

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 NEED OF CONVICTION OR FIRMNESS OF BELIEF.**

The words conviction and convince parallel one another. To be absolutely convinced of a matter is conviction. Being thoroughly convinced of Scriptural principles (and relating that to everyday living) is the same as saying that one has convictions on those matters.

Jesus said that when the Holy Spirit would come "he [would] reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment" (John 16:8). The Holy Spirit "will convince the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment." Adam Clarke comments thus, "He will demonstrate those matters so clearly as to leave no doubt in the minds of those who are simple of heart; and so fully as to confound and shut the mouths of those who are gainsayers."

There is a great need today of being convinced of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment but also of Bible doctrines, ordinances and Church standards based on biblical principles. The apostle Paul said, in regards to issues of his day, "Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind" (Rom. 14:5). Peter wrote, "But the God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus ... make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you" (I Pet. 5:10). The unwavering stability that the apostles speak of is aided by the Spirit teaching and guiding believers into truth, resulting in convictions (John 16:3).

Winds of every persuasion and idea will toss one to and fro (Eph. 4:14) unless we are anchored by firm convictions. Masses are drifting, drifting toward the great abyss of hell. If one is just drifting along, he is not drifting toward heaven. To gain heaven's harbor will require heartfelt convictions based on the principles of the Word—a purposeful set of the sails. What is conviction, and what principles operate behind the scenes in coming to a state of being convinced?

I believe God and Satan agree on one matter. That is that each will not infringe on the will of man; it is left free-standing. Satan has the advantage of man's fallen nature influencing the will, but God counters with the grace in Christ Jesus and the drawing of the Holy Spirit. Finally, though, every decision is of man's free choice. God will not impose on the free moral agency of any believer. But through the Holy Spirit and the Word, a compelling reasoning takes place regarding Scriptural principles. The Holy

Ghost is guiding "into all truth." There comes a point where, in all honesty, one is so convinced of the truth that we can see it no other way without transgressing the Word of God and our conscience. That is conviction—whatever the subject or issue may be.

Let it be noted that the doctrines of the Word, the principles and practices of the faith, become superfluous if they do not translate into practical everyday living. If Jesus' teaching about not resisting those who take advantage of us has no practical application in our walk of life, we indirectly say that Christ was just beating the air with His words. The same is true of His teaching that His kingdom is not of this world (John 18:36) and that believers are not to be "of the world" (John 17:14). We must also include the apostle John's well-known warning about not loving the world or the things of the world (1 John 2:15-17). Convictions bring about a visible and discernable application of these truths.

What are the ingredients of convictions for the practical application of the principles of the Word of God? Where is the foundation?

Convictions relating to Christian living must be able to transfer the weight of obligation and duty back to a Biblical doctrine or scriptural principle of the faith. This is the foundation.

Some have said that they have no conviction on certain matters of non-conformity, for example. The question is, why a sense of duty or obligation to keep oneself unspotted from the highly esteemed things of the world (Luke 16:15) does not transfer right down to the solid, unshakeable Scriptures already quoted? There is a possibility that one's structure of faith, while trying to span the mighty gulf between God and man, is faulty (see James 2:20-26).

For the Holy Spirit to foster convictions in one's heart, we must have a love for the truth. The apostle Paul spoke of the dire consequences of those who "received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie" (2 Thess. 2:10-11). A lack of conviction foiling the application of the faith may be due to unwillingness to bear the cross. Also, Peter speaks of people who were willingly ignorant (2 Pet. 3:5).

The voice of conscience is not necessarily conviction, but it could well be the beginning of conviction. When the conscience, which relates to something heard or perceived, speaks, one is morally obligated to stop, look, and listen. We need to come before the Lord and inquire whether

there is a scriptural basis for our feeling. Here honesty is required—the Holy Ghost will not force the issue. One must also be open to the light of the brotherhood, which is the wisdom of the just (Luke 1:17).

Blessed is the liberty one enjoys when, in heart and mind, the life he or she lives is traced back to the foundation of the Word. That is conviction, redounding to God's honor and glory. (*The foregoing was adapted from a Messenger of Truth article*)

The articles in this issue cover some areas of our practice of faith that are increasingly under attack, they are being diminished by not only outside influences but also through a lack of or wavering of convictions in the hearts of the believers. These practices are part of what sets us apart from Christendom in general because they are very visible signs of separation and non-conformity but we need to have firm convictions of their application to biblical principles if we are to maintain them.

To do them just because others in the group we belong to do them is not and will not be sufficient when the testing time comes to us individually and we already see in many professing Anabaptists that the testing time has come and gone and many have failed, as is evidenced for example by the reduction of the woman's veiling to a mere token gesture, or the use of items of apparel (or the lack thereof) including footwear, not just in everyday activity but in Lord's Day services.

These things are but the tip of the iceberg, it is what people see, but if in our hearts there is a growing lack of conviction and even a disrespect for the biblical principles on which our practices and standards rest and this is communicated either by word or example to the next generation or seekers the results will be a church that loses direction and will apostatize.

Those of us that have come out of the world from a non-Mennonite background came because the Lord showed us the truth and led us to people that loved it with their whole heart and lived it. But now we are seeing some of those very same people drifting into the areas where we have escaped from – we have come from darkness into His marvelous light and others seem to be going from His marvelous light into the darkness. Yes we are not perfect and have things in our lives to root out and correct but let all of us earnestly contend for the truth together and build conviction in our hearts so that our faith will never be shaken.

As we think in our hearts so we will do (Proverbs 23:7 paraphrased)

JvL.

MINISTER'S CORNER.**Coverings That Cover.**

Bro. Paul Nolt, TN. Published in: "The Timely Truth"

Several important principles of Christian living are taught in 1 Corinthians 11:1–16. One of those is the headship order God has established. “The head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man: and the head of Christ is God” (verse 3). This thought is further expanded on in verses 7–9.

