

THE AUSTRALIAN ANABAPTIST

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

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

Matthew 5:15

From The Editor's Desk.

Are you safe in Christ? Is He your Rock? Is He the Captain of your soul? These are just some of the titles by which Jesus is known in Scriptures. Please meditate upon them and truly appreciate Him, Christ your Saviour.

Advocate. 1 John 2:1

Almighty. Revelations 1:8

Alpha and Omega. Revelations 1:8

Arm of the Lord. Isaiah 51:9-10

Author and finisher of our faith. Hebrews 12:2

Bread of life. John 6:48

Bridegroom. Matthew 9:15

Captain of salvation. Hebrews 2:10

Chief Shepherd. 1 Peter 5:4

Chief corner stone. 1 Peter 2:6

Christ Jesus our Lord. Romans 8:39; 1 Timothy 1:12

Christ the power of God. 1 Corinthians 1:24

Christ the wisdom of God. 1 Corinthians 1:24

Counsellor. Isaiah 9:6

Deliverer. Romans 11:26

Eternal life. 1 John 5:20

Everlasting Father. Isaiah 9:6

Friend of sinners. Matthew 11:19

God of the whole earth. Isaiah 54:5

God our Saviour. 1 Timothy 2:3

Head of the church. Ephesians 5:23

Heir of all things. Hebrews 1:2

Jesus Christ our Saviour Titus 1:4

King of kings. 1 Timothy 6:15; Revelations 17:14

Light of the world. John 8:12

Lord, your redeemer. Isaiah 43:14

Resurrection and life. John 11:25

Rock. 1 Corinthians 10:4

Shepherd and bishop of souls. 1 Peter 2:25

Unspeakable gift. 2 Corinthians 9:15

Word of life. 1 John 1:1

Those who use His name must depart from evil. 2 Tim. 2:19

MINISTER'S CORNER.***SPIRITUALITY AMONG THE BRETHREN.***

What could possibly be more important to God's people than to know that the Lord's blessings are resting upon His Church and that all is well within every brother and sister's heart? Every sincere child of the Most High continues to strive for a closer and more meaningful walk with the Saviour even while his or her soul is rejoicing in the peace and rest they are experiencing. The faith "which was once delivered unto the saints" is still being contended for by the faithful and presented to the lost world as the only hope for crying, bleeding hearts.

It is a soul-comforting thought to realize that "the engine with its steady hum" powers the ship of the church forward despite troubled waters, as a certain elder once preached in a conference. Yet, many concerns rise to the surface as one ponders the spiritual vitality of those occupying that ship's passenger decks. Not until this ship attains yonder shore will it be fully revealed as to what measure in Christ each and every occupant had attained.

We want to take a close and sobering look at some of the more pressing issues at hand in these very deceptive, perilous, and ever-changing times. At stake is the salvation of the precious souls of the sheepfold, and we are compelled to face the issues with courage and humility. Satan is subtly attempting to mine away the very foundation stones of the church of God. Unless we are alert and keen to his tactics, loss of vision and spirituality among the brethren are imminent.

Firstly, positioned at the top, is the sin issue. For some reason, sin is losing its sting. We are finding, more and more, that there are those among us who are convincing themselves that they are at peace with their Maker. At the same time, they are resisting sanctification and, in some cases, even living with known sin and/or spirits of pride and offense. In the world, sin has lost its real meaning. It is ignored and covered, not with the blood of Christ, but with man's unholy reasoning. To a large extent, it is flaunted openly like never before.

Like Pilate, many are asking, "What is truth?" This sly, questioning spirit is confronting the church today, seeking to qualify one's faults and minimize the effects of sin upon the soul. For sin to become exceedingly sinful (Rom. 7:13), one must not quench the conviction and reproof of the Holy Spirit (1 Thess. 5:19). It is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to arrive at a godly sorrow for sin when the context of sin is viewed casually.

Along with being too casual and unresponsive regarding sin is the persistent, age-old question posed by Satan, "Hath God said?" This is the first work of the serpent within the heart of man. The result of this is that confusion is added to the already difficult task of dealing effectively with sin. It appears we often find ourselves somewhere in that uncomfortable gray zone trying desperately to find direction.

Some wonder if "hell fire" sermons and the clear teaching of the consequences of sin are a thing of the past. The minister may find less buffeting by Satan if he concentrates more on the love of God than on sin and its resulting doom. However, many spiritual brethren are asking for clearer and plainer teaching on this subject. Let us be encouraged to speak more diligently on the consequences of sin, naming sins, lest we be guilty of forming a league with the enemy of our souls.

Secondly, and equally troubling, is what appears to be a lack of power and grace to follow through on solid resolutions and consecrations. This is consistent with one of the perils of the last days, as described in 2 Timothy 3:5, "Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof." This shows itself in the fact that brotherly reproof and ministerial counsel, including Spirit-led preaching, is all too frequently met with pretense. Many favorable comments may be uttered and seemingly positive decisions made. But the follow-through is limited to that which requires little self-denial. We well may have times of serious discussion regarding our needs, and everyone is convinced that God spoke.

