

THE AUSTRALIAN ANABAPTIST

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

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

Matthew 5:15

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For A Conservative Anabaptist Perspective

From The Editor's Desk

Testimonies from the past can be of great interest and encouragement and admonition to us as we ponder on how those who went before us lived the Christian life in their day and age.

Here are a few selected words written on 14 March 1559 by a woman called Claesken who laid down her life for the testimony of Jesus taken from the *Martyrs Mirror*, pp.613-4.

“The Lord through His great grace and mercy grant that all those who hunger and thirst after righteousness may be filled.

My dearly beloved friends, my heartfelt prayer and request of you is once more, that you will peruse and search the holy Scriptures, and learn to fear the Lord from the heart; for “the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.” Proverbs 9:10.

Behold, my dear friends, lay this to heart, that the Lord will not hear those who do not fear Him now (John 9:31); and how precious the fear of the Lord is to him that will choose it; for nothing is to be compared to her. The fear of the Lord is honour, and glory, and gladness, and a crown of rejoicing. The fear of the Lord maketh a merry heart, and giveth joy, and gladness and a long life. Whoso feareth the Lord, it shall go well with him at the last, and he shall find favour in the day of his death.

My beloved friends, lay it to heart, how great a difference there is between those who fear the Lord, and them that do not fear Him, Malachi 3:18. Search well the Scriptures, that you will not be like the cities concerning which Christ says in the Gospel, that because they did not lay to heart His mighty works, which were done in their presence, it should be more tolerable for those of Sodom and Gomorrah at the day of judgement than for them, Matthew 11:20

My dear friends, lay to heart how great glory is promised to those who fear the Lord with the whole heart, and what great anguish shall come upon every soul of man that has not obeyed the Gospel; these shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord. 2 Thessalonians 1:8-9. Therefore become obedient to the truth and be transformed in your mind that you may prove what is that acceptable and perfect will of God.

1 Peter 1:22; Romans 12:2.”

Note: The *Martyrs Mirror* is available online via a link on our website Welcome Page at www.anabaptistmennonites.org



From the Pulpit

**RELATIONSHIP OF BIBLICAL AUTHORITY
AND CHURCH AUTHORITY**
Brother Melvin Burkholder 2010

A person doesn't know what to say at a time like this exactly, I did receive some encouragement to share on this subject I have preached on before and if I say some of the things that some of you have heard I give you my apologies but I would like to think on the subject of the relationship of biblical authority and church authority this morning.

We are going to do a little bit of thinking through history. We recognize in this title that there are two authorities that are legitimate, the Bible and the Church, and it is certainly more important to recognize that both possess authority than to be able to explain how exactly their authority is related.

I would like to just start out by thinking about biblical authority a bit. To deny the existence of authority is to deny God because God by definition is supreme ruler and Creator and if God exists in all then He rules overall and all authority ultimately resides in Him.

To acknowledge God's existence but not biblical authority is to say that God is there that He is silent, He fathered us forth and then He orphaned us leaving us to cry in the darkness after our creator. And this we cannot believe, such a God would not be good, if God is God then He is good and say we believe that God is a speaking God, He is nature is not darkness and secrecy but a light and revelation.

God is light, the true Light that lighteth every man that cometh into the world, [John 1:9](#).

God speaks through His world, He built His message into the world and gave us minds capable of reading it, Psalm 19 verse one says the heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament showeth his handiwork. Day unto day uttereth speech and night unto night sheweth knowledge. And then if you read the next verse without the italicized words it says, no speech nor language their voice is not heard. ([Psalm 19:1-3](#)) it is not de-

pendent on language but as the poet said; In the reason's ear they all rejoice and utter forth with joyous voice.

God spoke through His world and God spoke verbally, In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. **John 1:1.**

We look at this Book that we are here holding in our hands this morning and we believe that it is God's special revelation of Himself to His creatures, it is not just any book it is God's book, the book that God breathed because He had some things to say that He could not say in the stars and the trees and the birds and bees and so He moved man to write and holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Ghost (**2 Peter 1:21**) and they penned the holy scriptures which were able to make men wise unto salvation (**2 Timothy 3:15**).

We look at the origins this book and how unique it is and that claims to be the word of God and at the accuracy of its prophecies and the loftiness of its truths and we look at the love and hatred that it engenders in human hearts and the way that it is has been preserved through threat after threat like an anvil that wears out hammer after hammer.

We look at the power of the book and there are many people who say that they met God in this book and tell how their lives were transformed by the power from drunkards to saints.

I think of a brother in Paraguay especially when he said that he was transformed from a drunkard into a saint.

We hear in his words the ring of truth, it fits and it makes sense of reality, it is like a dictionary of ethics that I have it says it like this: "The law is not a tyrannical imposition confining man and tramping his opportunity to enjoy life but on the contrary it is God's grace His revelation of the structure of the spiritual universe where it teaches man to move along the cosmos lines of force rather than at cross-purposes with his true destiny."

I think the Bible agrees with that, Deuteronomy says the Lord commanded us to do all these statutes, to fear the Lord our God, for our good always, that he might preserve us alive, as it is at this day. Deuteronomy 6:24.

So the words in this book makes sense of life, it lines us up with the grain of the universe rather than cutting across the grain. It rings true.

We look at all these things and say God has spoken to His world through this book, it is the word of God, people meet God in this book because it is God's book.

This book must be reckoned with, it must be obeyed, the Bible has authority because it is the word of God, it will never change, it will never pass away not one jot or tittle (**Matthew 5:18**), you cannot safely ignore it, tamper with it, set it aside, explain it away, add to it or subtract from it, twist it or play with it in anyway.

It is the word of God, it has authority and God says this is My word, and it has My authority and I stand behind it and I hold you to it.

Well that's Bible authority, just a little bit of why we believe the Bible is authority.

Now what about Church authority?

Well God was not content to speak only through His world and through His book there are some things that he could not say through His world or through His word and so he came in human flesh, the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth. **John 1:14**.

