

THE AUSTRALIAN ANABAPTIST

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

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Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel,
but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in
the house.

Matthew 5:15

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From The Editor's Desk

May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion (fellowship) of the Holy Ghost, be with you all. Amen.

As members of the body of Christ, redeemed by His blood, we await the Lord's coming again for us at the end of our present human existence (1 Thess.4:14). and above all at the end of time. This present life will issue forth into union with the glorified Saviour in heaven. The apostle Paul in speaking to Timothy urged him to "Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ." Another translation puts it this way: "Endure hardship with us like a good soldier of Christ Jesus." (2 Tim. 2:3).

We can see from this Scripture that we are not in that battle alone, we have or should have the support, encouragement and the companionship of brothers and sisters in the Lord as we tread this strait and narrow way that Christ has called us to.

We also need to seek consolation in God's written word: 2.Tim.3:16: "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness." And the reason for this being given in the next verse: 2 Tim. 3:17: "That the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works."

Each of us has been given a gift from God not for our own personal use and edification but for the common good and to be used for the building up of the body of Christ so that it will not deteriorate or fall into apostasy. The faithful believer must always live in union with Christ, under His control and acknowledging His Lordship.

Having chosen this way of life, the Christian life, we need to and indeed must recall the words of Jesus in Luke 9:62 where He says that: "No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God." Along with this we should also realise that any person who lives under the Lordship of Christ will surely learn to know what it is to suffer for Christ and in 1 Peter 3:17 it reminds us that: "For it is better, if the will of God be so, that ye suffer for well doing, than for evil doing.

It is our prayer that we will continue to encourage each other, uplift each other and comfort each other in the times when trials and tribulations come into our lives but let us also remember the words so aptly spoken in.

2 Corinthians 1:3-4

"Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort; Who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God."

JVL.

MINISTER'S CORNER.**Cutting down the Wrong Trees.**

Deuteronomy 20:1-20

“When thou goest out to battle against thine enemies, and seest horses, and chariots, and a people more than thou, be not afraid of them: for the Lord thy God is with thee, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt. [2] And it shall be, when ye are come nigh unto the battle, that the priest shall approach and speak unto the people, [3] And shall say unto them, Hear, O Israel, ye approach this day unto battle against your enemies: let not your hearts faint, fear not, and do not tremble, neither be ye terrified because of them; [4] For the Lord your God is he that goeth with you, to fight for you against your enemies, to save you.

[5] And the officers shall speak unto the people, saying, What man is there that hath built a new house, and hath not dedicated it? let him go and return to his house, lest he die in the battle, and another man dedicate it. [6] And what man is he that hath planted a vineyard, and hath not yet eaten of it? let him also go and return unto his house, lest he die in the battle, and another man eat of it. [7] And what man is there that hath betrothed a wife, and hath not taken her? let him go and return unto his house, lest he die in the battle, and another man take her. [8] And the officers shall speak further unto the people, and they shall say, What man is there that is fearful and fainthearted? let him go and return unto his house, lest his brethren's heart faint as well as his heart. [9] And it shall be, when the officers have made an end of speaking unto the people, that they shall make captains of the armies to lead the people.

[10] When thou comest nigh unto a city to fight against it, then proclaim peace unto it. [11] And it shall be, if it make thee answer of peace, and open unto thee, then it shall be, that all the people that is found therein shall be tributaries unto thee, and they shall serve thee. [12] And if it will make no peace with thee, but will make war against thee, then thou shalt besiege it: [13] And when the Lord thy God hath delivered it into thine hands, thou shalt smite every male thereof with the edge of the sword: [14] But the women, and the little ones, and the cattle, and all that is in the city, even all the spoil thereof, shalt thou take unto thyself; and thou shalt eat the spoil of thine enemies, which the Lord thy God hath given thee. [15] Thus shalt thou do unto all the cities which are very far off from thee,

which are not of the cities of these nations. [16] But of the cities of these people, which the Lord thy God doth give thee for an inheritance, thou shalt save alive nothing that breatheth: [17] But thou shalt utterly destroy them; namely, the Hittites, and the Amorites, the Canaanites, and the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites; as the Lord thy God hath commanded thee: [18] That they teach you not to do after all their abominations, which they have done unto their gods; so should ye sin against the Lord your God.

[19] When thou shalt besiege a city a long time, in making war against it to take it, thou shalt not destroy the trees thereof by forcing an axe against them: for thou mayest eat of them, and thou shalt not cut them down (for the tree of the field is man's life) to employ them in the siege: [20] Only the trees which thou knowest that they be not trees for meat, thou shalt destroy and cut them down; and thou shalt build bulwarks against the city that maketh war with thee, until it be subdued.”

This chapter of Deuteronomy is about warfare, which reminds us again that God is not non-resistant. It is God's prerogative to judge and to destroy His enemies. Romans 9:18 states that “hath He mercy on whom He will have mercy, and whom He will He hardeneth.” These rules were given to Israel as a nation because as a nation she was a civil entity as well as a religious entity. As a civil entity she was responsible to bear the sword to maintain God's order within her own society. There were at least fifteen crimes for which an Israelite could be sentenced to death. Israel was also responsible to bear the sword to defend her own national and religious interests. We learn that in this chapter as well. Furthermore it is implied in this chapter that she was responsible to bear the sword to execute God's judgments upon the heathen societies and nations.

