

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

Have you ever looked into the face of death inches away
 Faced him squarely for a moment with no time to pray?
 Do you know what it is like to stare into far endless infinity
 Reaching further then earth or sky into eternity?
 All of us young or old are only a touch a breath,
 An inch, a moment away from the arms of death
 It is a marvel of Grace a wonder that any there be
 Who waken to life on this side of the gulf of eternity.
 Life has a purpose never let the vision grown dim
 That purpose is living for Christ and our fellow man through Him.
 Then, only then will that moment be welcomed and sweet
 When we slip beyond the tiny door of our heart's last beat
 Either to Hell, the prison house of despair
 Or at the Lamb's Marriage Feast all gathered there.
Above Poem from a message given by Melvin Burkholder

Evening Prayer

Giver of all, another day [year] is ended and I take my place beneath my great Redeemer's cross, where healing streams continually descend, where balm is poured into every wound, where I wash anew in the all-cleansing blood, assured that Thou seest in me no spots of sin. Yet a little while and I shall go to Thy home and be no more seen; help me to gird up the loins of my mind, to quicken my step, to speed as if each moment were my last, that my life be joy, my death glory.

I thank Thee for the temporal blessings of this world—the refreshing air, the light of the sun, the food that renews strength, the raiment that clothes, the dwelling that shelters, the sleep that gives rest, the starry canopy of night, the summer breeze, the flowers' sweetness, the music of flowing streams, the happy endearments of family, kindred, friends. Things animate, things inanimate, minister to my comfort. My cup runs over. Suffer me not to be insensible to these daily mercies. Thy hand bestows blessings: Thy power averts evil. I bring my tribute of thanks for spiritual graces, the full warmth of faith, the cheering presence of Thy Spirit, the strength of Thy restraining will, Thy spiking of hell's artillery. Blessed be my sovereign Lord!

From The Book of Puritan Prayers



From the Pulpit

Maintaining the Solemnity of Death

Brother Stanley Heisey

Greetings to all of you in Jesus name, it is a blessing to be here and share together round the Scriptures and as we open our hearts to Bible truths it has an impact on our lives and has the potential to change our lives so as to better equip us to serve our God in these last days.

For a little while I want to give consideration to one of the realities of life that some folks have chosen to ignore, it is not a very pleasant subject, it is one of those facts of life that confront us and man can try as they would to erase the facts of death but they are nevertheless real and impact upon our lives as mortal beings.

The subject tonight addresses the attitude that we take toward death.

Now we understand that we can really not intensify the solemnity of the subject, there is nothing that I can say that can make death more solemn, it is a solemn as it will ever get, it is a serious as it can be but we do want to give recognition to the solemnity of death.

It is easy for us to become nonchalant and indifferent to this subject and our attitude can be rather light but it is a weighty matter, the Bible makes it very clear.

And so we want to develop a right attitude towards this subject of death.

Open your Bibles to the second book of Kings chapter 20.

The character in this book is King Hezekiah, King of Judah, a righteous man that turned the hearts of God's people from idolatry to serve the living and true God.

He wrought great revival in the land of Judah, did many outstanding commendable things, he was a notable King and God's blessing was upon this man.

We see him in times of great distress exercising great faith.

I think of the occasion when Senacharib came and presented threatenings to the nation of Judah and Hezekiah took the letter and went to the Temple and spread it before the Lord, there was a greater recognition of God's faithfulness in God's care in God's interest in His people.

Here in second Kings 20 we have an interesting event that took place in Hezekiah's life.

Verse one, [2 Kings 20:1-7](#) ¹ In those days was Hezekiah sick unto death. And the prophet Isaiah the son of Amoz came to him, and said unto him, Thus saith the LORD, Set thine house in order; for thou shalt die, and not live. ² Then he turned his face to the wall, and prayed unto the LORD, saying, ³ I beseech thee, O LORD, remember now how I have walked before thee in truth and with a perfect heart, and have done *that which is* good in thy sight. And Hezekiah wept sore. ⁴ And it came to pass, afore Isaiah was gone out into the middle court, that the word of the LORD came to him, saying, ⁵ Turn again, and tell Hezekiah the captain of my people, Thus saith the LORD, the God of David thy father, I have heard thy prayer, I have seen thy tears: behold, I will heal thee: on the third day thou shalt go up unto the house of the LORD. ⁶ And I will add unto thy days fifteen years; and I will deliver thee and this city out of the hand of the king of Assyria; and I will defend this city for mine own sake, and for my servant David's sake. ⁷ And Isaiah said, Take a lump of figs. And they took and laid *it* on the boil, and he recovered.

It was heavy tidings that the King had received from the prophet, Thou shalt die not live.