God who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last day spoken to us by his Son. **Hebrews 1:1-2**.

And the Son of God has the authority of God because He is God, He is God the Son, He is not just the Son of God but God the Son.

Jesus said all power is given unto me in heaven and in earth, **Matthew 28:18**, and power is authority, the same Greek word, He is saying all authority is given unto me in heaven and in earth and He showed his authority while he was here when He spoke to the waves and they got still, **Matthew 8:26**.

When He cast out demons that showed His authority in the spiritual world. When He healed the sick, the blind received their sight, the lame walked, the dumb spoke. He had authority in the physical world. He raised the dead, authority over death.

He finally ascended to his heavenly throne but before He left He said, I will give you authority to act for me on earth, I will dwell in you and work through you, and you will be my body on the earth. You will receive pow-

er, **Acts 1:8**, you shall receive power and be my witnesses all over the world and throughout all time.

And of course He said in the great commission with all the authority of heaven and earth standing behind me, he says I have all power, all power is given unto me, with all the authority in heaven and earth standing behind me I commission you to go into all the world, teaching all the things in the word and I am with you, my presence, my spirit, my authority will attend you to the end of the age. (**Matthew 28:18-20**).

So God is saying, Jesus is saying I give you my authority to do my work.

And that is clear in the epistles too, it is clear in the Gospels, Matthew 16, and 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. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatsoever thou shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. **Matthew 16:18-19**.

Matthew 18:15-20: 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 sound it unto the church but if he neglect to hear the church let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican.

Verily I say to you, [now notice this] whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth is shall be loosed in heaven. Again I say unto you that if two of you shall agree on earth as touching anything that they shall ask it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven, for where two or three are gathered together in my name there am I in the midst of them..

He is with us and He gives us authority.

The epistles teach church authority

1 Thessalonians 5:12-13, and we beseech you brethren to know them which labour among you and our overview in the Lord and admonish you; and to esteem him very highly and love for their works sake.

Hebrews 13:7, Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God.

Obeys them which have the rule over you and submit yourselves for they watch for your souls as they that must give account that they may do it with joy and not with grief that is unprofitable for you. **Hebrews 13:17**

The church has authority, that is clear from the words of Jesus and the words of the epistles. God says to the church, you feed, you teach, baptize, ordain, reprove, and exhort, rebuke with all authority let no man despise thee (**Titus 2:15**).

Leaders are to be those who rule well their own houses for if they cannot rule their children how can they rule the church? **1 Timothy 3:5**.

Authority.

Elders who rule well are to be counted worthy of double honour, **1 Timothy 5:17**. Of course ruling with gentleness and humility not as lords. (**1 Peter 5:3**).

But undoubtedly the whole assumption of the New Testament is that the church possesses authority from God and again God stands behind is authority, beyond His delegated authority.

We must reckon with church authority to be scriptural.

Bible authority is not contrary to church authority, it establishes church authority.

So we have two models relating Bible authority and church authority in history.

Two authorities, God's word and God's Church, the Bible and the church both have authority from God, God speak through both, God works through both, what is their relationship?

Two models important in church history.

Number one puts church authority subordinate to biblical authority - it is God up here, then it is the Bible and that it is the church, three steps, three tiers.

Model two puts Bible and church basically equal in authority, God is up here and then Bible and church on the same tiers, same level.

That's a different way of looking at or a different model.

And I would like to spend a little bit time tracing how these two models have evolved through history.

Early Christians recognized God's authority above all; they recognized that God spake unto men giving them the scriptures, the Old Testament and New Testament. They further believed on the basis of the scriptures and that is important, on the basis of the scriptures, that the church possessed authority as well.

Just after the new testament closes we have writings of what we sometimes call the Apostolic Fathers, some of them wrote before the Apostle John died, I suppose he died around A.D. 100, and some of these apostolic writers, not Apostles, but writers who were successors to the Apostles, some of them knowing the Apostle John some of them even writing before he died talk about the authority of the church.

The Didache was written sometime between A.D. 80 and A.D. 140, as early as 80 and as late as 140 it says: "My child remember night and day the one who speaks the word of God to you honour him as the Lord, for where His Lordship is taught there is the Lord."

Clement of Rome writing about A.D. 96 says: "Let us honour those who have the rule over us."

Ignatius writing about 105, a pupil of the Apostle John, personally acquainted with him, and he is starting to get pretty strong it seems he says:

"Let everyone reverence the deacons as an appointment of Jesus Christ and the Bishops as Jesus Christ and the presbyters as the Sanhedrin of God's assembly of the Apostles. When I was with you I cried out, I spoke with a loud voice, God's own voice, pay attention to the Bishop and the presbyters and the deacons. Some suspected me of saying this because I had advanced information about the division of some persons but He for whom I am in bonds is my witness that I did not know it from any human being."

That tells us several things, it tells us that he is really emphasizing church authority is emphasizing it and also telling us that there was a challenge to that and that was about 100, 105, 110 A.D., somewhere around then.

Now these early writings are not inspired Scripture but they represent the views of the church at the time when the church was still relatively pure. And you can see that church authority, especially of leaders is strongly affirmed and the authority of the New Testament writers, we can give other references for that.

Now I think this represents model number one with God here, and then the Bible here and then beneath that the authority of the church deriving its authority from God and authorized by the word of God.

But as the centuries passed the church gradually moved away from the purity of the New Testament church adopting some pagan practices and slowly metamorphosing into what became the Catholic Church and one of the changes was an increase in church authority to the point where church authority equalled or even surpassed Bible authority.

It happened something like this;

First the Bishops of Rome gradually increased in influence and authority until after some hundreds of years this Bishop became known as the Pope or Papa, the father of the church and was considered the earthly head of the church.

But then the church had two heads, the heavenly spiritual invisible head Jesus Christ that the Bible says is the head and the earthly invisible head with power to deal at earthly punishments and rewards.

