

THE AUSTRALIAN ANABAPTIST

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

Vol. 7 No. 11 – NOVEMBER 2010



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.

We live in a day and age when most everyone wants to do what is right in his own eyes because they do not acknowledge the Kingship of Jesus Christ. And sadly even professing Christians often suffer from the same malady – pride!

Is there a cure? Yes, there is and it lies in a full surrender to God and all His ways, then and only then can we have victory in the Christian life.

Whilst I do believe that God gives special grace to those who have no scriptural fellowship because of circumstances and not choice, the scriptures indicate that a full life in Christ can only be truly complete within a scriptural fellowship. (Hebrews 10:25).

There are a number of ordinances that those who find themselves in a situation of not having a scriptural fellowship are not able to partake of or be blessed by, neither are they able to draw upon the exhortation, encouragement and support such a fellowship brings.

Nevertheless those who find themselves in such circumstances need to make a determination to maintain a very personal relationship with God at all costs – and they can be significant especially when it comes to separation from the world, 2 Corinthians 6:15-18 is especially pertinent.

Matthew Henry makes this observation on this scripture: “We should not join in friendship and acquaintance with wicked men and unbelievers. Though we cannot wholly avoid seeing and hearing, and being with such, yet we should never choose them for friends. We must not defile ourselves by converse (interact socially) with those who defile themselves with sin. Come out from the workers of iniquity, and separate from their vain and sinful pleasures and pursuits; from all conformity to the corruptions of this present evil world.”

We must never allow anything to come between our soul and God, and we should welcome anyone or anything that can lead us to know Him better. We should let nothing hinder us from being in a place where our spiritual life is being maintained.

People do observe us, whether we are in a fellowship or on our own, perhaps even more so when we are alone, so we need to be even more alert so that the expression of our lips corresponds with our communion with God. It is easy to say good and true things but we must live them if we are to draw others to Christ.

J.v.L.

MINISTER'S CORNER.

Keys to Christian Victory

Extracts from a message by Earle Zimmerman

Given at Danskin Mennonite Church (Part 1)

Brethren and sisters I greet you in Jesus name. I trust that our gathering together tonight would bring glory to the name of God.

Psalm 119:10-11

With my whole heart have I sought thee: O let me not wander from thy commandments. ¹¹Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee.

The message that we are considering this evening is Keys to Christian Victory.

The subject of victory automatically turns our minds to the thought of conflict. When there is conflict between two individuals or two nations or whatever it might be and when one is overcome then the other one has victory. As we think about Keys to Christian Victory what kind of conflict are we are looking at?

Let us narrow down the consideration to the conflict and the struggle that comes because of our identification with Jesus Christ. We know that living a Christian life brings conflict, we know that it brings opposition, we know that it brings struggles in an individual's life.

We want to consider some keys to Christian victory.

Firstly let us read Ephesians chapter 6 verses 10 through 20. In this Scripture it speaks about the armour that the Christian has in order to be able to resist the devil and to rise up not only to the opposing forces of evil but that we would rise above that and be victorious in our Christian life.

Ephes. 6:10-20

“Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. ¹¹Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. ¹²For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. ¹³Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the

evil day, and having done all, to stand. ¹⁴Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness; ¹⁵And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; ¹⁶Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. ¹⁷And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God: ¹⁸Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints; ¹⁹And for me, that utterance may be given unto me, that I may open my mouth boldly, to make known the mystery of the gospel, ²⁰For which I am an ambassador in bonds: that therein I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak.”

Now we want to consider first of all the nature of this conflict. What kind of conflict are we looking at? What is the nature of it?

I believe that the conflict that we are looking at here is the conflict with our own carnal world and carnal will. I think all those that have come to the age of accountability recognise that. There are some temptations that come our way from outside sources but the conflict that we experience can come and is a conflict with our own carnal will. The Apostle Paul said there are some things that which I would I do not and that which I would not, I do. And so there's a conflict with our own will, I want to do what is right and yet I can't.

