

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

From The Editor's Desk.

“In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.” 1 Thessalonians 5:18

In the last year or so there have been occasions where being thankful was probably the furthest attitude from our thoughts. Only by reading the scriptures, heeding the word of God, were we again brought to realise that being thankful is not really an option. Consider just for a moment how Christ Jesus suffered physically and emotionally so that we could be saved from an eternity of suffering. The words expressed by the author of this hymn can and should be an echo of our expression of thanks to God. Perhaps upon reflection you may be able to add your own “Thanks to God” for your own particular experiences and blessings.

May the Lord bless your thanksgiving which honours Him.

J.van Loon.

Thanks to God for my Redeemer, Thanks for all Thou dost provide!
 Thanks for times now but a memory, Thanks for Jesus by my side!
 Thanks for pleasant, balmy springtime, Thanks for dark and stormy fall!
 Thanks for tears by now forgotten, Thanks for peace within my soul!

Thanks for prayers that Thou hast answered, Thanks for what Thou dost deny!
 Thanks for storms that I have weathered, Thanks for all Thou dost supply!
 Thanks for pain, and thanks for pleasure, Thanks for comfort in despair!
 Thanks for grace that none can measure, Thanks for love beyond compare!

Thanks for roses by the wayside, Thanks for thorns their stems contain!
 Thanks for home and thanks for fireside, Thanks for hope, that sweet refrain!
 Thanks for joy and thanks for sorrow, Thanks for heav'nly peace with Thee!
 Thanks for hope in the tomorrow, Thanks through all eternity!

August L. Storm, 1862-1914.

MINISTER'S CORNER.**Anabaptist Distinctiveness**

From a sermon by: Dale Horst, Blue Rock Mennonite Church.

To lay a foundation for the message, I invite you to turn to 1 Peter 2. In this chapter the Christian is likened to four different things. First of all in verse 2, the Christian is likened to a "newborn babe." As a new born babe desires milk, so the Christian desires "the sincere milk of the word." Not only so that he simply knows it and can answer questions about it, but he desires the sincere word that he, "*may grow thereby.*"

Secondly, in verses 5-8, the Christian is likened to "*lively stones*". The picture that is drawn in verses 5 to 8 is that of a stone mason who is building a building of stone. He picks up a stone and chisels away at it. Finally, if he is not able to get it to fit, he will throw it aside and pick up another stone and start chiselling at that one. That is the way the Jewish elders and the Pharisees related to Christ. When Christ came, the Jews and the Pharisees could not get Him to "fit" their line of thought. Therefore, they chiselled away at Him and finally they cast Him aside because He did not seem to fit. That is the way a lot of people are having church today. Jesus does not seem to fit with their program. Therefore, they throw out the Gospel and go on with their way of having church and leave Christ out of the picture.

However, Jesus never was intended to be a stone that was made to fit. Instead Jesus was the Chief Cornerstone and that is the Lord's doings. Everyone must be fit to the Lord if they will be a part of the Church.

In verse 11, the Christian is likened to "*strangers and pilgrims.*" As strangers and pilgrims we are living the Christian life in a world that is sinful and hostile. That world is coming at us with various fronts. It comes at us on economic, philosophical, medical, and technological fronts. We could go on with defining the various fronts that the world throws up to us. While we are living here, we really do not belong here. We are strangers and pilgrims. While we are living here, we need to "abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul." As Christians we must never be comfortable here because once we become comfortable here, we lose our hope. We lose our prospects, because our focus is too low. Therefore we live as strangers and pilgrims, and the world misunderstands us. Nevertheless, "in

the day of visitation," (verse 12) wickedness will be condemned, the righteous will be vindicated and God will be glorified.

In verse 25, the Christian is likened to *"sheep going astray; but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of [our] souls."* As Christians, we follow the Good Shepherd, obey His commands, and we follow His example. We follow with great care because we "were as sheep going astray," and are zealous lest we go astray again.

Where we have people who are so hungering and thirsting for the Word, are abstaining from fleshly lusts that war against the soul, and are zealous in doing what is right lest they go astray, there we will have a peculiar people. I would like to use as our text verse this morning 1 Peter 2:9-10. *"But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light: (10) Which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God: which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy."* They are different — a people who are set apart. They are not only a people who are different, they are a peculiar people who are distinctive which means that their different-ness is not merely an oddity. Their different-ness is an identifying characteristic that marks them where they belong. The Christian is not merely an odd person. He is a Christian. He bears the marks of Christ. The difference that is seen in his life marks him as a disciple — "a peculiar people, zealous of good works" (Titus 2:14).

This message looks at Anabaptist distinctiveness. As I prepared for this message, I recalled a conversation that I had with a man from another state a number of years ago. He recognized that I represented a religious group, and so he asked the question, "What religious denomination do you represent?" Of course, my answer was, "The Mennonites." Then, he asked, "Well, who are the Mennonites, are they like the Lutherans? Are they like the Presbyterians? Are they like the Anglicans? Who are you like?" "Well," I said, "we are different from all of them." Then his next question obviously was, "But how?" This message is an effort to try to define what it is that sets the Anabaptists (or the Mennonites) away from all other denominations that are classified under the name of "Christian."