Yet, it is easy to go forth without the conviction and burden of the discussion really affecting the needy hearts. What was serious only days earlier is soon relegated to something of little consequence.

No doubt, Satan uses any tactic he deems necessary. There are those who openly and freely resist or refute the counsel of the brethren. On the other hand, why is it that concurring spirits often suggest approval and willingness to cooperate, but there is no real falling on the rock that brings the true spirit of contrition? Perhaps we are too much like the second son as related by Jesus in the parable of the two sons (Matt. 21:28-31). The second son said, "I will go," but he went not. This obviously was not doing the will of his father, nor do we do the will of our Heavenly Father if we do likewise. Again, Satan's subtle scheme is to bring forth pleasing words that will take away the edge and smooth the road, but the reality of an effective consecration is lost in the confusion.

Thirdly is the matter of proving the conversion experiences of converts as well as re-consecration experiences of spiritually-needy brethren. We have rightfully been admonished and exhorted in ministers' councils to be more careful and prayerful when proving these experiences. The point at hand is that our converts and brethren can tell of certain impressions and feelings that have come upon them that seem so real and befitting. This may include songs or Bible verse or quotes taken from our forefathers. Still others may tell of dreams or special infillings that are rather outstanding. It may be our tendency to place too much emphasis on the details of the experience and not enough on the fruit that should follow. True repentance always brings about a change, first inwardly and then outwardly. Cunning as he is, the devil suggests that everything is all right and that obvious outward changes are a sign of being gullible and weak.

It appeals to the flesh to get caught up in the emotional side of these experiences, but the real question is whether or not the Holy Spirit is witnessing to a changed heart. Central to this point is the fact that some seem to have frequent touches with the Lord. While the thought here is not to discredit any valid God-given touches, the question remains whether the experience, or the touch, effected a change of course. Did it produce a work of sanctification in the spirit and attitude of the heart?

Sometimes it is very difficult to rightly prove the spiritual condition of a well-meaning brother or sister. First John 4:1 tells us we are to try the spirits whether they are of God. We are often perplexed as to why it is difficult to arrive at a positive conclusion in certain conditions. This "overcasting of the skies" should behoove every God-fearing person to pray the Lord of hosts that He would favor the church with the gift of spiritual discernment lest we flounder in the waters of confusion. We cannot afford to lose our sense of direction. Satan would have us feel sympathetic towards the individual, and while we must be understanding and loving, we dare not lose sight of what God is asking of those with spiritual needs. When faced with this reality, the best approach is to seek the Lord's face for direction with all earnestness while striving to allow the simplicity of the gospel to prevail.

Another troubling issue is that of intellectualism. Often the question is raised as to what extent this grace-hindering spirit actually affects the church of God. Intellectualism reveals itself in "having a form of godliness," but the inward power and warmth of the Spirit is lacking. Other

typical fruits of this spirit are a lack of conviction and vision regarding the direction of one's life and leaving one's first love. But perhaps most outstanding is the leaning upon one's own reasoning as a guide in life. One may be well-versed in Scripture and have an unusual knowledge of Biblical facts. He may be capable of carrying on a convincing dialogue pertaining to spiritual matters. But the underlying motivation is not of the Lord.

Those affected by this spirit are able to produce experiences (sometimes frequently) of an emotional nature. However, the inward man is left starving. The fearful thing about this "ism" is that it tries desperately to appease the cry of the soul as well as the brethren attempting to prove the individual. It will, at times, readily agree to make necessary changes just to get by. It becomes skillful at manipulating around the "Christian course." It may be legalistic or permissive. Concerned brethren are wondering if the skilled, refined, manipulative, and diplomatic powers of intellectualism are chipping away at the pitch of the ark. To prove this spirit requires great carefulness and much courage. Indeed, intellectualism may be more prevalent than we want to admit. Is there a decrease in the godly spirit of contrition and brokenness? Oh, that we wouldn't lose that simple, trusting, child-like faith in God that is so necessary in times like these!

Another issue of great concern across the conference is nonconformity to the world. We repeatedly hear the statement, "The world is pressing in." Undoubtedly, this is true like never before. While the world advances against the camp of the saints, the line of demarcation is less and less clearly defined. As we look to the future, we wonder if we can maintain the standard of the pure gospel of Christ.

However, lest we despair, let us not forget that God is at the helm, and if we will follow His commands, He will lead us safely to the other side. Our part lies squarely in strengthening the things that remain, lest they die (Rev. 3:2). This cannot be accomplished by pure determination. The task is too great for mortal man with his limited ability to prove and understand all the details of what is acceptable or unacceptable. We believe that "the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much" (James 5:16). We have faith in God that, through prayer and effective revival, the Holy Ghost will continue to sanctify the Church. God will grant grace to maintain the transformation of minds and hearts, which will result in a proper separation from the world.

Of deep concern today are the fashions of the world that want to press in.