Another of these principles is that women are to have long, that is, uncut hair. Verse 6 states, “If it be a shame for a woman to be shorn or shaven, let her be covered.” Verse 15 helps to make clear that the sense of the word *if* is much like the word *since*, rather than being the sense of raising question whether or not it is a shame for her to be shorn or shaven.

Is cut or shorn hair for women no longer a shame — at least in Western culture? Yes it is! It is just that many are glorying in that which actually is a shame before God. Philippians 3:18-19 speaks of the enemies of the cross of Christ who do that very thing.

A third principle taught here is that an additional covering (besides the uncut hair) is to be worn by godly women. Verses 5 and 6 make it especially clear that a covering is in focus in addition to the natural hair covering.

The word *uncovered* in verses 5 and 13 is translated from the original Greek word *akatakalyptos* (#177 in Strong's Concordance) which means unveiled. The word *covered* and *cover* in verses 6 and 7 are translated from the Greek word *Katakalypto* (#2619) which means to cover wholly or veil. A root word for both of these Greek words is *Kalupto* (#2572) which means to cover up. It is translated *cover* and *hide* in the New Testament. Notice the thought of thorough coverage or hiding that this Greek word has in the following passages: The ungodly will “Say to the mountains, Fall on us: and to the hills, *Cover us*” (Luke 23:30). “No man, when he hath lighted a candle, *covereth* it with a vessel” (Luke 8:16). A great tempest arose on the sea, bringing danger of perishing as “the ship was *covered* with the waves” (Matthew 8:24). Jesus said of the doings of the ungodly that “there is nothing *covered*, that shall not be revealed” (Matthew 10:26). “if our gospel be *hid*, it is *hid* to them that are lost” (2 Corinthians 4:3). Those who help men from error “shall *hide* a multitude of sins” (James

5:20). It is God's will that Christian women take deliberate steps to rather thoroughly or fully cover their heads.

There are two purposes for this additional or man-made covering. The one is to symbolize willing acceptance of the headship order God has established. The woman is to cover her head in honour to her head (man), while the man is not to cover his head with such a covering and this is in honour to his Head, which is Christ (1 Corinthians 11:4-7). Verse 10 seems to further establish this thought of a symbol. The word *power* has the thought of authority. All rightful authority that mankind has, results from yielding to the rightful authority over him. This "power on her head" is probably just the thought that her covered head is a sign that she is taking her place under God, under man, and before the holy angels.

The other purpose for this covering is to modestly conceal or veil the glory of the hair. Verse 6 mentions that it is a shame for women to be shorn or shaven and verse 7 that "the woman is the glory of the man." Then verse 15 states that the woman's long hair is a glory to her.

The truth of this idea that hair is a glory to women is plainly shown all around us by those who follow the world (1 John 2:16) in pampering, primping, and flaunting their hair in the beauty parlours and public places of America. But godly women do not follow this vain course of the world. Rather than wearing jewelry and other items of display and finery, and displaying their hair, they "adorn themselves in modest apparel" (1 Timothy 2:9) and avoid outward adornment (1 Peter 3:3, 4). As they do so in loving obedience to Christ, they display an inner beauty that far transcends the superficial beauty of any amount of outward adornment.

How large should this covering be and what kind of material should be used in making it? The Bible does not specify exactly how this is to be. But there are some guiding principles given whereby the faithful can govern their practice in this.

One of these principles is in verse 15 of 1 Corinthians 11. The natural hair is a God-given covering. Verse 5, in speaking of the manmade covering, gives the thought that the head is to be covered thereby. Now what part or how much of the head is to be covered? Should it be the whole head-face and all? We believe not. Since God speaks of the head as covered by the hair which covers the part of the head He made the hair to grow on. Why would we not cover the amount of the head which He covered?

Another principle is closely related. The hair is a glory to the woman.

God commands modesty in clothing and hair arrangement in women and specifically forbids display and ornamentation in these. Therefore, the size of the covering should be such as to modestly conceal the hair by actually covering it. A third principle has more to do with the design of the covering than the size of it. Modesty is one of the Bible principles for the covering. Therefore it should be made of material that is heavy enough to actually cover — not be so sheer that the glory of the hair is visible through it. And it should be of material that is plain and subdued in appearance — not lacy or frilly, nor shiny, silky, or otherwise gaudy looking. It should be plain and simple throughout — no fancywork, or ties made or used in ways that are ornamental rather than useful, and so forth.

It would probably be an extreme position to think that the covering must be so large that every last strand of hair must always be fully covered. Or that it must be so opaque that nothing of the hair can ever be seen through it. But here are a few questions to ponder in relation to covering size and design.

Why is there such a strong gravitation in evidence so often towards smaller coverings with more and more of the hair exposed? Why do churches which accept coverings that only partially cover the hair almost always have members who do some primping and waving of the hair, draping it down over the ears, and so forth? Why is it that if covering strings are not used for their functional purpose, they usually become excessively long, are tied down low, or into a fancy bow, or become loose flowing streamers, and so forth? Why do small coverings and vain, prideful display, in dress or otherwise, go together so often? Would those who wear abbreviated coverings be happy with a patch of hair no larger than such a “covering?” Is the size and construction of our coverings established by honest evaluation of Bible principles as a united, spiritual brotherhood? Or is it established by a desire to be physically attractive, by comparing ourselves unwisely with other groups, or simply by default?

Thank God for sisters, young and old, who gladly give themselves to wearing coverings that do cover. Thank God for brethren (husbands, fathers, and young, single men) who have convictions for coverings that cover — and so appreciate and support their use. Thank God for congregations which earnestly seek God’s grace to daily live out all that is symbolized by coverings that cover. This includes all that is taught in 1 Corinthians 11 and in the whole New Testament.