We have been blessed with an Anabaptist heritage and tradition that we do not want to lose. This is not merely because our Anabaptist tradition and history is historical, but because it is also Scriptural. Therefore, we

want to go back to the Swiss brethren of 1525 and the Dutch Mennonites of 1536 and discover what it was that set them apart from the main flow of Christianity of that time. We are going back to that time because in that era there was a dividing of ways amongst the broader picture of Christianity. There were several Christian denominations that rose up over that time. What is it that causes Anabaptism to stand apart from the rest of the denominations of that era?

There might be some here who would object to the idea of looking at the subject of Anabaptist distinctiveness and say that we would rather look at Scriptural distinctiveness. I can respect that concern because we do not look at the Anabaptists as a perfect model of church life. They were men. Instead we go back to the Scriptures and look at the teachings of Christ and the work of the apostles in the Early Church and their teachings in order to discover a perfect model for what Christian living and church life ought to be. Nevertheless, there is value in seeing how those in the past interpreted and lived the Scriptures. It has been observed that when a person separates himself from his Anabaptist roots, it is not long before he is no longer Scriptural. Therefore, we want to be historical. We also want to be Scriptural.

We observe that many who share roots with us in 16th century Anabaptism have gone afield (elsewhere). While we could look at the various directions where they have gone, I would like to mainly focus our attention on two of them. On the one hand there are those who share with us Anabaptist roots who have gone afield in the direction of Pietism with its emphasis on experience and testimony. The Pietists are more concerned with personal salvation than the outworking of salvation and the maintaining of a pure Church. They emphasize the conversion experience and give testimony of how sinful they were, how they came to a terrible consciousness of sin, how they had an exhaustive mental labour within themselves and finally came to a crisis conversion. Now they have a glorious testimony of peace in their hearts because they have been saved. They emphasize the presence and work of the Holy Spirit in their lives and the proof that the Spirit is present in their lives they would tell you is the spiritual sensation that they sense within themselves. They testify how the Spirit leads them in daily activities. They see church as a gathering together of redeemed ones who have a parallel experience and therefore come together in order to share their parallel experiences in Christ. They respect the Spirit's presence

and work in their lives as the ultimate authority, this means that in the extreme that respect even undermines the authority of the Scriptures because of the concept that because the Spirit of God dwells in my heart, I have the entirety of truth right here. Therefore, there is the diminishing of the Scriptures.

The Anabaptists believed in the new birth. Also, the Anabaptists believed in the individual conscience, they believed in church life, and they believed in the Holy Spirit indwelling. What we have described stands afield from Anabaptism.

On the other hand, there is a group of people who share with us in 16th century Anabaptism but who have swerved to the side of Protestantism. The basic thought of Protestantism is that man is, and always will be, a sinner and that living and life, is and will be, a failure. "The Gospel is an impossible demand." They emphasize that our only hope in living is because Christ died for us. Therefore, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved" (Acts 16:31), and we are, "justified by faith," (Romans 3:28; 5:1; Galatians 3:24). Whereas Pietism's emphasis is focused on the work of the Holy Spirit, the Protestant focus is on work of Jesus Christ who shed His blood for our atonement.

The Anabaptists believed in the sinfulness of mankind and they taught justification by faith, but they also believed in practical Christianity where doing God's will was an unquestioned possibility as well as a necessity. Therefore, what we have described as Protestantism stands afield from Anabaptism.

Now, having looked at Pietism and Protestantism we want to look at several areas where the Anabaptists are distinctive.

1) The Anabaptists are distinctive in their view of the Scriptures. To the Anabaptists, the Scriptures were the sole authority. It was not only to be believed, where we say "yes, it is true," but the Scriptures were to be obeyed. It is true that the Protestant reformers did seem to place a lot of emphasis on the Scriptures. Luther translated the Bible because he wanted every German and every plow boy to be able to read the Scriptures. Zwingli, when he was preaching in the church of Zurich, became convinced that he must preach from the Bible. Therefore, starting with Matthew and going verse by verse, he preached directly from the Word. He spoke against such things as hypocrisy, laziness, idleness, and too much eating and drinking. He insisted on repentance and love and faithfulness

because he was preaching the Bible. Finally though, when he was confronted with the question, "When will you start living out in church life and in Christian life, what the Bible teaches?" He said, "We will wait until the State gives us approval to do so."

Therefore, what was the sole authority?

In contrast, for the Anabaptists the Scriptures were the sole authority. They were most radical in viewing the Scriptures that way. They placed little emphasis on classical creeds. It is true we could look at the Dortrecht Confession of Faith, we could look at the Schleithem Confession of Faith, but those confessions of faith do not define a theological system for the Anabaptists. Rather, they define in clear points some of the questionable issues that were addressed in the era which those were written. Really, the concept that the Anabaptists had, and the questions that the Anabaptists answered about what is holy, they needed to answer by having such a concept of the sole authority of the Scriptures.

If someone would ask the Anabaptists, "What is holy?" they would say there is no such thing as an holy object. Therefore, they put away the relics. There is no such thing as a holy place. They put away the concept that if you go to a certain place there you will be holy. They put away the concept of a person being a holy person apart from the fact that this person has yielded himself to full obedience to Christ and His Word. That is what makes a holy person. Therefore, in order to be holy they searched the Scriptures to see what God's will was for their lives and they lived that way. On that basis they were able to call themselves holy brethren.