And we want to consider the response that the King had when this message came, there was a keen recognition of what this message meant and the King's attitude toward death being something he was facing now personally caused him to set his face toward the wall, yea caused him to set his face toward God.

He sought the face of God he prayed earnestly.

The parallel Scripture in Isaiah 38 shares some interesting observations. At that time apparently the prophet came to him and he wrote some things down, the King penned some things that impressed him about death.

He said my age is departed and removed from me as a shepherd's tent, I have cut off like a weaver my life, he will cut me off with pining sickness, [Isaiah 38-12](#).

He recognised that death was the termination point of life, his own life, he took it very seriously and the attitude that Hezekiah took toward death was indicative of the attitude that he took toward life.

There was a sense of sobriety, there was a sense of seriousness that graced his life that caused him to be the man of God that he was and so at this time when he saw the face of God that the Lord saw fit to honour his prayer and extended his life 15 years.

During that 15 year extension time for Hezekiah something changed with him.

We could say that his relationship with God changed, his convictions changed, his attitude toward life, his attitude toward death changed.

We pick up now reading in the same chapter of second Kings 20 at verse 12, notice the dramatic change in these verses.

[2 Kings 20:12-21](#) ¹² At that time Berodachbaladan, the son of Baladan, king of Babylon, sent letters and a present unto Hezekiah: for he had heard that Hezekiah had been sick. ¹³ And Hezekiah hearkened unto them, and shewed them all the house of his precious things, the silver, and the gold, and the spices, and the precious ointment, and *all* the house of his armour, and all that was found in his treasures: there was nothing in his house, nor in all his dominion, that Hezekiah shewed them not. ¹⁴ Then came Isaiah the prophet unto king Hezekiah, and said unto him, What said these men? and from whence came they unto thee? And Hezekiah said, They are come from a far country, *even* from Babylon. ¹⁵ And he said, What have they seen in thine house? And Hezekiah answered, All *the things* that *are* in mine house have they seen: there is nothing among my treasures that I have not shewed them. ¹⁶ And Isaiah said unto Hezekiah, Hear the word of the LORD. ¹⁷ Behold, the days come, that all that *is* in thine house, and that which thy fathers have laid up in store unto this day, shall be carried into Babylon: nothing shall be left, saith the LORD. ¹⁸ And of thy sons that shall issue from thee, which thou shalt beget, shall they take away; and they shall be eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon. ¹⁹ Then said

Hezekiah unto Isaiah, Good *is* the word of the LORD which thou hast spoken. And he said, *Is it not good*, if peace and truth be in my days? ²⁰ And the rest of the acts of Hezekiah, and all his might, and how he made a pool, and a conduit, and brought water into the city, *are* they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah? ²¹ And Hezekiah slept with his fathers: and Manasseh his son reigned in his stead.

We could continue reading and gain some insight into the reign of his son, Manasseh, who reigned for a long, long time and during the majority of his reign he promoted wickedness, idolatry and corruption in the land of Judah. This wicked King followed on the heels of Hezekiah, in fact this young man was born during this 15 year period of time (that the Lord had extended his life by) and it becomes rather apparent that Hezekiah's values had shifted and his keen faith in God, his spiritual lifestyle gave way to a very materialistic lifestyle.

He became interested in things, treasures, possessions, things that perish became an obsession to him, he enjoyed showing other people what he had and whilst he gravitated toward earthly things spiritual realities waned in his life and his very selfish view of life becomes clear in this passage.

But nevertheless Hezekiah faced death.

And the record of Hezekiah at the time of his death is not very positive and the way he lived during his remaining years was a reflection on his attitude toward life and towards death.

And so the Bible record comes to us as a warning, it has something to say about our attitude toward life and death.

God is interested that we have a solemn view of the subject; there are some obvious reasons for that.

In the first place death is solemn because it is a product of sin

Back there in the garden when God had placed Adam and Eve in that perfect setting He gave them the right, the liberty to enjoy all that He had created but God had drawn a line, so far shalt thou go and no further.

God said of this tree you may not eat the fruit thereof He said that if you shall do that you will surely die. [Genesis 2:16-17](#).

Well Adam and Eve opted to disobey the voice of God and they died, yes they died spiritually, fellowship with God was broken but they became dying mortals, they were dying people as was the human race.

And so death reminds us of the depravity of man, it makes death a solemn subject because it takes us back to the very cause of death.

It takes us back to the initial sin, it takes us back to our own sinfulness by nature that we are dying people and death is a reality to us tonight because we are sinful.

Somehow death ought to take on a new image to us when we understand that truth.

Death is solemn because the Scripture says death has passed upon all men because of sin, [Romans 5:12](#).