CONCERNS ON READING MATERIAL

"According to their pasture, so were they filled; they were filled, and their heart was exalted; therefore have they forgotten me" (Hosea 13:6).

I have been asked to share some concerns about our reading material. It is important that the entire brotherhood develop sound conviction on this subject. But of greater importance is our conviction as leaders in the church to choose proper and edifying literature to read and study.

There is a growing interest in spirituality in the world today. Surveys, church attendance, and popular cultural media all testify that many are seeking for spiritual fulfillment. Tragedies of war, terrorism, and natural disasters are causing unrest in the hearts of men. The search for truth and for answers to questions has been accelerated.

Christendom is responding to this cry with evangelism by movies, music, and many books. All attempt to provide answers to the cry of the heart. Mega-churches can be found in many cities, with popular, charismatic leaders. Even secular authors are trying to tap the public's thirst for spirituality and for knowledge about the afterlife. Several recent best-selling books in America have spiritual or religious themes. Other writers, perhaps with questionable motives, are turning out compelling fiction with a religious background.

Are we immune from the possibly unsound influences these books may have on us? Are we fortified with the truth, so that we can provide sound biblical answers to those who are seeking? Can we sort out the wheat from the chaff? This is needful, because there is much chaff.

Historically, God's people have been "people of the Book." That Book, of course, is the Bible. In addition, writings by church leaders and fathers through the ages have been held in high esteem. In more recent years, many writers of the church have published sound doctrinal and devotional literature. We thank God for their gifts and their willingness to write. As they present their work to the church for proving and publishing, there are safeguards that give us confidence that we can depend on their truthfulness and reliability.

Solomon wrote, "Of making of many books there is no end." Certainly this is truer today than ever before. We are inundated with literature of all kinds. Much of it can be easily identified as chaff and is quickly discarded. Other literature may be captivating but could pose a danger to our faith and

practice.

Many books that are available today should cause us concern. Following is a list of problem areas in modern religious literature:

1. Writers who hold erroneous views of key scriptures. They hold to false concepts of salvation, marriage, the end times, and even that which comprises basic Christian living.
2. Books that refer to the church in a way contrary to Bible doctrine.
3. Historical figures are glorified, even pronounced as "church fathers," that we would question because of the way of life and doctrine they taught.
4. Psychology and counseling methods that are tainted with secular ideas that minimize the reality of evil, the work of repentance, the Holy Spirit, and even the miracle of grace available in Christ.
5. Fads and trends in child training, marriage counseling, or solving emotional needs that exalt an author's "break-through" technique or discovery that will solve our problems.
6. Fiction that passes as biography or history. These can be written in a very captivating and convincing style. Often, these distort real-life issues and can promote unrealistic expectations of marriage and family life. Courtship is promoted and glorified.

We do face perplexing times. There are complicated problems among us with few easy answers. As leaders or counselors, we may be tempted to go "down to Egypt" to find solutions. So we visit our local Christian bookstore and find a host of attractive titles that catch our eye. We may encounter a book that seems "tailor made" for our situation. But let's be careful not to bring a Trojan horse into our hearts, homes, or congregations. First Thessalonians 5:21 seems especially applicable: "Prove all things; hold fast that which is good."

As ministers and deacons, should we exercise more caution on what we read, accept, or promote from secular or sources outside our own? It seems unseemly for us to promote an author's theories or counsel from our pulpits. While a quotation, at times, may be in place if proper acknowledgment is made, building our theme or advice on that which is extra-biblical is building on sand. Paul said, "Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine" (2 Tim. 4:2). "But speak thou the things which become sound doctrine" (Titus 2:1).

In our private counseling, let's be slow to recommend books to our peo-

ple, unless we are sure that there is a consensus in the ministry that the book or method is sound. We need to be open with each other, too, so that existing safeguards can be utilized. "Where no counsel is, the people fall: but in the multitude of counselors there is safety" (Prov. 11:14).

Here are a few examples of books that are a concern. Some of you are familiar with them. Others may be unacquainted with these titles. I welcome your comments on these or others.

1] The Prayer of Jabez. This book was very popular several years ago. It taught a way of praying and Christian living based on an obscure prayer by an obscure man in the Old Testament. It promotes the prosperity gospel." It sold millions of copies.

2] The Left Behind books, a very popular series on end times. They are pre-millennial and full of the rapture, and conjecture about the antichrist, etc.

3] The Archko Volume. This book was written in the late 1800s. It purports to reveal that there are ancient, hidden manuscripts in the Vatican library that give added details about Jesus' trial, death, and resurrection. It was thoroughly discredited as fiction in the 1930s by a reputable Bible scholar. Studies of its authenticity that I have read convince me that it is nothing more than a pious fraud.

4] The Purpose Driven Life. This book has sold millions of copies. Its author seems to be a sincere pastor who has a solid reputation in the evangelical Christian community. Much of the practical advice it contains impressed me. But the poor foundation it lays depressed me. Its teaching or explanation of the new birth is very shallow. It has other deficiencies that have been noted by some critics of its methods and doctrinal focus.

5] There are other popular titles that should not be permitted. The Harry Potter series contains fantasy that glorifies sorcery and magic. It is unfit reading for our children. Currently, the best-selling book in America is The Da Vinci Code. It is religious fiction that completely distorts (blasphemes) the life of Jesus. It maintains that He married and had a family. It shouldn't even tempt us.

6] Numerous books on marriage counseling are available. Many have some truth; few have enough to merit their existence on our shelves. Our own writers and counselors have much more to offer. Let's be selective.

The wisdom of this world will only produce the results that we see in the world (1 Cor. 3:18).