Israel's warfare was different from the barbarous nations that surrounded her and different from much of the warfare that we are acquainted with today. It was not an open-ended, free-for-all, do as you please execution of human vengeance, but rather it was carried out according to divine direction. Israel was not to engage in indiscriminate slaughter or wholesale destruction.

In verses 1–9, the military personnel come into focus. There are four points that stand out:

1. It was not merely a human force, but rather an invincible one. When God said, “Go,” He also said, “I will be with you and I will fight for you to save you.”

2. When an individual had a valid reason for not going to battle that was to be recognized and respected. This Scripture gives three cases in point: if someone had just built a new house and had not moved in it yet, if someone had just planted a vineyard and had never had any harvest from it yet, or if someone had just betrothed a wife and had not begun married life yet. In all three categories, such were to be given a military exemption. Even though our God is so high and so great, He recognizes the rights and circumstances of each and every individual. Israel’s warfare was not to be at the expense of their social and domestic well-being.

3. Any fearful person would have the opportunity to go home. More than that, they were encouraged to go home lest their fear would become contagious. Israel’s army was to be a voluntary, courageous army.

4. This warfare was to be a venture under the direction of duly appointed leadership. You probably noticed in this passage that we read about priests, we read about officers, and we read about captains. Israel’s warfare was not something that was initiated by the whims and wishes of any one individual. It was a cooperative engagement that took place in the context of proper supervision.

Verses 10–18 move us away from personnel to military procedure, specific directions for the battle. We learn in this section that they were to discriminate between distant nations or those seven neighbouring nations. This discrimination was based on two things: First, God’s concern that these neighbouring nations would have a negative influence on His people and be the means of corrupting them. Second, that the cup of iniquity of these seven nations was full so that they were ripe for divine judgment. God would use Israel to bring that about. Israel did not decide how to deal with her enemies. God decided that and then communicated His desire to them.

The nations that were afar off were to be offered overtures of peace and the opportunity to become tributaries to Israel. Of course, if they refused that, then God commanded Israel to use force.

Now in verses 19 and 20, from which our title is taken, we move from procedures to precautions. These precautions applied to all their conquests. The primary precaution, or prohibition, was destroying certain

trees. We would call them fruit trees, although this category is much broader than fruit trees as we think of them. They were prohibited from destroying any trees that provided something edible.

Apparently they normally used trees in their military endeavours. They would cut them down and trim off the branches. Then men would line up on either side, take hold, and run with the tree, using it as a battering ram to put a hole through a gate, or through a wall. Another use was as a bulwark, as it refers to in verse 20, to pile trees up outside the wall and use them as a means of getting over the wall.

God prohibited Israel from using food-producing trees, despite their value in warfare, because these trees were a resource for the sustaining of human life. And regardless of the outcome of the battle, someone would need these trees.

Perhaps the key to understanding God's injunction are three words found in verse 19—"a long time." A siege might last a long time. Just because God was with them and had assured them victory did not necessarily mean that overcoming the city would be a swift and easy project. There would be situations where it would take a lot of military perseverance and endurance to get the job done. Under normal circumstances, the Israelites would have known better than to cut down the fruit trees. But when they came up against a difficult situation and became frustrated and desperate, their better judgment could become clouded, and they might start hacking away at the fruit trees. In their irrationality, they may resort to warfare that would actually be counter-productive, and result in their opposing themselves. God gives this precaution lest they succumb to the danger of allowing one extreme to produce another. How well God understands human nature! He knows how prone we are to think that we can do evil that good may come. God knows how capable we are of doing something presently that will make it ever so difficult for ourselves and eventually for those who follow us.

This precaution contains a principle that we need to pay attention to. God prohibited them from cutting down certain trees, and there are some "trees" today that should always be preserved regardless of the circumstances. We also learn from this account that the need for restraint increases when circumstances become trying and difficult. We should be impressed with the carefulness that is insisted upon in these verses. Verse

20 says, “Only the trees which thou knowest that they be not trees for meat,” can be cut down. There was no guesswork. If they were not sure whether or not it was a fruit tree, that tree had to be left standing. Does this not indicate how concerned God is lest we do things that actually destroy that which we must have in the long run to sustain spiritual life? In this passage it was physical life. But far greater are the implications to spiritual life.

In applying these Scriptures to our situation today, what are some “trees” we should not cut down lest we jeopardize our spiritual lives? Below are six sets of fruit trees that to cut them down would be “cutting down the wrong trees.”

