

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.

Do we realise our daily, even our hourly and indeed our continuous need of God's grace? Jesus said: "Without Me you can do nothing." John 15:5.

Do the realization and the feeling of this need move us to fervent prayer and eager searching of the Scriptures?

This issue starts a series of lessons focussing on the power of God in the lives of His followers. The first six titles carry the word *power*, subsequent lessons treat on the need of power, the availability of power or the effects of power. The power that is spoken of here is that power that comes only from God not from ourselves or from the evil one.

We think of the apostles and other early Christians as people of great boldness and confidence. Yet they were men like us. Many times they must have felt confused, weak, unworthy—in short, unable. Yet they reached for, and found, a power that produced mighty words and acts that glorified their Savior. Should we not experience the same power today? Do we?

How often do we experience the exhilaration of finding God's strength lifting us to do some deed we know we could not have accomplished on our own? How often do we find that, in ways beyond explanation, He has enabled us to resist a particularly strong temptation or supplied special grace to overcome a dreadful trial?

Today thousands and perhaps millions of hearts wonder if they can find God as something beyond a concept or belief. Their cry is, "Can I know God in a way that gives me spiritual uplift and strength? Can I know Him in a way that will make a real difference in my life? Will He give me strength beyond my own to cope with self-destructive habits, thoughts, and desires?"

Can we look them in the eye and answer, "Yes, He can. He is doing it for me"?

One thing I know, I cannot say Him nay;
 One thing I do, I press towards my Lord;
 My God, my glory here, from day to day,
 And in the glory there my great Reward.

F. Brook.



MINISTER'S CORNER.

Recognizing and Overcoming an Oversensitive Conscience.

From a message by Brother Merle Ruth

Given at New England Valley Mennonite Church, October 2009.

I shall read several lines from an account that every Bible reader is familiar with:

“So when they continued asking him, he lifted up himself, and said unto them, He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her. [8] And again he stooped down, and wrote on the ground. [9] And they which heard it, being convicted by their own conscience, went out one by one, beginning at the eldest, even unto the last. ([John 8:7-9](#))

And this was one of those occasions when the opponents of our Lord had it all planned in one way or another, at the expense of this woman, they expected to give our Lord a black mark and get Him into deep trouble.

It is amazing though how easily our Lord defeated the purpose and how did He do it? By the use of a simple question that activated the conscience of each of those men. That question brought into action a restraint that they had not reckoned with, being convicted by their own conscience they went out one by one.

We have depicted here in a very vivid way the invisible power of an invaluable faculty. Unlike the animal you have in your spirit a faculty known as the conscience. On this occasion I have been asked to speak about one particular kind of conscience: The Oversensitive Conscience.

Before we prepare to look at the abnormal we should possibly reacquaint ourselves with the normal. I am first going to devote some time to that.

Why was this faculty named the conscience? And how does it operate?

Those who have studied the etymology of the term tell us that the word itself signifies a knowledge held in conjunction with another. In this case the other person is God, it carries the idea of man being a co-witness with God in that process of either approving his own actions or condemning them. It has been observed that the term conscience is not found in the Old Testament, the thought however definitely is there and is usually expressed

by the word heart, which in Bible terminology evidently serves, at least on some occasions, as a synonym for the conscience.

One instance of this is the time when David's heart smote him after he had neatly cut off a piece of Saul's garment. (1 Samuel 24:4) In a few instances even the New Testament employs the term heart when clearly the conscience is in view, but, in contrast to the Old Testament the New Testament has numerous passages in which the actual term conscience does appear in the English translations, but we don't actually have a biblical definition and so the best we can do is to define the term on the basis of how it is used, on that basis the context can be defined as: An inborn capacity for moral perception, an inward feeling impelling one to act in accordance with his convictions, and inward monitor that urges one to do or not do what he himself believes to be right or wrong. The conscience speaks a uniform language you. This you ought to do, this you ought not to do.

Some definitions reflect the owner's personal experience. One boy had this to say about the conscience: "It is something that makes everybody seem to be looking at you when they ain't."

Another home-made definition that reflects personal experience was made by an Indian, he describes the conscience in these terms: "Conscience is a three cornered thing in my heart that stands still when I am good, but when I am bad it turns around and the corners hurt a lot, but if I keep on doing wrong the corners wear of and it doesn't hurt any more."