Since our people will read, and we want them to, it is up to us to provide leadership through teaching and example. There are books written by other Christian authors that can be read profitably, but I personally find it necessary to use a fine screen. Should we own books that we would be reluctant to loan to others? Should we go back to the basics in our counseling? Have the old standby volumes become outdated to us?

Let's promote sound reading habits based on the guidance of the Holy Spirit and fortified by a love for the truth once delivered to the saints.

By Min. D. Salsbury from "The Messenger of Truth"



God's Book

The Bible is the writing of the living God—each letter was penned with an Almighty finger; each word in it dropped from the everlasting lips; each sentence was dictated by the Holy Spirit. Even though Moses was employed to write his histories with his fiery pen, God guided that pen. It may be that David touched his harp, and let sweet Psalms of melody drop from his fingers; but God moved his hands over the living strings of his golden harp. It may be that Solomon sang songs of love, or gave forth words of consummate wisdom, but God directed his lips, and made the preacher eloquent. If I follow the thundering Nahum, when his horses plowed the waters, or Habakkuk, when he sees the tents of Cushan in affliction; if I read Malachi, when the earth is burning like an oven; if I turn to the smooth page of John, who tells of love, or the rugged, fiery chapters of Peter, who speaks of fire devouring God's enemies; If I turn to Jude, who launches forth anathemas upon the foes of God, everywhere I find God speaking; it is God's voice, not man's; the words of God's words, the words of the Eternal, the Invisible, the Almighty, the Jehovah of this earth.

This Bible is God's Bible, and when I see it, I seem to hear a voice springing up from it, saying "I am the book of God; man, read me. I am God's writing; open my pages, for I was penned by God; read it, for He is my author, and you will see Him visible and manifest everywhere." "I have written to him the great things of my law."



Blessed



Sometimes in life our days get dreary,
And we feel that we are pressed,
Then Jesus sends the sunshine,
And we know that we are blessed.

Sometimes we feel down and out,
Like we have no zeal or zest,
Then the Holy Spirit lifts us up,
And we know that we are blessed.

Sometimes we feel like we can't go on,
That we'd like to quit and rest,
Then the Lord provides us strength anew,
And we know that we are blessed.

Sometimes we feel like failures,
That we could not pass the test,
Then He helps us up to try again,
And we know that we are blessed.

Sometimes we feel like we're in a storm,
A raging wild tempest,
Then Jesus calms the fierce winds,
And we know that we are blessed.

Sometimes we feel like giving up,
Like pointless uselessness,
Then Jesus finds a use for us,
And we know that we are blessed.

When parents hold their children,
Close up to their breast,
And see the gift that God has gave them,
They know that they are blessed.

When we wake up to the dawning,
Of a day so new and fresh,
When we've been given another day,
We know that we are blessed.

When we stop to bow our heads to pray,
And we give the Lord our best,
We feel the touch of the Master's hand,
And we know that we are blessed.

On the day that we see Jesus,
Coming ore the eastern crest,
And we're caught up in the rapture,
We will know that we are blessed.

When we dine at the Master's table,
As a special, honored guest,
And He makes us one of His family,
We will know that we are blessed.

If we consider all that God has given us,
If we would simply stop to assess,
We would see beyond the slightest doubt,
That we are truly blessed.

~ Calvin Hart ~

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Instrumental Music In Church Worship

This article should be of tremendous interest to us in our day. It was written at a time in the Mennonite Church when there was an ongoing struggle concerning the use of musical instruments in the worship service. It was largely a conflict between the Mennonite Scriptural tradition and the encroachments of worldly society. Today, it is easy to observe which side won the battle in that setting. The following article would not even be permitted to appear in today's liberal Mennonite periodicals. This conviction (this testimony) has been effectively silenced and the organs, pianos, and rock groups now "blare away" in a church which once scripturally challenged their presence.

Today, we have the responsibility to lift up the torch of a "separated" life and witness. We reject the use of instrumental music in church worship. In addition to this position, because we consider our entire life as a worship experience before our God, we also reject the use of instrumental music in the home or anywhere else. We do not have to be artificially stimulated to worship our God! The Mennonite Church of the past lost their conviction because of a gradual compromise. First, they listened to groups which used instrumental accompaniment. Second, they bought records (today, it would be tapes!) with instrumental accompaniment. Third, they brought instruments into their homes (but not yet into the church). Finally, they brought the instruments into the church. Here, we see a gradual step-by-step loss of Scriptural position.

Although the following article accents the rejection of musical instruments in the church service, it is clear to all spiritually-minded men that the same principles apply to the total life-experience. It is our prayer that this article would be used of God to encourage our churches to maintain our clear, current Scriptural position of rejecting the use of musical instruments — whether it be in singing groups, on tapes, in the homes, or in the churches. May we be wise to avoid compromises which lead to defeat!

It is a significant fact, and one possibly not commonly known among us, that with the coming of musical instruments into the church, the singing was taken more and more from the congregation and was performed by small groups of select singers. This became more or less of a necessity, as the common people were unable to sing the more artistic music which had come into use to some extent and was greatly encouraged by the use of in-

struments. The same results can be seen in almost any church today where instruments are used. Choir singing, with all the pride and envy springing up in the hearts of individuals who long to prominence, has been not only the means of silencing, if not altogether, at least to a considerable degree, the voices of those not possessed with special ability for singing, but has also been the source of unending church troubles. Why should not the oldest saints and the men or women with the poorest voices be permitted to pour out the praises of their souls to God, who listens not to the sounds we can make with our lips so much as the sweet music of the soul which cannot be expressed by our frail human faculties?

And yet, the experience of other churches has proved that with the admission of instruments these privileges are bound to go. May the Mennonite Church never surrender, but rather strengthen her practice of congregational singing in which all can pour out their hearts in praise to God.