This includes highly esteemed name-brand clothes and furnishings, the amount of money spent on pleasurable items, expensive homes and landscaping, plus more. The church today is faced with a tremendous challenge of proving not only what a true Christian will not possess of earthly and tangible things but, also, the intent of the spirit that lies deep inside the heart of man.

Spirituality among the brotherhood! We are being weighed in the balances. It seems extremely timely that we allow God to burn out the dross. We must let Jesus give us that needed touch to our spiritual eyes so that we might have clear vision. And lastly, that the Spirit could burn within our hearts those sorely needed convictions that will see us through to our expected end.

Brother R.F.



THE CALLED.

In the first seven verses of the book of Romans, Paul the apostle highlighted several truths concerning the calling of God's children. He refers to the believers as "the called of Jesus Christ." Concerning himself, he uses three designations: a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, and separated unto the gospel of God. Speaking for the people of God, he says they "have received grace and apostleship," and, finally, that the faithful are "called to be saints."

Paul considered himself to be "separated unto the gospel of God" (Rom. 1:1). Previously he had been a preeminent advocate of the Jewish faith. Into his world of mistaken religion, first came God's call to salvation and, upon answering that, there followed the calls to servanthood and apostleship. All evidences in the Scriptures are that he willingly accepted the calls and considered himself as one separated from that which many considered to be their normal right.

As Jesus began his ministry, we see Him stopping by the seashore and calling to Peter and John, "Follow me." "And they straightway left their nets, and followed him" (Matt. 4:20). Following the disciples' history through the pages of the New Testament, we see their entire life redirected by the call. Following Jesus, learning from Him, and fulfilling His purposes became their vocation.

God's people could well be identified as "the called." Jesus said "For many are called, but few are chosen" (Matt. 22:14). His children are those who, when they are called, have chosen to respond positively.

One cannot be selective in accepting or rejecting the calls of God and still prosper in his Christian life. Our willing acceptance of His will indicates that we fully trust and love Him. Our hesitancy to surrender to the Lord's will shows that self is still too much in control.

The call to salvation is a general call. The final invitation of the New Testament opens the door widely to all men. "...And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely" (Rev. 22:17). In responding to this call, we set ourselves on the way to heaven. If we reject, we are without hope. We assume that the readers of this paper are largely people who have taken God's call to salvation seriously. How highly we treasure this most universal of calls.

The call to holiness. Paul addressed the believers in Rome in this way: "To all that be in Rome, beloved of God, called to be saints ..." (Rom. 1:7). Any who have progressed at all in their relationship to the Lord have heeded the call to holiness.

To accept the invitation to salvation and then reject the call to sanctification and holy living is to abort our life with the Lord. "Follow ... holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord" (Heb. 12:14). We are not called to be saints because it is better, but because it is essential.

Saintliness has two aspects. It is achieved by grace through faith as the blood covers our sins. When the miracle of redemption occurs, God sees us as "holy and unblameable and unproveable in his sight" (Col. 1:22). Then, secondly, that grace produces the works of righteousness which prove the imputed holiness of the soul. The one cannot be without the other.

Jesus' call is to come into the circle of His embrace. This transforming experience makes His interests become our interests. Our eyes are opened to our utter inadequacy and our complete dependence on Him to perform any good thing. Love for the kingdom becomes our very heartbeat.

The call to servanthood. Peter and John, as well as James, Jude, and Paul used "servant of Jesus Christ" as their primary identification in the salutations of their writings.

The call to service is first a matter of tuning our heart to the voice of the Holy Spirit. The servant, or slave, as was the meaning of the word in the

original language, was trained to be instantly alert to the wishes of his master. A nod or a hand signal would send the slave to his task. The love slave of Jesus Christ is eagerly attentive to the expression of his Lord. The task the Master requires doesn't matter to the servant as much as the conviction that it is His will. Is there a prayer He wants us to utter or a helpful act to perform? We are willing to do so. Does He want us to admonish or reprove? We will give ourselves. Does God want us to give ourselves to mission work or some form of ministry to the Church? We humbly accept and apply our talents to the best of our abilities. In every instance, He is the master, we the willing servants.

One brotherly service that tends to be rejected is the one of brotherly care. This humble service is a tremendously important key to the continued purity of the Church. If spiritual oversight is left solely to the ministry, much will go undone. The foot soldiers of the kingdom who are properly placed to see the needs and quickly respond to them are the lay brethren who God has prepared for the day and hour of need.

The call to apostleship. Normally we think of an apostle as being one of the twelve who was called to witness and testify of Jesus' earthly career. Looking at the original meaning of the word, though, we find the following: "a delegate; specifically an ambassador of the gospel; officially a commissioner of Christ ... messenger, he that is sent" (Strong's Exhaustive Concordance).

Furthermore, when the apostle Paul was listing numerous of the gifts in 1 Corinthians 12, he mentioned apostles as a gift, together with prophets, teachers, etc. From this viewpoint, apostleship is a present responsibility, not a historic matter. It would refer to those whom God wants to use in extending the mantle of salvation to the lost. Paul expressed the burden of that responsibility to the Corinthians: "Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God" (2 Cor. 5:20). In the following verses, he calls it the "ministry of reconciliation," that is, seeking to bring men back into fellowship with God. This ministry is the work of wooing, encouraging, warning, and teaching those who are standing torn at the crossroads.