Admittedly this illustration is rather crude but one must admit that he has given to the world an apt description of how the conscience functions and furthermore he laid his finger on a major cause behind a malfunctioning conscience.

That was an attempt to define conscience. We have found it to be man's highest moral faculty, in the beginning God pronounced it good although it may have suffered some damage as a consequence of the Fall, it is still basically good and performs a good function. Whenever the question of right and wrong arises the conscience steps forward to give its judgment and it always passes judgment in favour of that which is believed to be right. It is therefore a strong force in helping a person to maintain right conduct, for in every moral decision conscience sides with the side on which God is thought to be. Although it may be ignored and defiled and even seared, it will never begin to take the side of that which is known to be wrong.

I am moving now a bit closer to how it operates.

The unsuppressed conscience operates in all three tenses, past, present and future. It goes in advance and cautions one against a contemplated evil deed. It operates in the present condemning the evil deed while it is being committed and it operates also in regard to the past, repeatedly impressing the evildoer that he has done wrong.

Someone has made this observation: Conscience warns as a friend before it punishes as a judge.

Its judgment however is not limited to particular deeds, the whole of one's life comes under its surveillance. That publican who smote upon his breast saying: "God be merciful to me a sinner" was reflecting the judgment of his conscience.

The heaviest load that one ever carries is the guilt produced by a condemning conscience. After his first crime one young man confessed: "I have felt sick ever since." It was this that drove Judas to suicide. ([Matthew 27:5](#)). In view of what has already been said it is obvious that the conscience should be viewed as a God given moral guide, but is it a totally reliable guide? That is a very pertinent question, one that must be addressed.

To take the position, that in every instance the approval of one's conscience guarantees the rightness of one's conduct, leaves one with this problem: How then can you account for the different leadings dictated by conscience, the variations from person to person? You can find people whose actions are diametrically opposed and yet they both claim the approval of their conscience.

A Hindu once said to a British administrator over in India: "Our conscience tells us it is right to burn widows on the pyre of their husbands."

"Yes", replied the officer, "and our conscience tells us it is right to hang you are doing that."

There is another contrast.

A devout catholic prays to the Virgin Mary because if he would not his conscience would smite him. On the other hand a devout Baptist or Mennonite doesn't pray to the Virgin Mary for really his conscience would smite him for doing so.

Another side of this problem appears when during one period of life the same conscience approves but condemns in another period of life. A clear example of this is Paul the Apostle, long after his conversion he gave this

claim: I live in all good conscience unto this day. How could he make that claim when a part of this life had been devoted to the persecution of Christians? Paul's answer is recorded in Acts 26: I verily thought with myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus. (Acts 26:9). Evidently that early persecution had been engaged in, in all good conscience. Jesus had warned his disciples that the time cometh that whosoever kills you will think that he doeth God service. (John 16:2).

It must therefore be admitted that the conscience of the individual may approve what God would not approve. Is there a solution to this problem? Is there an explanation that accounts for the non-uniform witness of the human conscience? When all the insights that can be gathered are put together we arrive at this conclusion: The conscience will always cast its vote on the side of what is felt right by the individual, whether or not it actually is right depends on other factors such as, how you were taught, what you learned and accepted.

Stating it another way the conscience operates on the basis of what the individual has come to believe is right and good. Just as we distinguish between the judge and the law by which he operates so we must distinguish between our conscience and the accepted standard by which it hands down its verdict. This highlights the importance of rightly based beliefs, the accuracy of the verdict of your conscience depends on the validity of your beliefs, your conscience is reliable only as it is supplied with a standard that corresponds with facts and truth. If you are entertaining a set of distorted beliefs your conscience will not be altogether reliable just as a watch needs to be set of regularly by standard time in order to be accurate so your conscience needs to be set and regulated by guards and available standards.

Perhaps a still better illustration would be that of the sundial. During daylight hours and as long as the sun is shining the sundial will show the correct reading of the time, but when the sun is not shining or the light shines upon it from a lantern or from the moon at night it will not show accurate time. So it is with your conscience, with the light of the Word of God shining on it, you can generally rely upon it that when it is trained in ideals that are not Christian it will not be an altogether safe guide.