Every person upon the face of the earth is a dying individual, there are few that escape this life without dying but we tonight are a dying people. We live in the land of the dying and no one escapes that.

It is interesting to read the Bible record that we have in [Genesis 5](#) where God is careful to go down the list, quite a catalogue of individuals that lived and many of them lived a long, long time.

It talks how they begat sons and daughters and then it says the years of their lives were so many and even Methuselah 969 years and he died, he died, every one of them faced death except Enoch in that passage.

As we moved into the new millennium there was a lot of talk about those who had spanned three millenniums by their long life that touched the 19th century, they lived through the 20th century and now moved into the 21st-century and it is amazing to think of someone living to be 106 years old, 108 years, it is a long time but one day the record will be that they died.

It is solemn.

Death has an arrow in its quiver that will strike your heart at last, my heart at last, it will happen, it makes death solemn.

The wise man put it well when he said that there are three things that are never satisfied, yea four things say not, it is enough.

And the first thing that is mentioned is the grave. **Proverbs 30:15-16.**

And in that passage the grave is personified, it comes through as something that beckons for more, the open grave craves to receive another body, it is always ready it is never full, never satisfied and so somewhere tonight there is a grave, a cold dark grave awaiting your body and my body.

When you stop and think about that it makes death a solemn reality.

Death is solemn because it has so many options, there are so many ways in which we can exit this life into death, and it makes death solemn to think about that.

We can consider tonight the highway hazards that we deal with.

We travel on these roads especially interstate highways where you can travel 45, 50, 55 mph and coming in the other direction inches from your vehicle is another vehicle travelling at about the same rate of speed and on these snow and ice clad highways the potential for accident and death is very great. All it takes is a driver that is perhaps drowsy or a driver that is drunk or just a driver that is distracted, a slight turn of the steering wheel and it can be a very tragic accident that leads to the finality of death.

It happens all the time.

And it is good for us to think about that as we climb into our vehicles and head down the road it might be the last time that we do it.

We board jet aircraft with hardly giving a thought that we may not arrive at our destination.

Every now and then big aeroplanes go down, we do a lot of flying as a people and God has been good but it keeps death in right perspective as we consider the fact when we buckle our seatbelt that there might be somebody else that unbuckles it.

We don't know those things. Life is so uncertain.

There are occupational hazards that we deal with.

They tell us that farming is one of the most dangerous occupations that there is, many of us here tonight are farmers, there is a sense in which when we wake up in the morning and head out to the barn we are walking

into a death trap, we are dealing with high voltages, we are dealing with heights, we climb into the silo, climb up into the hay loft, we are dealing with powerful equipment, spinning shafts, gears, pulleys.

We are dealing with equipment that is vulnerable to accidents, tractors upset, and just a host of things that can happen and in our haste sometimes we take chances.

And sometimes folks have done that and it was the last chance that they took.

Now I suppose if we are honest we would have to admit that there were times when we kind of wiped the sweat from our forehead and say under a breath, That was close!

And there are a lot of folks that did not have the privilege of wiping their forehead; it was the last move they made.

It makes death solemn as we think about that, we just never know but every now and then it happens.

It may have been a neighbour, it may have been a relative, it may be someone far away that we have heard about but the chances are that some time it might be us.

It is good to consider it.

Death is solemn because we never know when.

The time and place has not been disclosed to us.

Sometimes the heart stops beating without warning and then we read in the obituary they died unexpectedly.

They were not anticipating a death but it happens so quickly.

Tomorrow I plan to attend a funeral of a young man, relatively young just passed away in his sleep, found dead the next morning. No apparent reason other than his heart just stopped.

It makes death solemn when you think about that it could be anyone of us tonight that we may not wake to see the morning light.

It is not uncommon, we don't know the time and place and it is good that we don't.

I suppose that if somehow if we could have perception to the time and place of our death we would die 1000 times before we would die once but

God has not revealed that to us but the truth is we are dying people and the truth is that it can happen any day.

And so it brings death home to us in a very solemn way.

Death is solemn because it brings us face-to-face with our sovereign God.

In times of unexpected death, in times of drawn out illnesses we cannot deny the fact that God is at work, He is in control of all these events, His stately steppings become evident and we stand back in amazement and marvel at what God hath brought and what God hath allowed, what God has done.

It is good to be reminded of this fact.

Turn with me to Ecclesiastes chapter 8, it just helps us to see how frail and feeble we are as weak mortals and that there is a sovereign God that determines the bounds of our habitation here upon earth.

Sometimes we can rather lightly say that, Well their time was up.

And there may be some truth in that but I think that somehow we have to see the fact that God has decreed the limits of life; God has set the day of death.