The Anabaptists were most radical in viewing the Scriptures as the sole authority. They did not content themselves with finding in the Scriptures comfort for fallen men. They took the Word in entirety. They found the comfort and the encouragement that were there for sinners but they also found commands to go and live by. The Scriptures gave them a new life. That life, though dangerous, was their only hope. Therefore, they searched the Scriptures to know how to live and they lived that way. The Anabaptists were "doers of the word, and not hearers only" (James 1:22).

In looking at their view of the Scriptures it is important for us to understand that the Anabaptists took a Christ centred view of the Scriptures which means that they did not see the Bible as a "flat Bible." Rather, they saw the Old Testament pointing forward to Christ and they saw the teachings of the New Testament in light of the Gospel. That is a Christ centred

view of the Scriptures. They rejected, as God's Word for their day, anything that did not agree with the life and teachings of Jesus Christ, even if it was in the Bible.

In contrast, the reformers looked at the Old Testament and they could find reasons to justify why they martyred Christians, and why they martyred the Anabaptists. The Anabaptists could have done that too, but the Anabaptists looked at all of the Scriptures in light of the teachings and the life of Christ. In doing so they read the Scriptures that way. That is the way they interpreted the Bible. If there was something that applied in the old dispensation, where Christ said, "But, I say unto you," they followed Christ. That is a Christ centred view of the Scriptures. The Anabaptists were distinctive in their acceptance of the authority of the Scriptures and in their obedience to it.

2) The Anabaptists were distinctive in their view of Christ. Everyone, religious or non religious needs to answer the question, "What think ye of Christ" (Matthew 22:42)? There are various answers which people can give to that question. One person can say, "Well, He is a prophet. He is God's messenger. He is a moral teacher sent from God." A person can also say, "He is God and He must be worshipped."

That is the emphasis that is behind a lot of what the Catholics do. The Mass, the chanting, the sprinkling of holy water, the kissing of the book, the veneration, various ceremonies, the stained glass windows are all largely an effort to bring worship to Christ. The cross, the crucifix and all, are used in an effort to bring worship to Christ.

We could also say, "He is the Saviour. The sin bearer in whom we have forgiveness and are justified." That is necessary for the cleansing of past sins. That is the answer the Protestants give to the question, "What think ye of Christ?" They emphasize the greatness of our salvation, with its access to God and fellowship with Christ, and look at it as the essence of Christianity. They sing such songs as "Alleluia 'tis done, I believe on the Son. I am saved by the blood of the crucified one." For them that is the essence of Christian living. Justification by faith becomes so great that holiness of life, obedience to Christ, and transformation into Christ's image are all minimized. "What think ye of Christ?"

The Anabaptist's view of Christ was that He is everything. Christ is a messenger. Hebrews 1:1-2 says, "God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these

last days spoken unto us by His Son." They saw Him as the Saviour. Romans 5:1 says, "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." They saw Jesus as messenger. They saw Him as the Saviour, but they also saw Him as the King. They believed that His disciples must follow His example and must do what He says. Therefore, they believed that God's will for us is revealed in the life and teachings of Christ. The life and teachings of Christ became the base line against which they evaluated all of their activities. His life and His teaching were considered together. To focus on His example would have opened the door for the "What Would Jesus Do?" mentality where we try to think now, looking at Jesus' example, what would He do if He were facing life as I am facing life?" The Anabaptists did not only look at His example. The Anabaptists also looked as His teaching, and faced life not with the supposed What Would Jesus Do? mentality but, "What has Jesus commanded us?" He is King. He is Lord. His life is our example. In it we see God's will, but through His teachings, we also know God's will, and what Christ has commanded us, that is what we live by.

We could summarize the Anabaptist view of Christ and say like Menno Simons said, "Whoever boasts that he is a Christian, the same must walk as Christ walked." He is Lord. He is our Saviour. He is our Messenger. He is "King of kings, and Lord of lords." (1 Timothy 6:15; Revelation 19:16) They saw God's authority in Christ and gave their lives in obedience to Him. The result was that their lives were distinctive. They were Christians following after Christ.

3) The Anabaptists had a distinctive view of the Christian. The Anabaptists accepted that no man was without sin. All had sinned. All needed Christ's atonement. Due to man's sinfulness and hopelessness, they rejoiced in the Gospel of Jesus Christ that brought salvation. However, to them, a Christian was more than one whose sins were forgiven. The Christian was one who followed Jesus in daily life. To them, saving faith and life went hand in hand. To them faith and practice were inseparable. To profess a new birth meant to live a new life. To claim cleansing meant to lay off the sins of the flesh and to "put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness" (Ephesians 4:24). To be a disciple was to do what the Master said. To take up the cross meant to be in conflict with the world, and the world's ways, to "Fight the good fight of faith" (1 Timothy 6:12), and to gladly take the buffeting from the world.

