

THE AUSTRALIAN ANABAPTIST

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

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

Matthew 5:15

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For A Conservative Mennonite Perspective

From The Editor's Desk

Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul; 1 Peter 2:11

In 1959 a Conservative Mennonite Church group adopted this statement at a churchwide meeting it states: “Resolved, That we teach and practice modesty, simplicity, and economy in everything in clothes, in homes, in farms, in machinery, in automobiles, and in all we possess or handle.”

No supporting scriptures are cited in the article. It is as though the truth is so self-evident and in keeping with the general tenor of the Scriptures that it would be superfluous to begin to enumerate them.

In times of hardship, it is not difficult to submit ourselves to the principles of modesty, simplicity, and economy. We see their value because they are the best way to deal with our restrictions. In other words, we get a longer-term benefit from temporarily practicing the self-restraint that these principles entail. But when we begin to achieve the success that self-denial affords, we are faced with a different issue. It is only natural to want to enjoy the rewards of our sacrifice. As far as our personal interests are concerned, we could easily relax. Is, then, the practice of modesty, simplicity, and economy no longer necessary?

Modesty, simplicity, and economy call for separateness from the world. They require the death of pride and covetousness. Spiritual deterioration begins when we turn back from living these principles.

It is this very simplicity that cuts across affluent, self-serving life-styles and leaves the carnal Christian groping for arguments to defend himself. How can I lend, hoping for nothing again, for example, and still preserve my security in abundance? How can I give away my coat and my cloak and still be practical?

Modesty, simplicity, and economy are not ends in themselves. Church groups could be cited that have made them gods. The result has not been spirituality. They are, however, crucial principles because first love toward God, a single eye, and brotherly love demand them.

Today's challenge is to make the trip back to basics. Away from love of luxury. Away from the eye lustfully set on fashion. Away from carnal security. Away from emulations. Back to simplicity, modesty, and economy.

May the articles this month help us to be the strangers and pilgrims that Hebrews 11:13 and 1 Peter 2:11 encourage us to be.

J.v.L.



From the Pulpit

Facing the Peril of Affluence

Brother Warren Martin

Richland Mennonite Church 2002

I appreciated what I've been hearing this morning, the soundness of truth that came our way. I take an interest in your prayers that the things that might be said are things that are true and right.

One thing that we can find comfort in as we relate to the brotherhood on a church level is that it helps to balance each other and I think this message here is an area where we need each other's help.

In *Proverbs 30:8-9* the writer says: ⁸ Remove far from me vanity and lies; give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food convenient for me: ⁹ Lest I be full, and deny *thee*, and say, Who *is* the LORD? or lest I be poor, and steal, and take the name of my God *in vain*.

This gives a balanced view of material possessions. - Facing the peril of affluence.

God has richly blessed us with much material goods so that we are in danger of the warning given in verse nine, Lest I be full and deny thee, and say: Who is the Lord?

The present affluence of our land is almost without parallel. I do not know of any time in history that there were such higher paying jobs with such a small percentage of income needed for the basic necessities of life.

Compared to years ago our working week has decreased and pay has increased and right along with that we have modern technology in our day that has brought new machinery into the working world, new appliances into the home, that has brought about a life of ease and comfort that has never been known by former generations. And not only do we face that along with the increase of new things and the affluence of our age but our people, we as a people have access to things and we have the money to buy and do things that is not always for the spiritual good.

The Bible gives many warnings of the effect that riches have on the heart of men. Would also have the warning that God gave Israel that when they entered the land of Canaan, a land of plenty, that they were to beware lest they forget God. (*Deuteronomy 8:1-14*)

We have the example of the Mennonite church in Russia, in the Netherlands and now the Mennonite church in North America.

The Mennonite encyclopaedia says this about the Mennonite church in the Netherlands; "That the increase of wealth and luxury led to indifference on the part of many."

The question that we face this morning that we must keep in mind is: What is this affluent age doing to the spiritual life of the church?

The thing that we want to think about mostly is the peril of affluence. That is a danger or risk.

I'm not saying that this is what we are as a people but these are the dangers that go along with it.

The first one that I have listed here is: The peril of self sufficiency.

The church at Laodicea was a self-sufficient church. Jesus said because thou sayest I am rich and increased with goods and have need of nothing, and then He says; Thou knowest not.

They had a self-sufficient attitude and they did not think they were in need. *Revelation 3:17*

Israel when they entered Canaan and had an abundance, they were to be careful that they did not forget God and that is still true today. It is an issue for us to get up in the morning and make plans and forget to do what James says, If the Lord will we shall this or that.