We are now coming face-to-face with how tremendously important it is to acquire personal, moral convictions that are Bible-based and God ap-

proved. Without those Bible-based convictions your conscience will be less than reliable. Furthermore the once properly taught person who repudiates his early beliefs with another set of beliefs borrowed from a Bible rejecting society is going to end up with a malfunctioning conscience. That is like throwing a monkey wrench into the mechanism of your conscience.

Conscience controlled by a wrong standard is sometimes called an erring conscience. That however can be misleading, the error lies not so much with the conscience as with the standard that its owner has supplied it with. The remedy is not to act against your conscience but to correct the platform on which it operates.

Again you may have heard the expression a doubting conscience, but really it is not the conscience that doubts, the doubt is lodged in the mind. What about this thing, is it right or wrong?

When one finds himself at a point of indecision like that rather than moving ahead prematurely you ought to stop, look and listen. There is an observation recorded in [Romans 14:5](#) which fits in well right here: "One man esteemeth one day above another: another esteemeth every day alike. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind."

Until you arrive at that point, until you are fully persuaded for or against in your mind, your conscience has nothing stable to work with and therefore cannot give you a clear signal.

Well hopefully this background will prove beneficial as we now come to the oversensitive conscience.

I'm of the opinion that this is an exception to the rule, that only a relatively small percentage of people have this problem and that it is confined almost entirely to those who are religiously inclined. The far more common problem would be what one would call the under-sensitive conscience, one that has been ignored so often that it has lost its sensitivity. Although I may be wrong I find very little in the Bible on this subject of the oversensitive conscience, instead of that because of their natural inclinations there is a loud call to maintain the sensitivity of the conscience. As a matter of principle Paul exercised himself to have always a conscience void of offence toward God and toward man.

As a warning to us; Those who take an apostate course are described as having seared their conscience with a hot iron. Nevertheless I do believe that especially in Christian circles there are here and there individuals with what we are calling an oversensitive conscience. Evidently you have among you here those who feel likewise, however in the course of my preparation I came upon this claim: Many persons are plagued by an oversensitive conscience.

I seriously question whether it is as common as that statement makes it appear today. It is true however that for some people it is for them very convenient to rationalise, to justify their new course of travel by blaming the former careful way of life on an oversensitive conscience from which they are now supposedly liberated. A great deal of that is being done and that is nothing more than self-deception.

One therefore is proceeding on the assumption that we are likely to have among us here and there persons with this kind of conscience. As I already indicated I find relatively little in the Bible on this subject however in [first Corinthians 8](#) Paul does speak of a weak conscience and I'm of the opinion that the conscience described there, under that label, would come into the category of what we are calling the oversensitive conscience.

In a few moments I'm going to be reading from that chapter, first Corinthians 8, but first may I acquaint you with the problem that is there in focus.

Some of the Corinthian believers had grown spiritually to the point where they knew that idols were nothing but materials out of which men had made them and they wrongly gloried in that knowledge. But there were other Christian believers who in their past had probably worshipped idols, although they were now converted they had not yet gotten the existence of idols out of their mind, consequently if they knowingly ate meat that had formerly been offered to idols they imagined themselves worshipping idols and after the pagan festivals such meat was available, often available in large quantities in the market places of Corinth and some turned up in the homes of their friends. The former group, those who knew that idols amount to nothing were minded to go right ahead and buy and eat such meat, they felt perfectly free to do that and they gloried in their knowledge and the liberty it gave them. But their bold examples threatened to per-

suade those who still had a conscience against it to ignore their conscience and to go in and do likewise, knowing that the Christian ought to be conscientious, and that is a dangerous thing to start violating one's conscience.

Paul in this chapter pleads with those who were walking roughshod over the conscience of the brethren, the climax of his plea is recorded in the last two verses of one Corinthians 8: "But when ye sin so against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, ye sin against Christ. Wherefore, if meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh while the world standeth, lest I make my brother to offend." [1 Corinthians 8:12-13](#).