May our singing always be such that the oldest grandmothers and grandfathers can unite with the young worshipers in the singing of those dear old songs which thrill our souls and inspire us with the messages they hear.

ANOTHER LOOK AT MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS

Today many Mennonite churches around us are losing the simple worship patterns practiced by our churches in the past and adopting patterns of the more worldly churches around us. We who are endeavouring to maintain Scriptural churches need to be alert lest we slowly follow in this same direction.

One of these practices is the use of musical instruments in a worship service. How did they arrive at this decision? How should we decide such issues? Is it safe to conclude that since they sound nice and were used in Old Testament times, they must be all right? Some have concluded that they are all right in the home but wrong in the church. Does God have a different standard for worship in the home than in the church? If we create a desire and a taste for them in the home or youth meetings, can we consistently say they are wrong in the church?

If we want the right answers we will need to ask the right questions. Will they help us and our youth to be more spiritual? Will they make the conscience more sensitive or will they still the voice of conscience? What direction on this issue do we get from God's Word?

It is worthy of notice that in churches and youth groups where their use has been promoted, one can notice a decline in spirituality and increased worldliness in life and practice.

Since we live under the new covenant, their use will need to be justified in the New Testament. To justify their use in our time from the Old Testament is like trying to justify political involvement and war today from the Old Testament. Our church, from reformation days, was founded on the principle that the New Testament alone is a safe guide for our faith and practice,

God has made and given to every one of us a stringed instrument of vocal cords with a wonderful ability to vibrate in praise to Him. This ability will go with us into heaven, and as the vials full of odours in Revelation 5:8 represent the prayers of saints; the harps could represent the praises of the redeemed out of every kindred, tongue, people, and nation of Revelation 5:9.

Let us follow the example of our perfect example, Christ, who in Hebrews 2:12, was moved to say that in the midst of the church He would sing praise to the Father. If we use this ability to bring praise to our own ability, we have missed the mark and not followed our Lord's example. God has made us with the ability to completely and fully honour and praise Him, unaided by men's creations. Let us use well our ability to praise Him now and we will be ready to join in that great song of Moses and the Lamb in eternity.



TROUBLED HEARTS

There are many troubled hearts in the world today. From the time of the fall of man through disobedience in the Garden of Eden, man has been in trouble. In reality we are all born in sin, as the Scriptures speak: "For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive" (1 Cor. 15:22).

Truly, we all had troubled hearts that were stony, hard, and disobedient. Then in Ezekiel 36:26, we are told about a new heart and a new spirit. This change is even to the point of taking out the stony heart and receiving a heart of flesh, meaning a soft heart. There are those today who once had a soft heart, which God gave them, "not of works, lest any man should

boast." But because of disobedience and sin, they left the narrow road, the Shepherd's fold, and the kingdom of God.

We can take special note of the song, "Troubled Heart, Thy God Is Calling" (Fanny Crosby). A call from God is much different than when we humans call someone. God is our Creator and Father. He has the right to forgive us, to give us peace and joy, to make us happy and free, and to write our names in the Book of Life for all eternity. It is this God who calls the troubled hearts.

The call of God may be at midnight, in the morning, or at noonday. He calls from the rising of the sun until the going down thereof. No doubt, the call does come. God loves us all; it is not His desire that anyone should be lost. Eternity is too long to turn the call aside. "Troubled heart, thy God is calling, He is drawing very near." This means to say that there is still grace. How thankful we should be! The second stanza says, "Come, the Spirit still is pleading, Come to Him, the meek and mild; He is waiting now to save you." It is the best offer a sinner, a backslider, or a wayward child can ever receive.

Troubled hearts indicate a vacancy. Centuries ago King Agrippa said, "Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian." The word almost seems to fit many a soul that is in trouble. Procrastination will likely take many to a Christ-less grave. It does not need to be that way. In the second chapter of Hebrews the question comes, "How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?"

One time we came to a certain widow's home. She had not grown up in a Christian setting. She had her Bible open and was waiting for someone to explain the meaning of what the Apostle wrote to the Hebrews, "To day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts" (3:15). To keep peoples' hearts hardened seems to be one of the devil's tools today. It is up to us to humble ourselves, open our hearts, and plead God for mercy. He has promised to help us.

In the Bible we read about Governor Felix, to whom Paul was sent. Felix had a perfect knowledge of that "Way." His heart became troubled. This again tells us that when we know the truth, we become more accountable. Paul discoursed with him about the way of salvation. Felix trembled and said that when he would have a more convenient season, he would call for Paul again. Felix likely was convicted, but perhaps like others, he went against the call of God. Procrastination is a subtle scheme of Satan.

Some have troubled hearts because their first love to God and man has dwindled to dangerously low ebb. In Matthew 24, Jesus tells about the end of time. He used the word, many shall be offended, even hate another, and many false prophets shall arise and deceive many. Then in verse 12, He says, "And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold." This all points to troubled hearts; we are in that time. Fear of the future is gripping men's hearts today. Hearts that are not right with God seem to be trying to console their souls that God will accept them at the Judgment Day. This alone can be proof of deception, but if your heart is troubled, thank God for the true reminder. Life is so short and death is so final that we cannot afford to be misled.

It appears that King David was not so troubled until the prophet reminded him of his sin. Today we have the Word of God, the Holy Spirit, our ministering servants, and others to remind us. Troubled hearts can be restored and find repentance while we are still in the day of grace.

It is possible that some Christians experience a troubled heart that may not be necessary. Perfect love casts out fear. We read of those times when Christ's disciples were afraid. Then Jesus calmed their hearts. For those who may be afflicted and unnecessarily disturbed, Jesus tells us in John 14:1, "Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me." Jesus then goes on to tell them of those mansions He has prepared, where we all, with patience, are hoping to be someday.