1. We cannot cut down the trees of the pre-eminence and centrality of Jesus Christ. Sometimes it becomes necessary for church leaders to work long and hard at helping our constituency to understand and to appreciate our church standards. And then sometimes we still are not able to help everyone. At times like this we must guard against reacting in such a way that we end up preaching only practical things. Certainly we need to preach practical things. There is among us a concern that focuses on Christ and on doctrine, but skirts the matter of making the proper applications. Sometime ago I was in a service, and at least six times in that message, the minister said there are things that we just don’t do as a Christian, but he never told us what they were. I am not in favour of that kind of preaching. The circumference of a circle is always determined by where the centre is; and the circumference of my life and your life and the circumference of our church life is determined by what is at the centre. If Jesus Christ is at the centre, then the circumference is going to be accordingly. The person who has Christ at the centre of his life is the best candidate to understand and appreciate church standards. If that be true, then we must keep Jesus Christ pre-eminent in our preaching. We cannot afford to cut down that tree. We cannot have spiritual life apart from the centrality of Christ.

2. Whenever we start swinging our axes and start chipping away at delegated authority, we are actually opposing ourselves. Spiritual life cannot be sustained apart from delegated authority.

In the situation where I grew up, a young father would often have a circle of people around him after church. I often wondered what was going on until one time I got close enough to find out. He was taking that oppor-

tunity to disagree with what had been preached or what the bishop had directed us in. He was using his axe and chopping away at church authority. Time went on and his children grew older, and he needed to exercise his authority to direct them. But he did not have any authority. He had chopped down the wrong trees. We can never afford to do that, whoever we are.

Perhaps the greatest temptation for Israel to cut down the fruit trees was when those fruit trees were not exactly ideal trees. It is quite common for those in authority to have some flat spots, whether civil authority, church authority, or parental authority. But when we *focus* on the less-than-ideal, we find it hard not to start cutting down that authority. God made no allowance for Israel to cut down fruit trees if they were not ideal. Consider David. How did he think about delegated authority? Was King Saul an ideal king? Not by any stretch of the imagination, and David would have had many opportunities to cut that tree down, but he did not.

It does make a difference if I consider it my life's calling to criticize and to challenge delegated authority, or if I consider it my calling to give that authority a reasonable amount of my support. Regardless who is in authority, there are always opportunities to make what they did look ridiculous.

Sometime ago there was a Sunday school lesson on church authority. In one particular Sunday school class, the teacher, instead of teaching the lesson, took the opportunity to give a lot of illustrations that he thought made church authority look ridiculous.

I am going to give a few precautions here.

First, as parents or church leaders we need to be especially discrete in our comments on civil authority. There are people today who hold a very dim view of civil authority. We ought not to help them out at all. Remember, if we help them we are cutting down the wrong trees.

Second, as parents or church leaders we do not get in the habit of second-guessing the administration of church leaders in other congregations. Sometimes this is done intentionally, and sometimes it is done unintentionally. Sometimes we make excuses for doing it. We say, "The person being disciplined is one of my friends or relatives, or the person called me and asked me for some advice," or something similar. We are best off to leave the people who are responsible to deal with the situation. Tell the person who is looking for sympathy that we have confidence in their lead-

ers and we believe they will do what is best for the situation. Otherwise we are going to get our hands on the axe handle, and we are going to be cutting trees that we had better not be cutting down.

Third, we should be careful about respecting the authority of other parents. The youth of our church have threefold accountability. They are accountable to God, they are accountable to the church, and they are accountable to their parents. When a problem develops with a teen-age young person, we do not immediately step in and address that individual. We should respect parental authority and give the parents the first opportunity to work through the situation. There may be some exceptions to that, but generally speaking, that is important, lest we cut down the wrong trees.

3. *We do not want to cut down the trees of human respect, dignity and fairness.* This is the other side of the previous point. The concern here is that those in authority do not exercise their authority in such a way that it fails to preserve an honourable relationship with everyone involved.

The Bible says that when the righteous are in authority the people rejoice. They rejoice because they can sense reasonableness and fairness and human respect. The Bible says to parents, “Provoke not your children to wrath.” When we exercise our authority as parents, we should always remain civil and rational. The Bible is also clear that those in authority are not to be strikers, soon angry, easily irritated or perturbed, but rather, patient. Possibly Israel’s temptation to destroy the fruit trees was when those trees were without fruit at the moment. Sometimes as parents and as church leaders we need to relate to individuals who are not very fruitful at the moment, but how we relate to them still matters. It is still a fruit tree. We must relate in a way that encourages them rather than in a way that cuts off the potential for fruit bearing. The Golden Rule helps us know how to relate to others in these kinds of situations. When we face a situation where it is obvious we cannot help someone and they choose to move on, we should relate in such a way that if they would change their mind, they would not hesitate to come back and take up right where they left off. Even if they never come back, they should still be able to respect us for the way things were handled.

Nabal was a man who incensed David. What David requested of Nabal was not at all unreasonable or abnormal, but Nabal’s response was unreasonable and abnormal. David was about to relate to him in such a way that

he would have been guilty of shedding blood without a legitimate cause. Abigail persuaded him to refrain from such tree cutting.

These are trees we don't want to cut down—trees of human dignity, respect and fairness.