Now there in verse 12 we come upon that expression "their weak conscience". Obviously he has in view that element in the Corinthian church whose conscience would not allow them to eat of that which to them was contaminated meat. Now in one respect they draw our admiration, for conscience sake they were willing to forego a convenience, they were endeavoring to be conscientious, seemingly they were the ones with a more tender conscience. But in another respect they were the ones who were still in first grade spiritually, their conscience needed to be further educated.

Possibly we could add to these further observations; they were not only scrupulous they were possibly over scrupulous, their conscience was not only sensitive but possibly oversensitive. Nevertheless, Paul, God's divinely inspired servant, urged their brethren to quit being so bold and to respect the conscience of their brethren.

Turn with me now to Romans 14. Here in verse 14 Paul is writing about the difference in opinion that existed with regard to meet that had formerly been labeled unclean by the Old Testament ceremonial law.

[Romans 14:14](#): "I know, and am persuaded by the Lord Jesus, that there is nothing unclean of itself: but to him that esteemeth any thing to be unclean, to him it is unclean."

Better than some, Paul understood, that the ceremonial law was no longer in effect, however, I take from this verse that he is telling his readers we need to make allowance for those who don't share in our understanding of the transition that has occurred between the Old and New Covenants.

Let's drop now to the middle of verse 22: Happy is he that condemneth not himself in that thing which he alloweth. [Romans 14:22](#).

Whether or not it is correctly informed the conscience is to be heeded, that is the uniform teaching of the New Testament.

Now my assignment is first of all to help my listeners to recognize the oversensitive conscience.

In my opinion we have already started down that road. We have just looked at two biblical snapshots that would fall into that category. I am now going to get more specific and enumerate the further marks that characterize the person who is the possessor of this kind of conscience.

Generally those persons are somewhat tormented by fears and anxieties. Their typical thought patterns run like this: I am afraid my performance doesn't satisfy God. I'm afraid that in this instance I wasn't altogether truthful. And in that instance I'm afraid I may have left the wrong impression.

Apologizing is good but such persons apologize excessively. They also confess repeatedly and often it is little details that are mere trifles in the eyes of other healthy Christians.

They may treat trifles as gross sins which ought to be publicly confessed. Such persons commonly have a restitution complex, they become almost obsessed with making right supposed wrongs, they search their past for things to make right until they begin to distrust their own memory. Their imperfect performance makes them feel self-condemned. They typically have doubts about their acceptance by God and seemingly they can never arrive at a place of peace and rest.

Putting it into a few words; unnecessarily they are frequently made to feel guilty.

Finally if I have this problem what can I do to overcome it? Or if I myself don't have that what can I do to help the person who does that?

I am inclined to believe that in many instances consciences of this kind simply need schooling in the school of God, more exposure to truth and more Holy Spirit directed teaching, time is also needed to assimilate these lessons and to get them established in the conscience.

Now if this observation is correct then perhaps we should begin using a different label instead of calling it the "oversensitive conscience" may be we ought to call it the "poorly educated conscience."

I think we would agree that in order to have a good conscience we need to maintain its sensitivity, along with that it needs to be properly formed,

Bible taught and open to the correction of the brotherhood. I'm also of the opinion that what we are looking at is thankfully, often a temporary problem linked to or associated with that stage of life in which the conscience becomes fully awake.

The moral awakening that occurs when a young person arrives at the age of accountability will often trigger problems of this kind because the activating of the conscience is a part of that moral awakening.

There is also an intellectual and emotional dimension to lead awakening all of which makes that a very stormy period of life. Problems of this kind can easily arise because that young person is hearing the call of God like never before, hopefully he is responding to that call, and overall he is able to process and trying to get his moral bearings on the sea of life.

I have personally known more than one instance where a severe conscience problem gradually vanished as a young person acquired more all-around maturity.

I have yet a list of what I am calling insights that hopefully can be helpful.

Insight number one.

One factor that sometimes contributes to this problem is a mistaken concept of God. It is easy to see how a warped concept of God could create a conscience problem.

Suppose for example: That you envision Him as a hard to please God who designed life to be a drudgery filled experience. Now I agree that is a warped concept of God but there maybe people with that concept, that God is a hard to please person who designed life to be virtually slavery.

Well with that kind of supposition you would never have dared to ever have an enjoyable time for if you did you might come away feeling guilty. The fact is God give us richly all things to enjoy (1 Tim.2:16) not only that, He allows you to have enjoyable times in the Lord and not feel one bit guilty about it.