Ecclesiastes 8:8: There is no man that hath power over the spirit to retain the spirit; neither hath he power in the day of death: and there is no discharge and that war; neither shall wickedness deliver those that are given to it.

We have no power, when God decrees that death is our lot we will conform to God's will, there will be no resistance, God will accomplish His purpose, and it brings us face-to-face with our sovereign God.

Every time we attend a funeral, every time we see the corpse lying in the casket we must recognise that there is a God in heaven that brought these circumstances to pass.

It is also solemn in the respect that it brings us face-to-face with God, the sovereign God, that it is appointed unto men once to die and after that the judgement, **Hebrews 9:27.**

And so when every individual passes through the door of death the Bible reminds us there will be a personal encounter with God, there is going to be a meeting with the sovereign One.

That makes death solemn, the fact that you and I as frail and as weak as we are will have an interview with the Almighty God after death and death is made solemn tonight in this respect that after death there is no change, death is so final.

Death is solemn because the way a person dies is the way he will be, the way that he is at the moment of his death is the way that he will be for ever. There is no changing, no adjustments.

And so it behoves us to consider the day of our death, to think about it, to give consideration to that reality and to set our houses in order.

None of us have heard the announcement that Hezekiah heard as such, no preacher or a prophet did come to your door and say: Thou shalt die and not live. But there is a real sense in which we all have received that message because we are a dying people and it behoves us to set our house in order.

Be sure that things are right before God.

Death is solemn.

And now we could raise the question: How can we keep it solemn?

It is a great question in a time when so many people celebrate the occasion God calls us to a solemn view of the subject.

One way to keep a solemn is to keep the subject fresh and obviously considering this theme tonight serves that purpose.

So let's turn back to Deuteronomy chapter 32 and I would like to notice verse 29, from God's heart we have these words: O that they were wise, that they understood this that they would consider their latter end!

[Deuteronomy 32:29.](#)

God is saying the wise individuals, the people that think seriously about life will think seriously about death, we will consider the day of our death, we will think about it, it will be on our minds and the more we think about it the more solemn this subject becomes, the more real it becomes.

That is why the Lord gives us the encouragement he does in Ecclesiastes chapter 7.

I would like to read a couple of verses from this chapter, It is better to go to the house of mourning, than to go to the house of feasting: for that is the end of all men; and the living will lay it to his heart. Sorrow is better than laughter: for by the sadness of the countenances the heart is made better the heart of the wise is in the house of mourning; but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth. [Ecclesiastes 7:2-4](#).

How do we keep death a solemn subject?

God says frequent the house of mourning, attend funerals, go where people are grieving, go where you can witness the remains of a loved one. And when we go in consider all that it says here the righteous, the living will lay it to his heart.

We allow it to affect our own view of life and death and so it is a healthy experience for all of us to attend the house of mourning.

We enjoy going to weddings, we appreciate the happy times and I believe that God would have it to be so but it reminds us here that is better for us to go to the house of mourning because it gives us a clear picture of life and a more realistic view of what life is all about that and how we are just passing through, we are dying people.

Isn't it true that if there has not been a funeral in your congregation for a while or you have not heard of someone close to you that passed on we get pretty careless about life, we almost assume that we will keep on living but God brings reminders and we go to the house of mourning and we lay it to heart.

I think we keep death solemn by allowing the Scriptures to speak to us on the subject, the Bible has so much to say, just little reminders here and there that man upon earth is as a flower that appears for a while and he fades and passes on, [Psalm 103:15-16](#).

So short are our days, so transient our life and God uses illustration after illustration to help us see that.

My days are swifter than a weaver's shuttle, [Job 7:6](#), it is just a reminder of how quickly we pass through life and life ends in death, there is a termination point.

We read of those who lived and serve God, who lived and promoted the kingdom, whether it be Moses or David or the Apostle Paul they all died, the record is clear.

I think in our preaching, in our teaching we do well to keep this subject fresh that we bring in the realities of death occasionally just to keep the righteous thinking right.

I found that it also helps to keep death solemn by visiting a graveyard occasionally.

There as you walk among the tombs, among the gravestones it is like walking among monuments of death, here are people that lived and beneath your feet is what is left has gone back to the earth as God has said it would. You look upon the markers and there is a name, names of people that you knew people that you talked with, worshipped with, people you loved and they are gone.

You observe dates on those tombstones, dates are significant.

All of us know one of those dates for ourselves, we know the day of our birth but tonight it is solemn to consider that God knows the other date; God knows what that one says, God knows what our tombstone will read.

It is solemn, it is only realistic to think in those terms.