The question is which head is to rule? Which head do you pay attention to?

By the time the institution of the papacy arose the church at large consisted of unconverted carnal members all forcibly brought from paganism into Christianity by the state church and with such carnal unconverted members the earthly invisible head, the Pope, quickly took precedence over the invisible head the Lord Jesus Christ.

As years passed the Popes increased their authority and eventually their official pronouncements came to be regarded as infallible, papal infallibility was finally made official dogma in 1870 but it was accepted as true much, much earlier than that, but it became official only in 1870.

As the Popes' authority grew so church authority grew, official church decisions and positions that were called traditions, decisions and positions, tradition, took on greater and greater importance until finally in the Council of Trent in 1546 the Catholics gave church tradition equal authority with the Bible, official.

They reasoned that members of the church had written the New Testament and the church had collected the New Testament books and established their authority, why should not the later decisions of the church be equally authoritative?

Now you notice that now we are saying that the Bible gains its authority from the church instead of the church deriving its authority from the Bible and that is a pretty significant shift.

And it is not true either, the church does not establish the authority of the New Testament books it recognizes the authority the books already have from God, that's the truth, that's the way it is and it is quite different.

Now theoretically this new model, model number two, God on top and then Bible authority and church authority on an equal level below.

But the Bible said so many things that embarrassed the Catholics, a Bible reading people would not find anything of purgatory or a celibate priesthood as the papists say, or Mary worship or the use of images or infant baptism or the mass as interpreted by Catholics.

And so what followed was which you would expect, The church told her members you don't really need the Bible, you don't really need the Bible we will tell you what the Lord wants you to hear, just listen to us, we will tell you what you need to know and what you need to do, you can't understand the Bible anyway. If you read the Bible for yourself you'll get the wrong ideas and what's more if we catch you with the Bible we will have to deal with you. And that was pretty serious stuff.

Men like John Wycliffe and William Tyndale who translated the Bible in the common everyday vernacular languages because they wanted people to have Bibles in their native tongues were persecuted as heretics because Rome did not want people to have Bibles in their hands.

It seems to me that in practical terms this is not placing church authority on an equal terms with Bible authority this actually elevates church authority above the Bible authority so it becomes God, church, Bible. A third model.

And I suspect that this will always be the case if church authority and Bible authority are supposedly given equal weight, it will always turn out to be that they are not equal and that the church goes above the Bible and to be fair we would note that the Catholic Church does allow her members to read the Bible today, that is no longer an issue in their church the same way it was earlier, at least since the 60s or maybe a little before.

Well the Protestant Reformation of the 1500s was largely a protest against the Catholic model of relating church authority and scriptural authority.

The Protestant said, the church is taking entirely too much authority on itself, we must get back to the Bible, Solo Scriptura, by Scripture alone became their rallying cry. Scripture alone as contrast to Scripture plus church tradition you see, Scripture alone, we are going to set aside this tradition, these pronouncements and positions and this body of information and positions that the church had accumulated.

Get the Bible into the hands of the people the reformers said, let them read the Bible for themselves, every believer has the Holy Spirit and is thus qualified to interpret Scripture. And they got busy producing accurate translations of the Bible, it was formerly in Latin which was not understood by common people, only educated people and the priests, the educated ones were mostly church people.

And so Luther produced an excellent German translation, still used by the Old Order Mennonites and the Amish I believe, Tyndale produced a good English translation, Thrilling Escapes by Night tells the story of Tyndale's experiences.

The King James version was translated in 1611 after the English Reformation had taken place and all this again was an attempt to get back to model one with God, Bible and church, with church authority derived from a responsibility to the Bible and not keeping the Bible from the people.

We appreciate this effort in the Reformation, our church grew out of the Reformation but our spiritual fathers who are sometimes called the radical reformers because they took the reformers ideas even further than the re-

reformers themselves, they thought the reformers profession of Solo Scriptura rang hollow that the reformers did not really live it.

For example Luther could cry, Back to the Bible! But when the Bible did not fit with his theology then he questioned those parts of the Bible and that it was; Oh the epistles, James's epistle was straw because James talks too much about works and not enough about grace.

That was not Solo Scriptura that is Scriptura plus Luther, that is how it sounds to me anyway.

And moreover Luther kept many Catholic practices which are not taught in the Bible, his criteria was if the Bible does not forbid it we will keep it. And so he kept the mass, infant baptism, elaborate liturgy and so forth.

The Swiss reformer Zwingli went further than Luther in his thinking he said: We will only keep those practices which the Bible teaches.

And this is a higher view of Bible authority but when the civil government authorities were uncomfortable with some of these changes he backed away from his position.

Now the Anabaptists took off where Zwingli left off and they said: We will keep only what the Bible teaches, we will allow no other authority, civil or religious to dictate to our faith, we will break with the state and the state church to build a church directly upon Bible principles and we will build upon the new testament specifically.

And there is another difference.

Reformers generally had a relatively flat view of the Bible in which the Old Testament and the New Testament had pretty much equal authority and this allowed them quite a few practices based on the Old Testament which was absent in the New Testament.

The Anabaptists had a step view of the Bible in which the New Testament superseded the Old Testament and the teachings of Christ in the New Testament the rule of faith and they built a lot upon the Sermon on the Mount which we do today and should.

So the way the Anabaptist built their model of authority was God, and under God Bible, especially the New Testament with higher authority, a step in there the New Testament had higher authority, and then the church

beneath that. And this was similar to the reformers model but much more rigorously committed to the New Testament Scriptures. Anabaptists were Biblicists - I like that name. Sometimes it is used in a negative way maybe, but they were people of the Book. They were even accused of Bibliolatry, worshipping the Bible instead of worshipping God, a very high idea of Bible authority I think they truly believe in Solo Scriptura.

But there is a problem with Solo Scriptura and that is what I would like to spend the rest of my time on.

Really the problem is not with the scriptures or with Bible authority the problem is with my fallen sinful will that makes myself the measure of all things. There is the problem.

