

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.

The Christian life is a challenge to the flesh, our carnal nature strives to be master, our carnal nature and flesh wants to be friends with the world where it can drink deeply of the pleasures of sin. Scriptures remind us that we should be like those heroes of faith choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; (Hebrews 11:25.) We are further instructed in godly wisdom and words of truth in James 4, which is highly recommended reading for those not wanting to be friends with the world, James asks us there know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God. (verse 4).

So there you have it brothers and sisters, not my words but the words of Truth spoken for our benefit, direction and ultimate safety as we follow the One who is Truth.

It is our prayer once again this month that the articles selected under the Lord's guidance will be of benefit to your Christian walk and if we are truly sincerely seeking and committed to following the Lord close by and not afar off, then these articles may be a help to you to encourage you as you strive to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able. Luke 13:24 and in Matthew 7:14 we are told why this is so, Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.

Let us determine today, and do so anew everyday, to strive to enter in so that each of us that endures to the end will receive that which is laid up for me (us) a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.

And finally brethren some questions that we could ask ourselves as individuals and as a brotherhood and the answer to them, based on the Scripture, should help us to have closer walk with God.

1. Why are some people more concerned with the signs than with the fruit of the Spirit?
2. How do I know if I truly have the Holy Spirit?

May the grace and peace of our Risen Lord, the Saviour of mankind, be your portion daily until His return takes us into glory forever more.

J.v.L.

MINISTER'S CORNER.

The Danger of Following Afar-Off.

Is your religion and investment or an adventure?

And it would be very interesting tonight to go around this audience and have each of you tell me how you view your religion. Do you view it as an investment or as an adventure and maybe we should define first of all what is an investment. An investment is what I put into something expecting return. Adventure is something a little different from that in that probably one of the things that clouds our view of adventure is that the amusement parks advertise themselves as adventure and so we associate adventure with fun and recreation. But if you look up the word adventure in the dictionary you will discover that the word adventure has the idea that you go into this project knowing that there will be risks, and knowing that there could be danger, knowing that there will be questions to answer that you don't have answers for. That is adventure.

Now tonight is your religion an investment or an adventure?

Open your Bibles to [Luke chapter 22](#).

I'm going to propose tonight that had Peter begun his walk with Christ as an adventure rather than as an investment. Maybe the account as is given to us tonight would read differently and maybe your walk with Christ would be different tonight if it were an adventure rather than an investment.

You brethren know that if you make a poor investment what do you do? You try to get out of that don't you? Take what you can get and let it go. Have you ever met a Christian who did that? They put something into it and it wasn't giving them the returns that they expected and what did they do? They laid it aside because they entered into that expecting a return. What is in it for me? That concept should be foreign to the Christian. The concept of what is in it for me is not part of the Christian adventure.

The Christian adventure is; I am making a commitment to Christ and to my walk with Christ and I'm willing to bear the cross, I am willing to take the risk, I'm willing to expose myself to the danger and I don't have an an-

swer for all the things that I might face, but I trust in the One who is leading the expedition.

And if I can remind you of the experience of those who went exploring the South Pole, it was an adventure, it meant that there were men who were committed to a cause, they did not know what the outcome would be and some of them never lived to tell the story.

Is that the way your religion is tonight? Are you in it for something that you can get?

One man wrote this he said: If we took heaven out of the picture how many people would stick with Christianity? If they didn't have heaven as the end goal how many would stick with the picture?

Are you living for reward? Are you living for commitment?

As we read this Scripture in Luke 22 passage keep your mind on the Danger of Following Afar Off. Let's remember when individuals decide to start putting distance between them and the One that they are committed to it didn't happen overnight, I would like to say that it was a process that took place with small things along the way that finally ended in the following afar off. And it can happen to you and I here this evening, look for that as I read this passage, as we start reading at verse 24, look for the things that may cause you and me to finally come to the place where we begin to follow a far-off.

This passage follows the Last Supper where Jesus sat down with His disciples and it was also the institution of the communion experience that we recognize today, that time of communion together.