The work of the apostles, as revealed in the New Testament, was not only evangelizing, but it was the establishing of the churches as believers were added to the number. That work has not ceased till this day, both at home and abroad. One of the great challenges of the ongoing mission program is

to lead small groups of believers to work together within the body of Christ.

How important it is that we do not neglect this call of the Lord. At home and in foreign lands, those with the call to apostleship are greatly needed to publish the good news and help establish God's church.

Could any of us think there is no call for us? Did God create some to sit on the sidelines, spectators of the ongoing work of the kingdom? God has a call for every man according to his abilities. The urgent work of the Gospel deserves our whole-hearted efforts in our particular sphere.

What would have happened if, when Jesus called Peter and John to follow Him, they had said, "Not now. We may follow you in a few days when we get done mending our nets and providing for the needs of our family"? Or what would the outcome have been if blind Bartimaeus had told the crowd, "Tell Jesus to stop by here the next time He's in the vicinity"? Most likely, history would have recorded different names in the pages of the New Testament. Have we become presumptuous of the grace of God? Although it is true that God is loving, merciful, and patient, dare we trifle with His call when it comes?

Over and over in His ministry, Jesus uttered the call. He has not ceased to beckon. We are called to salvation, to holiness, to be servants, to be messengers. How will we respond? "Many are called, but few are chosen."



Power to Reveal Sin - Part 5.

Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do.

Hebrews 4:13.

When our first parents fell into sin in the Garden of Eden, they hid from God. We have been trying to hide from God ever since, but without success, because God sees every hidden thing. Let us not fear His searchlight, for as long as we are on this side of the Judgment Day the searching of our hearts is for our correction and blessing.

May this portion of our study of impress us anew with the futility of

trying to hide anything from God. May we also realize the importance of being spiritual so we can prove when there is sin in the camp.

Acts 5:1-13

But a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession, ²And kept back part of the price, his wife also being privy to it, and brought a certain part, and laid it at the apostles' feet. ³But Peter said, Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost, and to keep back part of the price of the land? ⁴Whiles it remained, was it not thine own? and after it was sold, was it not in thine own power? why hast thou conceived this thing in thine heart? thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God. ⁵And Ananias hearing these words fell down, and gave up the ghost: and great fear came on all them that heard these things. ⁶And the young men arose, wound him up, and carried him out, and buried him. ⁷And it was about the space of three hours after, when his wife, not knowing what was done, came in. ⁸And Peter answered unto her, Tell me whether ye sold the land for so much? And she said, Yea, for so much. ⁹Then Peter said unto her, How is it that ye have agreed together to tempt the Spirit of the Lord? behold, the feet of them which have buried thy husband are at the door, and shall carry thee out. ¹⁰Then fell she down straightway at his feet, and yielded up the ghost: and the young men came in, and found her dead, and, carrying her forth, buried her by her husband. ¹¹And great fear came upon all the church, and upon as many as heard these things. ¹²And by the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the people; (and they were all with one accord in Solomon's porch. ¹³And of the rest durst no man join himself to them: but the people magnified them.

Joshua 7:16-21

So Joshua rose up early in the morning, and brought Israel by their tribes; and the tribe of Judah was taken: ¹⁷And he brought the family of Judah; and he took the family of the Zarhites: and he brought the family of the Zarhites man by man; and Zabdi was taken: ¹⁸And he brought his household man by man; and Achan, the son of Carmi, the son of Zabdi, the son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, was taken. ¹⁹And Joshua said unto Achan, My son, give, I pray thee, glory to the LORD God of Israel, and make confession unto him; and tell me now what thou hast done; hide it not from me. ²⁰And Achan answered Joshua, and said, Indeed I have sinned against

the LORD God of Israel, and thus and thus have I done: ²¹When I saw among the spoils a goodly Babylonish garment, and two hundred shekels of silver, and a wedge of gold of fifty shekels weight, then I coveted them, and took them; and, behold, they are hid in the earth in the midst of my tent, and the silver under it.

It is interesting to note that these two accounts both happened at the beginning of an era. The story of Ananias transpired at the time the New Testament church was established. Achan lived near the beginning of the conquest of Canaan. It is likely that both cases served to deter others from similar catastrophe.

It appears that the financial status of the early Christians varied considerably, and the church set up a procedure to deal with these inequalities.

The Christians realized that the things they possessed were not their own. They willingly shared with others, and thus all had sufficient.

It seems Ananias and Sapphira coveted the attention the unselfish Christians were receiving, but they were not willing to completely sacrifice their possessions. They sold a parcel of land and kept some of the money for their own use, but pretended to give all. Together they decided to lie about their intentions if questioned. To the casual onlooker things probably appeared in order as Ananias brought some money to the apostles. The couple, however, had failed to reckon with God's all-seeing eye. We wonder how Peter could immediately sense the dishonesty in the man before him, but the voice of the indwelling Holy Spirit left no question.