4. *We do not want to cut down the trees of conservative practice, or good traditions.* The Bible puts some tradition in a bad light. The Bible also puts some tradition in a good light, and it is such that we do not want to destroy. Israel's temptation to cut down fruit trees may have come when the trees were getting pretty old. They had been around for a long time, and it was time for a change. They developed a disdain for such trees. For many people, tradition is something to be disdained, something obsolete and outdated. But I would ask you, where is spiritual life sustained over an extended period of time apart from good traditions? Folks often fail to realize the need for these trees. They often realize it only after they are cut down.

It is a little like removing "the ancient landmark which thy fathers have set." When people start tampering with the landmarks and move them around, after a while nobody knows where the landmarks belong. People become spiritually disoriented when we start tampering with proven practices and good traditions.

I well recall thirty-five or forty years ago when these trees were being chopped down. I remember when they chopped down the tree of the tradition of the plain cape dress, and the people who were swinging the axes were not thinking at all in the terms that their wives and daughters were going to later on wear slacks and shorts. They were only thinking about what they did not want. The same is true when they cut down the tradition of social reserve. They were not thinking in terms of divorce and remarriage. They were thinking only about what they did not want. And when they cut down the tradition of having the preaching of the Word central in our worship services, they were not thinking of bringing all kinds of entertainment into the church. The point I am trying to make is that when we cut these fruit trees down, what they provide is gone, and gone many times to the point that the next generation does not even know what a fruit tree is.

Many of us have seen where these kinds of trees have been chopped down. And what comes up in their place but a bunch of thistles and thorns? One reason I am saying this is that there appears to be a new wave of pietism about to challenge us, and this is not a time to be intimidated be-

cause we have traditions. It is rather a time to hold fast to that which we have.

5. *We do not want to cut down the trees of charity, the trees of brotherly love.* The Bible says, “Let brotherly love continue.” Let those trees continue to bear fruit. Spiritual life cannot be maintained apart from brotherly love. We do not want to cut down the tree of voluntary brotherhood aid by setting up a mandatory system within the brotherhood. Or when we differ with each other on eschatology, let us be sure that we do not begin cutting down the trees of brotherly love.

When someone can serve in a way that exceeds my ability to do so, let us not allow jealousy to cut down the trees of brotherly love. When some negative information is passed on to me about my brother or sister, let us not cut that tree down by passing those things on. Let us rather just bring that talk to a halt. When someone in our midst has a financial loss, let us not cut that tree down by begrudging that person the assistance given him. If we cut down the trees of fervent charity, we are cutting down the wrong trees.

6. *We do not want to cut down the trees of proper organization.* Some accuse us of being so tightly organized that we put the Holy Spirit out of business. Some feel that distance and geography exempt us from the need for central organization. Some complain about the inefficiency of being organized, and point out that such an approach to church life hinders a quick-fix approach to problems.

We said earlier that our text shows us that the need for human restraint increases when difficulty increases. Some of that restraint comes through proper organization. It is a whole lot less likely that an individual leader would cut down the wrong trees when he is accountable to a larger body of believers than when he is by himself. It is more unlikely that a congregation will cut down the wrong trees when they are accountable to a district. It is also less likely that a district will cut down the wrong trees when they are accountable to the broader church.

The decision here in Deuteronomy 20 as to whether a tree was a fruit tree or not was not based on the judgment of one soldier, nor was it based on the judgment of all the soldiers under one captain, but it was finally decided on by the cooperate army of Israel. God said under no circumstances should the fruit trees be destroyed, because they contribute to the suste-

nance of physical life. The fruit trees of Christ's pre-eminence, the fruit trees of delegated authority, the fruit trees of human dignity and respect, the fruit trees of tradition, the fruit trees of Christian charity, and the fruit trees of due organization are the trees that we should never cut down. They should be left there under any circumstance, because they all have to do with the sustaining of spiritual life. Instead of cutting them down, let us cultivate and fertilize them so that they would continue to bear fruit and even more fruit.

From a message given at Numidia Mennonite Bible School Ministers Bible Study.



All love and associations that are not begun on good terms will end in hatred. We should take heed with whom we join in league and amity. Before we plant our affections, consider the persons what they are; if we see any signs of grace, then it is good; but if not there will be a rent. Throughout our whole life this ought to be our rule; we should labour in a company either to do good or receive good; and where we can neither do nor receive good we should avoid such acquaintance. Let men therefore consider and take heed how they stand in combination with any wicked persons.



TRIALS AND BLESSINGS - WORKING TOGETHER.

Are there some spiritual blessings that Christian people can gain through trials? When we are submitted to God's will and are enjoying the light of God's love shining upon us, we can experience God's blessing through our trials.

What comes to me now is that if we want this blessing, we must follow the way of humility. How else can our Shepherd, who knows what is best for us, speak to us unless we are humble and teachable, and also admit that we need His help? We need to admit to Him daily that we need Him.