[Luke 22:24-62](#)

And there was also a strife among them, which of them should be accounted the greatest. ²⁵And he said unto them, The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and they that exercise authority upon them are called benefactors. ²⁶But ye shall not be so: but he that is greatest among you, let him be as the younger; and he that is chief, as he that doth serve. ²⁷For whether is greater, he that sitteth at meat, or he that serveth? is not he that sitteth at meat? but I am among you as he that serveth. ²⁸Ye are they which have continued with me in my temptations. ²⁹And I appoint unto you a kingdom, as my Father hath appointed unto me; ³⁰That ye may eat

and drink at my table in my kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

³¹And the Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: ³²But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren. ³³And he said unto him, Lord, I am ready to go with thee, both into prison, and to death. ³⁴And he said, I tell thee, Peter, the cock shall not crow this day, before that thou shalt thrice deny that thou knowest me. ³⁵And he said unto them, When I sent you without purse, and scrip, and shoes, lacked ye any thing? And they said, Nothing. ³⁶Then said he unto them, But now, he that hath a purse, let him take it, and likewise his scrip: and he that hath no sword, let him sell his garment, and buy one. ³⁷For I say unto you, that this that is written must yet be accomplished in me, And he was reckoned among the transgressors: for the things concerning me have an end. ³⁸And they said, Lord, behold, here are two swords. And he said unto them, It is enough.

³⁹And he came out, and went, as he was wont, to the mount of Olives; and his disciples also followed him. ⁴⁰And when he was at the place, he said unto them, Pray that ye enter not into temptation. ⁴¹And he was withdrawn from them about a stone's cast, and kneeled down, and prayed, ⁴²Saying, Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done. ⁴³And there appeared an angel unto him from heaven, strengthening him. ⁴⁴And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly: and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground. ⁴⁵And when he rose up from prayer, and was come to his disciples, he found them sleeping for sorrow, ⁴⁶And said unto them, Why sleep ye? rise and pray, lest ye enter into temptation.

⁴⁷And while he yet spake, behold a multitude, and he that was called Judas, one of the twelve, went before them, and drew near unto Jesus to kiss him. ⁴⁸But Jesus said unto him, Judas, betrayest thou the Son of man with a kiss? ⁴⁹When they which were about him saw what would follow, they said unto him, Lord, shall we smite with the sword?

⁵⁰And one of them smote the servant of the high priest, and cut off his right ear. ⁵¹And Jesus answered and said, Suffer ye thus far. And he touched his ear, and healed him. ⁵²Then Jesus said unto the chief priests, and captains of the temple, and the elders, which were come to him, Be ye come out, as against a thief, with swords and staves? ⁵³When I was daily

with you in the temple, ye stretched forth no hands against me: but this is your hour, and the power of darkness.

⁵⁴Then took they him, and led him, and brought him into the high priest's house. And Peter followed afar off. ⁵⁵And when they had kindled a fire in the midst of the hall, and were set down together, Peter sat down among them. ⁵⁶But a certain maid beheld him as he sat by the fire, and earnestly looked upon him, and said, This man was also with him. ⁵⁷And he denied him, saying, Woman, I know him not. ⁵⁸And after a little while another saw him, and said, Thou art also of them. And Peter said, Man, I am not. ⁵⁹And about the space of one hour after another confidently affirmed, saying, Of a truth this fellow also was with him: for he is a Galilaean. ⁶⁰And Peter said, Man, I know not what thou sayest. And immediately, while he yet spake, the cock crew. ⁶¹And the Lord turned, and looked upon Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said unto him, Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice. ⁶²And Peter went out, and wept bitterly.

Now we would like to suggest tonight that the process of causing one to follow afar-off begins with conflict

In [verse 24](#) we find a conflict taking place among the disciples which became a distraction to the cause of Christ. These individuals wanted a place of prominence in the kingdom of Christ and they misunderstood what Jesus' mission was at this time. It was a conflict that distracted them from the intended purpose that they were to be focused upon.

Having experienced the communion experience strive followed. And I will ask you a question, this is a personal question: How many times after a communion experience that you had, have you allowed conflict to distract you? Maybe a brother said something or a sister said something to you right afterwards and something arose within your heart and what did you do with it? What did you do with it?

You see that becomes the process that will lead to a person putting distance between each other and between themselves and Christ.

Conflict. Conflict with those we see, with those the nearest to us. Beware of the small conflicts that we encounter in life. Beware of our own desires of our heart, they will have consequences and if we don't rein them in we will suffer a loss.

Verse 33.

Commitment without knowledge.

Peter was right ready to say: Lord I'm ready to go with Thee, both into prison and to death.

Commitment without knowledge, and often times it is easy to commit ourselves to that which we are ignorant of. We'd do well to stop and consider what we are committing ourselves to.

And Christ said: What man is going to sit down and build a tower and doesn't first sit down and say what is the cost going to be? Because the cost reflects upon his ability to make a commitment and if the cost is greater than what he can commit to he doesn't commit himself. It is important tonight that your commitment to Christ is with knowledge.

And where do you get the knowledge? Well the knowledge comes from the Word of God.

Too many times I'm afraid people have made commitments on the spur of the moment, on impulse, by pressure, and I think it is important with our young people that their commitment is a commitment that comes from their choice rather than pressure exerted upon them. The power of choice is very important in long-term commitment.