What a blessing to go to bed at night with an honest heart made free because we took another look at Calvary. Then we know it is only by the grace of God that we have peace. "Troubled heart, thy God is calling." Will we answer or wait too long?



RECOGNIZING SIN AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

Bro. J. Smith, Mississippi.

Webster's Dictionary defines sin as the breaking of religious or moral law, especially through a willful act. The Bible backs up this definition. In 1 John 3:4, it is said, "Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law." Following is a definition of sin from a book on Bible Doctrine and Practice:

"Sin is all that which offends the holiness of God and incurs His wrath.

In a broad sense, 'All unrighteousness is sin' (1 John 5:17). That is, everything that does not honor or please God is sin.

"Sin is not relative to changing values; it is not defined by the opinion of men. Only by holding one's life up to God's unchanging holiness can man understand what sin is. The law and the perfect example of Christ Jesus serve as a holy pattern unto which man must compare himself. Thereby alone can man see sin as it really is."

As we study the Bible, there are certain things that are plainly called sin. A few are as follows: Contempt for others ("He that despiseth his neighbour sinneth" Proverbs 14:21); foolish thoughts ("The thought of foolishness is sin" Proverbs 24:9); unbelief ("And he that doubteth is damned if he eat, because he eateth not of faith: for whatsoever is not of faith is sin" Romans 14:23); and neglect of opportunity ("Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin" James 4:17). The apostle Paul also writes, "Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, Idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditious, heresies, Envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God" (Galatians 5:19-21).

Jesus teaches us in Mark 7 that sin begins in the heart. We may not have committed some of the above named sins, but if we find in our hearts that we are selfish and it is more important to gratify ourselves than to do the will of God, we are guilty of sin. We can rightly say that "selfishness is at the heart of every sin." Speaking badly of others just to lift ourselves up or to make a good story is selfish and, therefore, is sin.

How do we recognize sin on our lives? In Isaiah 59:2, we read, "But your iniquities have separated between you and your God." Is it too strong a statement to say that anything that distances us from God is sin? If we have, or allow, anything in our lives that makes us feel empty and restless or in question of our salvation, I think this could be iniquity causing separation between God and us. If we are so consumed with our social life, occupation, and duties, technology, or maybe even the newspaper, that our relationship with God suffers, we are distancing ourselves from the Lord. Also, if we are knowingly violating the church's teaching and decisions, we are sinning. We have been warned that using certain aspects of technology is strictly forbidden. If we are using these things in our homes, we are sin-

ning.

The apostle Peter tells us that we are to lay aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speaking (1 Peter 2:1-2). Do we sometimes find ourselves a little jealous or envious when someone else prospers or when we look at their abilities and successes? Are we disappointed when they have a misfortune, or are we almost glad? Envy is a sin that can lead to the evil speaking we read about in the above verse.

Now that we have addressed sin, let's address some of its consequences:

Sin causes deception. Hebrews 3:13 reads, "But exhort one another daily, while it is called Today; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin." We may allow little things in our lives that we are uncomfortable with but which we want to justify. After a while this thing may no longer make us uncomfortable. Is the thing no longer wrong, or are we being deceived? If this goes on long enough, we will be claiming salvation without a cross or the fruit of the Spirit. It can happen that we disobey the Holy Spirit so many times that eventually we believe we are saved when we are not. Is there any worse situation?

Sin is progressive (2 Timothy 3:13). We can use the illustration of a snowball rolling down a hill. The farther it rolls the more snow it picks up. The more snow it picks up, the bigger it becomes, and the faster it rolls. Soon it is very hard to stop. I don't think we can overemphasize the importance of diligence in the small things of life and nipping wrong thoughts and attitudes in the bud. Likely there have been few if any Christians whom, walking close to the Lord, lost out by falling prey to some big temptation. I believe that strong Christians only lose the way by first becoming weak Christians. This happens due to a lack of diligence in dealing with the small things that come into their lives and not keeping a close walk with God. We must believe this, because God has promised that His grace is sufficient to overcome. We must abide in the vine if we are to grow.

Sin is destructive. The Bible tells us in Romans 6:23 that the wages of sin is death. Sin brings about spiritual and physical death. It may be thrilling at times, but it drives us to do things that will destroy our bodies, our homes, our reputation, our conscience, and our hope of salvation. It's like the illustration of someone giving a young man a car and telling him that he can drive it until the car is used up. After that he will be out of transportation. He might want to race and spin the wheels because it's fun, but if he is wise, he will treat the car with respect to make it last longer. In like man-

ner, God has given us only one life, mind, and body for this earth. Are we willing to waste these on the thrill of sin? A friend who nearly lost his life while on drugs once said that when God is not in your life and sin has dragged you down, you will do whatever Satan tells you to do. You don't have the power to say no. Do you want Satan, who hates you, to have the power to make you destroy your body and mind with immorality, drunkenness, hate, unforgiveness, greed, and fear? Sin drives you to do the destructive things that cause you to always be looking over your shoulder. Unless the Lord saves you, sin will eventually land you in hell.

Sin is delusional. Satan is a master of illusion. He can make the empty and beggarly sins of this world look glamorous and fulfilling. A traveling circus, when lit up at night, looks glamorous and exciting. But in the morning, it looks junky, empty, and uninviting. It seems like Satan tempts different age groups with different temptations. Things that looked appealing enough in our younger years to tempt us to give up our salvation can look rather vain and empty when we are older. Surely the things that tempt the older ones are equally vain and empty. Even though we know this, we are still often tempted. Sometimes we just have to persevere and live by faith.