As we think about death I believe we ought to abstain from all frivolous speech on this subject. Perhaps that goes without saying but I find that even among God's people there is a tendency to speak lightly of the subject of death, to say things that almost are intended to be humorous little stories that speak about someone dying and what they experienced after death.

But death is not a laughing matter, there is nothing funny to say that someone has one foot in the grave and the other foot on a banana peel, it is not a joke.

We do not need to say things to incite laughter on a subject that is so solemn because whenever we do that it is just like stripping the subject of its awesomely solemn content.

Death is serious, death is not a laughing matter, it is solemn, it is the end, it is the beginning of an eternal world.

Somehow we have to see it for what it is and lay all jokes aside.

Looking more specifically at a situation when death has touched one close to us.

I believe there are some things that we can do to preserve an atmosphere of solemnity around the occasion.

We can rejoice that we have public viewings and funerals where we can go and share the grief and we can go to the house of mourning and be reminded of the solemn truth and that we can understand the stately steppings of God and marvel at His presence.

And it is right that we take our children to viewings and funerals to impress upon their minds the reality and the solemnity of death so that they somehow develop a frame of reference that enables them to think right, that they develop a right fear of God as they consider how brief our life is.

As it relates to viewings I think many of us can recall when it was in vogue to go to the funeral home for a viewing, for some they were held in the home of the deceased and some of the facilities were not always very accommodating and in more recent years we have moved away from that practice and by and large we have adopted the practice of gathering in the meeting house for viewing, very appropriate, very suitable, very much in order.

One of the concerns that emerges with this new approach to viewings is that perhaps we have created inconvenience or irreverence.

We gather here in the Lord's house and there is a body lying somewhere in the building, there is a grieving family, and as folks wait their turn to view it is a time and opportunity to visit, and I'm not saying we should not talk at all but I think the chatter, the noise level can probably use some help.

Sometimes there is a ripple of laughter that goes through the group but God calls this the house of mourning, it is not the house of mirth, it is not a time to laugh, it is not a time to socialise as such, this is not a family reunion, this is the presence of death.

It would be far better for us to enter these doors and say absolutely nothing but to sit here and stand here and to ponder the realities of this occasion. To think about the movements of God among us. To ask myself the question, What if it would have been me? That the living may lay it to heart, this is a serious time.

And I think we can strip death of its solemnity by our conduct and our conversation at a time like this. I would encourage us to keep it in sober terms and tones.

As we move into the service songs are sung, the Word of God is declared, it is an opportunity again for the living to lay it to heart.

We do not need to say a lot of good things about the person that has passed on, basically the audience know what they have done and how they have served, the Lord knows it.

I think it is a time to address the people present, to speak to the souls of men, hearts are tender, there is an openness to receive truth at a time like this and let us not miss the opportunity whether it be through the preaching of the Word, whether it be our conversation at the viewing or at the grave side, it is a time to speak about realities and encourage people in their walk with God.

It all helps to keep the subject in its right perspective. It is solemn.

But it is amazing to me how that the loved one can pass away and we can gather in a tearful manner and hear the Word of God proclaimed and the last clod of dirt can fall upon the box and it seems just that quick our minds can shift gears and we can talk about the weather, we can talk about the new baby, we can talk about almost anything but the realities of the occasion.

And by the time we move into the refreshment period it is almost like a general social hall that is if we are not careful to maintain a solemn atmosphere.

I want to encourage us in that.

Death is a time to grieve, it is a time to mourn, time to shed tears.

We have the Bible record of those who mourned for days, for weeks, it was not a laughing time, there were no humorous stories shared.

When devout men carried Stephen to his burial they made great lamentations over him, [Acts 8:2](#) and that is what death is to do for us, we grieve, we sorrow not as those who have no hope but we consider the reality of the whole scene.

It is good for us to lay it to heart.

In summary I would just like to remind us that it is imperative that we think rightly about the subject of death because it does have a direct impact on the way we live just like it did for Hezekiah.

My prayer would be that maintaining death as a solemn subject would make us live in such a way that as James Elliott put it: "When it comes time for us to die all we do is die."

There is tremendous truth in that statement, if we view death right we will view life right and when we die we can die in peace.

Blessed are they that die in the Lord. [Revelation 14:13](#)

The poet put in perspective when he had these words to share:

Thou we adore oh eternal name and humbly we owe to Thee,
 How feeble is our mortal frame what dying worms are we.
 Our wasting lives grow shorter still as months and days increase,
 And every beating pulse we tell leaves but the number less.

The year rolls around and steals away the breath that first it gave
 Whatever we do, whatever we be we are travelling to the grave.
 Danger stands thick through all the ground to push us to the tomb
 And fierce diseases wait around to hurry mortals home.