And also we may forget what *Deuteronomy 8:18* says, But thou shalt remember that the Lord thy God it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth.

But the affluent age we are living in makes it easy for us to think that we can manage by ourselves that we don't need God.

It is not that we purposefully forget God but it is easy to just not realize how much we need Him because our needs are met, and needs are met, our

material needs are met, our fruit room is full of the abundance of the earth, the house has all the furnishings we need. But right along with that self-sufficient attitude it also produces an independence toward the brotherhood, a lack of appreciation for the counsel and advice that is given.

So affluence can give us a false concept of success and make us feel like we have arrived when really, Have we?

You know what Jesus said there in Revelation 3? Because thou sayest.

They were the ones saying they were rich, Jesus did not say they were rich. And that is one peril of affluence; it can make us feel we are self-sufficient in that affluence.

Another peril that we must be careful of is: Being high-minded or proud.

Wealth or abundance can give an improper concept of the individual's importance.

Nebuchadnezzar said: Is not this great Babylon that I have built? He felt very important but God showed him that the kingdom could go on without him. *Daniel 4:28-31*

How often have riches or an abundance of material possessions made problems in the church because an individual had an over estimated of opinion of himself because of what he owned?

Another peril that is close to this is: The peril of selfishness.

Affluence can cause us to forget other people and think about ourselves.

The rich man in Luke 16 is an example of that. In verses 19 through 21 it says: *Luke 16:19-21* ¹⁹ There was a certain rich man, which was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day: ²⁰ And there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, which was laid at his gate, full of sores, ²¹ And desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table: moreover the dogs came and licked his sores.

The thought there in the end of verse 19, fared sumptuously every day, he lived to the full, he lived to the extent that he was able to and he forgot about the poor man there by his gate. It was a selfish attitude that he had.

Who was the one that gave everything that she had? It was the poor widow.

Luke 21:1-4

Affluence brings the temptation to spend our financial resources on ourselves, on our own interests and enjoying the pleasures of this world and if we do this the demands of the self life become increasingly more demanding.

And right along with that is the peril of free spending.

It can produce thoughtless and wasteful spending, just because we can afford something does not mean we should buy it. Having the money in our pockets increases the temptation to stop and buy something at a fast food place even when we are close to home because the money is there.

Sales items, it is not a bargain if we don't need it or we might see a sales item that is 20% off and so we buy because some day we might need it and yet is it a bargain if we don't even need it?

As parents we should spend our money wisely and guard against the impulse spending. Why?

Well for one reason to be an example to our youth and to the children that are in our home. Few of our young people know little about financial struggles or difficulties and affluence tends to make us a "now" people and it does not prepare us for hard times.

Another peril of affluence is: The desire for an easy religion.

A road to heaven that is not too costly.

The more we surround ourselves with a life of ease and luxury or a lifestyle that caters to the flesh the less equipped we will be for the spiritual battles of life.

The worldly lifestyle of ease and comfort does not prepare us to bear the cross and live a life of separation.

It is also may be one of the reasons for the struggles that we face with borderline members, youth who are lured by the IMAX theatres and the world of entertainment, the computerised life and the modern communication systems.

One of the reasons that we as a church are faced with this problem, and it is not the only reason, but there is an excess of money and wealth, people earning more than they need to live and they have extra money and so they are tempted to do things that they could not do if the money wasn't there.

Another peril is that: Riches and material possessions or affluence and the excesses of life tend to master us. They get a hold of us.

Ecclesiastes says that he who loveth silver shall not be satisfied with silver.

Ecclesiastes 5:10

We get to the place where we have plenty and yet we feel like we still need more, we feel like it isn't quite sufficient, we can become addicted to this just like people are addicted to drugs and strong drink.

The Psalmist says that if riches increase set not your heart upon them.

Psalm 62:10

They give us a false sense of security.

What did the rich man; the rich fool say in Luke 12 when his new and bigger barns were full? I will say to my soul, Soul thou hast much good laid up for many years, take thine ease, eat drink and be merry. *Luke 12:15-21*

This was a picture of a false sense of security, he thought he had all that he wanted and this is a sad picture when this happens in a home. This kind of the home does not prepare us to serve Christ and the church.

Another peril of affluence is: That it can confuse the important choices of life.

Lot is an example of this. When Abraham and Lot were viewing the land Lot saw the well watered plain of Jordan and he made a choice to go down there, but that affected a very important decision in Lot's life, one of the next things that it says about Lot is that he pitched his tent toward Sodom.

Genesis 13:8-13.

And when we begin to make choices that reflect financial bargains we must be careful, we do not allow financial bargains to be the deciding factor because it can confuse us on other issues and choices that we make later on.