Another thought on the nature of this conflict is that it is a struggle with the god of this world. The forces of evil that are all about us, the god of this world Satan and all of his forces are arrayed against the child of God and for us we are engaged in a struggle with the god of this world. Now granted we are not fighting against the devil, the power of God is able to overthrow the devil and it helps us to resist the devil, but Satan comes to us at very inopportune times. It comes in ways, times and places that you and I would be embarrassed to admit. It is a struggle with the god of this world.

Jesus said to Peter: Satan has desired to have you. And he means business, he is, as it were, playing for keeps and so we need to be guarding against that, the struggle is with the god of this world. (Luke 22:31)

We are also engaged in conflict that comes through the opposition of the worldly minded.

There are those that living after the flesh, there are those that may have a form of godliness but they are denying the power thereof, and often times it is because of some of their activity and some of their influence that causes a struggle with us, it makes a conflict. It might be friends, it might be individuals that at one time were a part of us or individuals that are looking seriously at a separated way of life but then they chose otherwise and now they can do all things to be in opposition, making problems for the child of God.

We sing that song: “Am I a Soldier of the Cross?” and there is a verse that says: Is this vile world a friend of grace to help me on to God? Well I think we know the answer. This vile world is not a friend of grace. There is opposition that we experience because the forces of evil are arrayed against the child of God.

Hebrews 12:3 says in encouragement: “For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds.”

Here in verse 12 Ephesians 6, it says we are not wrestling against flesh and blood, it is not a physical battle but rather it is a battle in the spiritual realms, it involves things that we can see but the nature of it is that it goes beyond what you can reach and see and it is a battle that is arrayed against us, it is within our own spirit. We dare not allow our focus to move away as some are doing, their emphasis is on social concerns and environmental things, there are many whose gospel is in that direction. Well if that is where the battle is it would be minor but it is deeper than that. We wrestle not against flesh and blood.

This conflict that we experience is not only defensive in nature but it is also offensive.

We are not only standing here holding the shield up so that the darts don't come but we need to be conducting ourselves in such a way that we are actually resisting the devil and the Scripture says that he will flee from us.

We sing that song: Christian walk carefully danger is near. That is on the defensive, walking carefully, watching out, but then we also sing: Conquering now, stoop to conquer. And now we are on the offensive.

Well the human tendency is that as we are engaged in conflict that we can become discouraged and give up. But we dare not do that, the Scripture

warns us against fainting by the way. Galatians 6:9 says: Be not weary in well doing for in due season we shall reap if we faint not.

And so the secret for victory is that we remain alert and we recognise the offensive efforts of the enemy and we, by the power of God, are able to resist them in such a way that we are helped on to victory and the power is available for that.

Now there are positive and negative aspects to this conflict. You know we can have a negative aspect, and a negative aspect could be that we are fearing the struggles, we are afraid of the pain and suffering that might come our way as we are serving the Lord, but I don't believe we need to be looking at that, we shouldn't looking at that side of it, but rather we should have a fear of being defeated and being overcome by the evil. Oh for a faith that will not shrink, though pressed by many a foe. That should be our concern, I want a faith that one shrink rather than looking on the enemy and how strong the enemy is. Romans 12:21 says: "Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good."

Well we could also be looking at the thought that that we are afraid of losing our friends. That's part of the negative, we are afraid of what it is going to cost to us but we shouldn't be looking at that. There are some positive aspects to conflict and one of them is that it moves us closer to God. When we are engaged in conflict with call upon the Lord and then we are brought into a closer relationship with the Lord and we can experience the power of God in a real way and that should move us closer to Him.

So we need to recognise that there is not only a negative aspects to conflict but there is a positive side to it that draws us closer to the Lord. It moves us to be counted and to stand up and be counted for the Lord. It helps us to show about colours, it produces spiritual exercise and spiritual exercise produces spiritual strength.



In the December issue Brother Earle will conclude his message by looking at some guidelines that actually unlock and open up our understanding of Christian victory and focus our attention more directly to some Keys to Christian Victory



HOW GREAT THOU ART AND HOW FRAIL I AM.

The hymn, "How Great Thou Art," is one of the most powerful hymns to appear in recent times, with good probabilities of enduring. This song extols the Creator and exclaims about "all the worlds thine hands have made" with a few references to the grandeur of some of its details. It then goes to the wonder of God sending His Son to die for us and that He will return again. No doubt, some of the attraction of the song is in its basic, simple testimony to God's greatness, "How great Thou art!"