For the Anabaptists, Christian discipleship was a way of living and it affected every area of life. It affected their home life, business life, and their social life. Although they believed in salvation through Christ and justification by faith, we do not find them speaking so much about that. Instead, if we read Anabaptist writings, we will find them speaking mostly about keeping the commandments of Christ and obedience, because without obedience there is no discipleship. That is a concept that we must keep alive if we will keep alive Anabaptist concepts in our churches today. The Protestants value their testimony of salvation. The Pietists value their testimony of the Spirit's leading. However, a person living contrary to the law of Christ is not a disciple no matter how glorious his testimony of what God has done for him may be.

The Anabaptists lived under the law of Christ. As a result of that there were times when they were accused of having a works religion. People accused them of looking at the New Testament similar to what the Old Testament law was. It is simply that it is a different way of describing the Law. To bring yourself under the requirements of the New Testament is to bind yourself under Law like the Old Testament saints were bound under law. The Anabaptists replied that we believe in atonement through the blood of Christ. There is nothing that we can do that would make us holy before God, except for the fact that Christ died for us.

Without His shed blood there is no forgiveness. We are forgiven. However, that forgiveness is not merely a cleaning up of our experience, where God no longer sees our sins anymore. Rather, that cleaning up is that liberating of our hearts so that we can live a life that is acceptable before God. The Protestants emphasized the atoning and the cleansing. The Anabaptists emphasized, yes, there needs to be a cleansing, but there needs to be new birth. There must be a change of heart within so that as we go out our lives can be accepted of God. Perhaps we could say it best by using the words of Romans 12:1. After outlining the doctrine of salvation, the apostle Paul says, "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service." Presenting our bodies speaks of our daily life. How is it acceptable to God? It is acceptable to God because Christ first gave Himself so that our sacrifice could be acceptable.

Therefore, it is not that we are pushing ourselves into the Kingdom of heaven. The Anabaptists were sometimes accused of being "heaven storm-

ers," which means they were trying to push themselves into God's favour. No, that is not the way they looked at it. They looked at it as God working through Christ to provide a propitiation for them, to make it acceptable and possible for them to be accepted with God, acceptable of God. "Transformed by the renewing of your mind."

The question could be raised, "What did the Anabaptists believe about the Christian in sin?" Well, they did not believe that a person could live in sin and that grace would cover it. If they would have believed that, it would have spared them much suffering. They could have continued in the Roman Catholic church doing what they knew was wrong but God would take care of that and they would not have needed to suffer at all. But God forbid, instead they committed their necks to the sword so that they could live in obedience to Christ's Word. They willingly suffered because they knew that the grace of God did not overlook disobedience.

Neither did they believe in sinless perfection beyond the reach of sin. Instead, they recognized that they "were as sheep going astray; but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of [their] souls" (I Peter 2:25). They faced the responsibility to earnestly walk the narrow way and to take heed and to examine themselves, "lest any root of bitterness [spring] up troubling them]," and any of them be defiled (Hebrews 12:15).

The Anabaptists believe that the Christian had help to live godly in this present world. First of all, the Christian had the Word, and the Christian had the Holy Spirit — Christ within, but also the Christian had the Church. The Anabaptists believed that discipleship and obedience to Christ and His Word could only be realized in the context of a faithful gathered Church.

4) The Anabaptist distinctive view of the Church. It is true that the Anabaptists gave an individual emphasis to Christian living. The salvation of our soul does have a personal meaning. However, an individual's faith attains meaning only in the context of a believing community. "A person," the Anabaptists said, "cannot be a Christian by himself." That concept is foreign to the individualism of our culture. It is being threatened by the individualism of our culture, but Jesus' followers are not on their own. They are not guided merely by the sincerity of their personal motives. Rather, the Christians take their cues from the Bible as mediated by the community of God's people, the Church. Here, he finds the help of others to walk the narrow way in the community of faith, under the Lordship of Jesus Christ, the threatened disciple discovers how he is to live and act. In the brother-

hood he finds wisdom and helps to moderation, discipline and love to help him as he endeavours to follow Christ in this hostile world.

The concept that one can only be a Christian in the community of believers, in the Church, is a distinctive Anabaptist concept. Protestants and Catholics emphasize that church life is to help men to be saved. Anabaptists not only concerned themselves with helping men to salvation (though that was a part of their work) they also concerned themselves with keeping one another in the fellowship of the saints and without blemish unto the coming of the Lord. To the Anabaptists the church was not merely a place where we come together to hear preaching. Therefore, they did not call their places of meeting a "church." This was a meetinghouse. Instead, the Church was the people. They saw the Church as a body of believers endeavouring to grow in Christ likeness. The linkage between the members in that body was not an incidental linkage that we happen to bump together because we live close to each other and we will worship together on Sunday morning.

The Church was not an incidental coming together. Neither was the church merely a free association of adults who recognized a similar sinfulness, a similar salvation through faith, a similar religious experience that we have something in common. The Church was not merely a free association of adults who had a similar experience. Neither was it a mere social curiosity, where here we all come together, we all enjoy agriculture, we all enjoy working hard, we enjoy the principles of simple frugality and so we are all here on one level. It was not simply another community within the larger community doing something religious in a slightly different way. That was not what the Church was. Instead the Church was the community of those who deliberately resolved to follow Christ and to live out His will here on the earth.