Basically the problem is that Solo Scriptura has fed individualism.

I'm giving a quote from a Protestant book that not all Protestants agree with but many, many have and this idea, this concept has been very influential the writer says: "The new Protestantism frequently describes the Reformation as the birth of individual freedom and of the sovereignty and autonomy of the individual conscious ultimately rooted in the depths of the human mind which cannot be bound by any exterior and objective authority."

So the individuals says: You don't tell me what to believe, I'll decide what the Bible means, I must satisfy myself, it is my reasoning, it is my conscience and my opinion can outweigh the position of the whole church.

Individual authority then supersedes church authority.

And the Catholics commented, Ah, well this is how Solo Scriptura works "the Bible alone, grace alone, conscience alone, the individual alone."

That is how Solo Scriptura works.

And the question is: Where does the individual fit into our model of authority, God, Bible, church.

What do you say, is it God, individual, Bible, church? Let's hope not.

Or is it God, Bible, individual, church or God, church, Bible, individual? Where do you put yourself? Are you above the church or below the church, are you may be above the Bible?

I decide what the Bible means, I can make it say whatever I want. Some people position themselves like that and it seems like Solo Scriptura can be water over the wheel of proud self-sufficient individuals. I decide for myself what the Bible means, church confessions and standards? The Bible is my standard, I have a big standard book! That's been said you know.

Brotherhood convictions? I must satisfy my mind and conscience. Tradition? Every generation starts fresh at square one. One young man told me in effect, I'm not interested in the past, I look ahead not back.

Well it is easy to say that this individualism makes for many church divisions, splits and splinters, you get smaller and smaller, like the Quaker told his wife, "Nobody is right but me and thee but sometimes I think that thou art a little queer." And it's often been said and it's too true.

Roman Catholics who hold to the authority of the church to pronounce infallibly what the Bible means, they did not have many divisions and don't.

The Protestants who hold the freedom of conscience to interpret the Bible may have had many divisions and of course we know where the Anabaptists come in that, they have had many too.

Why do different people studying the Bible, the same Bible, come out at so many different places? Like a Moslem doctor asked me after we had discussed our convictions and practices for a while she said: Do the other Christians have a different Bible? Well the answer is, No, but you would think so wouldn't you.

The problem is that our thinking is so easily tainted by our desires. We believe what we want to believe and we adapt the scriptures to agree with us.

I received a letter some years ago from an ex-Amish woman attempting explain what first Corinthians 11 really means is that women should not be veiled!

Well how did she come up with that? Well not from first Corinthians 11, she came up with that from the heart.

And meanwhile the Catholics look on and say; You gave away the store when you denied the absolute authority of the church to say what the Bible means.

But we cannot and will not go back to that old position which bred so much evil in the past, we must keep the Bible in the hands of the people and our people into their Bibles. We must do more Bible reading not less. The scriptural model really is God on top, then Bible and church underneath than.

In the third place: How can we make it work?

Maybe some helps, I would just like to get practical now.

First we can recognize that there is more to being an authentic scriptural church than not dividing.

Jesus letters to the churches make it clear that churches can lose their validity.

Apostasy is a real threat, it was setting in already in A.D. 90 when the letters to the churches were given to John and it is better to withdraw and divide them to go down the tubes together.

1 Corinthians 11:19 For there must be also heresies among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you.

I suppose that means, what it seems to mean that sometimes it is right.

Secondly we must continue to recognize freedom of conscience, it is taught in the Bible

Paul's testimony before the Sanhedrin insisted upon freedom of conscience, Paul earnestly beholding the counsel said, Men and brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day. **Acts 23:1**. That's where I am in conflict with you.

And it is right. The apostle said to the Sanhedrin again we ought to obey God rather than men, [Acts 5:29](#), and the Sanhedrin was a religious body judging religious issues.
So the Bible teaches it.

Then when Paul talked to the Bereans he commends them for testing his teachings with the scriptures, he did not say, listen to me, put your Bibles on the shelf and your minds into cold storage. He didn't say that.
[Acts 17:11](#).

Thirdly, so we continue to recognize freedom of conscience at the same time we remember that the Bible recognizes church authority. It says obey leaders, submit to them, esteem them very highly in love. ([1 Thessalonians 5:12-13](#))

Are we obeying these commands?

If so I believe God will honour our obedience and not allow us to be led astray like He did the Rechabites ([Jeremiah 35](#)).

But if we are rebellious we have no promise of blessing.

Submission is such an important Bible concept.

We are told to submit to church leaders, [Hebrews 13:17](#), we are told to submit to group conscience in [Ephesians 5:21](#) submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God.

That is not talking about husbands and wives, that is talking to our church members, look it up.

It is applied to husbands and wives sometimes but that's not what it is talking about, submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God that is submission to group conscience.

Now to know submit is to give up, definition; yield, give up, resist no longer, to yield to authority and admonition. And it is important to understand that submission implies disagreement, if there is no disagreement there is no submission - impossible.

One of the Brunk brothers, it was Lawrence I think said that he and his wife have a 50/50 arrangement when they agree they go his way when they disagree they go her way.

Which means that he does all the submitting and she does none because there is no submission possible or necessary where you agree, you cannot submit like that.

So as the Bible tells us to submit it is clear that we must at times give up our thinking in favour of a leader's thinking or in favour of clear group conscience – there must be disagreement.

Now does this mean that we always do that?

Well, not if there is a clear principle at stake but I think if we are honest we will recognize that most times people do not resist the authority because the church is telling them to violate their conscience but because they are trying to avoid the cross or assert their wills, that is by far the most common.

If submitting actually does mean violating your conscience then what do you do?

Well suppose you are in a church that is allowing plain blatant disobedience to Bible truth, you have cut hair on women, divorce and remarriage like back in 1968, militarism, the worship of Mary, but not some detail of application that you disagree with but a clear violation of Bible truth that you cannot submit to, but there is no room for cockiness or disrespect, only those who love the church and weep for her have the right to criticize her.