In Revelation, chapter 4, the four and twenty elders in heaven are quoted as saying, "Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou halt created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created." How great is our Creator? How great is His creation?

We are told that our sun is about ninety-three million miles away from the earth. Astronomers tell us that the sun is a star of only average size among a hundred billion stars in the galaxy that we are in, the Milky Way. Then they say that there are as many galaxies as there are stars in the Milky Way. They think that they have photographed star-like objects six thousand million light years away. One certain star is calculated to measure two billion four hundred million miles across.

As big as this universe may be, it is not as big as God is. Solomon testified, "... the heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain thee. (1 Kings 8:27).

The marvels of creation go on and on. Scientists say that a million kinds of animals, 335 thousand kinds of plants, and 800 thousand kinds of insects have been classified. Every one has a complex existence that could only have been planned. Natural marvels abound without number.

How well the Psalmist said it when he said, "The fool hath said in his heart; There is no God" (Psalm 14:1). The apostle Paul wrote, "For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse" (Rom. 1:20).

This applies equally to Jesus Christ, for "God ... created all things by Jesus Christ" (Ephesians 3:9). It is with this Godhead that we all have to do. The apostle Paul wrote, "For in him we live, and move, and have our being ... For we are also his offspring" (Acts 17:28). There is offered to us a relationship with Him.

Holy men of old times have given us a view of our status with God. Moses began a psalm with a testimony: "Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, thou art God." From that he turned to the other side—our side—and stated one of our severe limitations: "The days of our years are threescore years and ten; and if by reason of strength they be fourscore years, yet is their strength labour and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away" (Psalm 90:2,10). Seventy or eighty years compared to the One who is from eternity! In comparison, our time isn't a dot in the ocean.

The psalmist David said, "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handy-work ... His going forth is from the end of the heaven, and his circuit unto the ends of it: and there is nothing hid from the heat thereof" (Psalm 19:1, 6). David also said, "The earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein" (Psalm 24:1). He said, "The Lord looketh from heaven; he beholdeth all the sons of men. From the place of his habitation he looketh upon all the inhabitants of the earth" (Psalm 33:13-14). These observations made David cry out, "Lord, make me to know mine end, and the measure of my days, what it is; that I may know how frail I am" (Psalm 39:4).

Many people do not realize how frail they are. It seems as though some, because of riches, feel themselves strong. Some feel that they are strong because of political power. Some feel strong because of social status. But the apostle Peter wrote, "For all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away" (1 Peter 1:24).

Isaiah gave us this word of the Lord: "I am the Lord that maketh all things; that stretcheth forth the heavens alone; that spreadeth abroad the earth by myself; That frustrateth the tokens of the liars, and maketh diviners mad; that turneth wise men backward, and maketh their knowledge foolish" (Isaiah 44:24-25).

We can safely say that no man has one-billionth the power that God has. Do we know how frail we are? Do we too often try to fortify ourselves with the power of money, and then trust in it? How often do we trust in our own resources?

Of ourselves we are frail. We are frail physically. In the Scripture, this brief life is referred to as a vapor, a shadow, a wind, and as an handbreadth.

We are soon cut off, and we fly away. We are frail in our knowledge. "And if any man think that he knoweth anything, he knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know" (1 Corinthians 8:2). By nature, we are frail in character. The apostle Paul exclaimed, "O wretched man that I am!" David said, "I am a worm." Asaph, in the seventy-third Psalm, said, "I was as a beast before thee."

Now the good part is that it is to frail man that the Almighty God offers a relationship, a relationship that is eternal. This life, as short and frail as it is, is enough, if we use it rightly.

The mighty God loves frail man. He has offered us to be His sons. "But as many as received him, to them he gave power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name" (John 1:12). In Him this short life opens into endless life (John 11:26). In receiving the Holy Spirit, we are given access to power (Acts 1:8).

In our walk with God, we are expected to keep these two facts in mind: the greatness and power of God and our frailty. Jeremiah said, "Cursed be the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm ...Blessed is the man that trusteth in the Lord, and whose hope the Lord is" (Jeremiah 17:5-7).