Infinite joy or wretched woe attends on every breath
 And yet how unconcerned we go up on the brink of death.
 Waken O Lord our drowsy sense to walk this dangerous road
 And if our souls are hurried hence may they be found of God.

May the Lord bless us tonight which may be our last on earth.

*"The prophet that hath a dream, let him tell a dream;
And he that hath my word, let him speak my word faithfully.*

What is the chaff to the wheat? saith the Lord"

Jeremiah 23:28

THE CHAFF AND THE WHEAT

The Lord wasn't asking an entertaining riddle with the question, "What is the chaff to the wheat?" He was deeply burdened and serious. Israel had come to a state where judgment was imminent unless the people came to their senses. So-called prophets were smoothing over and minimizing Israel's decay with their "dreams," and the people were buying it. In this atmosphere, the wheat, the truth and heart of God's law, was ignored. Instead, they gave ear to misleading vain dreams, chaff that ran counter to God's word. Weightless and pesky, the vain and valueless things with which Satan likes to dilute true religion and corrupt sound practice are like chaff. The Lord's question, then, was "Why do my people mix chaff with the wheat?"

When grain is thrashed, the chaff becomes evident. But a farmer is interested in clean, chaff-free grain. So when the threshing process takes the chaff away, there is no sense of loss, rather satisfaction. The good grain is now uncontaminated without worthless encumbrances. This is a good illustration of the continuing sanctification in Christian living. On the Day of Judgment, the separation of the chaff from the wheat will be absolute, Luke 3:17.

An experienced farmer knows the importance of properly setting the sieves and wind blast of his threshing machine. He makes adjustments until he gets good dean grain in the bin. His goal is all the grain with the least amount of chaff possible. If he opens the sieves too much, more chaff will be retained. If he closes them too far or applies too much air blast, good grain will be thrown out the back of the harvester. Likewise, the Holy Ghost moves upon the believer's spirit and soul, 1 Thessalonians 5:23, to garner the good grain. His faithful counsel and reproof exclude the chaff—needless, vain, and fleshly things—as much as possible. It has no value when compared to the grain.

It is a disheartening inclination of man to corrupt the original intent and purpose of something pure and simple by superfluous additions. Bits of this and pieces of that are added here and there until the real purpose tends to be overlooked and forgotten. The chaff obscures the wheat. This was the case in Israel when Jesus came teaching the gospel. But John the Baptist said Jesus would have His "fan in his hand" and would "thoroughly purge his floor" Luke 3:17. Christ often had to first blow away the chaff. This caused consternation and resistance and provoked many false accusations against the Lord.

Unless we are zealously affected for the faith, Galatians 4:18, we will hold to "chaff" with tenaciousness. A close analysis of chaff shows that it is usually self-serving, at the expense of the purity and simplicity of the faith. One must conclude that there is a root that taps the fleshly spirit realm in this matter. When this spirit prevails, the faith is not something to sacrifice for, and the beautiful fruit of temperance is lost. Galatians 5:23.

Pure religion is a scriptural belief and the proper practice of that belief. The chaff problem usually shows itself first in the practice part, or the actual living of the faith. Unconverted people may not understand the ordinances and doctrines of the Word, but the humility and sincerity demonstrated when God's people conscientiously live them touches many. Practicing the principles and ordinances of the Word, with the good grain undefiled by chaff, speaks of godliness.

The practice of pure religion is not an end in itself, like setting it on a pedestal for one's own admiration. True religion redounds to the praise of God and reminds men of their need of salvation. For these reasons, sincere believers rejoice in the wheat and eschew the chaff.

Thinking about the beautiful ordinance of matrimony, and then all the activities that go with a wedding today, sparked the inspiration for this article. The doctrine of holy matrimony is one of the principal stones in the walls of the church. The "wheat" of this ordinance is preached and taught. It is in the activities surrounding the wedding where chaff is wont to appear. The Lord's question to Israel, "What is the chaff to the wheat?" seems fitting for us also when applied to this setting.

God has given the church a most precious and impressive way to contract marriages. Compared to the way the world does, it is unique, befitting a peculiar people, 1 Peter 2:9. The simplicity and purity of the church's manner of bringing about a marriage is good grain. It has spoken to many hearts that walk in another way. Certainly, we have nothing to be ashamed of; rather we are duty bound to praise the Lord for His provision to the church.

The record of marriages in the church that endure until death doth sunder the union has been good. One could say it has been nearly perfect. Of more recent times, there is a growing concern that some homes are not as sound as they ought to be. Sadly, some have failed. While much more effort and activity is put into a wedding today than years ago, some of the additions are chaff and have subtracted from the wheat. This raises a question whether there is a correlation between these developments. We need more emphasis on the fear of God (wheat), preventing the spirit of having fun, bestowing and seeking honour one of another, and light sociality (chaff) that subtracts from the sacredness of the occasion.