Fourthly recognize the authority of the church to make applications to the Bible.

Some would sharply limit the authority of the church to apply the Bible in a binding way but they are not really consistent in their thinking.

The Bible says obey parents, obey civil rulers, obey church leaders, and in each case this direct Bible command gives authority to make rules or standards.

I can illustrate that: The Bible says obey parents.

And father says: Well son it is time to go to bed.

And the son says: You are exceeding your authority, the Bible doesn't say anything about what time to go to bed.

The father can say: No, but it says obey parents and that means I have authority to make rules – off to bed with you!

That's right, we all acknowledge that.

The Bible says obey rules and you are going 55 when it is 45 and the officer pulls you over and says: You're exceeding the speed limit, here is a ticket.

And you say: You are exceeding your authority the Bible doesn't say anything about how fast to drive.

He can say: No, but it says obey your rulers and this implies authority to set speed limits, he is your ticket!

We all recognize that.

The Bible says obey church leaders and we make a standard and people say: Oh but your exceeding your authority, the Bible doesn't say anything about this or this or that.

Let's be consistent, it says obey those that watch for your souls that implies authority to set standards.

When Jesus gave the power of the keys the most natural interpretation of that is that this is the power to interpret or apply Scripture.

And Jesus recognizes the authority of application, you remember the times when Pharisees were denying material support to parents by dedicating their goods to the temple. Now the direct Bible command is honour thy father and thy mother ([Exodus 20:12](#), [Matthew 19:19](#) and others). There was no direct Bible command saying you must give your needy parents money. This is application, it is a sensible application but it is still an application it is not a direct Bible command. When the Pharisees tried to evade that application saying it is corban, sorry but my money is dedicated to the temple I have none to give to you. Jesus said you have made the word of God of none effect by your tradition. When they ignored the application they ignored the Word. [Mark 7:9-13](#).

In [Acts 15](#) the early church decided it was unlawful to eat meat offered to idols and Paul in [1 Corinthians 8-10](#) makes it clear that there is nothing intrinsically evil about eating meat offered to idols, the idol is nothing he says, the earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof but nevertheless showed that the Gentile converts should make a clean break with paganism and so the Jewish converts would not be offended the Jerusalem conference forbade eating meat offered to idols.

Was this exceeding their authority?

Well the answer is in Revelation where Jesus twice in His letters to the churches recognizes the churches authority to make application about not eating meat offered to idols, He stands behind it.

Of course applications must be clearly tied to the Word of God, we can make many ridiculous ones, the Pharisees did they said: The law says that you shall not do your work on the Sabbath.

Is it lawful to eat an egg laid on the Sabbath? I think that chicken did some work you had better pitch that one.

Now that kind of application is silly and we keep it clearly tied to Scripture.

Number five. Beware of church statements displacing the Scriptures.

Nothing should come between the people of God and the Word of God.

With the Catholics the traditions of the fathers got between, they said you don't need to read the Bible you read our interpretations. But the Bible is still there but the focus is on tradition.

The Protestants, and I'm not saying this on my own but I'm saying this on the authority of the Protestants themselves who would say, the Protestants theological confessions tend to come between this is what the Bible means, test your orthodoxy by this confession. If you line up with the Westminster your all right.

The Bible is there, the focus is on the theology.

Now how about the conservative Mennonites? Is it the standards?

These are our applications to New Testament teachings, the Bible is there but the focus is on standards.

Well I trust not, I hope not but sometimes I wonder if some of our people are at this place they think they are okay because they meet the standards, the Bishop statement, but they neglect personal Bible study and reading, they hear the preaching and the teaching and follow the book and they don't need the real Book, at least not enough to dig into it for themselves.

They might say they need it but they just don't get around to having their devotions because they don't feel burning need for it.

It should not be that way, I don't think it is that way altogether by any means.

But what do you think of this quotation?

"Just as a man need not learn the civil code by heart in order to be a good citizen because he leaves the maintenance of law and order to the lawful authorities in the same way a man can do without the study of Scriptures and be a good subject in God's kingdom if he accepts the entire revelation that the church guarantees."

That is a Catholic statement and that is exactly what the Anabaptists would have thoroughly repudiated and we should also.

Let's get our people into the Word and be in the Word ourselves.

Number six. Rein in individualism with submission, humility and charity.

The social currents in this country flow strongly toward individualism and part of the reason is that this country was founded by Protestants who strongly affirmed individual liberty, many came to the New World for liberty of conscience and here they established a political system, championed individual liberty, the first modern democracy.

Which is good, we appreciate that but this country has taken individualism to extremes and one result is that people have little respect for authority especially church authority.

Now let's go back to our model of authority again.

God up here, then the Bible and then the church under that.

Where does the individual fit in?

Not above the Bible by all means, not above the church, below the church in some ways but mostly within the church - that is where we fit. Part of the church, within the church blending with humility and submission and charity.

Three key attitudes that keep each of us in our place and make us useful.

Submission I did talk about, humility esteeming each other and even others ideas better than myself or my ideas.

George Brunk, "If the wisdom of God in one single brother is greater than Bible and conference together then nail up the church, lay the Book on the shelf and let every man be a law unto himself!"

But that is not the way it is the wisdom of God in one single brother is not greater than conference together, humility is that conviction that all of us

are smarter than any of us, that wisdom will not die when I die and that whilst majority is not everything it is something. It is something.

And last but not least charity, the perfect bond that holds believers together.

Submission, humility and charity I believe those words contain the answer to most church problems.

Humility, submission and charity mean that we work out our understanding of truth not by ourselves alone but in the context of brotherhood and that is the Anabaptist position and concept of authority.

As William McGrath says it: "The Anabaptists believed in the free establishment and protection of a disciplined church consisting of only born again disciples, United in the voluntary self-binding commitment to the standards and discipline of the new testament as interpreted and applied by and through the brotherhood, within the brotherhood."