It seems to be necessary that we be admonished continually not to put our trust in ourselves, or in man, "but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy" (1 Timothy 6:17).

Brother Ben.



GENERIC CHRISTIANITY

The developments of every age have afforded apt illustrations for teaching the Christian life. Our modern age is no exception. And so it is hoped that the reader will not take offense at the title of this editorial and think it as being coarse.

The dictionary defines generic as: general, not being protected by a trademark; not having a brand name. Today's common usage of the word includes the thought of something substituted for the real thing, something that is undistinguished or run-of-the-mill.

The selling argument behind generic products (for example, drugs) is that they do the same thing as the original, and are cheaper. Why not use a substitute that costs less if it does the same thing as the name brand product? This type of thinking is persuasive. Similarly, there is a common and gen-

eral belief relating to being saved and the Christian pathway that is assuaging the consciences of the masses. The trademark of Christ and the truth does not protect their "discipleship" from modifications that suit the flesh. This is generic Christianity. It isn't stamped with the brand name of Calvary being crucified with Christ. But the subtle incentive of less cost makes it attractive, and it is seducing multitudes.

By speaking of a lesser cost, we are not implying that salvation is bought by paying a higher price of self-effort. Such an effort is also generic. But we do believe that discipleship defines one's Christianity as much as his faith does. When one truly believes in Jesus as his only hope of salvation, then his gospel, or faith, is not generic. As a result, he carries a cross that is the genuine death-to-the-flesh-dealing instrument, not a generic one. The original, and only, way of salvation is costly in the sense that it asks the death of the old man. This is only reasonable in the light of the price Christ Jesus paid for our redemption (Romans12:1).

The truth is that popular Christianity does not bear the trademark of cross-carrying discipleship. It doesn't have the brand name, "Never-Changing Truth in Christ Jesus," which is forever settled in heaven (Matt. 24:35). Quite obviously, there is "another" way that is taking the place of the original. This way has become so general, or common, that the deceptive substitution for the original is hardly ever questioned. In this generic Christianity, grace is cheap (Jude 4). Society has bought heavily into this cheaper, generic Christianity, and God's children are not exempt from the temptation.

The apostle Paul mentions "another Jesus," "another gospel," "another spirit," and warns against believing "any other gospel." Just reading the following words of the Apostle causes a shudder in one's spirit: "For if he that cometh preacheth another Jesus, whom we have not preached, or if ye receive another spirit, which ye have not received, or another gospel... " (2 Corinthians11:4). "I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel: Which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ. But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed" (Galatians1:6-8).

There is, of course, only one true Jesus, the Son of God, who is the Savior of mankind. While on earth, He taught the way of salvation, not sparing

the flesh. He told us that the way was strait and narrow (Matthew 7:14). He laid down the principles of self-denial, bearing one's cross, and discipleship (Matthew 16:24). He said He wasn't of this world, neither were His followers (John 17:14-16), and that His kingdom was not from hence (John 18:36). This Jesus finally suffered in substitution for sinners, securing a blood-bought atonement. After laying down His life, He was buried, but He resurrected on the third day, and forty days later He ascended to heaven.

Those preaching "another Jesus" in Paul's day were not claiming that the Messiah was another person other than Jesus of Galilee. They were merely misinterpreting Jesus and His grace in a way that essentially denied His saving power, because they didn't want to bear their own cross. They subtly corrupted His teaching on man's utter depravity. In essence, they subscribed to a different way of "salvation" that didn't include the absolute surrender of self at the foot of the cross of Christ. Thus, they had "another Jesus" and "another gospel."

This matter may be closer to us than we care to think. Considering the implications, it is a sobering thing. Following is an example that bears out the point. The details vary from the situation in Paul's day, but the spirit is essentially the same.

Church Member has lived a shallow Christian life for several years. He doesn't have a great deal of conviction on the principles of the faith. "Why be so serious and close on such little things?" There has been an undercurrent of resistance toward absolute abandonment to Christ and the narrow way. He has often tried to get around bearing his cross. Yet, all this time Church Member has believed, and maintained, that he was a Christian. The time came when Church Member was asked to make his calling and election sure. After much struggle and frustration (Have I not been a Christian?), the light begins to dawn. He comes to see that he has had his own standard of spirituality, and on that basis he was giving himself a passing grade. Brokenly he comes to the foot of the cross in full commitment to Christ. This results in clarity of direction and committed discipleship.