The church was where there were people who realized they were sheep gone astray and needed to return to the Shepherd and Bishop of their souls. They knew that they not only needed to straighten out a relationship this way [God to man] but they also had to straighten out a relationship this way [man to man]. Until one has both relationships straightened out, he is not saved. Therefore, we cannot separate the concept of one becoming a Christian, and becoming a member of the Church, because one is not saved until he has identified and has been added to the Church. The Lord adds to the Church those that should be saved.

This community was made up of those who resolved to live, in the present, God's will for man. That made the Church, as the Anabaptists understood it, the Kingdom of God, where God reigns. This was the holy city.

Here there was concord. Here there was holiness. Here they were "follow[ing] peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord" (Hebrews 12:14). This was the New Jerusalem come "down from God out of heaven" (Revelation 21:2). This was the place God had chosen out of all the nations of the earth to put His name there. That was their concept of the Church. This was a "chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that [they] should shew forth the praises of Him who hath called you out of darkness into His marvellous light: (10) Which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God: which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy" (1 Peter 2:9, 10). This was "the pillar and ground of the truth" (1 Timothy 3:15). This was the lantern of righteousness "in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom [they shone] as lights in the world" (Philippians 2:15). That was the Anabaptist's concept of the Church.

With this distinctive concept of the Church the Anabaptists emphasized several things.

A) They emphasized voluntary membership. No one was coerced to join the Church. Anyone who was in the church who chose to no longer be united with them was free to leave. Of course, they preached the Gospel and they called sinners out of the world and gave warning. Nevertheless, they believed that church life was a voluntary institution. They taught that entrance into the Kingdom called for repentance and saving faith. That was the way in. "Enter in at the strait gate" (Luke 13:24), they preached. "Enter in at the strait gate and that gate is so narrow that you must hang all your flesh on the gate posts." For the Anabaptists that meant actually giving up their bodies. There were very few of them that came through with even their bodies. That was their concept of the Church. In the Church was a group of people who had all left their flesh hanging on the gate post, and here we do what Christ says. Here we live for Christ. Here we live for each other in living for Him. That was the Church.

B) They taught believer's baptism. When a person believed the Gospel and repented he was baptized upon the confession of his faith. However, that baptism was not seen as an ordinance for cleansing flesh, or washing away sin, but was "the answer of a good conscience toward God" (1 Peter

3:21). That baptism signified a change of life by the virtue of Christ's death. That baptism was not an individualistic right, where a person knelt down and he testified of his faith and then he was baptized and now he had a relationship with the Lord because he had been baptized. Baptism, to the Anabaptists was not an individualistic right. Baptism meant that this person not only was committing himself to Christ, but was also committing himself to the body of Christ. In baptism, he was declaring himself ready to participate in dealing with sin in a new and redemptive way.

He declared himself to be one with the body, with all of the binding and loosing that the body performed in his life. To the Anabaptists the binding and the loosing of the body as it dealt with sin was an integral part of being the body of Christ. He committed himself to submit to Christ and His Word and agreed to give and receive active help in living out the teachings of Matthew 18, which was highly emphasized in Anabaptists writings. Baptism to them was not divorced from Church membership.

The emphasis of Pietism in our day is that one can be baptized and full of the Holy Ghost and then he decides which church he wants to be a part of. Not to the Anabaptists. For the Anabaptists, baptism and Church membership were never divorced. When one was baptized, he was baptized into the family of God. When he gave himself to Christ, he gave himself to Christ's Church. That was not a vague large body out here some place that now he is a part of Christ's Church universal. The Anabaptists saw themselves as baptized into the local congregation and submitted themselves to the binding and the loosing of that local congregation. That was their concept of the life of the Church.

I would like to look at Acts 4:32. This is the Anabaptist's concept of the Church and it is Scriptural. "And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common." That one heart and one soul represent what the Anabaptists believed. Here we are baptized, one heart and one soul with the people of God.

C) They also emphasized the Lord's Supper. They observed it as an ordinance — a memorial act. The bread and cup were symbolic of Christ's body in His death. By sharing it they were not simply testifying of the fact that I have taken Christ's broken body and His shed blood into my life and it means something to me. The Anabaptist's concept of Communion was that in sharing the Communion, we are confirming our oneness with the

body. "We are members one of another" (Ephesians 4:25). Therefore, in our Communion services there is the sense in which we are grateful that He died for me. We sing songs about that. Above all we must maintain the concept that our communion services are a time of us testifying to one another that we are members together of His flesh, His body, and of His bones. We are members together in that. They also emphasized oneness under Christ. They were a body of members.

D) They emphasized Church government. As the Church laboured to keep sin on the outside, it required the need to set standards according to the Word and the working of the Holy Ghost. The Anabaptists took this concept that we must obey the local congregation — the binding and loosing of the local congregation. There is only one reason why it is wrong for us to obey and that is whenever what is asked of us is in direct violation to what the God of heaven asks of us. There were times when the Anabaptists found themselves in local congregations that began to go contrary to the God of heaven. In that case the Word of God was the sole authority in their lives. However, where there was not that conflict, there was no question but that to be one with the people of God meant that "I obey," and that obedience is essential to my salvation.

Those four aspects of Christian faith set the Anabaptists apart.

