the gospel of grace. That response is faith. This would certainly include living by the promises of God.

Paul was unashamed of the gospel due to its effective character. "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God unto sal-

vation." The good news about Jesus Christ is essentially the grace of God proclaimed to man: "the ministry which I received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God" (Acts 20:24). This grace is God's power poured out unto the saving of souls. This power is experienced by all who place their faith in the gospel, whether Jew or Gentile: "for everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also for the Greek." The gospel is effective, because it holds forth God's righteousness to sinful man, if he is willing to trust in the Lord. "For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith."

The gospel is referred to in the scriptures as a promise. "And this is the promise that He has promised us, even eternal life" (1John 2:25). The gospel is often stated in the form of promises: "But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved . . . whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved" (Acts 15:11 and Romans 10:13). These gospel promises are partaken of by faith. "The just shall live by faith."

In addition to initial salvation, the good news of God's grace includes many other promises from God. "I will build My church . . . You shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free . . . When He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth" (Matthew 16:18; John 8:32; and John 16:13). All of these promises are experienced by faith as well, because "the just shall live by faith" - - continually, as well as initially.

O Lord God, I want to respond to Your promises properly. How gracious that You only ask me to trust in what You have promised to do. I do not want to ignore Your promises or doubt them. I want to live by relying upon every promise You have ever made. In Your faithful name I pray, Amen.



The Church Relating to the Old Testament

Some relationships are inevitable. In one way or another, the church has always had to relate to the Old Testament. The Old Testament can

mean both a collection of writings and an era of time. Normally the context in which the expression is used indicates which meaning applies.

As soon as she came into existence, the New Testament church faced the question of which day of the week to worship. During the Old Testament era, this had not been a question. The fourth Commandment had made it a settled matter. “Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy” (Exodus 20:8). Nevertheless, there was a movement away from Sabbath Day observance toward Lord’s Day observance, based partly on Jesus’ example in His post-resurrection appearances. In each instance where the day of such an appearance is specified, it took place on the first day of the week. The pattern He thus established was adopted by His followers. In commemoration of their Lord’s resurrection, they began to meet for worship on the first day of the week. By the time John wrote his last book, that day had become known among Christian’s as “the Lord’s day” (Revelation 1:10).

However, many Jewish Christians probably continued to respect the Sabbath. Jewish Christians, during that transition period, were permitted to continue practising Old Testament rites provided they did not build their hope of salvation upon them. For example, circumcision could be continued as a tradition, but not as a requirement.

The outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost created the awareness that a new day had dawned for the people of God. When he wrote Colossians 2:16, Paul put Sabbath observance in that package of Old Testament rituals that had been nailed to the cross by Christ.

For the early church, relating to the Old Testament became especially problematic, as the Gentiles were increasingly evangelized. Acts describes how the work of early missionaries was repeatedly undercut by Judaizers. According to them, Gentile believers were to submit to certain Old Testament rites, especially circumcision. The Jerusalem Conference grew out of the unrest created by this controversy. The issue at stake in that conference was what constituted a right way of relating to the Old Testament. That effort to resolve the problem was blessed by God. The peril that threatened the church was removed, at least for a time.

During the middle of the second century, Marcion created quite a disturbance in the church. He had a high regard for the New Testament, but thought that the God of the Old Testament was different from the God of the New Testament, so reconciling the two became a very perplexing prob-

lem. Unfortunately, his attempt at solving the problem reflected unfavourably upon the Old Testament. His “flat theology” failed to comprehend the concepts of progressive revelation and progressive grace.

The sixteenth century reformation focused on new issues as to how the church ought to relate to the Old Testament. There were numerous debates between the Anabaptists and the Protestant reformers, often based on their different ways of relating to the Old Testament. The reformers often employed the Old Testament to defend practices such as infant baptism, union of church and state, persecution of dissenters, and participation in warfare. The Anabaptists challenged the validity of such appeals on the basis that we no longer live under the Old Covenant. It was along this line that many Anabaptists developed the convictions for which they died.