Church Member's former claim of being spiritual did not harmonize with the true Christ's spirit and teaching. One is loathe to even think it, but he must have had "another Jesus." The "other gospel" he was embracing did not bear the trademark of the truth in Christ Jesus. His interpretation of discipleship was vague and didn't bear the trademark of loving God like Je-

sus taught (Mark 12:30). Looking at the very essence of the matter, he had a generic Christianity, general and common to Christendom, that insulated him from the cost of the genuine.

The reality of this should cause us to ponder our walk of life in the light of eternity. Jesus speaks of the terrible disappointment and awakening that some "believing" people will experience on the Judgment Day. But then it will be too late. Jesus told of people who thought they had been in His presence, but they were turned away. "Then shall ye begin to say, We have eaten and drunk in thy presence, and thou hast taught in our streets. But he shall say, I tell you, I know you not whence ye are; depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity" (Luke 13:26-27).

On another occasion Christ said, "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity" (Matthew 7:21-23). These all had a generic Christianity.

Who was that one whom these people called the Lord, with whom they were sure they had walked and communed? Jesus said it wasn't Him; He had never known them. These people's delusion is frightening.

At the time of Christ's ascension, two angels told the disciples, "... this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven" (Acts 1:11). The Jesus who will return to judge the world will be "this same Jesus," not another, generic one. It is imperative, therefore, that we serve the true Christ and have a genuine Christianity. Let the genuine cost what it will, a true Christian will never buy a cheaper Christianity. It won't do on the Judgment Day!



GOD'S PROMISES IN ADVERSITY

"And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose" Romans 8:28.

The above verse is often brought to our attention when we encounter adversity or reverses in life. We hope that somehow some good can result from our adversity. This is good, and it is true that God means for good to be the end result. Joseph told his brothers that they meant what they had

done for evil, but God meant it for good (Genesis 45:5).

For God it is a simple matter for good to result from apparent evil. Man's nature is such that evil, or bad turns (happenings), seem to have an ill or adverse effect upon us. How then can we learn to allow all things to work for our good?

God's promises, which are abundant, are always upon condition. So likewise, this promise (Romans 8:28) is given to them who love the Lord. Is it any wonder that man, in his unregenerate state, often becomes bitter in adversity and turns farther away from God? Upon observing his adversity, Job's friends advised him to curse God and die. This is man's natural reaction. Job responded by saying, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him" (Job 13:15). How could Job take such a positive approach in the midst of such negative circumstances?

Was it not because Job loved the Lord? Where can we find a clearer illustration of all things working together for good to them that love the Lord than in Job? The Bible clearly states that "the Lord blessed the latter end of Job more than his beginning" (Job 42:12). Had he followed popular opinions, job would have turned away from God, but because he loved the Lord, he came through adversity a better man.

While God permitted Satan to bring these evils upon Job, it was surely His divine plan and intention that Job would come through victorious. By the same token, can we not also assume that regardless of what God allows Satan to bring upon us, His divine plan is that we would come out being better Christians?

The emphasis then of Romans 8:28 would likely fall on "them that love God" instead of on "all things work together for good." We must bear in mind that the sacred writer does not say that all things are good. Rather, many of those things that come our way are evil and adverse in themselves. Sometimes they are even unfair or unjust, because Satan is the source. However, the Scriptures do say that all things work together for good to those who love the Lord. Or, blended with the important ingredient of loving the Lord, all things result in good. What really matters is not so much the source of the adversity nor the magnitude of it, nor the nature of it, but the end result in our life—the bottom line.

A certain individual chose to withdraw from a profitable business. He did so not because the bottom line was not showing a profit, but because he had objected to the large bills that needed to be paid. His focus was on the

negative part of the business more than on the final outcome. The obvious result was that he forfeited his rights to any and all profits. Are we in danger of dealing with our circumstances in life in like manner, and thereby never reap the benefits of the bottom line? When we are in the midst of adversity, let us also consider the end result.