Insight number two.

The problem we are looking at is probably the most common among new Christians. They are at the point where they are discovering that they haven't got rid of temptation, instead of allowing that to disturb them they need to learn the difference between being tempted and committing sin. Rightfully the latter should produce guilt but the former, being tempted, is not a

thing about which to feel guilty. Until you learn that lesson you may be plagued with unnecessary guilt.

Insight number three.

We need to realise that there is also a difference between God and our conscience. God is a person, a merciful, loving, forgiving person. Your conscience is not a person, it is a God implanted monitor that operates, shall I say operates somewhat like a policeman, if you confuse the two, if you envision God as a policeman you may very well jeopardize your assurance of His accepting you.

Insight number four.

Why is it that such people are commonly plagued with doubts concerning their standing with God?

One of the major reasons is an inadequate knowledge of the basics on which God accepts the penitent sinner. It is a mistake to think that when God decides whether or not to accept you He goes by how perfect or imperfect you are, to think that way is a mistake. Instead of that He looks to see if you have a faith that is relying up on the work performed by and performed for you by the Lord Jesus.

[Romans 5: 1](#): "Therefore being justified by faith we have peace with God." because we have a faith that is relying upon the work performed by the Lord Jesus, that is the basis of your acceptance however imperfect you may be in Christ. You have been provided with a perfect standing before God. There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the spirit. ([Romans 8:1](#))

Well it was the recognition of this fact, this basis of our acceptance by God, it is the recognition of that fact that moved the hymn writer to burst out with praise: "Glory I am saved, My sins are all pardoned, My guilt is all gone." A good conscience can give you that kind of assurance and joy as you understand the basis on which God accepts you.

Insight number five.

You may need to learn to cope with your temperamental make up. Some people are temperamentally inclined to be highly introspective, along with that often goes a perfectionist tendency. Such persons are for ever looking inward and lamenting the poor performance and feeling self condemned. Such persons need to stop relying upon themselves and turn their eyes toward the light, the Lord Jesus, and make Him the object of the faith not

self. Of whatever temperament you may be you must learn how to get rid of your sensitivity by the way of repentance and confession and then come out of those shadows and bask in the bright sunlight of God's forgiving grace.

Insight number six.

In every properly taught person being untruthful will generate feelings of guilt but when are we untruthful? Some individuals think they are when they aren't.

Suppose you write to a friend that your grandfather is wanting to pay your family a week-long visit. However as it turns out circumstances required him to leave after being there only two days so it did not materialize like you said it would. Were you untruthful? Should you feel guilty? Is it really necessary to quickly write another letter and correct the matter?

My opinion: No. Because you did not mean to deceive your friend. That change of circumstances was beyond your control and will have no ill effect upon your friend. There is also such a thing as committing an innocent mistake for which you need to neither apologies nor feel guilty.

Insight number seven.

The Bible does teach restitution and in so far as possible we do need to make wrongs right, especially when those wrongs affect other people. But we need to beware lest we imbibe a wrong view of restitution. Repeatedly making restitution can be mistakenly turned into a works religion, a way of getting rid of guilt, a way of earning the acceptance of God. I say it can be mistakenly turned into that, a works religion, a way of getting rid of guilt, a way of earning the favour of God. But that won't work and you need to learn that, we cannot atone for our sins in that way, if we could we would be our own saviour.

Insight number eight.

This is a fact we cannot ignore to overlook.

We have a personal adversary who has gained a reputation for being an accuser of the brethren. How did he gain that reputation? I am assuming that he got that by his many attempts to make the saints of God feel like lost sinners, it seems as though he makes that his specialty. The inexperienced and unsuspecting saint who grinds under the accusations of his conscience and lives too much by his feelings may actually become a victim of the delusions of Satan.

Both the newborn saint and the long-time saint need to learn to act on that graciously supplied promise: Resist the devil and he will flee from you. The devil is still our enemy but he is now a defeated enemy, thanks to the victory of Christ.

Now by the way of conclusion.

There is no better way to educate your conscience than to become thoroughly acquainted with God and His Word. As you gain the knowledge of God's will, you liberate yourself from the bondage of ignorance and you'll give your conscience a platform from which it can supply you with unerring guidance.