Another peril of affluence is: The stiff competition that it is to the true riches.

Jesus said in the parable of the sower that the earthly riches have the potential to crowd out the word of God.

Jesus also said that we cannot serve God and mammon, we cannot serve both, our loyalties will be to the one or the other, but we cannot serve both.

Matthew 6:24

He also said where your treasure is there will our heart be also.

This morning if we want to know where our heart is we need to only look and to see where our treasure is, what are the treasures that we enjoy?

One of the greatest perils of affluence is this: That the material wealth of this world will not help us to meet our moral responsibilities toward God. And the Bible says that riches are deceitful. They are deceitful because in the final analysis they are not what we tend to think they are and they will not help us on the day that we stand before God. Someday we will all stand before God and it will not matter what we had to our name in this world or in this life but it will matter if we were faithful stewards, that will matter. It will matter if we were faithful stewards of the material things that God has entrusted to us and if we misuse them then it will be against us and if we believe this we will use our earthly riches and wealth to gain the eternal riches.

This brings us to the last part: What can we do?

How can we learn to live in a land of plenty that pictures affluence as a satisfying way of life without being absorbed by it?

We do believe that God has answers for us. We have neither chosen nor provided the favourable circumstances that we are enjoying but it is on our part to decide how to use these blessings. And it is.

I have listed some things and I'm sure you might think of others.

The one thing that we must keep on teaching is that God is the divine owner of everything and that we are only stewards.

You notice there in Luke 12 one of the questions that was raised when that rich man said I will say to my soul, Thou hast laid up goods for many years, take thine ease, eat drink and be merry. But God said unto him: Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee!

Now listen to this: Now then whose shall those things be which thou hast provided? Whose shall those things be?

Well one thing we do know is that they were not his, it was all God's.

And we must remember that the time we are living in here and have access to all these things that they belong to God and not to us, we are stewards,

we are only stewards and we must be ready to use them to His honour and glory.

Number two: I think we should be careful that we are not living to the full. Sure we are living in the world where there is easy credit, buy now and pay later, and we should be careful that we are not doing this kind of thing not using all the credit that we can get. But I think we ought to be living sacrificially and this must be done before the rising generation.

Someone has said that the wants of one generation become the needs of the following generation.

The question is: Why is our younger generation so being influenced by the affluence?

It is easy for the older generation to lament how the younger generation is being caught up by affluence of our society and forget that we as parents may have directed them in that way by the life that we have lived.

Now this may not always be true but we have raised our children and how are we raising them? Are we raising them in a sacrificial life style where they see and realize that these things are God's and that we believe in giving and helping in the work of the church and the brotherhood assistance program and things like that.

So how deeply have we been influenced?

The materialistic values of today have a way of rubbing off on us but we should not allow the luxuries of this life to become necessities in our home, we should be ready to live a Bible way of life.

Another thing that I think helps us is by diversifying our efforts.

We should be ready to be involved in the work of the church, not to put all our time into earning and not to put all that time into making financial gains and not to allow the spending of all our time for this but to use our talents in the Christian school efforts and in the work of the Sunday school, the outreach work of the church.

Someone has said that it is hard to make rapid financial gain when your time is divided between the church and your job.

Another thing that I think might help is that we must keep maintaining a Bible way of life, teaching and practicing the stranger and pilgrim concept in this world.

This world, brethren and sisters, we are only passing through, this country is not our home, we are not planning to stay here but we are planning to move on and we must live that way, living the separated life style, not allowing the insurance mentality to influence our thinking but rather promoting assurance which stimulates trust in God and a submissive attitude toward the unplanned experiences that God brings into our life.

So let's not allow the extra money and a better income lead us to live selfishly.

But most of all we must remember that the true meaning of life is found in Jesus Christ.

Jesus said that a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesses.

In closing I would just like to read a Scripture from first Timothy chapter 6 where Paul was speaking, he was writing this to Timothy, he said:

1 Timothy 6:17-19 ¹⁷ Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not high-minded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy; ¹⁸ That they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate; ¹⁹ Laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life.

So let's not forget the words of Jesus as we are to living in this world here below that a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of things which he possesses.

May the Lord bless you.



Thy word *is* a lamp unto my feet
And a light unto my path.

TITHING—IS IT OPTIONAL?

God-fearing people have tithed since nearly the beginning of time. We know it was a commandment in the Law of Moses. But what about the practice today? Let's consider the Word of God for direction.