When we go through dark times in our lives and do not know where to

turn, what a blessing we find in giving up our own ideas. Then we can trust that God will take care of us. When I go through some dark and confusing days, I find it much easier and better when I lean on God for His love and care. He is my best Friend in time of trouble! But, oh, to always reach this place of rest! It seems at times my flesh and soul are in turmoil. One moment it feels as if the flesh has given up and we want to trust all into the Lord's hands. But again, before we can really grasp the meaning of true peace within, our soul cries out for another assurance that God is near.

When going through a trial, it is so comforting to know that the Holy Spirit prompts His children to pray for us. We should be strengthened by this and not forget that God's promises are for each one of us. We need to remember that God extends His love and grace to everyone and that He never forgets anyone. It is a great encouragement to hear that others are praying for us and to have faith that our name is going up to our Lord's throne. We may be surprised how many times someone is praying for us. Often we think we're alone, but this may not be the case. God's Word says that He knows what we need before we ask. Do we realize how great God's love is for us?

Finally, in closing, there is a question. Does God permit dark times in our life to show us His love and care? Is it His way of teaching us how to live closer to Him? These are the times we need Him the most. If you were to go through a trial, what are some valuable lessons that you might learn?

Perhaps to be patient would be one. The Scriptures say to "wait on the Lord." Another one might be learning to live for others, or having our interests in the right place. And always to have the goal, "I want to reach heaven" in mind. This all brings more meaning to life, and in the end, "Heaven will be worth it all." Pray for me, for I feel weak and undone. I need the prayers of those I love.

Sister Carol, Kansas.



FOOT WASHING

Why Jesus Washed Their Feet.

The washing of another's feet is a practice few Christians participate in today. In some nominal Christian gatherings each year on the Thursday be-

fore Good Friday there is washing of feet of some communicants - up to 12 in number— a ritual that has been performed for centuries. It is this act that Jesus spoke of in the upper room the day before He died on Calvary.

Through the years, painters have shown Jesus washing the feet of His disciples. At least one painting shows Peter remonstrating with Jesus, refusing to let Him do so.

But also over the years, the practice, in most churches, has been discontinued—dismissed as anachronistic because of its cultural implications (we all prefer to keep our personal space to ourselves) or because of embarrassment. Our customs are so different from the days of Jesus when, after walking dusty roads in sandals, washing the feet was a necessity. But is the practice still valid in our modern, clean well-dressed context? That's a good question. To answer it, we need to examine what Jesus did back then and why He did it. back then

Let's explore what Jesus did and said about foot-washing, and its meaning and importance. The record is found in the thirteenth chapter of John. (Note that John did not include other aspects of the Last Supper, as did Matthew, Mark and Luke. See Matthew 26:17-30; Mark 14:12-26; Luke 22:7-20).

Here is John's record of the occasion:

“Now before the feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour was come that he should depart out of this world unto the Father, having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end.” (John 13:1)

In taking the role of the absent servant, who should have performed this service, Jesus showed the disciples how much He really loved them. He, the Lord of heaven, took on the humble role of a servant. His love and humility demonstrated the depths to which He would shortly go on the cross in order to save humankind. One cannot understand this practice of foot-washing without linking it with the love of the Saviour.

“Jesus knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he was come from God, and went to God; He riseth from supper, and laid aside his garments; and took a towel, and girded himself. After that he poureth water into a basin, and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel wherewith he was girded.” (John 13:3-5)

Before their disbelieving eyes, the disciples saw their Master filling the role of a servant. He was demonstrating that, for His followers, there can

be no pride of position. Humility is the mark of the Christian.

Jesus reinforced this when He had finished washing their feet. He said: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord; neither he that is sent greater than he that sent him." (John 13:16) or in plain English "I tell you the truth, no servant is greater than his master".

This must have been a very strong rebuke to His disciples who, shortly before, had been striving to be "the greatest" in His kingdom.

Going around the circle, Jesus eventually came to Peter. Never backward, and not fully understanding what was happening, Peter proclaimed loudly that Jesus would never wash his feet (see verse 8).

Jesus didn't let this presumptuous assertion go unchallenged. Instead, He went to the heart of what it means to have a relationship with Him. He said to Peter, "Unless I wash you, you have no part with me" (verse 8).

So this act of foot-washing was to show to all of humankind that the eternal, infinite love of Jesus is linked to the cleansing of the person, and that this cleansing comes through Jesus. It also makes clear our need to overcome all pride and self-importance, for it has no place in the life of a true follower of Jesus.

When Jesus pointed this out, Peter went to the other extreme, asking Jesus to wash not just his feet but his hands and head as well (see verse 9). Jesus responded by reiterating the proper place and meaning of foot-washing. For in addition to removing the dirt from dusty highways, foot-washing reminds us of His great sacrifice on the cross and keeps forever before our eyes who He is and what He has done for us.

What about today?

But do we need to wash others' feet today? Meaningful as it may be, is this practice just a relic of the past with a good moral for today?

Jesus' words come clearly to us: "Do you understand what I have done for you?" He asked His disciples, "You call me 'teacher' and 'Lord,' and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. *I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you*" (verses 13-15; italics added).