Peter accused Ananias of keeping back part of the money. The Greek writers, as well as the German translation, use a term which denotes embezzlement or improperly diverting money for one's own use. Since Ananias and Sapphira wanted people to think they were being moved by God and the spirit of generosity, it was dishonest to keep anything for themselves. The sharp rebuke that was given and the swift judgment that was meted out show us how God abhors dishonesty.

Then we also have the Old Testament account of Achan at the time when Joshua led the Israelites into the land of Canaan according to God's instructions and they proceeded to conquer its inhabitants. The first city they came to was Jericho. God gave them instructions to march around the city once a day for six days and seven times on the seventh day. He also told them that the people of Jericho and their possessions were accursed

and must be destroyed. Only the gold, silver, and vessels of brass and iron were to be spared and brought into the treasury of the Lord. Disobeying this command would bring trouble to the camp.

The capture of Jericho went exactly as planned. Israel must have been delighted as their obedience caused the walls of the city to collapse. This was great! With God on their side and with Joshua as their leader they would conquer the whole land!

What Joshua and most of the people did not know was that there was sin in the camp. Achan had taken a beautiful garment and some silver and gold. This was a direct act of disobedience. We see in his heart a disregard for the word of God given by Joshua. He had hidden the loot and somehow expected to get away with it. However, he forgot that God was watching.

The next city they were to conquer was Ai. Here the Israelite soldiers were badly beaten and some were killed. Joshua and all the people became utterly discouraged. They questioned why God would bring them into this land if He intended to slay them.

God told Joshua the reason for their defeat. There was sin in the camp, disobedience, theft, and deception. God would give them no more victories until the offender was dealt with. Achan was singled out as the transgressor, possibly by the process of casting lots. His confession brings out the progression of sin: I saw, I coveted, I took and I hid it.

Human nature has changed very little since the events portrayed here occurred. Although we would not tell an outright, premeditated lie, do we pose as being spiritual while willfully hiding some disobedience? We believe the Bible teaches nonconformity to the world, and the Holy Spirit has given us clear guidelines on issues of today. How careful are we to uphold these important standards? Cell phones and computers are but very small tools, and we may think no one sees when we misuse them. Yet God is aware of our desire to download some game or song that is detrimental to our spiritual health and contrary to church standards (brotherhood agreement.) He also sees the signals our hearts send out as we tap the keys to send an inappropriate message that caters to the flesh.

Do I forget that God is right beside me as I linger at the magazine rack in the department store, look at the cover of some periodical, and perhaps reach out to find out what is inside? What is more, there could very well be someone watching who knows I am out of place.

We might think nobody knows if we are not completely honest when

filing our income tax, but God knows exactly how the numbers should read. Are we tempted to misrepresent a vehicle or piece of machinery we trade in? Do we forget that God sees exactly the flaw we wish to hide?

When we are keen to the Holy Spirit, He will reveal when there is sin among us. Even if the prompting we receive is not as outstanding as that which Peter received, may we not shirk our responsibility. The Holy Spirit is not a vague, far-off voice that we can heed or ignore as we choose. He has often spoken to us individually or through brotherly council. Why would we ask for another revelation?

One of the questions answered at our baptism relates to being willing to give and accept reproof. This question has been modified in later years to include the thought of showing care and concern for our spiritual family. This indicates what our motive should be as we go to share with our brother. It is often good to ask someone how they are faring without having anything specific in mind. If my brother or sister can sense that I am genuinely interested in their spiritual well-being and not just inquisitive or critical, he/she will not be as quick to put up their guard. If I am close enough to my brother to feel his heartbeat, he will be more open to share his heart. Then, if help is needed, it can more easily be given.

We will not prosper if hidden sin is allowed among God's people. If a congregation lacks the discernment to bring sin to light, it could indicate a spiritual indifference. A spirit of aloofness or independence can also hinder God's cleansing work. If we feel our brother is hiding something and we are unwilling to care, do we not become a partaker of his sin? Are we afraid to probe a little for fear of a rebuff? An attitude of "live and let live" has no room among God's people. We dare not think that we each have our besetting sin so we will not question our brother's inconsistencies.

Joshua's task was not complete when Achan was singled out. The sin needed to be judged. What if we are stalled when sin is exposed? We may need to give ourselves to prayer and search our own heart. Am I afraid of what I may need to repent of or bring to light?

As we view Christendom today, we see that the falling away foretold in 2 Thessalonians 2:3 is taking place. Sound values that once were upheld, like the separation of church and state, modesty in dress, nonresistance, moral purity, honesty, and marital fidelity no longer seem important to many who profess Christianity. The gods of sports and leisure are being worshiped like perhaps never before. May we pray for vision and diligently

follow the Holy Spirit's prompting.

We should seriously consider how can we be more alert and sensitive to spiritual needs in others? How can we know whether we are motivated by love or by a critical spirit? How can we keep the boundaries of sin clear in these last days? *Adapted from a series of 6 lessons by Gospel Publishers Moundridge Kansas.*



Faith.