In 1534, at Munster, Germany, a group of religious fanatics attempted to set up a kingdom of God by force. Because of some early connections and one or two similarities with the Anabaptists, older church historians created the false impression that the Munsterites were a typical Anabaptist group. That tragic episode was a consequence of elevating the Old Testament above the New. The temporary kingdom they thus set up was predominantly Old Testament in character.

Some segments of the professing church have had considerable difficulty in relating properly to the nationalistic spirit found in the Old Testament. The typical devout Israelite seems to have loved his nation almost as much as he loved his Lord. “If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning” (Psalm 137:5). In their day, religion and state were combined, and Jerusalem was the centre for both. Consequently, love for God’s people and love for the nation were the same.

Too many protestant churches still combine a supposed Christianity with a strong nationalistic bias. In doing so, they seemingly overlook the great change that God introduced in the New Covenant. When the Israelite prophet addressed his king, he was speaking to a member of his church. But in the New Covenant, God-approved religion was denationalized and the church was separated from the state.

Unlike Judaism, Christianity can never be monopolized by any one nation. In their visions of the future, the prophets foretold a day in which Gentiles could find favour with God without becoming Jews. “Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved” (Romans 10:13; Joel 2:32) The New Covenant dissolved the long-standing division between

Gentile and Jew and made “of twain one new man” (Ephesians 2:15). Since God’s people now form an international body with a heavenly citizenship, a patriotic devotion to any one nation is very unbecoming. Furthermore, the New Covenant saint cannot serve as an agent of God’s wrath.

When is the church relating rightly to the Old Testament? One answer to this question is supplied in the opening portion of Galatians 4. Old Testament Israel had within it the church in her pre-Christian form. The martyr Stephen referred to this when he spoke of “the church in the wilderness” (Acts 7:38). Galatians 4:1-7 highlights the transition through which the church has since then passed:

Now I say, That the heir, as long as he is a child, differeth nothing from a servant, though he be lord of all; but is under tutors and governors until the time appointed of the father. Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world: but when the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons. And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father. Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.

When the church was a child, God treated it like a child. The minor’s conduct was rigidly regulated, and no part of his inheritance could be touched. But as the young heir matured, the father began treating him as a son. The father might even share with his son a down payment on his inheritance. The coming of the Holy Spirit makes it possible for saints to live like mature sons. This meant that the Galatians were going backward instead of forward by giving in to the Judaizers.

The Holy Spirit is the first instalment of the church’s inheritance (Ephesians 1:14) and is further evidence that in the plan of God, the church has come of age. With the Holy Spirit comes a new nature to displace man’s old nature. Instead of functioning merely as an Outward restraint, the law of God now functions as an inward dynamic as well. Rules may still be needed as a means of control, but as they cannot convert, their value is limited. God’s temporary concessions to immaturity have been removed. Moral and ethical standards have been lifted to a level higher than before.

Second, the church is relating to the Old Testament rightly when she gratefully remembers that for a time those writings were her only Bible.

The first writings of the New Testament did not appear until about twenty years after Pentecost. Christ was being preached, and the Gentiles gathered into the church with no Bible other than the Old Testament. However, the newly constituted church did need to have the Old Testament Scriptures opened to her. As is reflected in Luke 24, Jesus began this process after His resurrection. On the Day of Pentecost, that process was greatly accelerated. The whole earthly life of Christ, from Bethlehem to His ascension, provided a new perspective for approaching the Old Testament. With their new understanding, the followers of Jesus went into the synagogues and reasoned with their fellow Jews straight from their own Scriptures. Philip, as he taught the Ethiopian eunuch, preached Christ from the Old Testament. The church should therefore continue to treasure the Old Testament.