I remember this brother, he made a deal with his friend he said: I will stand at revival meetings if you stand. And the reason for that was that his dad said: "You can't get your driver's license until you become a church member, a Christian." You know where the young man is today? For all practical purposes he is an alcoholic.

Commitment without knowledge.

Who was a fault there? I'm going to put some of the blame upon the father for putting that kind of pressure on his son. Beware, that is forcing somebody into a commitment.

The commitment to Jesus Christ tonight is of greater importance than a driver's license or the privilege to drive. And I realise the father was probably trying his utmost to steer his son in a right direction but it was in a wrong direction, it brought about the wrong problem, and I think he would have done better to sit down with his son and ask: "Now what does hinder you to make a commitment?"

Let's look at the things that hinder making a commitment.

I remember sitting down with a young person one time and simply asking that question: Now what is it that causes you not to want to make a commitment to Christ? And the answer was: “Well my friends, I didn't see any difference in them so why should I?”

You know what the answer to that question must be? “What your friends do has nothing to do with your responsibility and accountability to God, it has nothing to do with that.”

You know we have to help our young people to understand what commitment is, we have to do that. Otherwise we have people making commitments without knowledge. Impulsive commitment, doing what the rest of the people are doing. Let's be careful with that.

One brother made this observation he said: “In one conference you joined church, in another group you stood at revivals, he said I would rather have my children come pounding on the bedroom door at night saying: I can't sleep, I am scared.”

Have we created a culture? We don't join church but stand at revivals, and I'm not questioning people standing at revivals, I'm simply saying: Are we really looking for that kind of commitment that's needed, commitment with knowledge. Commitment because an awareness of an accountability before an Almighty God. At some place in every person's experience they must entertain that thought and as they entertain that thought it will be a desire to receive knowledge so that the commitment they make is a commitment with knowledge.

Verse 45.

Individuals who find themselves following afar-off will at some time probably experience the difficulty of dealing with their emotions. Notice the emotions that we find expressed here in verse 45. “And when He rose up from prayer and came to his disciples he found them sleeping for sorrow.”

Now I am sure that the sorrow that they were experiencing was in the uncertainties of what Jesus had been trying to tell them, it had brought about a drain upon their physical being and they became sleepy and they slept.

A brother recently explained the nature of man in this way: Man is made up of body, soul and spirit here is the body, here is the soul and here is the spirit.

The man who is of the flesh, the soul, is controlled by the body and the impulses of the body.

The man who is spiritual allows his soul to be subject to his spirit and his body is subject to his soul.

That is the process in the divine plan of God from Genesis, that the spirit controls the soul and the soul controls the body but when Adam and Eve fell we have the reversal, where the body made a demand upon the soul and severed the relationship of the spirit with God. It is important tonight that we understand that concept that our souls, our emotions, our intellect which is a part of the soul as I understand it, is being directed and controlled by the spirit of God and not by our body and we find here that these men, who were to be praying, who were to be warding off temptation, were allowing their soul, and their emotions to be controlled by the body rather than by the spirit.

And too many times that is exactly what happens in a person's life as they start this path of drifting away from God, they find that their emotions have a greater control over their body, that their body and their emotions are controlling them rather than their spirit being in control of them.

What are you doing with the emotional frustrations that you experience in life? Are you living out of your emotions, or are you living out of your spirit? It is going to make a difference in the decisions and choices that you make in life, it is going to make a difference. I want to say along with that, it is important that we give heed to the spirit of God.

Three things that the Word tells us it says: Grieve not the spirit. It says: Resist not the spirit; and it says: Quench not the spirit. It is a process. The individual who grieves the spirit doesn't turn around at that point but moves on to a place of resisting the spirit and then eventually moves to a place of quenching the spirit. And that is a very dangerous place to get to, very dangerous place.

Let us not grieve the spirit of God. Remember it is what gives us the ability to bring our emotions into subjection rather than being controlled by them.

Verse 50.

The next step in this process we find a man who had zeal but it was zeal without knowledge,

Somebody is going to hurt my leader and there is one solution, get a sword and let's deal with it. Zeal, very zealous, totally, never stopped to think of what was going on here, we have two swords and we have this whole army of men and somehow the miraculous is going to take effect here.

How many times do you find people on the pathway toward the world who become very zealous but the zeal is misdirected. The zeal is used in a way that is harmful rather than helpful. Just keep that in mind. Individuals begin to feel, I think it is part of this emotional package, they get very zealous for a cause. I see it so many times when individuals are drifting they become very evangelistic and you start to say: Now who really needs to be evangelized here? You or the people you think need evangelism? I'm not saying that evangelism is wrong but why is it when people begin to drift toward the world they become more evangelistic or at least they put their emphasis and thrust on that, zeal without knowledge.