Sin separates from God (Isaiah 9:2). God is the One who has given love, peace, contentment, and security. The farther we are separated from God, the less we experience these beautiful blessings. Anyone who has ever been close to God, as in a conversion experience, knows that at that time there was nothing they would have traded for that feeling of closeness with God. They only wanted to please Him. It seems like we can so easily forget that blessedness.

In closing, I would like to encourage us all to take our Christian lives seriously and live close to God. I believe that, like anything else, the more we put into our Christian lives, the more we will receive. We will find that the sense of purpose, the peace, and the comfort that comes from living close to God will be worth it.

From: "The Messenger of Truth"



Followers of Christ to the End.

The stories of brothers and sisters in Christ who have and are being martyred can either be an encouragement or a deterrent to us to continue on in the faith to the end of this life depending on the strength of our commitment to Christ Jesus. One of the most widely known books in Anabaptist circles is without a doubt the Martyrs Mirror and we have again drawn our "Snapshots" this month from that publication.

As you read the selection consider the following scriptures, not only in relation to the martyrs mentioned but also, to your own life. Have any of us ever seriously thought about these scriptures and how they should be applied to our own life or that we may one day come to a situation where we would be challenged to apply them to our lives or forsake Christ.

None of us I am sure would desire to be tested as the two brethren mentioned but nevertheless we may be tested in another way that is meant to lead us to renounce Christ. Do we have a grasp and understanding what these scriptures are saying, what they are calling us to? Study the requirements and the promises that go with these requirements, the words in Matthew 19:29 and Mark 10:29-30 are those of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, He knew what He was talking about and what it would take to be His disciple, likewise the Apostle Paul in Acts 14:22, Romans 8:35-39 and 2 Corinthians 1:2-5 knew what he was talking about, the suffering for Christ in this life but in and through all that the comfort of knowing that God is there with us to the end and will welcome us into His Kingdom – Well done thou good and faithful servant enter into the joy of thy Lord.

May the Lord bring each us to a deeper understanding and appreciation and through that a willingness to be His disciples to the end however that comes and whatever circumstances we face until that glorious homecoming into the everlasting city (Revelation 22:14)

JvL

Matthew 19:29

And every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for My name's sake, shall receive a hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life.

Mark 10:29-30

And Jesus answered and said, Verily I say unto you, There is no man that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or chil-

dren, or lands, for my sake, and the gospel's, ³⁰But he shall receive an hundredfold now in this time, houses, and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands, with persecutions; and in the world to come eternal life.

Acts 14:22

Confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God.

Romans 8:35-39

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? *Shall* tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? ³⁶As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. ³⁷Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. ³⁸For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, ³⁹Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

2 Cor. 1:2-5

Grace be to you and peace from God our Father, and *from* the Lord Jesus Christ. ³Blessed *be* God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort; ⁴Who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God. ⁵For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ.

SNAPSHOTS.

Brief excerpts from historical publications.

“Martyrs Mirror” by J.Thieleman van Braght.

GOTTHARD OF NONENBERG AND PETER KRAMER, A. D. 1558

Gotthard of Nonenberg and Peter Kramer were both of them faithful men, who walked to edification among the brethren in the Duchy of Berg, (*see footnote 1*) where the truth of the Gospel began to shine again at that time, and very many came to the faith and knowledge of the truth. Thus these two men were called and chosen ministers of the church and provid-

ers for the poor [deacons], which office they assumed, and for a time faithfully discharged, and as they sought to live godly in Christ Jesus, the consequence was that they had to suffer persecution, as also appeared, since both were apprehended in one night, and brought to Winnick. There the steward took them, to vent upon them his arrogance, and to treat them with contumely. (*see footnote 2*) But they firmly resolved in their hearts, to adhere to the truth.

They lay there in prison a long time, and had to endure many temptations and conflicts in order to make them forsake the truth, in which case they should be free to return to their wives and children; and their lives should be spared. But the love which they had for their Lord would not permit them to abandon the truth, and turn to the doctrines of men. They much rather forsook their wives and children, and their temporal possessions, yea, finally even their lives, flesh and blood, which they would rather give for a spoil, that they might enjoy the crown, and that their names might be found in the book of life. When the time for their trial had come, they were brought before the learned, who employed many subtle stratagems against them. But these men, with the divine help, repelled all their subtle and insidious wiles undauntedly and fearlessly, and sought no other counsel or way; but as Christ had gone before, so they endeavoured to bear His cross after Him; whereupon they were sentenced to be executed with the sword.

When brought forth from prison, to be taken to the place of execution, these men were and remained firm and immovable as a wall, and determined to adhere to the truth, and not to separate from the faith. When all saw their boldness, and perceived that they were upright, pious persons, and had to die simply on account of their faith, nearly every one wept; the steward, the judges, deputy, and executioner as well as the common people. But the hearts of these people were full of gladness, and they joyfully sang with a cheerful mind. Again they were approached with various wiles, the comfort of life being held out to them, in order to bring them into dependency. This continued for a long time, until two o'clock in the afternoon; so long did the steward delay the matter, thinking to intimidate them, in hopes that they should turn. For this reason he made strenuous efforts to bring them over to his views, so as to induce them to go to church, and hear the doctrine of the priests. But when the steward did not succeed in

bringing the mover to his views, he called the executioner, into whose hands the prisoners were delivered. The executioner acted with reluctance, and received them with tears; for his heart misgave him.