The earliest record of returning a portion of one's increase to God is when Cain and Abel "brought of the fruit of the ground" and of the "first-lings of his flock," offering these unto the Lord (Genesis 4:3-4). This might have been more or less than 10 percent of their increase, but, obviously, something impressed them to do this. God was pleased with Abel's offering, but not Cain's. Was that because Cain's offering didn't come from a heart of sincere love and devotion?

Abraham, returning from the slaughter of the kings, gave tithes of the spoil to the priest Melchizedek (Genesis 14:20; Hebrews 7:2). This apparently pleased this great person, and he graciously received Abraham's tithe. Who was this man?

Later in the book of Genesis, we have the account of Jacob making a vow to give a tenth of all that God would give him (Genesis 28:20-22). We have reason to believe that Jacob kept this vow and that God loved it and blessed him in that.

All of these accounts happened before the Law was given. Somehow these people understood God would be pleased with this act of honour and devotion. It seems that by this time, it had become a custom in the world to honour kings by tithing.

The Old Testament Law gave specifics as to when, where, and how to tithe. It's not fully clear how these tithes were used, but generally they were used for the maintenance of the tabernacle and the temple. They sustained the priests and Levites and were used to help the poor. The Levites were to give tithes of the tithes they received (Deuteronomy 14:27-29; Leviticus 27:30-34; Nehemiah 10:35-39).

Faithfulness in tithing was very important to God in the Old Testament. It was a focal point in some of the great revivals in Israel. When Israel drifted

away from God and became selfish, they left off tithing. When they repented, it was restored (Nehemiah 13:10-12).

The law actually asked for more than a tenth. There were other offerings, such as, offering of the first fruits and firstborn of animals and freewill offerings at the feast of weeks. Blessings were pronounced upon faithful giving in the Old Testament (Proverbs 3:9-10; 28:7).

The next to the last chapter of the Old Testament leaves a solemn exhortation to "Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse ... and prove me now herewith" (Malachi 3:10). Here again, a blessing was pronounced on faithfulness, and a curse was upon unfaithfulness (read Malachi 3:7-11).

Going on into the New Testament, John the Baptist, Jesus, and the apostles taught in much the same vein. John taught: "He that hath two coats, let him impart to him that hath none; and he that hath meat, let him do likewise" (Luke 3:11). Giving 50 percent is suggested here!

Jesus taught: "Give and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal, it shall be measured to you again" (Luke 6:38). In Matthew 6:33, He teaches the principle of seeking God and His kingdom first, with a blessing promised on doing so. Then in Luke 12:33-34, He exhorts to "sell that ye have [that which is in excess], and give alms." Thereby one lays up "a treasure in the heavens." Zacchaeus, upon receiving Jesus into his life, declared, "Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor" (Luke 19:8). Jesus was very pleased with this declaration.

Concerning the collection for the congregation at Jerusalem, Paul encouraged the Corinthian believers this way, "Therefore as ye abound in every thing ... see that ye abound in this grace also" (2 Corinthians 8:7). Later, in chapter 9, he said, "He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully. Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver" (vv. 6-7). Then he follows with an assurance that God is able to supply them with all their need. Paul charges the rich to be "rich in good works" and refers to

Jesus' teaching about laying up treasures in heaven (1 Timothy 6:17-19). The Apostle John tells us that one of the proofs of our love to God and our fellowmen is in our giving (1 John 3:17-18).

In matters of the moral law, the gospel of Jesus went much deeper and addressed not only the letter but also the spirit (Matthew 5:40-42). This did not annul the letter. Our giving enters into our moral obligation to love God with all our heart and our neighbours as ourselves (Matthew 22:37-40).

Here are some of the things tithing does:

1. Recognizes God as our King.
2. Shows the increase of our labour as the result of God's goodness and His blessing, it is not a result of our ingenuity or managerial ability.
3. Proves our faith in God, His providential care, and His promises.
4. Helps keep God first in our financial enterprises.
5. Makes us more aware of how we use our money.
6. Expresses our love, devotion, and appreciation to God for all His goodness shown us.

What are some guidelines for giving today?

If we're on a fixed wage, setting aside a regular portion of our take-home pay seems reasonable. By doing this first before meeting other obligations, we are in essence taking of the "first and best," which is something God smiles upon. Young people earning wages, begin this practice as soon as you are allowed to keep your earnings.

In light of the economic standard of North America and many western nations compared to the rest of the world, giving of what we have seems to be no more than giving as the Lord has prospered us (1 Corinthians 16:2).

Tithing is often very difficult to budget but it is the time when the Lord says, "Prove me."

Tithing—is it optional? Perhaps it is optional. However, devoted Christian, do you want to do any less?