'Tis by the faith of joys to come
We walk through deserts darkest night;
Till we arrive at heaven our home,
Truth is our guide, and faith our light.

The want of sight she well supplies;
She makes the pearly gates appears;
Far into distant world's she pries,
And brings eternal glories near.

Though lions roar, and tempests blow,
And rocks and dangers fill the way,
With joy we tread the deserts through,
While faith inspires a heavenly ray.

Isaac Watts



The Church - An Ark of Safety.

From a message given by Brother Carpenter
At Flora Mennonite Church
2009.

I greet you in the name of our faithful heavenly Father. I count it a privilege to gather with the saints in other places and gather with the saints here this morning, it is always a blessing to be with those who love the Lord and are seeking to follow Him.

We are thinking about the Church as an Ark of Safety for a message today. I invite you to turn to the Gospel of Matthew chapter 16 verse 18, Jesus is here talking to Peter and in the last part of that verse says: "I will build My church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."

I would like to raise a few questions in relation to this subject this morning and the first is: What is the meaning of the title?

When I think of an Ark of safety I think of the Ark in which Noah and his family by faith entered and were protected, [Hebrews 11:7](#) tells us that: "By faith Noah warned of God of things not seen yet moved with fear to prepare an Ark for the saving of his house by which he condemned the world and became an heir of righteousness which is by faith."

I believe that if we also have faith in the Word of God we also realise that we need a place of safety for ourselves and for our families, for our loved ones around us. In the community where we live there is a great need for an Ark of safety because there is a great judgement coming. It is not going to be by water this time, it is going to be by fire the Scriptures tells us, and we can read the Scriptures for ourselves and discover that is something we don't want to have any part of, we don't want to be involved in that, in that outpouring of wrath. And so we need an Ark of safety, we need a place where we can find refuge today so that we will have a refuge in the future whenever the judgement of God is poured out, perhaps it will be yet today that some of that judgement will begin.

The word church is not used in the Old Testament, it is used in the New Testament, the Greek word *ekklesia* is used here for the English word church. You will notice that in Matthew 16:18 where Jesus said: I will build My church. This is the first usage of the word church in the scriptures and it means a calling out, for example a popular meeting especially religious congregation and it is also translated the assembly in Acts 19 where we have the uproar at Ephesus, maybe you would want to keep your finger here at Matthew 16, and turn briefly to Acts 19 where the three times that the word assembly is used, it is actually the same Greek word as is translated church.

[Acts 19:32](#): "Some therefore cried one thing, and some another: for the *assembly* was confused;" that is the word *ekklesia*. And also down in verse 39 and verse 41 the clerk, the town clerk had calmed the people down he says in verse 39, "But if ye enquire any thing concerning other matters, it shall be determined in a lawful *assembly*." The word assembly again and in verse 41: "And when he had thus spoken, he dismissed the *assembly*." ([Acts 19:39](#), [Acts 19:41](#)).

Here three times in this chapter the word assembly is used. It is hard for us to think of this group of people being a church, there was a lot of discord and for the most part they didn't know why they were coming together, here they were crying out: "Great is Diana of the Ephesians," ([Acts 19:28](#)) so there was a lot of confusion in this setting, in this assembly, and that isn't God's will for the church, I think it is appropriate that a different English word is used here. You also find in this passage in verse 37 the town clerk says: "For ye have brought hither these men, which are neither robbers of churches, nor yet blasphemers of your goddess." ([Acts 19:37](#)). That whole term there "robbers of churches" actually according to Strong's means temple destroyer, he was saying these men are not destroying your temple like you're acting like they are, it isn't really that way, it isn't that bad, in those three words together 'robbers of churches' are formed from a different Greek word here, but all other usages of the word church and its forms in the New Testament, going back to Matthew 16, all other usages are the same Greek word *ekklesia*, a calling out, we think of the church as the called out ones, called out of this world, and that is what is in focus when we think about the Church as an Ark of safety.

As I said the first usage of the word church in the Bible is here in verse 18 where Jesus said “I will build My Church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.” The only other usage of the word church in the Gospels is in Matthew chapter 18 verse 17 where Jesus is saying how to respond if thy brother trespass against thee, [Matthew 18:15-17](#):

"Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican."

So in these three chapters, Matthew 16 through 18, we have the first and the last usage of the word church in the Gospels and we would like to focus our thoughts basically this morning from these three chapters.

I'm going to take time to read Matthew 16 first of all, let's start at verse one,

[Matthew 16:1-28](#)

"The Pharisees also with the Sadducees came, and tempting desired him that he would shew them a sign from heaven. ²He answered and said unto them, When it is evening, ye say, *It will be* fair weather: for the sky is red. ³And in the morning, *It will be* foul weather to day: for the sky is red and lowring. O ye hypocrites, ye can discern the face of the sky; but can ye not *discern* the signs of the times? ⁴A wicked and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given unto it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas. And he left them, and departed. ⁵And when his disciples were come to the other side, they had forgotten to take bread.