Or Walter Klassen writing in the pamphlet "Neither Catholic nor Protestant" this is a little longer quotation I would like to read it;

"Anabaptists really took Luther seriously when he insisted that every believer no matter how humble has the Holy Spirit and could therefore legitimately interpret Scripture but they went a step further and held to the old principle that ultimately it is the church that interprets Scripture. They had both.

While this was clearly Catholic teaching it assumes among Anabaptists a form which reflected their view of the church, it is not the hierarchy as in Catholicism nor an appointed group of scholar teachers as in Protestantism which interprets the Bible but rather the gathered disciplined community.

The community struggles with the meaning of Scripture and reaches where possible a common understanding of its intent.

While this method is by no means without its problems and weaknesses it did serve as an attempt to avoid authoritarian interpretations on the one hand and uninformed individualistic imaginations on the other."

Insightful!

So then in conclusion we believe in the authority of the Bible as the Word of God, we believe in church authority subjected to the Word of God not divorced from the Word, not putting distance between the Word and the

believer and we also believe in the freedom of the individual conscience to interpret and to apply the Word in the context of brotherhood, with humility, submission and charity.

And we recognize that there will be some tension between individual conscience and church authority. And that is not necessarily bad.

In Western political theory two contrary ideas have been allowed to exist side-by-side, natural law, which was supposed to be written by God in the heart of each individual, and civil law.

And natural law and civil authority fight each other.

Natural law tends toward anarchy.

Governmental authority tends toward totalitarianism.

The two are irreconcilable yet they have been allowed to exist as necessary checks to each other.

Now that is political theory.

The corresponding ideas in church life are individual conscience and group voice or church authority.

Individual conscience by itself makes for a lot of divided Christians each going his own way, and that is anarchy. And it needs brotherhood to keep itself in check, it needs brotherhood.

Group authority by itself makes for a dictatorial church government that easily drifts into abuses and it needs Bible reading Spirit filled individuals to call it to scriptural account.

Now both individual conscience and group authority are biblical and both are necessary but there will always be tension between them.

It has being like that since the beginning of the church and as we continue endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit, (Ephesians 4:3) it will tell you of that tension, it has been like that for 2000 years, it will continue to be like that, we cannot eliminate either but neither can we nail down or reconcile them, we can only find our way together in humility and Christian charity with the aid of the Spirit of God without whom we can do nothing.

Brother Mehvin



THE LIGHT OF LIFE

After God spoke the world into existence, "darkness was upon the face of the deep" And God said, Let there be light: and there was light." (Genesis 1:2-3).

Much later, Paul asks in 2 Corinthians 6:14, "what communion hath light with darkness?" Light and darkness are opposites and never can be together in one place or in any heart. At the same time we know that at the dawning of the day, there is only a little light. Also, at dusk, as the light is removed by the earth's rotation, darkness again takes over. This would also be true in a spiritual sense. Often there is first a desire, then some understanding, and finally the new birth brings full light. Conversely, when spiritual light is not followed, spiritual darkness is ready to blind the mind and heart. The last state is worse than the first (2 Peter 2:20).

"Then spake Jesus again unto them, saying, I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life" (John 8:12). "That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world" (John 1:9).

Take that together with Titus 2:11, "For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men," we understand that each person born on the face of the earth will at some time in his or her life have a visitation. If they follow the light provided, they would come to a crossroad in life and need to choose. Sadly, most people love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil (John 3:19-20). "But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be manifest, that they are wrought in God" (John 3:21).

Coming to know God through the new birth does a wonderful work. The sins of the flesh and spirit are repented of, with the end result described in 1 John 1:7, "But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin."

A further promise is recorded in John 16:13, "Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth is come, he will guide you into all truth." Truth and light go hand in hand. If we love the truth, light will always be given for our pathway. To love the truth means that we are ready to deny ourselves, ready to walk the narrow path, ready to obey. With this spirit, we are easily entreated, be-

cause the entreaty is toward and in the light.

It is a wonder to behold how the Holy Spirit brings people from all nations and walks of life into a common body of believers. As long as these individuals love the truth (first love) and are obedient, light is upon their pathway. The journey may be slow and long. It is against the current, and especially so as we near the end of time. There are many false prophets, each proclaiming that they hold the truth, but their fruits are to the contrary. It behoves the scattered sheep that are not yet in the fold (John 10:16) to beware of these wolves. They do not love the truth, nor do they carry the true light. These false prophets would negate certain scriptures, saying they are cultural and, therefore, can be ignored.

The leaving of our first love (light and truth) can easily happen if we do not appreciate light. This can be in ever so small of matters. At first it will be experienced in resistance towards the Holy Spirit and/or the teaching of the church. If not dealt with in the initial stages, a faithful and caring brother or sister may admonish us this brings more light, and we are more accountable. Should this light be neglected, we are taught in Matthew 18:15-17 to present such an individual and his condition to the church body. This brings further light and accountability and another opportunity to repent and return to the first love position where the full light is on the pathway. Should the love for darkness be greater than the love for truth, the light that remains is snuffed out. Samson experienced this: "And he wist not that the Lord was departed from him" (Judges 16:20).

Due to the fact that such an individual is no longer a child of light, he, also, can no longer be a part of the church, which is the body of Christ holding up the light of the world.

It is for this reason that the doctrine of the avoidance of the excommunicated is practiced in the church, as taught so clearly in the Scripture. There can be no communion between light and darkness.

When the judgment of the church is not accepted as just, the one excommunicated exposes himself to yet further darkness. He does not love the truth, because it is to the destruction of the flesh. In this state, self-justification becomes the weapon of choice. Such an individual is no longer under the Justification of the blood. With a feeling of not having a cov-

ering, he must, like Adam and Eve, try to make his own by sewing fig leaves together (self-justification). As the darkness deepens, he comes to the state that Jesus speaks of in Matthew 6:23: "If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!" What a deplorable condition! How difficult to recover from! Second Thessalonians 2:10-11 states that due to not loving the truth (light), God will send them strong delusions that they should believe a lie. This condition brings forth bitterness, unrest, and many other fruits of darkness. Peace is spoken of with confidence, but where is it? The Scripture says, "Ye shall know them by their fruits."