Along with that I would like to emphasize this: If you have somehow acquired a hard to live with conscience blending in with a Christian brotherhood will give you the benefit of a teaching ministry that God can use to re-educate your conscience without destroying its sensitivity.

May God help us both as individuals and as a group to rightly draw the line between the sensitive and the oversensitive.



A THOROUGH WORK

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 (Isa. 57:15), where all is perfection. 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" (Matt. 5:48). Christ also instructed a certain young man, "If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast" (Matt. 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" (Rom. 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" (Matt. 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" (Eph. 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 (Matt. 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" (Dent. 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" (Josh. 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... "(Josh. 9:14, 15)."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" (Isa. 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 mold 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?" (Josh. 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?" (Zech. 4:10). "Take us the foxes, the little foxes, that spoil the vines: for our vines have tender grapes" (Song of Sol. 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.

Brother G.K.



IS THE ROAD CLEAR?

Is the road clear between Heaven and me?
 Or is there trash in the road and weeds by the side?
 Little doubts and fears, things I couldn't let rest?
 Do I stumble over offense, or give it my best?
 Is the road clear—no stones of despair
 Or detours to take, no clouds in the air?
 Am I watching for clutter? I must keep my road free.
 Free from all pride, worry, and jealousy.
 If the road is clear, my steps sure may be,
 For someday I will reach the land of my dreams.

A sister in the Lord.



THE OBLIGATION OF THE FAITHFUL TO ONE ANOTHER

By all indications, we are in the closing days of time. Hopefully this is not viewed as being negative about life. True Christians enjoy life, but they take comfort in Jesus' words, "And when these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh" (Luke 21:28).

Almost everything seems to be fluid these days.

The gospel of salvation, of course, stays the same in every age. We believe in an unchanging gospel despite changing times. But the Holy Spirit

does adjust the focus of the Christians' attention to address changing conditions. The "need of the hour" does not go unnoticed. As circumstances and developments in the world and among the people of God change, the attention of the faithful is arrested by the present need.

Against that backdrop, we want to consider the obligation the faithful have toward one another. This may strike some readers as being different. But the thought is that expressed in Malachi 3:16, "Then they that feared the Lord spake often one to another" That was a time that tested the faith of the faithful, and they needed to strengthen one another.

The disciples of Jesus are not isolationists. Their love reaches out to the needs of others all over the world. Coming close to home, they are burdened for the weak ones in Zion and the prodigals. They endeavor to strengthen the weak and draw the wandering ones home. Not minimizing these areas of obligation at all, the need of encouraging the faithful also should not be overlooked. They are subject to buffeting and doubt, especially when Satan insinuates that their stand is outdated. The pressures of our day are such that the faithful must strengthen one another.

The writer to the Hebrews states the need well. He says we should continue "exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching" (Heb. 10:25).

A "circle the wagons" attitude is generally viewed as self-protective and negative. As such, it is hardly befitting of true Christians. Nevertheless, the courage of the faithful should not be taken for granted. Was David being negative when he asked, "If the foundations be destroyed, what can the righteous do" (Ps. 11:3)? His words may include the thought that the true, sincere children of Israel the strength of the nations should not allow their courage to be undermined.

There is a foundation of conviction in the church that steadies the building. The strength and vitality of the church are found in those with concern, vision, and zeal for the "faith which was once delivered unto the saints" (Jude 3). They carry a fond hope, a vision, of the church gaining higher ground.

The persistent undertow of the world, though, is giving rise to spirits that question and contest that vision. Too many are not able to identify with a concern about worldliness and a longing for more spiritual life. This indicates that they have little conviction relating to the faith of our fathers. What can the righteous do? Certainly they can pray for a genuine revival

and instruct those with shallow conviction. But just as importantly, they should exhort one another to be faithful and not lose the hope and vision of restoration.

The unity and oneness of the church of God is a principle of the faith (John 17:11, 22; Eph. 4:4-6). That principle relates to preserving the Pentecostal unity of the church as compared to the idea that the many varied churches are all parts of the church of God. But within the church, we must also hold dear the teaching of being one in practice of gospel principles. The apostle Paul says that we should "stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel" (Phil. 1:27). This oneness is being tested today.