Brother Darryl

DRIFTING IN OUR MATERIAL AFFAIRS

"For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy"

2 Timothy 3:2

Truly, we are living in the very last times. We see the above prophecy coming true all around us. Yes, we notice these tendencies even in our own hearts and lives. But God is greater than our enemies and will give grace to overcome if we accept His way. This article treats on one of the enemies trying to gain entrance into the hearts of the pilgrims on the Christian pathway.

The Problem: Worshipping the god of financial success. It affects everyone, rich or poor or in between. This is a god that is very subtle, partly because there is nothing inherently wrong with financial success and because we need a certain amount of success to provide the necessities of life. In fact, up to a point, it fits in quite well with our Mennonite heritage of thrift, good management, and temperate living. When these attributes are exercised to God's honour and glory, the rigors of making a livelihood can be very enjoyable, and "the blessings will come down as the prayers go up."

However, have we drifted beyond the livelihood stage into the area of worshipping financial success, not realizing the danger we are in? Do our hearts fill with compassion and love when we see a brother who is struggling financially? Can we walk a mile in his shoes, realizing that "the Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away" and that it just may be the Lord's will to give us financial hardship next? To those who sometimes feel like the windows of opportunity are closed and hardship seems to be their lot remember that there is a heavenly crown awaiting all the faithful. Someday, when our eyes are truly opened, we will see that it was for our eternal good.

We love to read the Old Testament story about the three Hebrew captive boys, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. The king had set up this huge image and commanded all men to bow while the music played. Here were three boys who refused to bow their knees to a god of this world. Not only that, they told the king that it did not matter what he did to them or whether

God would choose to save their physical lives from the king's wrath or not. But they would not, under any circumstances, bow to the image he had made.

Brethren, the devil himself has set up a golden image, the music is softly playing, and he is trying to lure us into a deadly trap. In this case, the image is financial success, and the music is the world calling us to come partake of this fruit. "It is good for food, pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise." Are we standing faithfully like the three Hebrew children, or have we begun to succumb to that powerful influence?

We have had many years of unbelievable prosperity in this wonderful land of ours. Are too many of us bending the knees to this image? The father of lies is trying to make us think that we will not survive unless we do so. It seems so sensible. After all, times are different now. We need more money to finance our lifestyle. Then we wonder why we don't prosper spiritually, why our spiritual fervour drops away so soon after revivals. Could it be that we should make an abrupt and serious change in our fundamental attitude towards making a livelihood? Will we need to admit that we have not put God first in the financial area of our lives? We may even have unknowingly exerted pressure on others (our families, our children, those close to us, our brothers and sisters) that unless you excel financially, you are not quite up to par? Has it become so important to us to succeed that all else has become secondary? Have too many choices been made based on dollars and cents instead of the Holy Spirit's tender counsel? Could it be that some of the losses in the struggle with modern technology are partially a result of some of these misguided choices?

Not only that, but menial labour is becoming distasteful to us, as something below our dignity and to be done only temporarily until we can have it "easy." Fathers, we should teach our children that hard physical work is not necessarily synonymous with covetousness but is biblical and physically healthy. Teach them that it is more rewarding to save than to spend, especially for ourselves. And finally, teach them that our possessions are totally the Lord's property and are to be used completely to His honour and glory.

The remedy: The remedy for our drift in these areas is to come back to the gospel way, the way of simplicity and true sanctification. When we walk through that beautiful crop, or that profitable barn, or when we get a promotion at work, does our heart swell with pride as we plan further financial pursuits with the gains we have accumulated? The remedy is to dedicate it all to God's service, without reserve.

There is nothing that will provide more moderation in our everyday affairs than to actually give it all to the Lord. Will some of us need to actually literally sell (some of) what we have and give to the poor? Oh, what treasures are awaiting us in the heavenly kingdom as we come back to God and truly take His way! In tough times it is easier to call on God for help to make that next payment or to cope with other difficulties. Rare is the man who, in good times, does not begin to trust in the earthly riches. The danger is great! If we find ourselves in this category, may we call upon God for vision and earnestly pray for victory.

The reward.

When, by God's marvellous grace, we reach that heavenly home, there will be nobody present who will be thanking God for that financial empire acquired back on earth. We will not praise Him for the good deals we were able to make in our financial pursuits.

Brothers and sisters, when we see Him face to face, we will praise and honour and thank Him for every trial, every financial setback, all the difficult times, yes, even the times of great grief and sorrow. Then we will see clearly that these were the things that drew us closer to God. "Blessed are ye that weep now: for ye shall laugh" (Luke 6:21). There is nothing worth more in this life than God's nearness. It is a foretaste of that heavenly home.

May each of us find that place of rest with the Lord, here and in eternity.