"In the day of prosperity be joyful, but in the day of adversity consider: God also hath set the one over against the other, to the end that man should find nothing after him" (Ecclesiastes 7:14). Does this not indicate that the reverses and trials we encounter are only temporal things helping prepare us for the hereafter? Do we really consider (stop and look at all the different angles), or do we take a quick look and make a hasty decision? May our love to God be of such that we can claim the promise of Romans 8:28. Let us firmly believe in our hearts that none of these things can separate us from God, and the end result will be good.

Today, as always, we find many people in adversity. How touching when one can hear from the heart of one in adversity a clear expression of a genuine love to God! They leave a testimony of how these things have worked together for good. Adversities have resulted in a work of grace in people's lives that possibly would not have happened if it had not been for the trouble they had been through. These people very likely loved God in the past, have loved Him in the midst of adversity, but love Him more now.

How meaningful when one has been through financial adversity and probably lost all of his earthly belongings, and yet from such a setting comes forth a testimony of how one's priorities are changed from the earthly to the heavenly. The result is a deeper thanksgiving and appreciation for things that are worth far more than earthly belongings. It seems that such testimonies speak louder when they come from one who is, or has been, in adversity. Is it not because they have a deep love for God and have allowed those things to work a good work in their hearts?

The testimony of a certain individual who lost a loved one amidst adverse circumstances is, "I have concluded that if God can see me through such a crisis, He can see us through anything." The experience was a most unpleasant one, but the end result was good. The experience (all things) working together with his already established faith and love to God worked a good work.

Thanks be to God who giveth us the victory!

Reprinted from Vol. 87, No. 8, April, 1988 Messenger of Truth.

God's Call – Our Choice!

Jesus said unto His disciples,
If any man will come after me, let him deny himself,
And take up his cross, and follow me. (Matthew 16:24)

God grant we may answer—
I have made my choice forever,
I will walk with Christ my Lord;
Naught from Him my soul shall sever
While I'm trusting in His word.

I the lonely way have taken,
Rough and toilsome though it be,
And although despised, forsaken,
Jesus, I'll go through with Thee.

“There is no devotion to principles or a cause;
Nothing but overwhelming, absorbing love
To the Person of Jesus Christ.”

Oswald Chambers.

GOD'S PEOPLE PATRONIZING THE PHILISTINES.*From a message by Brother Merle Ruth – Dohner Mennonite Church*

For this occasion I have in store a message with a rather strange title — *God's People Patronizing the Philistines*. Your first thought might be, how can we possibly do that? We are far removed from the time of the Philistines. Furthermore, in our part of the world there never were any Philistines. Why discuss an option that does not even exist? Hopefully all such questions will be answered as we move along.

Open your Bible now to 1 Samuel 13. We find here the account of an occasion when the Israelites did indeed patronize the Philistines. 1 Samuel 13:19-20 says, “Now there was no smith found throughout all the land of Israel: for the Philistines said, Lest the Hebrews make them swords or spears: (20) But all the Israelites went down to the Philistines, to sharpen every man his share, and his coulter, and his axe, and his mattock.”

Here are two groups of people — the Israelites and the Philistines. They are evidently living in rather close proximity to each other. However, they do not appear to be on real good terms. Nevertheless, reluctantly, and out of seeming necessity, the Israelite farmers would periodically take their tools to the Philistines to get them sharpened. Notice especially the occasion in verse 20.

Apparently, these particular Israelites were dwelling up in the rocky highlands — no wonder their tools became blunt. Why were they not down in the fertile valleys? Evidently, it was because that is where the Philistines were. So, when an Israelite wanted to get his sickle or hoe sharpened, he had to go down to a Philistine blacksmith and he probably had to pay dearly to get the job done. On this basis we can probably say that these Israelite farmers were patronizing the Philistines; they had become regular customers of the smiths that were to be found among the Philistines.

Why was there no smith among the Israelites? There are two possible answers. In order to cripple the Israelites, the Philistines may have kidnapped every smith found among them. The other possibility is that the Philistines had deliberately monopolized the metal working trade.