There is a unity that can be attained through attrition and compromise. But it is not the "unity of the Spirit" (Eph. 4:3). The unity of the Spirit will be found only on gospel grounds. Walking in Jesus' steps, self-denial, and separation from the world are part of this ground. The faithful should encourage one another to be steadfast and unmovable on this ground.

The faithful also need to exhort one another to sanctify their spirits, lest evil be spoken of the way of the cross. The enemy of the faith surely is delighted when one tries to "set things straight" with the force of his own spirit. "For the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God" (James 1:20). "Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the Lord of hosts" (Zech. 4:6). Concerned brothers and sisters need to be faithful to each other and not spare the flesh when it wants to "help" in the Lord's work. The need of the hour is too great to misstep here.

The faithful must be patient and understanding of the weak. Paul says those "that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak" (Rom. 15:1). He also says the faithful should relate to others "with all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love" (Eph. 4:2).

For the faithful to exhort and admonish one another to keep a right spirit is like helping sharpen the sword of the Spirit (Eph. 6:17). The faithful must know that the battle will not be won with a dull sword. Aquila and Priscilla helped the mighty Apollos by expounding to him "the way of God more perfectly" (Acts 18:26).

Perhaps the courage of the ministry is the most taken for granted. This may be true even among themselves. This should not be so. The ministry has an obligation to encourage one another to "fight the good fight of faith"

(1 Tim. 6:12). It is said that the elders of a bygone time occasionally checked on the spiritual progress of younger ministers. They encouraged them to press ahead faithfully. Many servants of the Lord today can testify how they have been lifted when another spoke words of encouragement or instruction to them.

It is especially meaningful when faithful lay brothers and sisters exhort their minister or deacon to not lay down the standard.

We are in the last great spiritual battle of the ages. We need one another like the martyrs of the sixteenth century, who mutually exhorted each other as they were led to execution. Even family members urged their doomed loved ones to be faithful and not recant. Soldiers in mortal combat are melded into a fighting unit by the buddy system. That is for a very earthly victory. How much nobler the cause of righteousness! The battle demands we succor one another by mutual, sincere support and encouragement (2 Sam. 21:17).

We have an outstanding pattern in 1 Corinthians 16:15, ". . . ye know the house of Stephanas, that it is the firstfruits of Achaia, and that they have addicted themselves to the ministry of the saints."



POWER PROMISED.

But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles, they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint. Isaiah 40:31.

God's power is infinite. Our minds end where infinity begins because we can only comprehend what can be measured, and even those measurements are relative. God's power is not measurable. It has no beginning and no end. It is neither new nor old. Of God's power nothing is ever lost. This power creates matter from nothing, forgives sinners, changes lives, loves the unlovable, heals, and restores. This is the power promised to believers today. Why do we doubt when so much is promised to us in times of difficulty? "Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; (for he is faithful that promised)" (Hebrews 10:23). "Through faith also Sara herself received strength to conceive seed, and was delivered of a child

when she was past age, because she judged him faithful who had promised" (Hebrews 11:11).

Luke 24:45-53: Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures, ⁴⁶And said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: ⁴⁷And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. ⁴⁸And ye are witnesses of these things. ⁴⁹And, behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you: but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high. ⁵⁰And he led them out as far as to Bethany, and he lifted up his hands, and blessed them. ⁵¹And it came to pass, while he blessed them, he was parted from them, and carried up into heaven. ⁵²And they worshipped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy: ⁵³And were continually in the temple, praising and blessing God. Amen.

Acts 1:4-11: And, being assembled together with them, commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, saith he, ye have heard of me. ⁵For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence. ⁶When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel? ⁷And he said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power. ⁸But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth. ⁹And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight. ¹⁰And while they looked stedfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel; ¹¹Which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven.