So we are going to get real, get on the evangelism band wagon and really do something for the Lord. But we really don't have our own spirit into subjection. It is not going to work out.

The next point is in [verse 54](#).

Oftentimes individuals who start that path lose hope and that is what we discover here in verse 54. It says: Then took they him and let him in and brought him into the high priest's house and Peter followed a far-off.

To me it is a picture of a person who lost hope. This looks hopeless. Here the Lord was going to bring these men into subjection and it didn't work out that way, He became a prisoner and all zeal to right this thing was lost. What did He end up in doing? He put the ear back on the high priest's poor servant and that was a lost cause, hopelessness.

I used the illustration of evangelistic thrust when people are drifting out and they go out and try to sell Jesus to people and you know they just really pump this thing up too, and they discover that yes it might make a short time impact but it doesn't pan out the way they read it in a book and they lose hope. It is part of the pathway away from Christ.

Remember all the evangelism, if Jesus Christ is not the central focus and is not the power behind it, is a wasted effort. Evangelism must be for the name of Christ and the honour and glory of God and not for the exaltation of men. Let's keep that in mind as we pursue things in life.

Well we notice that as hope is lost men turn back to the things that benefit themselves.

Peter as he followed afar-off, and I don't know what was going through his mind, did he think this was a total lost cause, all was lost, there is no hope, and it says here in [verse 55](#) that when they had kindled a fire in the midst of the hall, and were set down together, Peter sat down among them. Now if you found yourself in a hopeless situation where would you go for comfort? Where would you go to sit down? There's a personal question. If you lost all hope where would you turn?

Peter turned to the very people who had taken his Lord captive

I'm going to read a few verses here from the Psalmist: [Psalm 1:1-2](#)

“Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. But his delight is in the law of the Lord; and in his law doth he meditate day and night.”

Where do you turn in the times of hopelessness or when the light has gone out at the end of the tunnel? Where do you turn? Do you come back to this Book? Or do you turn back to the society of people in search of answers?

I'm going to give this as an additional caution. You can go to any bookstore and you can find an awful lot of books that will tell you how to deal with hopelessness. I would simply like to recommend tonight that we come to this Book. You say well it's too hard to understand, too hard to understand.

I think if you would take the book of Proverbs you will discover from simply reading the book of Proverbs, and Proverbs is an easy book to read in my opinion, it is simple short statements, you would discover a light at the end of the tunnel again. A lot more light than what Peter discovered sitting by the fire and being with those who were scornful. Let's remember that.

We may not, must not go out to the local town and sit down with the world's, go to the bar or someplace like that to find comfort, but do I, do we go to the books of Protestant writers to look for a solution for a problem? And I give that as a warning to us. There are a lot of people turning to

the Protestant writers for a solution to their problems and are not willing to come back to the Word of God and simply take it for what it says. There is light at the end of the tunnel if we are willing to read with knowledge. As our devotional leaders said here this afternoon, this Book makes sense when we know the Author of the Book.

You know I would choose to propose that a lot of the books written out there that are supposed to find a solution for man's problems, if you met the author you would probably be disappointed if you asked them: "How is it working out in your life?" and they might tell you: "Not too good, it is easier to write it then it is to live it."

Let's go back to the Word of God, I am not saying all these other books are all heresy but I will say this, in the times of deepest discouragement they are not the books to go to. We read those books when we have the clearest minds, the clearest emotions and we can filter out what we are reading because it is going to take a lot of filtering. It is going to mean comparing what we read to what the Scriptures say.

Peter found himself sitting among the scornful and the Psalmist says that our delight must be in the law of the Lord and in that law we meditate day and night.

I will say this again, some of you may remember this from Bible school, but to me the difference between head knowledge and heart knowledge is the flow of what we read in the Scripture from the head to the heart through meditation and when we sit in the seat of the scornful and walk in the way of the ungodly it becomes the blockade for the knowledge to flow from the head to the heart. And if you don't believe that, we know what the Scripture says, but if you sit down with a couple of brethren and you become scornful of another person, you tell me what effect it has on your heart. It will block off the needed information from the head to the heart, and remember this: Out of the heart the mouth speaketh.

And so the end result is that the knowledge that should have flowed from the head to the heart has been blocked off and instead what comes forth from the mouth is more scornful words and more destruction.

Where are you sitting or where are you going for help when hope is lost? Peter was willing to find comfort and satisfaction, he failed to crucify himself by sitting down at the fire with these individuals.

The next thing that we notice happens is in [verse 58](#).

It actually is a number of verses here but it comes to a denial of Christ. There is a place where we finally say: I don't know Him, I am no longer associated with Him. That is the process.