POSSESSORS OF OUR POSSESSIONS

History tells us the Mennonite people have been known to be successful in their earthly pursuits. Over time, they have developed an aggressive attitude in their nature to accumulate earthly goods as well as earthly education. In general, they are progressive in religious life as well as in temporal things. How much has this become a snare to the church of Jesus Christ?

Much has been said in the past about materialism. Can we say that we have gained new spiritual ground in this area over the last number of years? We must sadly admit that it is not as much as had been hoped for. Could it be that we have put the emphasis in the wrong direction (from the outside in rather than from the inside out and making it a conviction of the heart)? Therefore we find ourselves in bondage to earthly goods and the protection of the same and the comfort that that provides to our earthly and carnal nature. Amos 6:1 says, "Woe to them that are at ease in Zion!"

This has led us away from our simplicity in the gospel, elevating ourselves in human reasoning. This is unlike the Apostles of the early church and their teachings of the New Testament. They took joyfully the spoiling of their goods. They gladly gave of their substance for the needy, the poor, the hungry, the destitute, and for the good of their neighbours. They did not claim ownership of their goods and possessions but confessed that they were only caretakers of the same. They understood that the material blessings were to be used for the welfare of others. Can we say this likewise?

In the book of Nehemiah, we read how this prophet surveyed the walls of Jerusalem. The Jew's enemies had destroyed them. The gates also were burned, and the city was in ruins (Nehemiah 2:17). As the work of rebuilding was in progress, the enemies came upon them once again, but in conspiracy. They even offered to help them build those walls again. They had in mind to overtake the Jews and destroy that which already had been repaired or rebuilt. As we begin to repair our own drift into the world, the love of social life and the things of this world present an accumulation of rubbish in the way as Nehemiah also found (Nehemiah 4:9-10).

There is a cry going forth to the God of heaven to help us see more dearly how to repair that which is in decay. Part of the decay pertains to the

strength of the "bearers of burdens" to repair the walls and install the gates again to their original values and concepts (v. 10). The burden for our own salvation, as well as that of our children and grandchildren and our fellowmen, has waned and is in decay. We have grieved the Holy Spirit; therefore we are in bondage, to a degree, to Pharaoh and his taskmasters. This is due to losing our burden for one another to help us be more spiritually minded, which is life and peace in Jesus Christ our Lord.

When we all become more burdened for our salvation and be true burden bearers, then we will be drawn together in the bond of love. When this will take place, these material things will become but "dung, that [we] may win Christ" (Philippians 3:7-8). We will then follow Him in the new generation of the gospel of His Word. Then materialism will fall.

It is required of ministers and deacons, and surely desirable in everyone, that they are "of honest report," known to be trustworthy. People should be able to say, "He can be trusted; he will stand by his word and will not cheat you. His cheque will be good, and he speaks only the truth." Parents who live by this rule of Bible values are paving the way for their children to inherit a blessing. "The just man walketh in his integrity: his children are blessed after him" Proverbs 20:7.

When it comes to selling or buying commodities, "Thou shalt not have in thine house divers measures, a great and a small. But thou shalt have a perfect and just weight, a perfect and just measure shalt thou have: that thy days may be lengthened in the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee" Deuteronomy 25:14-15. Note the promise of longevity that goes with honesty. In the course of normal business, when settlement day comes, in case of mistakes, an undercharge on your bill or an overpayment to you should be reported with the same concern as an overcharge or an underpayment. That will build strong confidence and trust.

There may be times when certain legal requirements might test our resolve of integrity. However, 1 Timothy 2:2-3 encourages us to pray for the king (or those who have the rule) so that the laws would be such that "we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty." This is a noble desire.

Other areas test our character in many ways. A few examples follow.

Since the income tax systems of many countries are based largely on trust and self-assessment, they place the responsibility of truth and proof squarely on our shoulders. Our attitude about taxes says much about our values and us. Tax accountants should never have to say, "I can't work for that brother of yours because of what he wants me to do in his behalf!"

Insurance fraud and sometimes other fraud can be very tempting or appear so reasonable. It depends on how and from where we look at the circumstances and we do well to be careful lest we slip. For those who have experienced a new birth, outright stealing is normally not a strong temptation. But a way of reasoning that "it is owed to me" because of this or that can bring a temptation to just claim it. Extortion (forcing another to pay us more than what is right or fair) is very much akin to stealing and can block one's inheritance in the kingdom of God (see 1 Corinthians 6:10).

International border crossings can become a real test of honesty. We may think the officials are overly zealous, or that the rules are unintelligent, or we might presume that the rules simply don't apply to us. And then there are those countries where bribery seems to be the accepted or the expected way of doing. It's important to be mindful that according to Romans 13, God is in control of the governments, and we are to pay proper respect and obedience to them.