This obviously is a command from Jesus Himself, albeit one that many today ignore, arguing changed circumstances and times. However, these words of Jesus still speak to us today.

Churches that retain the practice usually plan to carry it out as part of the

Communion service. Jesus never gave instruction as to when we should perform either the Communion service or foot-washing. But each time we participate in a foot-washing service, we demonstrate our need for humility, and we are reminded of the great love Jesus had for His disciples and for us.

Why would we want to disregard the words of Jesus and the blessing that comes from following His example?

An ancient rite?

The practice of foot-washing predates the 12th century, when a pope is first recorded as washing the feet of 12 sub-deacons. Augustine mentioned it in about the year 400 and Tertullian, a Christian author of the 2nd century, spoke about it. Certainly, the disciples practiced it in the first century. Coming forward, during the Middle Ages, foot-washing was practiced by the Albigenses of southern France and the Waldenses of the Piedmont valleys of Italy. From the time of the Reformation, the Mennonites, Hussites, and certain Baptists groups have all followed the practice. Some Protestant groups still practice foot-washing, usually with the Communion service. The foot-washing service teaches us that we must care for our fellow believers. However, Scripture is clear that this service goes beyond humility and caring for others. We have an explicit command from Jesus, and all His commands bring blessings to those who follow them. When we participate in the foot-washing service, we demonstrate our willingness to follow Jesus fully. I would rather put aside thoughts of embarrassment, ignore cultural mores and practices, and enter into a practice that Jesus taught. The experience can indeed be a blessing to all if it is done with the humility of Christ in our hearts.



THE FASTING LIFE

"This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come" (2 Timothy 3:1). Would anyone disagree with the statement that we are living in perilous times today? Brethren, I would like to share a burden that I believe the Lord has laid on my heart. I will leave it here for your proving.

The doctrine of self-denial, which I am calling the "fasting life" in this

article, is in danger of becoming something we give our intellectual assent to while we resist its practical application. Brethren, we cannot live as other men do and expect to be true disciples of Jesus Christ. That thought bears repeating. We simply cannot live as other men do and claim to be true disciples of Jesus Christ.

Over the past number of years we have witnessed what the apostle Paul wrote when he foretold that "evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived" (2 Timothy 3:13). It would take something besides optimism to believe that this sinful old world is getting better. To the contrary, we see that violence, corruption, ungodly living, etc. are on the increase. The ideologies of man (humanism, materialism, consumerism, New Age Movement, etc.) do not offer any kind of genuine cure for society's ills. The people of God believe that the problem is not political, nor is it economic. In fact, it is not even moral, exactly. The problem is spiritual in nature.

I have been in the church for over twenty-five years now. I came to the church during what is now referred to as a time of cleansing and renewal. From that time to this, there have been many changes in the world, and there have also been many changes in the church of God. Let me say here that, so there is no misunderstanding, my confidence is strong that God is with His people. I believe that His Spirit is still speaking to us today. I have no doubt whatsoever that God will be with His church until the end. We have Jesus' own promise that He will be with us always, even unto the end of time (Matthew 28:20).

We may, however, be facing challenges that we have not confronted in times past. And the question remains, "Are we ready?" The real challenge the church of God faces is simple—the need to be true to God. It isn't a question of us trying to be more religious. We have plenty of religion. What we need is more spirituality.

God is looking for people who are hungry to know Him better. Jesus said, "And this is eternal life, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent" (John 17:3). Paul's prayer was that he might "know him, and the power of his resurrection" (Philippians 3:10). We need that same resurrection power operating in our lives today. It only comes from having a real relationship with the living Savior, Jesus Christ. The modern conditions surrounding born-again Christians influence the mind to where we find it hard to see things differently than the world sees

them. More serious than this, we may find it very difficult to see things as Jesus, Paul, the early church, our martyr brethren, and church leaders of the past saw them. It seems that we can read our Bibles and, on an intellectual level, agree with what we read. At the same time, on a practical level, we might be shocked if someone would actually attempt to apply in everyday living what the Scriptures teach.

Let's take prayer for an example. Do we have a rich prayer life whereby we come to God and find grace and strength for the day? Do we anticipate with joy the time we spend with God in prayer? Or have we become feeble and somewhat lazy in our approach to praying? Has it become just a duty to perform? Are we only going through the motions, stringing together a well-worn set of familiar phrases and calling that prayer? We often hear someone confess at revival time that they left off their Bible reading and prayer. Jesus told us to watch in prayer. The example He left us on prayer can be seen in Mark 1:35, where it says that "in the morning, rising up a great while before day, he went out, and departed into a solitary place, and there prayed."

Search the Scriptures and see how our Lord prayed often. If the only begotten Son of God needed to do this, where does that leave us with all our needs? Remember that the servant is not greater than his master. Jesus is not the only example we have. In Acts, we see the early church, whose members prayed. They often prayed together. In the first chapter of Acts, we see the disciples gathered together, and it says, "These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication" (v. 14).