All this behoves us to examine ourselves honestly. Do we love the truth? The concern about the drift into worldliness in dress and sports continues. The dangers of cell phones and computer misuse hangs over us. Are we walking in the light that has been given? If not, are we aware how darkness will overtake if light is rejected? A person who is being led toward the truth can only stand at the crossroad of choice for so long. Such an individual must move ahead into further light, or he will begin to lose light. With this comes confusion, a loss of peace and the closeness of the Heavenly Father.

"Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin" (James 4:17). The NRS puts it this way: "Anyone, then, who knows the right thing to do and fails to do it commits sin."

Brother Robert



**Christ is our pattern whom we must strive to imitate;
It is necessary that our pattern should be exact
So that we might see our imperfections and be humbled for them,
And live by faith for our sanctification.**

Richard Sibbes

THE CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST

"Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God ... upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Matt. 16:16-18).

"We believe in one true, united, organized, visible church of God, which constitutes the true believers, which is the pillar and ground of the Truth, and which is called to be a light unto the people." John 17; 1 Corinthians 12; Ephesians 4; 5:23; 1 Timothy 3:15; Hebrews 12:22-23; Revelation 2:3

Why a Church?

1. When God created man, He made him a social creature that needs the company of other people for normal development and happiness. Men and women need the association, help, and sympathy of others to grow in body, mind, and character.
2. The hunger for human companionship is, therefore, a divinely implanted instinct, a God-given hunger within man for his highest good. "For none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself" (Romans 14:7).
3. Since man is also a religious being, God arranged for a divine society wherein His redeemed children live and grow spiritually.

What is the Church?

1. The church is the community of those who are united in God by a common faith. Because they are united with Christ, they have many things in common: joys, hopes, aspirations, problems, and aims.
2. The church is the new and spiritual Israel. Abram and his descendants became the nation of Israel, the people of God in the Old Testament. The church is the spiritual Israel of the New Testament. She is a called-out people, trained to worship the one true God; so that through them, the knowledge of the true God and the practice of true worship would be brought to all peoples of the earth.
3. The church, God's people, are no longer a nation united by ties of blood, but they are united by the bond of faith in Christ. They are not separated from the general society of men by geographical boundaries but by moral and spiritual boundaries. Members of the church of God live as sojourners in the world.
4. She is a community of believers. From Pentecost the believers grew

steadily in numbers. They kept closely together as they shared in the common enjoyment of their newly-found faith. They also shared materially with each other in their joy and fellowship as they worshipped their risen and glorified Saviour.

5. The church is not of human origin; she was established by Christ. He controls this divine society and has determined her constitution and by-laws. She is His church.

6. The kingdom of heaven is not the same as the organized, visible church of God. Repentant sinners are born into the kingdom and baptized into the church.

7. The church is both an organism and an organization. As an organism, she exists as one united body with all members functioning mutually as the Head (Christ) directs. As an organization, her various offices and gifts cooperate for their services to be the most effectual. By divine directions, this organization has her officials and rules of order for three reasons:

- (a) that members may be of mutual service to one another.
- (b) that members may be fortified against the evils of this world.
- (c) that members might unite their resources to better carry out the Great Commission, the work Jesus entrusted to them.

The Church

1. Cannot be compared to a democracy (a government where supreme power is held by the people).

2. Cannot be compared to a theocracy (a government by officials considered divinely inspired).

3. Cannot be compared to an autocracy (a government by one person having unlimited power).

4. The true church is like a monarchy, which is a government where one person rules with absolute sovereignty. She is a government having a chief of state with life tenure. It is important to remember that the monarch is not some pope, bishop, presbytery, council, committee, conference, or board but is none less than God Himself.

It should also be remembered that

- (a) No human was consulted when the Law was given.
- (b) There was no referendum of the gospel of Christ submitted to the apostolic church for its approval, revision, or rejection.
- (c) There is a fearful penalty attached to any effort to modify, add to, or

take away any part, however large or small, of the Word of God.

(d) Reverently, we stand in awe in the presence of God, recognizing that the gospel was conceived in the mind of the Infinite God, and therefore it is perfect wisdom and love.

(e) Two things must be avoided: liberalism and legalism. Liberalism takes very little concern of the conduct and beliefs of its members. On the other hand, legalism emphasizes, with exactness, the small details in its members' lives, which in effect usurps the work of the Holy Spirit.

The Work of the Church

1. The church provides the right atmosphere for the converted soul to grow in Christian character and experience. The Spirit of God works through the testimony of people and their influence upon each other.
2. The church is to be an example and pattern of holy living, demonstrating the practical application of the Word in daily life.
3. The mission of the church is to carry the gospel to the entire world.
4. The church is in the world to do Christ's work of bringing men and women to Him.

Illustrations of a Working Church

1. It is said that in a properly built bridge, the load is distributed evenly over the entire structure. Bridges have collapsed, resulting in loss of lives, because of structural failure to distribute the load evenly. Does the church of today suffer from such an uneven strain? This may happen when some shirk responsibility, which is then thrown upon someone who is already overburdened.
2. The illustration of the church as the body of Christ brings out the deep and sincere sympathy that should exist between her members. In a natural body, if one member is injured, the whole body feels pain and distress. So in the body of Christ, the church, there is a close sympathy between the members. Thus they share their joys and experiences in fellowship.
3. The apostle Paul uses another illustration as he describes the church. Christ is again called the "head" of the church, but Paul thinks of Him here as her leader, guide, or supporter (Ephesians 5:23-32). As a husband should love, support, and care for his wife, so does Christ love and care for the church. He gave His life for her; He is purifying and cleansing His church so that He may have a pure and beautiful church, one that shall be

spotless, undefiled, pure, and without any blemish. The church, the body of people who are saved by faith in His atoning blood, is the Lord's highest care and concern.