⁶Then Jesus said unto them, Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees. ⁷And they reasoned among themselves, saying, *It is* because we have taken no bread. ⁸*Which* when Jesus perceived, he said unto them, O ye of little faith, why reason ye among yourselves, because ye have brought no bread? ⁹Do ye not yet understand, neither remember the five loaves of the five thousand, and how many baskets ye took up? ¹⁰Neither the seven loaves of the four thousand, and how many baskets ye took up? ¹¹How is it that ye do not understand that I spake *it* not

to you concerning bread, that ye should beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees? ¹²Then understood they how that he bade *them* not beware of the leaven of bread, but of the doctrine of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees.

¹³When Jesus came into the coasts of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, saying, Whom do men say that I the Son of man am? ¹⁴And they said, Some *say that thou art* John the Baptist: some, Elias; and others, Jeremias, or one of the prophets. ¹⁵He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am? ¹⁶And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. ¹⁷And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed *it* unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. ¹⁸And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. ¹⁹And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. ²⁰Then charged he his disciples that they should tell no man that he was Jesus the Christ.

²¹From that time forth began Jesus to shew unto his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day. ²²Then Peter took him, and began to rebuke him, saying, Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall not be unto thee. ²³But he turned, and said unto Peter, Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offence unto me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men.

²⁴Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any *man* will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. ²⁵For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it. ²⁶For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul? ²⁷For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then he shall reward every man according to his works. ²⁸Verily I say unto you, There be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, till they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom."

The following chapter then (17) gives a record of Jesus on the mount of transfiguration.

I would like to raise the question now in the second place why is the Church an Ark of safety? I think these verses of these chapters here give us several answers to that question. The first answer I would share from verses 13 to 20, [Matthew 16](#), is because God is the builder and the owner of the Church, He knows here that Jesus made this statement: I will build My church.

I don't think it is making a distinction here between God and the Lord Jesus Christ, they work together,

I will build My church, God is the builder and the owner of the Church. That is why the Church is an Ark of safety, God is the one who has created us, He is the one who is sustaining us, He is the one who has redeemed us and He is the one who wants to redeem us eternally, He wants to be our eternal redemption, I will build My church.

Secondly in [verses 21 to 28](#), because God has purchased and redeemed her with His own blood. The message that Jesus gave to his disciples was in verses 21 to 28 and how He was going to suffer and to die. Peter said, he began to rebuke Him in verse 22 saying: Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall not be unto thee.

Jesus said you are an offence to me Peter, get thee behind me Satan, this is something I am not going to listen to, that is not the way it is all. In order for the Church to be built, in order for souls to be saved there is a very necessary step that I must take and I will take it and that is to suffer and to die.

Our Lord Jesus was willing to do that, He was ready to do that, that is the reason for which He came into this world and here it tells us about that, thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men.

To savour means to exercise the mind, that is what Peter was thinking about here, he was thinking about what was convenient, he was not thinking about what was good for mankind and we have in [Acts 20:28](#) the Apostle Paul speaking to the Ephesians elders he said to them: Take heed to the flock over which the Holy Ghost has made you overseers to feed the Church of God. Notice there that he uses the term God, the Church of God which He has purchased with His own blood.

It is interesting how it doesn't make a distinction in there in relation to God and Christ, the Church of God which He has purchased with His own blood they were very much involved in this work together. God has purchased and redeemed her with His own blood, that is why the Church is an

Ark of safety, it was a very high price that was paid, the only price that could be paid for our redemption.

Further in [Matthew 16](#), going back to [verses 5 to 12](#), I see a third reason why the Church is an Ark of safety because God has given her pure doctrine, God has given her pure doctrine and this is indeed a great blessing. The scriptures speak as in Timothy where he says the Church of the living God which is the pillar and ground of the truth. This is a great blessing, there are many, many, many ideas of men in the world today, some are based upon visions and dreams which men have written down, women have written down, and there are those who follow them, are convinced of them, are persuaded that this is truth. But it is not truth, the Word of God is truth, God has given us the pure doctrine of the word of life. And what a blessing it is that we have this truth in that we can read it, we don't have to wonder now is it really true or isn't it? Is there a God or isn't there? Does God mean what He says or doesn't He? Or is there something else that is more solid?

Yes probably everyone of us at one time or another or maybe numerous times are faced with questions like that and the devil is still in that business of raising that question: Yea, has God said, is that really true, isn't God keeping something back from you? Yes he is the devil says. But the fact is that God has given the Church pure doctrine and that is why she is an Ark of safety.

Fourthly in [chapter 17, 13](#) verses here in relation to the transfiguration and also [verses 22 and 23](#), because God has decreed that all her tribulations will end in glory. That is why the Church is an Ark of safety. In the first 13 verses it was glorious to be there upon the mountain, Peter said Lord it is good for us to be here, if thou wilt let us make three tabernacles, one for Thee, one for Moses and one for Elias. Well [verses 22 and 23](#) bring back the focus to where they were, while they walked in Galilee Jesus said unto them the son of man shall be betrayed into the hands of men and shall kill Him and in the third day He shall be raised up again and they were exceedingly sorry.