- † Their view of the Scriptures.
- † Their view of Christ.
- † Their view of the Christian
- † Their view of the Church.

May we follow their examples as "a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of Him who hath called you out of darkness into His marvellous light: (10) Which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God: which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy" (1 Peter 2:9-10).

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Family Worship - Article 2. **The Importance of Family Worship**

Godly homes and families have produced a strong society from the beginning of time. The downfall of churches, societies, and nations can be traced to the deterioration of the home. One main purpose of the family is for spiritual instruction and training of children for eternal salvation. "And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus" (2 Timothy 3:15). Therefore, family worship is necessary in building strong homes and preparing young men and women for a life of service to God.

Family worship is the united worship to God by all members of a given household. God walked in the midst of the Garden of Eden in the cool of the day to commune with Adam and Eve. The Patriarchs — Noah, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob — built family altars unto the Lord. "Thus did Job continually" (Job 1:5). Joshua said, ". . . as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord" (Joshua 24:15), even if his home would be the only one. Aquila and Priscilla had a church in their house. The Anabaptists put great value on family worship.

When family worship decays, worldliness comes into the church. The church has promoted family worship in its best times. If anyone reading this is not practising family worship in their home, by all means begin at once. "But if any provide not for his own, and especially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel" (1 Timothy 5:8). Knowing that spiritual things are of more value than the natural, this verse applies to any father that is neglecting this duty. Every father is charged with the responsibility to be the spiritual leader of his little flock somewhat like a church leader is to a congregation. The call of family worship at an appointed time is a reminder to the seriousness of hurrying to the day's business without God. If a family member is neglecting his personal devotions and private prayer, family worship can stimulate a spiritual desire to get back on track. It is hard to "kick against the pricks" of hearing our parents pray about our needs and shortcomings.

A family with no worship or cold, formal, hurried worship is at a low ebb spiritually. Where family worship is alive with zeal, interest, and enthusiasm, every family member is blessed, and there is increased happiness because each receives heavenly food.

Family worship continually impresses upon parents their need to bring their children up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.

Family worship continually impresses the mind of a child "in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it" (Proverbs 22:6).

Family worship increases the intellect in Bible knowledge and wisdom which is an asset naturally and spiritually.

Family worship promotes domestic harmony and love, especially when it is scheduled and regular. It sets an example for being punctual in rising time, meal times, and retiring time. Praying for one another is one of the best ways to increase mutual love.

An already established practice of family worship provides some of the most cherished times to draw a family close to God and each other in time of household affliction or death. Otherwise, homes are not accustomed to taking such deep hurts to the throne of God for support from heaven.

A singing, praying family will have a sweet influence on visitors and neighbours Evangelistic zeal is better accepted. The influence of household worship to God will benefit the church tremendously. It could be the greatest single cause of a great awakening of the church when God blesses with spiritual vitality every home represented in a given congregation.

What might a nation reach in prosperity if most of its homes daily praised God and prayed for His protection and blessing on the land? "Mine eyes shall be upon the faithful of the land, that they may dwell with me: he that walketh in a perfect way, he shall serve me" (Psalm 101:6).

Family worship can rise no higher than the spiritual life of its members, but it will protect and complement spiritual growth and can check spiritual decline.

It should consist of singing, reading the Scriptures, and prayer. It should be made interesting to each age group. Children should be taught to pray and participate in singing. Sing children's songs with the toddlers. Pray for God to enrich your family worship.

Worship in the home will help teach virtues to its members that will do more for the prosperity of the home than any other single thing. Some of these virtues are: More regard for others' wellbeing; more sense of responsibility toward work needing to be done; more carefulness for others' and our own things; more patience in operating equipment, making it last longer; more integrity in business life — paying bills and debts, etc.; more

respect for authority — parents, church leaders, etc.; more appreciation for past efforts of faithfulness; a continual sense of doing all for Jesus' sake.

"Rid me, and deliver me from the hand of strange children, whose mouth speaketh vanity, and their right hand is a right hand of falsehood: That our sons may be as plants grown up in their youth; that our daughters may be as corner stones, polished after the similitude of a palace: That our garners may be full, affording all manner of store: that our sheep may bring forth thousands and ten thousands in our streets: That our oxen may be strong to labour; that there be no breaking in, nor going out; that there be no complaining in our streets. Happy is that people, that is in such a case: yea, happy is that people, whose God is the Lord" (Psalm 144:11-15).

—Elvin Z. Rohrer, *"The Inspirational Informer"*, October-November 1998

SNAPSHOTS.

From: Menno Simons' Life and Writings.

Examples of Consecration to the Lord's Service

Yes, dear reader, the true Christian faith, as the Scripture requires, is so living, active and powerful with all those who through the grace of the Lord have rightly received it, that they, for the word and testimony of the Lord, do not hesitate to forsake father and mother, wife and children, money and possessions, to suffer all scorn and disgrace, hardships and dangers, and finally to have their poor weak bodies which are so fearful of suffering, burned at the stake, as may be frequently seen and observed in the instances of so very many people and faithful witnesses of Jesus, especially in these our Netherlands.