However it actually was this Israelite dependence upon the Philistines was part of a deliberately planned strategy. The Philistines were intent on maintaining their military advantage. When it came to fighting, the Israelites were at a disadvantage due to the fact that the Philistines had what they did not have, the “latest” in weapons, namely, swords and spears. The fact is plainly stated in 1 Samuel 13:22. “So it came to pass in the day of battle, that there was neither sword nor spear found in the hand of any of the people that were with Saul and Jonathan: but with Saul and with Jonathan his son was there

found.” So then, the purpose of this parenthetical-like section is to explain why the Israelites had neither swords nor spears to fight the battle that was right then in the making.

At this point we really ought to go back to the beginning of the chapter. A glance at verse 1 tells us that time wise we are at the beginning of the reign of Saul, Israel’s first king. “Saul reigned one year; and when he had reigned two years over Israel, (2) Saul chose him three thousand men of Israel; whereof two thousand were with Saul in Michmash and in mount Bethel, and a thousand were with Jonathan in Gibeah of Benjamin” (1 Samuel 13:1, 2a). Here is Saul establishing a standing army of 3,000 men. Two thousand were kept with him in the vicinity of Bethel and the other 1,000 were stationed a little further north with Saul’s son Jonathan.

Unlike his father, this valiant son of Saul Jonathan perceives how great a reproach it is to Israel and to Israel’s God for the people of God to be under the hand of Philistine oppression. Right in Jonathan’s neighbourhood these enemies of God’s people have a fortified outpost. Moved by God, Jonathan makes a successful attack upon that Philistine garrison, and soon news began to circulate that a war with the Philistines was “brewing.”

1 Samuel 13:6-15

“When the men of Israel saw that they were in a strait, (for the people were distressed,) then the people did hide themselves in caves, and in thickets, and in rocks, and in high places, and in pits.⁷And some of the Hebrews went over Jordan to the land of Gad and Gilead. As for Saul, he was yet in Gilgal, and all the people followed him trembling.

⁸And he tarried seven days, according to the set time that Samuel had appointed: but Samuel came not to Gilgal; and the people were scattered from him. ⁹And Saul said, Bring hither a burnt offering to me, and peace offerings. And he offered the burnt offering. ¹⁰And it came to pass, that as soon as he had made an end of offering the burnt offering, behold, Samuel came; and Saul went out to meet him, that he might salute him.

¹¹And Samuel said, What hast thou done? And Saul said, Because I saw that the people were scattered from me, and that thou camest not within the days appointed, and that the Philistines gathered themselves together at Michmash; ¹²Therefore said I, The Philistines will come down now upon me to Gilgal, and I have not made supplication unto the LORD: I forced myself therefore, and offered a burnt offering. ¹³And Samuel said to Saul, Thou hast done foolishly: thou hast not kept the commandment of the LORD thy God, which he commanded thee: for now would the LORD have established thy kingdom upon Israel for ever. ¹⁴But now thy kingdom shall not continue: the

LORD hath sought him a man after his own heart, and the LORD hath commanded him to be captain over his people, because thou hast not kept that which the Lord commanded thee. ¹⁵And Samuel arose and gat him up from Gilgal unto Gibeah of Benjamin. And Saul numbered the people that were present with him, about six hundred.”

We have just heard the sad account of the failure of the king that Israel had so much longed for. They had likely imagined that if once they had a king, the Philistine menace would disappear. But when you “pin” your hopes on man instead of God, you are bound to be disappointed.

I am reading now from verse 17. “And the spoilers came out of the camp of the Philistines in three companies.” We are then told that these spoilers spread out over the land in different directions. This term “spoiler” indicates that their purpose was to plunder the land. It was probably a show of power designed to further intimidate the Israelites. The verses we first looked at, 19 and 20, follow immediately on the heels of this. They help to explain why these spoilers met so little resistance. They had something the Israelites did not have — newly sharpened swords and spears.

So, overall when looked at from a purely human point of view, it is a pretty pathetic picture. A God-rejected king with a handful of poorly-equipped followers, up against a large, well-equipped Philistine army. The point we do not want to miss is this: the thing in focus — patronizing the Philistines — in its original setting, was part of the package of being an enemy-dominated people. At this point, the Israelites are not the free people that God meant them to be; they are at this point a poor type of the free church that our Anabaptist forefathers so much insisted upon.