It began because they were trying to decide who was the greatest. They were trying to decide where do I fit in this whole picture. People are still trying to decide that tonight: Where do I fit in the picture of life? Where do you fit in this congregation or the congregation that you are a part of? Where do I fit?

And if we don't figure that out we will let that become a stumbling block for us and eventually you will be following afar-off, and we could review individual's lives were that has happened, they could never figure where they fitted in life and eventually they drifted on and away.

In closing: [Hebrews 10:19-25](#).

The writer here gives a very simple solution to the problem of following afar-off. I will start at verse 19 we have a continuity of thought here and it is important that we don't break that up.

Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, *the importance of the blood of Christ and Jesus Christ being in the focus of our life.*

“Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus; By a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh; And having an high priest over the house of God; (*here is what we do with the problem*) Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; (for he is faithful that promised ;) [24] And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: [25] Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.

From these verses, especially verse 22, we have the personal responsibility of drawing near to God and we can conclude that I can do it on my own but when we come to verse 25 we see the need for the Church family, for the Church family, that we might exhort one another and so much more as we see the day approaching.

May God bless you as you follow close to Christ.

*From a message by Bro. Wilmer Martin
Given at Ewing Mennonite Church, 2008.*



CAREFUL OR CREDULOUS?

By Brother Roland.

The Apostle John, an elder in the early church, wrote words of simplicity but of great importance to his fellow believers. In today's spiritual environment, it is vital for us to understand their true meaning. We read as follows in 1 John 4:1-6:

"Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world. Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God: And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world. Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world. They are of the world: therefore speak they of the world, and the world heareth them. We are of God: he that knoweth God heareth us; he that is not of God heareth not us. Hereby know we the spirit of truth, and the spirit of error"

We clearly understand the initial warning contained in this passage: We must be careful not to readily believe every spirit that presents itself, even though it might present itself as coming from God. The Apostle Paul condemned in the strongest terms those who came preaching any gospel other than that which came from God. Already in those early days of the church, strange spirits were trying to "pervert the gospel of Christ" (Galatians 1:7). Surely in our day there are more false prophets than ever before.

The basic test by which false spirits may be known seems at first glance to be simplistic. The spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God; the one that does not so confess Christ is not of God. Today's false spirits may be very careful to say that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh. But what does it mean to confess that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh?

First of all, let us establish that confession in the sense used in this scripture means more than merely saying something. Jesus warned His disciples that in the judgment many people will try to justify themselves as having known Him and acknowledged Him, but He will tell them that He never knew them. They did not do what He taught them to do. Confession in its true meaning demands agreement of words and deeds.

It is wonderful to us that the great Power by which all things were made should have come down and lived on earth, full of grace and truth. Many have tried to explain how this was done. Some have gone to great lengths to support one belief or another about how the Son of God came down to the world. When He came, however, the world did not know Him, and neither does today's world know Him (John 1:1-5, 10-14).

We may not understand all the wonder of the incarnation of the Son of God. Job's three friends were adamant in their pronouncements about God. In the end, God told them to make sacrifice and ask Job to pray for them. His wrath was kindled against them, because they had not spoken rightly of Him. Let us be careful to maintain a simple faith in Jesus our Lord, believing what He said about Himself and what the apostles said about Him. He came in the flesh to do the will of His Heavenly Father. He is the Christ, the Son of the living God. He is our Lord and our God.

We need to keep in focus the reason for any expressions of our belief that Jesus Christ came in the flesh. It is not an exercise in the ability to explain things in a way satisfactory to science, so-called. Any such expression needs to be a simple statement of faith rather than an intellectual or systematized theology. God in the form of His Son is too great to be "put in a box" by the finite mind of man.

Many people would like to deal with essentials like faith and love and obedience on an intellectual or highly spiritualized plane. These then become subjects for discussion rather than practice. To confess that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh means that the teachings of Christ are totally applicable to my life in the flesh!

Jesus taught great truths in very simple terms. He asked not only for outward conformity, but also for inward purity. Having come in the flesh, He often put His teachings into parables that were striking and realistic, and they still are today.

Spirits that do not believe that God's grace can enable us to stand in obedience to these teachings are spirits of antichrist. They would have us to be satisfied with a life of sin, saying that fulfillment of Christ's teachings is for some future kingdom. Let us beware of such spirits! There are many of them in today's religious world. They also come to attack us through the lusts of our own flesh. Christ's total victory over sin and Satan while He was in the flesh assures us that we also can be victorious.

Those spirits that try to explain away or water down Jesus' teachings are essentially trying to take away the authority of those teachings. God forbid that we should ever be found trying to make any explanation as to why we cannot in our day follow the commandments of the One who came down to redeem us! This would be tantamount to denying that He is in the Father and the Father in Him.