When we are visiting and telling others about yields, business deals, or exceptional happenings, we must be careful with the truth. Due to our inherent nature, we may, at times, be faced with sly and almost unconscious temptations to stretch the truth or pad the facts. At other times, the temptation may be to be strong and bold. For what purpose? Let's think about it.

According to the Bible, in the end, abiding by the truth has more overall blessings and benefits than any amount of apparent advantage given by dishonesty and deception. Two more scripture quotes give us as Christians a charge by which to live. "Buy the truth, and sell it not; also wisdom, and instruction, and understanding" (Proverbs 23:23). "Recompense to no man evil for evil. Provide things honest in the sight of all men. If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men" (Romans 12:17).

Brother Luke

Self-Denial

Colossians 3:1-6 ¹If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. ²Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. ³For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. ⁴When Christ, *who is* our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory. ⁵Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry: ⁶For which things' sake the wrath of God cometh on the children of disobedience.

Man is a spiritual being housed in a body tainted with the seed of sin and subject to death. Satan has created an unholy alliance between self and our mortal body to attain his goal of enslaving the spiritual man. Jesus, by offering Himself as the supreme sacrifice on the cross, made a way in which we can die to self and resurrect to a new life in Christ. When we begin this new life, we become painfully aware that the struggle has only begun. As long as we are in this perishing body, the seed of sin strives to find root, but thanks be to God, through Jesus Christ there can be victory, Romans 7:25.

When self is alive, our goals and desires are earthly. When life favors us, our spirits are buoyant, but with disappointments and setbacks our feelings quickly sink. Self dies a painful and difficult death, but after its death there is a beautiful resurrection of the new life in Christ. A new life in Christ gives us a spiritual vision that views life from the eternal perspective. Paul admonishes us to seek those things that are above. We continually touch and handle temporal things, but they are only for our present use. When our affections are firmly placed on heavenly things, disappointments do not rob us of our hope. Rather, we look forward all the more to that wonderful time when we shall leave these temporary things behind and appear with Him in glory.

The old man with his evil tendencies remains as a potential threat to the new life as long as we are in this mortal body. The deeds listed in verses Colossians 3:8-9 are natural to the carnal nature. Even after the old man has been "put off," these tendencies remain. As self is crucified, the new man grows and begins to fill our lives and the spirit of Christ begins to

manifest its nature. This spirit knows no prejudice based on race or family lines, but desires to bond and fellowship with those of like nature. Nevertheless, as Colossians 3:12 indicates, a conscious effort is needed to put on these beautiful attributes. As we realize how poor and needy we are, we implore the Lord to fill our lives with His goodness. Situations will arise that will test us, but rather than striving to have our own way we will ask, "What would Jesus do?"

Christ loves us, not because of what we are but in spite of what we are. As we yield ourselves to His gentle entreaties, our hearts become the temple of the Holy Spirit. However, this treasure is housed in an earthen vessel, full of many imperfections. If we focus on these imperfections in our brethren, it causes a loss of love and destroys fellowship. True charity loves unconditionally and will create a covering for these imperfections, both in our lives as well as in the lives of our brethren.

As Christ began His ministry on earth, He aroused hope in many hearts. His disciples believed that He was the Messiah, and their understanding was that the Messiah would deliver them from bondage to the Romans. Early in His earthly ministry, Jesus began to introduce the purpose of His mission, which included His apprehension, suffering, and death. Peter, who appeared to be the disciples' spokesman, rebuked Jesus for talking this way. Jesus used this occasion to give His followers a lesson on the importance of self-denial (Matthew 16:21-25). He began by rebuking the influence that Peter had tried to exert on Him. He taught them that self-denial and cross-bearing would be a requirement. Since that time, self-denial has been a mark of the true followers of Christ. For the first fifteen hundred years after Christ, self-denial took on many literal forms. It could mean losing a lucrative occupation, loss of friends, and the esteem of men. For many Christians it went even further, meaning the loss of home and family, being hunted like wild animals, and, if apprehended, imprisonment, torture, and death. To those who were martyred in that era, self-denial meant following the bleeding footsteps of Christ to the cross both spiritually and literally. One of our beloved martyr brethren of that time wrote that the gates to the straight and narrow way were so narrow that those who pressed through left their flesh on the gateposts.

Today in the western world, we are offered freedom to live our faith.

Moreover, many opportunities offer themselves for material advancement and security. We greatly appreciate this freedom and abundance, yet we must sadly admit that our environment has not made our convictions stronger about practicing self-denial. As we study this lesson, are we ready to examine closely some areas where our practice of this doctrine may be eroded?