But Gotthard said to him, "How I have longed for this day; why do you delay so long?" When the executioner began to bind them, he said to them, "Dear men, be not afraid; for Christ also was bound innocently." When the steward heard these words he said to the executioner, "You must not speak in this manner." Then Peter said, "We will adhere firmly to the covenant of the Lord, which we trust we shall not break." Thereupon Gotthard began to speak, and said, "Here we must suffer tribulation. He that would hereafter be crowned, must fight valiantly now. As the bridegroom went before, so the bride must enter into joy through much suffering and tribulation. This we are taught by the words of Christ. The fact that the Lord was executed between two murderers, lightens the cross and affliction; hence we fear neither slaying nor killing. For if they have done this in the green tree, what shall be done in the dry? Luke 23:31. The servants of God must drink the sour wine now here upon earth; but when we get to Christ, we shall drink new and sweet wine with Him. Matthew. 26:29. We must first bear affliction." With this, they reached forth their hands, and willingly suffered themselves to be bound, which astonished many. Yea, the common people were amazed, and said, "What marvellous thing behold we here I these men so willing to go to death, when they could easily obtain their liberty." Gotthard said, "We do not die, but pass through death into life eternal, to God and to all His dear children; of this we have a sure hope; hence accept this death with joy, and trust that we shall please God."

When the time had come for them to die, they rose to their feet, called upon God in heaven, and, as brethren in Christ, and as a token of brotherly love and unity, kissed each other with the sweet kiss of peace, as those that were united with God, and were thus beheaded standing. But since they were executed unjustly, the executioner said with great fear and trepidation, that he should never execute such men again. After their heads had been severed from their bodies, the common people began to go home; but the steward called out to them, saying, "Don't be in such a hurry, but help bury these pious men first; they did not die for any crime; they are neither thieves nor murderers; they were pious of life and conduct; they embraced

a faith which the lords and princes could not understand, and hence they had to suffer." Thus these pious witnesses of God were buried, and the seed of their blood did not remain without fruit in that place. To God be all the glory. Amen. This happened about the year 1558.

Footnote 1: The Duchy of Berg was a feudal type territory located in the area where the city of Düsseldorf is in present day Germany.

Footnote 2: contumely - 1. Contempt: insulting, scornful, or contemptuous language or treatment 2. derisive remark: an openly insulting, scornful, or contemptuous remark. Encarta® World English Dictionary © & (P) 1998-2004 Microsoft Corporation. All rights reserved.



Preserving Our Walk With God

By Alan Priest

And the Lord God planted a garden eastward in Eden; and there he put the man whom he had formed" (Genesis 2:8). The remaining verses in this chapter show how God and Adam communicated one with the other and shared what must have been a very outstanding and precious fellowship. Now, compare this to chapter 3, verses 23 and 24: "Therefore the Lord God sent him forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from whence he was taken. So he drove out the man." Between these passages something terrible happened, something that must have grieved the heart of God very much and filled Adam with remorse for the remainder of his days.

Genesis 2, verse 25 states that Adam and Eve were not ashamed. So it is when we are walking with God; everything is clear, and we know there is nothing between US. We feel free to talk to God about whatever is on our hearts, and we are ready to receive whatever God has to say to us. Our hearts are aglow with love for our Lord, and we feel sure of His love for us. "These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full" (John 15:11). We are friends with God.

Such a pleasant situation will be disrupted if we allow ourselves to listen to another voice. Adam and Eve listened to Satan, heeded his temptation, and sinned. Immediately their disobedience stood between them and God, and they walked with God no more. Job said that Adam tried to cover his transgression. Paul explained that death and the sinful nature began with Adam. Adam and Eve could not walk with God any more—God provided a covering for their sin and saved their souls, but they had to reap what they had sown, and never again could the relationship be what it once was.

How, then, do we preserve our walk with God? Enoch walked with God because he pleased God. Noah walked with God because he was a just man, and perfect in his generations, a preacher of righteousness.

What do these terms mean? They mean that we turn our back on Satan, and do only those things that please God. They mean that we work hard at dealing truthfully and rightly in all our business and conduct. They mean that we constantly keep ourselves sanctified unto God through careful obedience to His Word. They mean that we do not neglect any opportunity to declare God's righteousness to others by word and life.

To walk with God, we must walk where God walks, and the most likely place to find Him is where our fellow Christians are walking: most specifically, in the church. Have you left your toil and trials, come to church on a Wednesday evening, and been refreshed by the presence of God through the singing, praying, speaking, and fellowship of the saints?

Finally, how highly do we esteem our walk with God?

Should it not be our most valued pursuit? We should never be too weary to seek God through prayer and Bible reading. How precious should be the time spent in godly meditation. "Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you." (James 4:8). "Examine me, O Lord, and prove me; try my reins and my heart. For thy lovingkindness is before mine eyes: and I have walked in thy truth. (Psalm 26: 2-3).

From The Christian Contender September 1995.



Refuge

O Lord, Whose power is infinite and wisdom infallible, order things that they may neither hinder, nor discourage me, nor prove obstacles to the progress of Thy cause. Stand between me and all strife, that no evil befall, no sin corrupt my gifts, zeal, attainments. May I follow duty and not any foolish device of my own. Permit me not to labour at work which Thou wilt not bless, that I may serve thee without disgrace or debt. Let me dwell in Thy most secret place under thy shadow, where is safe impenetrable protection from the arrow that flieth by day, the pestilence that walketh in darkness, the strife of tongues, the malice of ill-will, the hurt of unkind talk, the snares of company, the perils of youth, the temptations of middle life, the mourning's of old age, the fear of death. I am entirely dependent upon Thee for support, counsel, consolation. Uphold me by Thy free Spirit, and may I not think it enough to be preserved from falling, but may I always go forward, always abounding in the work Thou givest me to do. Strengthen me by Thy Spirit in my inner self for every purpose of my Christian life. All my jewels I give to the shadow of the safety that is in Thee—my name anew in Christ, my body, soul, talents, character, my success, wife, children, friends, work, my present, my future, my end. Take them, they are Thine, and I am thine, now and for ever.

From The Valley of Vision: A Collection of Puritan Prayers & Devotions

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