Alas! how many did I formerly know, and know the greater part of them now, both men and women, young men and maidens (would to God that they be increased, to His praise and to the salvation of all the world, to many hundred thousand) who from the inmost of their souls seek Christ

and His word and lead a pious, unblamable life (yet ever in weakness) before God and all men; they are sincere and sound in doctrine, unblamable, I say, in their life, full of the fear and love of God, helpful to everyone, merciful, compassionate, humble, sober, chaste, not refractory or seditious, but quiet and peaceable, obedient to the government in all things that are not contrary to God; and yet, they have for a number of years seldom slept on their own beds and do not now. For they are hated of the world in such a measure that they are persecuted without mercy, betrayed, apprehended, exiled and robbed of their property and life, like highway men, thieves and murderers. And this for no other reason than only that they out of true fear of God, do not dare to have a part in the abominable carnal life nor the cursed shameful idolatry of this blind world.

Inasmuch as it is found in fact and in truth that our faithful brethren and sisters in Christ Jesus, the beloved companions in the tribulation and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ (Rev. 1:9), so sincerely fear and love the Lord, their God, that rather than knowingly and wilfully speak a false word [denying that they were baptized] or to act hypocritically contrary to God's Word [keeping themselves against their convictions outwardly in the state church in order to shun persecution] ; they would give their good name, reputation, as well as their money, goods, bodies, and everything of which human nature may be desirous, as a prey to the bloodthirsty; therefore we would leave it to the judgment of your Excellencies and Honours, whether they are such pernicious, evil people as, alas, they are called by many, and generally adjudged.

I do not esteem my natural life to be better than the beloved men of God did their lives. I can be deprived of nothing except this perishable mortal flesh which at some time must die and return to dust (even if I should live to the age of Methuselah). A hair shall not fall from my head without the will of my heavenly Father. If I lose my life for the sake of Christ and His testimony, and on account of my sincere love to my neighbour (in whose salvation I am interested) I know of a certainty that I shall save it to life eternal. Therefore I can not keep the truth to myself, but I must testify to it and set it forth without hypocrisy in the true fear of God, to my beloved Lord

Assurance of Salvation.

How tragic it would be if we went through life thinking we were saved and then woke up on Judgment Day to find out we were mistaken! But the Bible teaches that this will be the case with many people. Christ said, "Many will say unto Me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Thy name? and in Thy name have cast out devils? and in Thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from Me, ye that work iniquity" (Matt.7:22-23).

However, we do not have to go through life without the assurance of salvation. In 1 John 5:13 the apostle says, "These things have I written unto you...that ye may know that ye have eternal life." How then can we have this assurance? This is the most important question we will ever face in life because our eternal destiny is at stake! The Bible teaches that those who remain unsaved will spend eternity in a place of perpetual torment (Matt. 25:46; Rev. 14:9-11). The reason for this is because their sin has not been paid for, and God's perfect justice requires that payment be made for sin (Rom. 6:23). Therefore, it is vital that we know the answer to this question. This is why the Apostle Peter wrote, "...give diligence to make your calling and election sure" (2 Pet. 1:10).

It is true that we must believe in Christ in order to become saved (Acts 16:31), but how can we be sure we have genuinely believed in Him? Certainly we cannot rely upon our feelings since feelings can be misleading. Some might suggest we can be sure by acknowledging the facts of the gospel or saying the sinner's prayer. However, the Bible indicates it is not possible to believe without being regenerated because by nature we are spiritually dead (Eph. 2:1 cf. 1 Cor. 2:14). This is why Christ said, "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3). Therefore, we cannot know we have truly believed until we know we are born again.

But what does it mean to be born again? Is this some kind of emotional experience? No, the Bible teaches that being born again means our life is changed. In 2 Corinthians 5:17 we read, "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature; old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new." The Bible also tells us what changes will take place in our life when we are born again.

First, we will not continue to live in (i.e. habitually commit) sin: "We know that whosoever is born of God sinneth not; but he that is begotten of God keepeth himself..." (1 John 5:18 cf. 3:9). "How shall we that are dead to sin live any longer therein?" (Rom. 6:2).

Second, we will seek to live a holy life by obeying God's Word: "...ye know that everyone that doeth righteousness is born of Him" (1 John 2:29). "... whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God..." (1 John 3:10). "And hereby do we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments" (1 John 2:3).

Third, we will love others, regardless of who they are or what they have done: "... everyone that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love" (1 John 4:7-8). "We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death" (1 John 3:14).

Fourth, our affections will not be upon the things of the world: "If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him" (1 John 2:15). "For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit.... But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His" (Rom. 8:5, 9).

While these things are never the cause of our salvation, they are the evidence that we truly have been born again. If they have not taken place in our life, then it is vital that we earnestly seek God and implore Him to regenerate us. He promises we will find Him if we seek Him with all our heart (Deut. 4:29), and the way to begin is by reading His Word. The Bible says, "So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God" (Rom. 10:17).

Gaining Inspiration From Old Testament Worship (Part 2) **Laying a Hand on the Sacrifice**

The Israelites sacrificed countless animals. The Bible records both God's instructions and the actual practice of these sacrifices.

Just before the animal was slain, the one making the offering would lay his hand on its head. Often, Leviticus uses phrases such as "he shall lay his

hand upon the head" of a sacrifice. Just what is the significance of this detail? Do spiritual lessons exist for New Testament saints to glean?