Children today are indulged with toys, electronic entertainment, designer clothes, and sports equipment. To concerned and spiritual parents, the Spirit quietly offers instructions on how to teach their children self-denial. For us as parents to be effective in teaching this to our children, we first need to be self-denied. When our child comes to request something that "everyone else has," we may believe that this will not serve for our child's benefit. Do we have the courage to refuse this request? When our children complain of not being accepted by their peers, do we sympathize with them or do we use this as an opportunity to teach that we get only in proportion to what we give? When children are instilled with the teaching of a self-denied life, they become better adjusted to cope with the challenges of life. Above all they stand a much better chance of being able to respond to the call of God. Children taught this way will not find it so difficult to comprehend the necessity of surrendering their will to the Lord and dying to self.

The church has, by the grace of God, reached out globally to many people hungry for the gospel. This has proved to be a great blessing, that is truly a blessing that has been facilitated by our prosperity.

Nevertheless, we are still challenged by the responsibility of stewardship as we live in a world with a much lower standard of living than ours. Many people suffer deprivation and sickness because of poverty. We are told that if we have a roof over our head, food in the refrigerator, clothes on our back, and a place to sleep, we are richer than seventy-five percent of the world's population. Some of our brethren live in these poor conditions. How is all this before God?

If money is spent on large homes, modern appliances, and vehicles that cost a year's wages, if so much sumptuous food is prepared that leftovers are thrown away, or if meals with a high cost are purchased at fine restau-

rants, is this acceptable stewardship before God? When do we become the rich man in the story of the rich man and Lazarus? It is so important that we practice true Christian stewardship and self-denial in all things.

Professing Christianity today does not emphasize self-denial. However, when a seeker of the truth comes to us, we cannot shrink from stressing the importance of this teaching. Does our lifestyle support our teaching? Would our communities give us this testimony that we live as those whose affections are on things above? Though we would give our assent that indeed this is our conviction, it is the test of everyday living that reveals our true affections. There are times when our schedule is tight, and financial loss may be the result if we are delayed. In this setting, how do we meet the test when someone we are doing business with does not meet our standard and jeopardizes our schedule? Does my reaction support my profession that my affections are not on the things of this earth? Scripture plainly teaches us to mortify the flesh Colossians 3:5.

This chapter goes on to outline a complete formula with rich instructions for a self-denied life. What do we lose by putting off the deeds of the flesh as we are exhorted? Those works of the flesh only bring sorrow, bondage, and, eventually, death. On the other hand, what great gain we experience when we put on, by the grace given through Christ, those beautiful and godly attributes mentioned in Colossians 3:12-14 ¹²Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering; ¹³Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also *do* ye. ¹⁴And above all these things *put on* charity, which is the bond of perfectness.

This brings a life of freedom from sin and self, and freedom to serve our Lord in an acceptable way. Self-denial frees us as parents to humble ourselves and confess our wrongs to our children, thereby leading them by example in the way of peace. It frees us from spirits of unforgiveness and offense and allows us to exercise compassion and forbearance for one another.

The Apostle Paul brings a very apt illustration on this subject 1 Corinthians 9:24-27 ²⁴ Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one

receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain. ²⁵ And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they *do it* to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible. ²⁶ I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air: ²⁷ But I keep under my body, and bring *it* into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway.

Those who pursue professional athletics must sacrifice many ordinary pleasures in order to obtain their goal intense training and self-discipline must be exercised to compete for the gold medal. Many devote all their energies for this cause, yet only one will win.

This kind of effort applies to the Christian's race. However, it is a race where every entry may win.

The athlete competes for a temporal reward. The Christian brings his body into subjection and runs this race, not to compete, but to obtain an eternal crown.

Are we too apologetic to the world about our belief on self-denial? Today there is a trend to good food, fine dining, luxury items of all sorts, etc. Is there merit in denying ourselves of these things? And how can parents teach their children to resist peer pressure in areas that compromise self-denial?

Tell me not of gain and loss, Ease, enjoyment, pomp, and pow'r;
Welcome poverty and cross, Shame reproach, affliction's hour.
Follow Me—I know Thy voice; Jesus, Lord, Thy steps I see;
Now I take Thy yoke by choice, Light Thy burden now to me.

James Montgomery 1771-1854

Lord, I care not for riches. Neither silver nor gold
I would make sure of heaven, I would enter the fold.
In the book of Thy kingdom, With its pages so fair
Tell me, Jesus, my Saviour, Is my name written there?

Mary A Kidder 1820-1905

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