The apostle John gave us a second point of proving for spirits that present themselves to us. This point has to do with what these spirits are interested in and what they listen to. Having a worldly source, they understand and are understood by the world. Their primary focus is on worldly things. The world listens to them.

John made the simple claim that true Christians are of God. Oh, how the world cries foul when we make that claim! Accusations of pride will immediately come from the spirits that do not acknowledge Christ's coming in the flesh.

The simple test is this: We, who know God listen one another, those who are not of God do not listen to God's children. They rather maintain their own perceived personal link with God, doing according to their own world influenced thinking. And the world approves of them, because it wants to do the same.

The apostle Paul wrote, "Prove all things; hold fast that which is good" (1 Thess. 5:21). God's Holy Spirit will gently help us to do this very thing, if we will walk in the Spirit, not fulfilling the lusts of the flesh. We need not fear, "because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world" (1 John 4:4).



The Freedom of Truth

Romans 8:2: *For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death.*

"What is truth?" These words were spoken by a cynical Roman official nearly two thousand years ago. It is a question that penetrates to the heart of man, and it is on the lips of many today. Truth can make man uncomfortable, and sometimes, like Pontius Pilate, we would like to ignore it or sidestep it. What is freedom? Freedom is a universal desire of man, but does fallen man really understand that desire? Today's lesson links freedom and truth. One we desire, and one we sometimes fear, but in the eyes of God we cannot have one without the other. May this study increase our understanding and appreciation of truth and of the freedom it brings.

Read John 8:30-47. This episode described here took place in the temple at Jerusalem. Jesus had gone there for the Feast of Tabernacles, a Jewish holy day, and, while there, He preached to the people.

Our Lord's public ministry lasted only three years. Toward the end of that short time, in spite of all the wondrous works which Jesus had performed, a resistance to Him and His teachings grew and became more open. Many of those listening to Him began to believe. Jesus encouraged them to be faithful, and He offered to lead them into freedom. If His disciples would live in freedom they must continue in His Word. This is more than a one-time acceptance of the Word; it means a daily walk, an abiding, a continuing. This brings truth, and truth brings freedom.

It seems evident that the Jews who began to answer Jesus were not believers, but rather opposed Him. They were not really trying to understand Him better. Their statements were a challenge, a rejection of what Jesus was trying to teach. They were telling Jesus that He was wrong. Their opposition was rooted in an unwillingness to acknowledge their need. Their heritage, their way of life was their bedrock.

Their confidence was in themselves, in their own spirituality, their own understanding, their own religiousness. The truth about the real condition of their souls was something they were not willing to face.

As Jesus spoke to them, He revealed to them true freedom. The ones questioning Him were not truly free, but they did not know it. That is bondage of the mind as well as bondage of the soul! Jesus finally had to

speak quite bluntly to the doubters and sometimes we need to do the same. This was because their hearts were so hardened. He had to tell them they were the exact opposite of what they thought they were. They presented themselves as followers of God. In fact, they were followers of the devil and did his work.

Although Jesus' enemies hardened their hearts even more when they heard His words, yet we, today, benefit from His teaching. His words help us to a better understanding of the devil, the foe of our soul. Jesus' words also help us to discern true godliness.

The world offers several kinds of freedom to us. The flesh would ask for unfettered indulgence of our appetites. All we want, when we want it; no restraints, no limits. If it feels good, do it. That's the desire of the flesh, but that road leads to ruin. It leads to extreme selfishness and finally debauchery. It can lead to alcoholism, drug addiction, gluttony, or other excesses which finally destroy the flesh itself. In short, it leads to bondage.

The rebellious heart of fallen man desires freedom of the will. It defines freedom as being able to do what I want and go wherever I want when I want. No one is going to tell me what to do. I am the boss, and I am in control of my own life. This is a self-centered view of life. This self-centeredness leads to difficulty in relationships, loneliness because of selfishness, broken marriages, broken homes, broken hearts. In short, this road leads to bondage.

The mind of man may desire intellectual freedom, deciding for myself what truth is. I will decide for myself what is right, and what is wrong. I will choose my own morality.

This is the so-called freedom that was first offered by Satan in the Garden of Eden: "And ye shall be as gods" (Gen. 3:5). This desire often refuses to take into account that eternity is coming, an eternity that is created by and filled with an all-knowing, all-powerful God. This God created us, we are accountable to Him, and He will measure us by His standards and not ours. This so-called freedom will also end in bondage, the eternal bondage of hell.