And so it is in this life on this earth this day but Jesus said that in the world ye shall have tribulation. That's the way it is and that's the way it

will be until Jesus comes, there is tribulation, there are difficulties, there are tests and trials for the people of God but that is not the way it will end and the picture that Peter and James and John saw there on the mountain was well what did Jesus discuss with Moses and Elias? It doesn't tell us in this gospel but in another gospel it tells us that He spoke with them of his decease which He should accomplish at Jerusalem, His death which He should accomplish at Jerusalem, what was going to be done there and the glory that would follow. Why was Jesus willing to endure the cross? Well that was because of the joy that is set before Him. He saw what would be gained by the cross and so He was willing to endure that, it was for your gain and for mine.

The Church is an Ark of safety because God has decreed that all her tribulations will end in glory.

2 Timothy 2:11-12

*"It is a faithful saying: For if we be dead with *him*, we shall also live with *him*: ¹²If we suffer, we shall also (What?) we could put shall also reign with *him*:"*

Fifthly in [Matthew 17 verses 14 to 21](#) and also [24 to 27](#) the Church is an Ark of safety because God gives to her grace and spiritual power. God gives to the grace and spiritual power.

Here was a lunatic in need of healing and there was his father both were seeking God's mercy, verse 15, Lord have mercy on my son for he is a lunatic and sore vexed, for oft times he falleth into the fire and oft into the water and I brought him to thy disciples and they could not cure him. Then Jesus answered and said: Oh faithless and perverse generation how long shall I be with you, how long shall I suffer you, bring him to me, and Jesus cast out the devil. And his disciples asked why they weren't able to do it and Jesus said this kind goeth not out except by prayer and fasting.

The Lord gives to her (the Church) grace and spiritual power, that same power that Jesus demonstrated here and so many other times in his earthly ministry is also being demonstrated in the lives of the children of God today. Grace to be able to rise above, I think of an account I read of an invalid, when some Christian friends went to visit the invalid with hopes of being a source of cheer and encouragement to the invalid and as it turned out it was the other way around, I think it was probably both ways, but the visitors said to the invalid: We admire your attitude. Then the person there

in bed was walking by faith and her thoughts were far above her circumstances and she was experiencing rest and joy in the midst of that.

Well have you seen that? Have you seen the grace of God in the life of your brother or sister in the midst of trials and tests and the varied experiences of life? What a beautiful thing that is to see God giving grace and spiritual power to his children. [Verse 27](#) Jesus here speaks in these verses of the tribute money, Jesus asked Peter who do the kings of the earth, who do men of this earth take custom or tribute of? Their own children or of strangers? Peter said it is strangers. And if I understand this right Jesus was saying rightfully they shouldn't need to take of us but He says in [verse 27](#): notwithstanding lest we should offend them go and cast a hook into the sea and pull out the first fish and you will find money there to go and pay our tribute. Spiritual power not to offend as well is here.

Why is the Church an Ark of safety? [Colossians 1:18](#), because Jesus Christ is her instructor her pre-eminent head. That is why it is a great blessing to have our mental powers and God hasn't given them in the same measure to everyone. In our area we have grouse and I think of this bird, the grouse comes and stands out on the road when you're almost to it and all of a sudden it will run right in front of you and let you run over it, it doesn't seem to have very much wisdom, God has deprived her of wisdom, Job speaks about that, God spoke about that Job in the book of Job.

But the Church of Jesus Christ is not deprived of wisdom because Jesus Christ is the head. In Him is all wisdom and He attributed that wisdom to the body and that is why the Church is an Ark of safety because Jesus Christ is the head, He is the instructor.

And one more answer, and you can add to this list but when I thought there: Why is the Church an Ark of safety? Because the Holy Spirit indwells her and guides her.

[Galatians 4:6](#): And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father.

[Romans 8:9](#): Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his.

[John 16:13](#):he will guide you into all truth:

This is the work of the Holy Spirit, and when I think about God's loving care for His Church and providing the Holy Spirit can you think of a better way that he could minister to the needs of his children than to put his Holy Spirit right within us. I can't think of a better way.

I'm sure that there are other answers that you can give to this question but let's move onto one more question.

When is our Church an Ark of safety?

To be concluded in the July issue.



God takes a safe course with His children, that they may not be condemned with the world. He permits the world to condemn them, that they may not love the world. The world hates them, that they may not love the world; that they may be crucified to it, the world is to be crucified to them. Therefore they meet with such crosses and abuses and wrongs in the world. Because He will not suffer them to perish with the world, He sends them afflictions in and by the world.

Christ chiefly manifests Himself to the Christian in times of affliction because then the soul unites itself most closely by faith to Christ. The soul in time of prosperity, scatters its affections and loses itself in the creature, but there is a uniting power in sanctified afflictions by which the soul (as in rain the hen collects her brood) gathers his best affections unto his Father and his God.

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