The first deacons were elected so that the apostles could dedicate themselves to the word of God and prayer. The apostles' commitment was that "we will give ourselves continually to prayer" (Acts 6:4). The apostle Paul constantly encourages us to pray and make intercession for others. The New Testament is full of examples of a praying people.

Please don't misunderstand what I am saying. I know we pray. I know that we are a praying people. My question is, "Do we truly know the intimacy with God that comes through an active, genuine prayer life?" There isn't space here, but numerous verses could be used to support what is said here. For instance, see Acts 1:14; 12:5; 16:13; Romans 12:12; 1 Corinthians 1:11; Ephesians 6:18; Colossians 4:2; James 5:15,16; 1 Peter 4:7; Matthew 5:44; 14:23; 26:41; Mark 6:46; 13:33; Luke 6:12; 18:1; 21:36; 1 Thessalonians 5:17; 1 Timothy 2:8; James 5:13; 5:16; and 1 John 5:16.

There are many more besides these. Let us take an honest look at how we measure up in this area.

Here's another question: What role does fasting play in our lives? What role should it play? We don't hear much about it, do we? Why is that? Again, we read our Bibles and agree with what we read on an intellectual level. Yet, we would be quite surprised if someone actually applied to his or her life what the Scriptures teach on fasting. There seems to be a certain disconnect in our thinking so that we can't see the discrepancy between what we agree with (the Scriptures) and our actual practice. Here are some scriptures that relate to Christians fasting: Matthew 17:21; Acts 14:23; 1 Corinthians 7:5; Matthew 6:16; Mark 2:1820; 2 Corinthians 6:5; 11:27. Notice that Jesus didn't say, "If you fast," but, "When you fast" (Matthew 6:16). Fasting needs to be done in the spirit of the New Testament, but there is an assumption on our Lord's part that His disciples will do it. He taught us how to give alms, pray, and fast (Matthew 6:1-18). We acknowledge that we should give alms and pray. We need to ask ourselves how we can identify with Jesus, the apostle Paul, the teaching and practice of the early church and the martyr brethren and not practice fasting.

How can we allow ourselves to place so much emphasis on food (and rich food at that) and not see the disconnect between our lives and the Biblical standard? Just on the natural level, some may be eating themselves into an early grave. But the real question is how our lifestyle is affecting our relationship with Jesus Christ. Why is it that we seem to lack conviction on this matter? How does the doctrine of self-denial relate to our eating?

The apostle Paul writes to the Philippians, "Brethren, be followers together of me, and mark them which walk so as ye have us for an ensample. (For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: Whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things)" (Philippians 3:17-19).

Bear in mind here that the belly represents more than mere eating. It stands for the appetites and passions of the lower nature. We need to operate out of a spiritual heart rather than allowing our appetites to control our lives. We can read this passage and think to ourselves that these were pretty bad people. We find it difficult to believe that it may apply to us. Could it be that in some of these areas we have become enemies of the cross of Christ?

Or, in other words, enemies of true self-denial? In our conversations around the table, as well as afterwards, are we minding earthly things?

The Lord has impressed me with the tremendous importance of feeding my mind with spiritual literature. We tend to think of newspapers or the weekly newsmagazines or Reader's Digest as somewhat benign or harmless reading. Is there a danger that we become calloused to sin through too much of this sort of reading material? Some are pretty knowledgeable when it comes to politics, sports, and so forth. Could we practice a "news fast" once in a while? The spirit of the world says that we need to be in the know. This spirit causes us to not want to appear ignorant of current events.

The news media oftentimes has an agenda besides the mere passing of information from them to the public. There is sometimes a subtle slant to the news that we are hardly aware of, which may have a tremendous influence on our thinking. I am not condemning all reading of news. I am only questioning whether we should be feeding on it to the extent that we do. Perhaps the Lord would like to see more dependency on Him and less connection to the world.

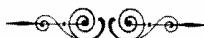
The teachings of the Bible, which are truth, must become matters of the heart, or we stand in danger of having only a form of godliness. I have written about prayer and fasting, but the fasting life includes every area of our lives. Any number of other aspects of Christian living could have been written about. As true disciples of Christ, we need to present our bodies as living sacrifices to God (Romans 12:1-2). This is a very reasonable service for us to perform.

Are we in some danger of having a religious spirit rather than being truly spiritual? There is power in submitting our lives to the authority of the Holy Spirit. There is grace in drawing close to God. We need to pursue the mind of Christ in these matters. They are weighty. We are at the end of the age. There is no reason why any of us should be foolish virgins. When Christ returns, will He find us truly watching? If He tarries, are we prepared to meet the challenges of our day? May our light shine so that all men can see the Son of God living in our hearts. I pray a blessing on all of God's people.

Brother Samuel, Arkansas.

SOWING

THE



GOSPEL

Jesus used the example of sowing seed to teach a lesson on spreading the seed of the gospel. God desires that His Word be spread and that its work in the heart of man would bring forth a bountiful harvest. He has given to man the duty to sow this seed.