What is that freedom that Christ is offering? Scripture states, "Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin. And the servant abideth not in the house for ever: but the Son abideth ever. If the Son therefore shall make

you free, ye shall be free indeed." Christ offers freedom from sin and its eternal consequences. The servant of sin will have no place with God in eternity, but those who possess the Spirit of the Son will abide with God forever. That is the truth, recorded in the Word of God. John 8:34-36.

The mystery of godliness is hidden to the carnal mind. The freedoms that the world dangles in front of us lead into bondage. The gospel leads in the opposite direction. It teaches us to deny our fleshly lusts. We then become masters over our appetites and desires, instead of slaves to them. That is real freedom. The gospel teaches us to surrender our wills to the will of God and to become His servants. We receive the salvation of our souls and eternal life instead of eternal death. That is real freedom. The gospel in our heart causes us to give up our ideas and accept God's judgments and His church's proving of the issues in our lives. Our loving Father then makes us His sons through adoption, and we become "partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light" (Col. 1:12). That is real freedom.

The way to obtain real freedom, freedom in Christ, is to face the truth. In order to be able to face God, we must accept the truth about ourselves and others. God is truth and cannot abide where untruth is. This is not only the way to find God, but it is also the way to walk with Him.

We say that the truth hurts. It does! It hurts our pride and our self-exaltation.

We prefer to blame others for the troubles in our lives. Perhaps I struggle with bad feelings because of what my brother said or did; If my neighbors would do differently, then I could truly love them. I have a hard time being a successful Christian because of my parents' failures. What do people expect from someone who was raised like I was? People do not really understand me. If they did, they'd know I'm not so bad. The ministers didn't treat me right and the list could go on and on and on.

Thoughts like these lead into a very real bondage, even for those who want to live a Christian life. By blaming others for our troubles, we become bound to those people's actions. We cannot be free in our spirit until others acknowledge their wrongs and make confession to us. We make ourselves to be victims, and we cannot be delivered from our hurt feelings and habitual failings because we think they are not really our fault. We like to think that we are innocent and others are guilty.

What is truth?

The truth is that we are responsible for our actions, our thoughts, words, and feelings. Accepting this responsibility brings freedom. Repentance and self-denial are necessary. Is true freedom worth it?

- ✓ It is true that unwanted thoughts and feelings come to us unbidden.
- ✓ It is true that there are real hurts in life where we have been treated wrongly.
- ✓ It is true that some of the circumstances of life are beyond our control.

But, by the grace of God, with the indwelling Spirit, we can control how we react to the circumstances. We can, like Jesus, refuse the tempting thoughts and resist them, or we can harbor them. We can label our unwholesome feelings as sinful and deny them, or we can nurse our hurts and our grudges. We can feed them or starve them.

These are some of the truths that are difficult for us to accept. We choose self-pity. We choose to continue in pride. We choose to be offended. We choose to be self-righteous.

In spite of all our best intentions and efforts, we may fail. We may stumble or be overtaken in a fault. However, with God's help we can repent and rise again. Both Samson and Peter did so. When we quit justifying ourselves and accept our responsibility, we call these things our besetting sins and come to Christ for deliverance. This is the freedom that Jesus offers. The servant of sin will not abide in God's house forever, but the Son will and all those who have the Son in their hearts.

The freedom to choose rightly is one of God's oldest gifts to man, first given in the Garden. "Adam, you have a choice. You can stand tall, or you can fall. You are free." Perhaps we could put our own name in place of Adam.



Power Demonstrated (Part 2 in a Series on Power)

And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power. 1 Corinthians 2:4.

Today many professing Christians, with widely varying beliefs and practices, claim to be led by the Spirit. Some place much emphasis on the sign

of speaking in tongues but seem to ignore the "fruit" (Galatians 5:22-23). May this lesson help us to prove whether or not the power of the Holy Spirit is evidenced in our lives. "For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God" (Romans 8:14).

Let's read what the Scripture reveals about the power of God demonstrated at Pentecost through the pouring out of His Spirit, the Holy Spirit.

Acts 2:1-18

"And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. ²And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. ³And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. ⁴And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance. ⁵And there were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven. ⁶Now when this was noised abroad, the multitude came together, and were confounded, because that every man heard them speak in his own language. ⁷And they were all amazed and marvelled, saying one to another, Behold, are not all these which speak Galilaean? ⁸And how hear we every man in our own tongue, wherein we were born? ⁹Parthians, and Medes, and Elamites, and the dwellers in Mesopotamia, and in Judaea, and Cappadocia, in Pontus, and Asia, ¹⁰Phrygia, and Pamphylia, in Egypt, and in the parts of Libya about Cyrene, and strangers of Rome, Jews and proselytes, ¹¹Cretes and Arabians, we do hear them speak in our tongues the wonderful works of God. ¹²And they were all amazed, and were in doubt, saying one to another, What meaneth this? ¹³Others mocking said, These men are full of new wine.