If the Lord were to come on the scene today with His "fan ... in his hand ... and throughly purge his floor," would we resist Him like the scribes and Pharisees did? God forbid. Let us look at the matter realistically, with a burden for the true faith. If we sincerely seek God's highest honour and glory, and the best foundation for our new homes, we will value the wheat and be glad that the chaff is taken away. The Holy Ghost knows how to set the sieves and temper the wind blast so that all the grain is saved and the chaff excluded.

"He that soweth the good seed is the Son of man; The field is the world; the good seed are the children of the kingdom; but the tares are the children of the wicked one; The enemy that sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the world; and the reapers are the angels.... Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father" Matthew 13:37-43.

Brother Gladwin



PROOF OF CITIZENSHIP

What makes one a citizen of Zion? What keeps him a citizen of Zion? In this world, we are normally citizens of the country where we were born. We can also become citizens by being born of citizens or marrying citizens, as well as by the process of naturalization.

Likewise, possibly some try to become citizens of Zion by other ways if they are not born into it. But to be born is the only way to become a citizen of Zion. Jesus said, "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" John 3:3. "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God" John 3:5. Our birth certificate, the gift of the Holy Ghost, is valid as long as the seal is not broken. "And grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption" Ephesians 4:30.

In today's world, many are claiming citizenship in Zion without the proper credentials. Jesus said, "Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? ... And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you" Matthew 7:22-23. Man is very able to believe that he is accepted of his Creator, as we see the world over. There are millions with false hopes based on many, many differing faiths. Can we be ensnared as others? Can we, by human reasoning and being lukewarm because of culture religion, succumb to a false hope? History would suggest it is entirely possible and, should we forebodingly say, probable.

What has the true evidence of discipleship been through the ages, as well as today? As we look back to the martyr brethren, the early church, to John the Baptist, and to Jesus, the message was, "Repent." What is repentance, and what does it do for us? One thing it does is establish our citizenship in Zion. Sometimes we hear the statement, "He or she had such a good experience, but it just doesn't seem to bring much change in their convictions about carnality and worldliness." Are we putting too much emphasis on emotional experiences and not enough on a changed life and the true fellowship of the saints? As we read about our martyr brethren and the church, they are nearly silent concerning experiences, but they speak of taking up the cross, living a godly life separate from the world in purity and holiness. Often they required a substantial time of proving godliness and true Christian fellowship prior to acceptance.

A Roman Catholic theologian, Franz Agricola, had this to say about the Anabaptists: "As concerns their outward public life they are irreproachable. No lying, deception, swearing, strife, harsh language, no intemperate eating and drinking, no outward personal display is found among them. But humility, patience, uprightness, neatness, honesty, temperance, strait forwardness in such measure that one would suppose that they had the Holy Spirit of God."

Such a testimony would indicate that the Anabaptists had the oneness of the Spirit, of conviction, love of the brotherhood, no resistance, were teachable, these are accompanied by the sweet fellowship of the saints. These are proof of citizenship in Zion and of discipleship.

Many people today would claim to have the Holy Spirit, but they would not feel it necessary to be in unity with their fellow church member. They can justify themselves by claiming a personal relationship with God even though there is a lack of fellowship with their brother. In nominal Christianity today, it is not expected for one to lose his identity in the body of Christ. He can retain his individuality in doctrine and conviction as long as he believes in some basics.

But this is not the vision of the Church. If we have resistance in our hearts and cannot submit our opinions and wills to God and His church, we are not continuing steadfastly in the "apostles' doctrine and fellowship," as was said of the early church, Acts 2:42. Would we not conclude that the close fellowship of the saints is the best proof of being a citizen of Zion? Christian fellowship would be the sharing of goods, sharing of struggles, burdens, and personal convictions.

How beautiful is Jesus' prayer for us in this regard: "And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one: I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me" John 17:22-23. Also, Paul, writing to the Corinthians and to us pleads, "Now I beseech YOU, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment" 1 Corinthians 1:10.

In conclusion, how can I claim to be a citizen of Zion and not be in fellowship with the body, my congregation, and my brethren? *Brother Arlo*

THOROUGH IN ALL HIS WORKING

God is thorough in all His working—He does not leave His purposes unfinished. God's view is from eternity to eternity. He inhabits eternity where all is perfection, Isaiah 57:15. Only those who are made perfect in Christ shall dwell in eternity with God. The grace of Calvary does a thorough work of preparing one for that eternal dwelling.