There is so much depth and truth embodied in the Scriptures that sometimes our earthly minds cannot grasp the full meaning. Christ, who can do all things, reached into the hearts and minds of His disciples and opened their understanding to the things which had been written about His suffer-

ing and resurrection. They began to understand how the different parts of God's plan of salvation fit together. Two parts of the plan, the crucifixion and resurrection, had been fulfilled. After Jesus' resurrection, people had to change their thinking and serve Him as the Son of God. Jesus told the disciples that their mission was to preach repentance, or calling people to turn from their own selfish ways to Christ, and remission of sins, or God's gracious offer of forgiveness to all who would believe. This message was to be preached in His name beginning in Jerusalem where Jesus died; from there it would spread out into the entire world (Acts 1:8). Jesus confirmed to His disciples the Father's promise that the power of the Holy Ghost would be poured out upon them.

Christ's declaration that the Spirit was about to be given evidently triggered concern among the disciples about the establishment of the kingdom. Connecting the coming of the Spirit and the coming of the kingdom was consistent with Old Testament thought (Isa.32:15-20, Zech.12:8-10). The popular expectation was that Christ would establish an earthly kingdom immediately. The words at this time expressed the eager anticipation of the apostles for this kingdom. Jesus did not correct His disciples' views concerning the restoration of the kingdom to Israel but told them that the timing was in the Father's hands.

Jesus gently turned the disciples' attention to their duty to carry His message throughout the world. The power they were to receive would enable them to tell others about Him regardless of the consequences. Their task was not to convince others but to testify of the truth of the gospel.

Jesus led His disciples just outside Jerusalem, and there He blessed them. While He blessed them, He was taken up and carried into heaven. The disciples' sorrow over Jesus' death had been totally reversed. Now they awaited the promise of God with joy.

In the debate of how the world began, today's world belittles God. Much is being taught of evolution. Many educators say that intelligent design is not scientific and attempt to exclude the creation account from school curriculums. But no matter how hard the prince of this world may push this agenda, it does not change the truth. Truth will stand forever, and it needs no defense. The Bible clearly teaches that all things were created by the infinite power of God. Life, with all its complexities, has its beginnings with God. Those who study the intricacies of life marvel at the witness of a

power beyond happenstance—a witness of intelligent design. The believer stands in awe of such power.

Even as God's power was not limited in creating life, it has no limitations in changing lives. The sinner who becomes convicted of his sins and reaches out to God will experience the power to be transformed. His desires are no longer for self but for the will of God. People marvel at the changes and say, "Is this the same person?" No man can of his own will change himself, this only comes by divine power.

"For my thoughts are not your thoughts" Isaiah 55:8. This verse reminds us of our limitations and of God's greatness. Today's Bible scholars and theologians are trying to understand God's eternal truths through study, reason, and logic. Christians are sometimes tempted to understand Scripture at less than face value. All that we know about God has come from Him. He has given us His eternal Word and then opened our understanding so we can in part comprehend His might and majesty.

The promise, "But ye shall receive power" (Acts 1:8), was given not only to the disciples before Jesus ascended but also to all those who experience the new birth. At conversion the Holy Spirit enters the heart of the believer, bringing God's power into his life. This power enables him to overcome sin and live a godly life. It helps him to become an effective witness of the gospel, to suffer wrongfully, and to be taken advantage of with joy for Jesus' sake. Each day this power must be renewed. God is honored as we acknowledge our weakness and ask Him for strength for the day. We should not expect an abundance of power that would begin to lift us up, but just enough for the need of the moment. "And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong" (2 Cor. 12:9-10).

There are many misconceptions of the evidence of the power of God. The disciples who walked daily with Jesus misunderstood His teachings about the kingdom. They thought of an earthly kingdom that would free them from Roman rule and perhaps provide a place of honor for them. We, too, at times presume upon the power of God because of misunderstandings. One person thinks that God's power will enable him to make all the right decisions. Someone else may think he can leave God and the church

and yet rely on God's power to keep him from harm. Others hope for power to achieve great things and become famous. Power is not given to honour man but to glorify God. He does not show His power strictly for display. There will always be needs that man's ability cannot meet. When we are weak, God strengthens us.

Can a Christian ever truthfully say, I did not have the strength to stand"? With God's promise of power, should a Christian speak about how weak he is?

May we realize daily our weaknesses and reach for the promise of power.



New Creatures

**At times with sudden glory,
He speaks, and all is done;
Without one stroke of battle
The victory is won,
While we, with joy beholding,
Can scarce believe it true
That even our kingly Jesus
Can form such hearts anew.**

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