Isaac Watts noticed that parallels do indeed exist between this feature of the sacrifice ritual and our receiving of our Sacrifice. In a much loved hymn, he penned these words:

"My faith would lay her hand
On that dear head of Thine,
While, like a penitent, I stand,
And there confess my sin."

For Jesus to be our sacrifice for sin, our faith must lay her hand on His head. With the Old Testament saints, we see significance and rich meaning in this parallel. Laying a hand on the head of a sacrifice indicates a number of actions.

Confessing sin. To lay a hand on the head of the sacrifice is to confess, "I am guilty of sin; I need a sin bearer." If we regard this to be too hard, all that is left for us to do is stand empty-handed and condemned.

Accepting God's way. To lay a hand on the head of the sacrifice is to say, "I accept God's plan for the clearing of sin, and I accept this sacrifice as God's provision for me." We realize God's blessing as we reach out to the Person that He provided.

Acknowledging our Sin-bearer. To lay a hand on the head of the sacrifice gives recognition that Jesus bore "our sins in his body on the tree" (1 Peter 2:24). "He shall bear their iniquities" (Isaiah 53:11). The sins of those who are dying in sin was borne by the One who was dying for them.

Trusting the sacrifice. Laying a hand on the head of the sacrifice says, "I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him" (2 Timothy 1:12). This action expresses confidence in the plan, in the sacrifice, and in the ability of God to bring it all together.

Identifying with the sacrifice. Laying a hand on the head of the sacrifice is saying, "I am crucified with Christ" (Galatians 2:20). Since our Sacrifice was put to death for sin, we will now put sin to death in our lives. New Testament saints who have placed their hand on the head of the Sacrifice have another added dimension not available to Old Testament saints. We place our hand in Jesus' hand, and give our life and love to the One who died for us.

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"Exhort One Another Daily"*Sheldon Heatwole, Brashear, TX*

Have you ever been in the midst of a deep struggle, and a brother approached you with the encouragement, "I am praying for you"? Have you ever traveled far from home and been refreshed and strengthened to there meet brethren of like precious faith and share convictions with them? That is exhortation. Exhortation is words or actions that have the purpose of encouraging, strengthening, admonishing, warning, or comforting. Anything done to help another not lose his way from earth to heaven is exhortation. Why is it important to exhort one another? Exhortation is a command from God. Consider the verse from which the title is taken: "But exhort one another daily, while it is called Today; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin" (Hebrews 3:13). God knew that exhortation would be important for mankind.

Exhortation is important because of the fleeting opportunity to exhort. Now is the day of opportunity; tomorrow may be too late.

Exhortation is important because of the deceitfulness of sin. Our adversary is at work to camouflage sinful practices and make them look right. The daily routines of life can easily blind us to our real needs so that we become spiritually lax. With the progression of time, increased laxness leads to complacency, and sin is tolerated in our lives. We need the exhortation of others to help us avoid falling short of our heavenly goal.

How is exhortation accomplished? Before we can exhort others, we first must be following the exhortation we are seeking to give. We may not realize how many people observe us and receive encouragement to remain steadfast. Living a victorious, consistent Christian life is very important. Exhortation is also a part of collective worship. When we gather as fellow believers and discuss the Scriptures, we receive a blessing. We should also engage in encouraging discussions when we visit as families.

We will not be able to exhort others profitably unless we take time to relate to them. Discussing the happenings of the week gives opportunity to share special challenges and provides opportunity for encouragement. Often a few spontaneous words of praise to God or recognition of His goodness or protection can uplift those about us.

Exhortation is effective when the goal is to benefit all involved and not to vindicate ourselves. Exhortation should be given with the consideration that we too face the same tendencies (Galatians 6:1). Encouraging one an-

other in the Lord is possible only as we have a true love and a genuine concern for the spiritual well-being of our brother.

When exhortation includes expressing a concern to a brother, it must be preceded with much prayer. If the Holy Spirit is to bring our brother's need to our attention, we must be in communion with God. We also need to be familiar with the Scriptures to be convinced that our concern is legitimate and Scripturally based.

When is exhortation to be exercised? "Exhort one another daily." The command to exhort daily is a challenge to be alert daily for opportunities. One of the ways to exhort daily is to live a faithful life daily and so leave a faithful example. Our greatest responsibility in exhortation is to encourage our families.

"Exhort one another daily while it is called today." Today is the time to exhort. How serious the tendency is to put off necessary action until a later time! The devil has a way of making tomorrow look appealing for this spiritual work, but for the procrastinator, tomorrow never comes. The Holy Spirit is faithful in bringing the special needs of others to our attention today. Do not ignore the promptings to send that letter, make that phone call, or breathe that prayer for a brother. We have a responsibility to help our brother; may we accept the challenge.

Who benefits when we exhort one another? When we give a gift to someone, we do not benefit from it ourselves. This is not the case with the gift of exhortation. When we exhort someone, we also receive a blessing, perhaps even the greater blessing.

The goal of exhortation is to help others make it to heaven. Therefore, any exhortation should have an uplifting effect on them. As we keep our brother's good in focus, we can be channels through which God can ultimately receive the honor of which He is worthy.

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