Jesus said, "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect" Matthew 5:48. Christ also instructed a certain young man, "If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast" Matthew 19:21. Our Lord insisted on a thorough work concerning dealing with the flesh. To be "justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus" Romans 3:24 is to come into a standing with God in which one is just as though he had not sinned. What a thorough work of grace!

John the Baptist clearly prophesied the manner in which Christ would work. Speaking of Him, John said, "Whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly [thoroughly] purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire" Matthew 3:12. As the Lord calls men from a life of sin to a life of righteousness, He surely does a thorough work.

Sanctification is the continuing work of God's grace in the Christian's heart and life. The Holy Spirit continues the thorough work began upon being justified. This sanctification is a must if the believer is to maintain his justified standing with the Father. Like justification, sanctification is by the grace of God from the cross and requires the individual's cooperation and submission. The apostle Paul, again and again, points out the believer's responsibility in this area. He says that they should "put off concerning the former conversation the old man ... And ... put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness" Ephesians 4:22-24. God needs man's thorough cooperation and compliance to prepare him for heaven's perfection.

Due to the weakness of the flesh, we tend to stop short of thoroughly dealing with our self-life, Matthew 26:41. There is a lesson for us in the early history of God's people. When the children of Israel were to conquer

Canaan, God instructed them to do a thorough job of driving out the native inhabitants. God said through Moses, "And when the Lord thy God shall deliver them before thee; thou shalt smite them, and utterly destroy them; thou shalt make no covenant with them, nor shew mercy unto them" Deuteronomy 7:2. Here is a crucial point.

As the sinner heeds God's call to repentance and is justified he enlists in the Lord's host. The battle to possess the true Promised Land lies ahead. Under the Captain's leadership, the command is to go forth and fight the enemy and "make no covenant with them."

Joshua and the people took Jericho and eventually Ai, which were no small victories. "And when the inhabitants of Gibeon heard what Joshua had done unto Jericho and Ai, They did work wilily ... and said unto him, and to the men of Israel, We be come from a far country: now therefore make yea league with us" Joshua 9:3-6. Many newborn children of God have experienced something very similar.

After Satan's initial defeat when one is born again through the power of the blood of Christ, Satan makes another approach, but "wilily." His suggestion is that the Christian should relax in his vigilance and warfare and settle for what he or she has gained. "Now therefore make a league with us" was the Gibeonites suggestion to Joshua. That is still Satan's pitch to us today. Those "inhabitants" desiring a league today may be remaining spirits, attitudes, and areas of carnality that should be dealt with by continuing in sanctification. God would do a thorough work.

It is noteworthy that time and again in Israel's history, when faced by an enemy, God was consulted as to whether they should "go up" against the foe. The Christian should be careful to ask the Lord's counsel regarding his life and not lean to his own understanding or compare himself with another one's standard. Under this type of reasoning, one is liable to the deception to which Joshua fell prey. "And the men took of their victuals, and asked not counsel at the mouth of the Lord. And Joshua made peace with them, and make league with them, to let them live" Joshua 9:14-5." "Woe to the rebellious children, saith the Lord, that take counsel, but not of me; and that cover with a covering, but not of my spirit, that they may add sin to sin" Isaiah 30:1.

What could be the cause when one lacks personal conviction regarding matters pertaining to Christian living? God does not press everyone into the same mould and opinion, but this does not mean that He tolerates carnality. If one finds himself a little on the fringes of the general concern among God's people, it may be that he has made a league with a carnal spirit. When that happens, the warfare ceases on that particular point. A relaxation in the warfare against self brings about a certain "peace." But there may be an even broader effect that eventually influences one's general view of self-denial and cross bearing. This person becomes independent and fails to seek counsel of the Lord. Initially there may well have been a certain direction through the conscience, as appears to have been the case with Joshua. "And the men of Israel said unto the Hivites, Peradventure ye dwell among us; and how shall we make a league with you?" Joshua 9:7. The question, "What's wrong with it?" is generally man-consciously orientated and therefore not an honest inquiry of God's will. If one persists in this approach, the grace of sanctification will be frustrated.

"For who hath despised the day of small things?" Zechariah 4:10. "Take us the foxes, the little foxes, that spoil the vines: for our vines have tender grapes" Song of Solomon 2:15. Let Christians beware lest they come to terms and finally accept as tolerable disobedience in little omissions and commissions. Joshua and the men of Israel thought their visitors came from so far away that they were hardly of any consequence. Therefore they were willing to make a league with them.

God will do a thorough work in any person if he or she is willing to be just as thorough. The Lord will not be able to make of us the person we should be if we excuse ourselves by saying, "That's just the way I am." Are we willing to disannul those leagues that have been made? This is certainly not pleasant for the flesh, for it means that then the warfare will begin anew. But victory is promised to the faithful.



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