¹⁴But Peter, standing up with the eleven, lifted up his voice, and said unto them, Ye men of Judaea, and all ye that dwell at Jerusalem, be this known unto you, and hearken to my words: ¹⁵For these are not drunken, as ye suppose, seeing it is *but* the third hour of the day. ¹⁶But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel; ¹⁷And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams: ¹⁸And on my servants and on my handmaidens I will pour out in those days of my Spirit; and they shall prophesy."

After Jesus' resurrection, He returned to His disciples and for forty days taught them the meaning of the Scriptures.

After returning to heaven, He sent the Holy Spirit to His followers. The Holy Spirit, part of the Divine Trinity, is one with God the Father and the Son, Jesus Christ. It is through the Holy Spirit that the Father and Son work.

The Holy Spirit came visibly in the form of "cloven tongues like as of fire," and with miraculous power, giving His disciples the ability to preach in languages they had never learned. Many of the listeners were devout Jews who knew the Scriptures well. Peter explained the Scriptures and showed them that Jesus is the Messiah. The Holy Spirit worked in the hearts of those who wanted truth, and thousands were saved and added to the church.

Jesus said, "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again" (John 3:5-7). "Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his" (Romans 8:9). These scriptures, and many others, show us that we must have the Spirit of Christ if we would be saved.

How can we know if we have the Spirit of Christ? Jesus said, "By their fruits ye shall know them" (Matthew 7:20). Let us consider the fruit of the Spirit, described in Galatians 5:22-23.

Love for each other: "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another" (John 13:35)

Love for God: "Jesus answered and said unto him, If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him" (John 14:23). True love for God proves itself through obedience to God.

Joy: True joy also comes through obedience. Jesus said, "If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love. These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full" (John 15:10-11).

Peace: "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid" (John 14:27). "For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritu-

ally minded is life and peace" (Romans 8:6).

Longsuffering: Long and patient endurance of trouble, injury, or offense.

Gentleness: "But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy" (James 3:17).

Goodness: "Ye also are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, able also to admonish one another" (Romans 15:14)

Faith: Complete and wholehearted belief, trust, and confidence in God. "For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith" (1 John 5:4).

Meekness: "Mild tempered, not easily provoked or irritated, submissive to the Divine will, enduring injury with patience and without resentment" (Webster's Dictionary).

Temperance: Habitual moderation, self restraint. "And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things" (1 Corinthians 9:25).

These qualities, which often overlap, may collectively be considered to be the fruit of the Spirit and are strong evidence of the indwelling Holy Spirit. Another sign of His abiding presence is a love for the truth.

The Holy Spirit gives the believer power to overcome sin, the world, and the devil (Romans 8:13-14). The Holy Spirit gives power to the church of God to reprove sin.

In the early church, Stephen was a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit. The power of the Holy Spirit was clearly demonstrated through Stephen, who spoke plainly and fearlessly to the Jews who opposed the gospel. Stephen did not fear the painful death awaiting him, and in true love he forgave those who killed him.

The great power of the Holy Spirit is available for Christians today. It is demonstrated each time someone recognizes his sinful nature and with true godly sorrow and true repentance is born again. The power of the Holy Spirit changes hearts and lives from the inside, the result of which is visible, outward change.

Satan, in his attempt to deceive us, seeks to imitate the power of the Holy Spirit. "For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect" (Matthew 24:24). "For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. And

no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light" (2 Corinthians 11:13-14).

To detect a counterfeit, one must first know the characteristics of the genuine article. The true Spirit is the Spirit of Truth and will never disagree with God and His Word. "For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one" (I John 5:7). Evil spirits also may appear very attractive, as Jesus indicated, and may perform great "signs and wonders." We must try these spirits to see if that which they suggest is in harmony with the Word and if it flows with the spirits of true Christians. We must also prove whether they give power to live above sin and to overcome the weaknesses in our natures.

Peter's listeners were "pricked in their heart" (Acts 2:37) for Peter preached with power. Each one understood in his own language, and each one knew that this was a serious matter that called for action. Today, too, Christians speak with power. As they perform their daily duties or as ministers preach the gospel, they speak a universal language, the language of love and compassion. This language, spoken from the heart, goes to the heart, and those who gladly receive the message are saved. This message is supported as Christians today, by the power of the Holy Spirit, live in sincere obedience to Christ's teachings.



"It seems to me the devil in Western society has actually had a battle plan to try and make life so easy for Christians that we lose our understanding of self-denial and we lose our understanding of the cross and giving in to God's will and crucifying my own will."

Anonymous.



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