In order for man to be effective in this effort, he must first have the seed sown in his own heart. "The husbandman that laboureth must be first partaker of the fruits" (2 Timothy 2:6). As the seed sown in our hearts comes to fruitage in faithful obedience, we also go forth sowing seed. The call for this work is to all who have allowed the Word to cleanse and regenerate their heart and change their life.

An unbiased vision is necessary for effectiveness when sowing gospel seed. God is no respecter of persons; neither is His servant to be. God offers His Word to all, and it will work for anyone who has a prepared acre. Who knows where those prepared spots are? Since it is not always so evident, the sower needs to spread the seed of the gospel everywhere so that some will come to fruitage.

When we think of sowing in Jesus' day, we picture a man carrying a sack with seed in it. As he walks along, he reaches into the sack and slings the seed out evenly over all the soil from which he hopes to gain a harvest. Along the side of most fields, there is a pathway packed hard from travel. From here, birds can pluck the seed before it has opportunity to sprout. At places the ground is stony, is hard to be tilled, or has shallow topsoil. Because of the shallow soil, the seed may quickly sprout and begin to grow, but the lack of moisture in the stony ground soon starves the plant, and it dies. Even in the ground that appears to be well prepared, hidden weed seeds may be present that sprout and choke out the good plants. As the sower is sowing, some seed falls on each of these conditions in the field. Surely, this is an example of what the sower of the gospel encounters as he goes forth.

His concern is that the hearts of the hearers, whatever their condition, be covered sufficiently with the true Word of the gospel. Among all the adverse conditions, there will be some prepared soil that in time will bear the fruit of a spiritual harvest.

Jesus did not indicate that preparation of the field was the duty of the sower. However, there are some factors that are important for the sower to consider. He does not just go out one day and start slinging seed. He

spends time familiarizing himself with the seed and its value and is aware that there is a season for sowing. God is the one who prepares the heart through the gentle, timely work of His Holy Spirit. He tenderly invites, showing man his sin and pointing out the judgment that will come on sin. He shows him that he is lost without a Savior. God also points out those who are humbly walking His way and the comfort and security they experience. He shows what joy can be experienced when the godly way is chosen. His desire is that the Spirit's tender work will soften and prepare the heart so when the faithful servant sows the seeds of the gospel, some will fall on prepared soil. He is calling the stony heart and the heart that is filled with the cares of life as well as those who are standing on the way-side of indecision. As He sends His faithful servant to sow, He sends equally to all conditions of the heart.

The gospel is for all people everywhere. Jesus sent His disciples into the world to sow the seed. He sent them to all races and creeds of people, to the downtrodden, to those in prison, to those who are homeless, destitute, and without hope, to those not open to the truth because of other religious persuasions, and to those open to hear. The sower did not avoid any area of the field where he thought the prospect of harvest was less, but he sowed the seed on all of it.

Man's tendency is to spend more effort where he thinks there is more worthiness. But salvation is open to all, and God loves those who seem less worthy or less receptive just as much as those whom man tends to judge as more worthy or more receptive. The love of the sower servant is manifest in that he, like God, makes no distinction about status when sowing the seed. He faithfully toils wherever the Master Sower sends him.

To be ready for that small task God has for us, we must be first partakers of that experience of which we are to speak. It is not enough to once have met the Lord; it takes a continual walking with Him. Personal devotion to God is vitally important. This preparation establishes the environment for warm and effective family devotions. For most of us, our first responsibility is to sow the seed in our own home. This faithful work of humility then reaches out beyond our own small circle and touches others we know. A humble spirit gives us the vision that all men are worthy and enables us to reach out to anyone, whoever or wherever he is.

Unless we have this vision, our efforts will not be as fruitful as they could be. When we have agendas of our own and our lives are not fully

submitted to God, we pursue our own desires and fail in the work God has for us. God needs a complete surrender from the servant He sends to sow the seed. He knows the season and the condition of the hearts of all men and knows when the time is right for seed to be sown. We cannot see those things as God does, and therefore we need to follow faithfully and carefully as He leads.

We should not think of probable results (or the lack of them) to determine whether or not we will share God's message. The work of saving souls is the Lord's, and the whole-hearted, unconditional efforts we put forth to spread the Word will not go unrewarded. We may never know what our efforts have accomplished, but if there are those who are saved by the love of God manifest in our lives, whatever we were caused to endure in that work will not be regretted. Surely the more we reach out there will be greater probability of the seed finding a prepared spot. As we go forth, let us not neglect the prisons, rescue missions, hospitals, and nursing homes. May we share God's message with the poor, the handicapped and maimed, the mentally and physically distressed. The list of opportunities is endless, and God needs available servants. Will you be sower?

Adapted from a Sunday School Lesson by Gospel Publishers, Moundridge, Kansas.



Life's Clock

**The clock of life is wound but once,
And no man has the power
To tell just where the hands will stop—
At late or early hour.**

**To lose one's wealth is sad indeed,
To lose one's health is more,
To lose one's soul is such a loss
As no man can restore.**

**The present only is our own,
Live for Christ with a will;
Place no faith in tomorrow,
For the clock may then be still.**

Anonymous.

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