The Working Church

1. "And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ" (Ephesians 4:11-12).

2. "Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular. And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets; thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healing, helps, governments, diversities of tongues" (1 Corinthians 12:27-28).

3. In Ephesians 4:11-13, Paul sets forth the reasons for organization in the church:

- (a) perfecting of saints
- (b) work of the ministry
- (c) edifying of the body
- (d) unity of the entire body

4. Wherever people live or work closely together in any way, there is sure to be some organized way to carry out their common purpose. The work to be done has to be distributed among the members of the society or organization according to the ability of each one. Christ is the Head of the church. He does all the planning of the work of the church. He sets the goals to be reached. From Him, through the Scriptures and the Holy Spirit, are given the instructions to each member in order to achieve His desired goal. After Christ returned to the Father, the Holy Spirit guided the disciples in their activities and directed them in what to do.

5. The ordinances Christ gave to the church help to keep her in proper working condition, both as individuals and as a collective body. They were conceived in divine wisdom, instituted by divine authority. Every Christian should keep them with deep appreciation.

6. The church is not a sailing vessel made to carry men and women from earth to heaven. She is, rather, a company of saints united into a body for carrying out the great work of God which Jesus began.

The Church and the World

1. When Jesus referred to the "world," He meant all the forces that are arrayed against God and His kingdom. People who do not love and serve God are of the world.
2. Jesus taught His disciples that they should expect opposition from the world. This is because Christ was hated and persecuted by the world.
3. To become a member of God's church means that one separates himself from the sin and vices of the world.
4. The church, being separated from the world, is subject to misunderstanding, hatred, and ridicule. This has been the history of the true church since its beginning and will continue as long as it faithfully reproves the world of sin and error.
5. Persecution and opposition from Satan's kingdom, the world, has not greatly hindered the true church. What has hindered the testimony of the church has been false teachers, false doctrine and practice, and insincere brethren professing to be Christians who remained inside the church.
6. Christians are required to submit to the government in all civil matters. They are to suffer instead of denouncing or being part of any attempt to overthrow the government that persecutes them (1 Peter 4:12-19).

When a Church Fails

1. The church at Galatia: unsteady, unstable, lacking assurance. The people of Galatia had received the gospel with a ready response. Soon someone came among them, teaching that to really be saved they must keep the Law of Moses also. Because they lacked stability, they were easily swayed and began to take up that false teaching. To be true to God the church must be mature and stable in order not to be pushed from her foundation by unscriptural teaching (Galatians 1:1-5).
2. The church at Ephesus: a church lacking love. Only forty years after the church was planted at Ephesus, this startling message was received from Heaven, "You have left your first love." This church had many commendable works, toil, and endurance, but an inner decay had destroyed their love for God. Likewise today, a church member may be faithful in attendance and perform the tasks he is asked to do but not with a perfect love or with his whole heart.
3. Pergamos: a church of lax moral life. The church at Pergamos was located amid very evil surroundings, "where Satan's seat is." These evil sur-

roundings had an influence on the life of the church members. This church failed to keep itself clean from the impurity and immorality that prevailed around them. It allowed or tolerated those members who did not hold the true faith (Revelation 2:12-17).

4. Sardis: a spiritually dead church. This church had departed far from the ideal set for the church of Christ. It had no spiritual power and, though still existing and performing as a church, was as good as dead and useless (Revelation 3:1-6).

5. Laodicea: a lukewarm and worldly church. Another church in affluent and prosperous surroundings, yet they received the most serious message of the seven churches. The weakness of the church at Laodicea was her lack of spiritual fervour, resulting in lukewarmness in spiritual things. Affluence often brings with it a feeling of independence, self-sufficiency, self-satisfaction, and worldliness. It is always dangerous for a church to be satisfied with herself.

How the True Church May Be Known

The true church of God is built according to the pattern of God's Word. Menno Simons briefly notes six signs whereby the true church of Jesus Christ can be identified:

1. The salutary (beneficial or promoting health) and unadulterated doctrine of His Holy and Divine Word (in other words, where the Word of God is preached and taught in all its purity).
2. The Scriptural use of the sacraments of Christ, namely, baptism and the Lord's Holy Supper (communion).
3. Obedience to the Holy Word.
4. Sincere and unfeigned love to one's neighbour.
5. Where the name, will, word, and ordinance of Christ are confidently confessed in the face of all cruelty, tyranny, tumult, fire, sword, and violence of the world and sustained unto the end.
6. This sign is the pressing cross of Christ, which is borne for the sake of His testimony and the Word. This very cross is a sure indicator of the church of Christ, as can be seen by the example of Jesus, the apostles, prophets, and many other true Christians.

In Conclusion

The Rock upon which Christ built His church has kept her safe through

every kind of oppression. She gladly spilled her blood when led as a lamb to the slaughter. Her love and devotion is to the living Word, Jesus Christ, whom she follows faithfully wherever He leads. Her voice can still be heard, along with the Spirit's voice, saying, "Come."

She is quickening her steps as she sees the approach of the Bridegroom, who will soon return to receive her to be with Him forever. "And the Spirit and the bride [the true church] say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst say, Come ... He which testifieth these things saith, Surely I come quickly" (Revelation 22:17-20).

Brother Don



Meeting with the Lord

If I desired to put myself into the most likely place for the Lord to meet with me, I would prefer the house of prayer, for it is in preaching, that the Word is most blessed; but still I think I should equally desire the reading of the Scriptures; for I might pause over every verse, and say, "Such a verse was blessed to so many souls; then, why not to me? I am at least in the pool of Bethesda; I am walking among its porches, and who can tell but that the angel will stir the pool of the Word, while I lie helplessly by the side of it, waiting for the blessing?"

From "Grace Gems" Charles Spurgeon



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