Third, the church relates rightly to the Old Testament when she regards it as the source from which to learn about her own identity. On both the natural and the spiritual levels there are benefits in knowing who we are, both individually and collectively, and from whence we have come. One saint shared this insight: “From the Old Testament I learn who I am by nature; from the New Testament I learn who I have become by grace.” Although the ancient nation of Israel is a type of the church, the actual connection between the Old Testament people of God and the New Testament church stems from the faithful Israelite remnant that began to emerge as most of Israel turned aside. When the church was reconstituted, that Old Testament remnant became the nucleus of the church. Together with the Old Testament saints, we form the one olive tree of Romans 11.

Some do not see it this way. They ignore certain threads of fulfilment from the Old Testament in the New Testament until they reach the Book of Revelation. There they find the nation of Israel coming into prominence again, separate from the church. They view the church as the temporary detour over which God’s postponed plan is now travelling. But this gives the church a mistaken identity. Are there two plans of salvation? Are the people of God divided? No, there is only one body of saved people, the “one fold” of John 10:16 and the “whole family” of Ephesians 3:15. Whether Jew or Gentile, newborn saints are reconciled unto God “in one body by the cross” (Ephesians 2:16). They thus become “fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God” (Ephesians 2:19). In Christ, even Gentile believers become children of Abraham (Galatians 3:29). As New

Testament saints, we are the heirs of the Old Testament covenants of promise.

Fourth, the church relates rightly to the Old Testament when she avails herself of the tremendous contribution that the Old Testament can make to the spiritual edification of her members. For example, the Book of Psalms is a treasury of inspirations. The Old Testament can mean even more than it did previously because of the additional light that the New Testament throws upon it. Also, a knowledge of the Old Testament increases our Capacity to appreciate the New.

Fifth, the church relates rightly to the Old Testament when she remembers that that Covenant has been replaced. We need to be careful how we use the Old Testament to support the New Testament way of life. Some would go so far as to say that any attempt to do this is wrong, but 2 Timothy 3:16 tells us, “All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.” The Old Testament is the seedbed from which all New Testament truth has grown, but God’s final revelation awaited the coming of His Son.

Sixth, the church needs to strive for consistency in relating to the Old Testament. If it is wrong for New Testament saints to appeal to Deuteronomy 22:5 as a reason for teaching distinction between the sexes in dress, then it is equally wrong to appeal to the example of Amos denouncing a king as grounds for involving ourselves in civil government. Those who do the latter, commonly forbid the former. That is not being consistent.

Seventh, the church must avoid mixing together indiscriminately the natural aspects of the Old Testament with the spiritual aspects of the New Testament. The redemption by blood in Exodus 12 is not the same as that in Ephesians 1:7. A liberated Israelite coming out of Egypt was not redeemed in the same sense as a New Testament saint is. If we do not distinguish between physical and spiritual salvation, we will probably also fail to distinguish between the natural seed of Abraham and his spiritual seed. The way in which circumcision is treated in the New Testament is an example of how the Holy Spirit led those writers to properly move from the natural to the spiritual.

Lastly, the church relates rightly to the Old Testament when she is grateful for the privilege of living in the long-anticipated era of “better things” (Hebrews 12:24). The New Testament is the final revelation of God and so gives the ultimate rule for faith and practice. “It hath been said

... but I say unto you” (Matthew 5) — these oft-repeated words of our Lord indicate that the New Testament supersedes the Old Testament and therefore constitutes the highest possible court of appeal.

Merle Ruth, The Christian Contender July '98



My Book

Lord, how I thank Thee
For Thy wonderful Book,
Lord, for its message
Each time I will look
Thrilling my spirit
Again and anew,
Wonderful pages
This message from You.

Lord, for its beauty
Its comfort and stay
Oh, how it helps me
Thru life's daily way,
Turning my eyes
From the world and its fare
Upon Thy promise
To cherish and care.

*Gertrude Grace Sanborn 1956
Published by: Bible For Today Press
Used by permission.*

Compiled & Edited by: J van Loon
E-mail: shimara2@bigpond.com
Web: www.anabaptistmennonites.org