The situation we are looking at reminds me of a conversation I once read about. A man who had gotten himself in trouble asked for an interview with D. L. Moody. After relating his story, he added this question: “Now, what would you do, Mr. Moody, if you were in my predicament?” Moody’s reply went like this: “I would have first of all been careful not to get into any such predicament.” That is indeed the wisest course; “an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.” Those Israelite farmers whose tools needed sharpening, were in a predicament, but really it was a predicament of their own making. They never should have allowed themselves to become enslaved.

The Israelites had once been a gloriously-liberated people. Under the leadership of Moses, a former generation had been liberated from the bondage of Egypt. Under the leadership of Joshua, and with God fighting for them, later generations had subdued the Canaanites. During that era, the Philistine men-

ace did exist, but it never developed into a serious threat because Israel was benefiting from the protection of God.

But, alas, the book of Judges tells a different story. Turn with me to Judges 2:11–17. “And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD, and served Baalim: ¹²And they forsook the LORD God of their fathers, which brought them out of the land of Egypt, and followed other gods, of the gods of the people that were round about them, and bowed themselves unto them, and provoked the LORD to anger. ¹³And they forsook the LORD, and served Baal and Ashtaroth. ¹⁴And the anger of the LORD was hot against Israel, and he delivered them into the hands of spoilers that spoiled them, and he sold them into the hands of their enemies round about, so that they could not any longer stand before their enemies. ¹⁵Whithersoever they went out, the hand of the LORD was against them for evil, as the LORD had said, and as the LORD had sworn unto them: and they were greatly distressed. ¹⁶Nevertheless the LORD raised up judges, which delivered them out of the hand of those that spoiled them. ¹⁷And yet they would not hearken unto their judges, but they went a whoring after other gods, and bowed themselves unto them: they turned quickly out of the way which their fathers walked in, obeying the commandments of the LORD; but they did not so.”

In order to remain a spiritually free people, we need both stable spiritual leadership and respect for that leadership. But these apostatizing people proved repeatedly that they did not want to be led in the right way: “They would not hearken unto their God-appointed judges.” Instead, “every man did that which was right in his own eyes” (Judges 17:6; 21:25).

When we move into 1 Samuel, we are confronted immediately with the sad result of such living. Now, even their leader, Eli, fails both as a father and as a priest. All this is the prelude to the bondage we read about in 1 Samuel 13. I am ready now for 1 Samuel 4:10-11. “And the Philistines fought, and Israel was smitten, and they fled every man into his tent: and there was a very great slaughter; for there fell of Israel thirty thousand footmen. ¹¹And the ark of God was taken; and the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, were slain.” Here they are, the Philistines, gaining the upper hand.

But in the darkest of times, God is at work behind the scenes. Suddenly, Samuel, a truly godly leader appears on the scene as a “breath of fresh air.” There is temporary relief as God uses Samuel to show Israel where to place their trust. Listen, as I again read; this time from 1 Samuel 7:9–11. “And Samuel took a sucking lamb, and offered it for a burnt offering wholly unto the LORD: and Samuel cried unto the LORD for Israel; and the LORD heard him. ¹⁰And as Samuel was offering up the burnt offering, the Philis-

tines drew near to battle against Israel: but the LORD thundered with a great thunder on that day upon the Philistines, and discomfited them; and they were smitten before Israel. ¹¹And the men of Israel went out of Mizpeh, and pursued the Philistines, and smote them, until they came under Bethcar." When Israel has God fighting for them, the Philistines are not an invincible force; even without spears and swords, they can be defeated.

But, in spite of the good leadership of Samuel, the influential element in Israel stubbornly chose to throw away their distinctiveness and become like the people around them. In 1 Samuel 8:4-5 we come upon a new development. "Then all the elders of Israel gathered themselves together, and came to Samuel unto Ramah, ⁵And said unto him, Behold, thou art old, and thy sons walk not in thy ways: now make us a king to judge us like all the nations." Of course, Samuel protested, but verses 19 and 20 record the verdict. "Nevertheless the people refused to obey the voice of Samuel; and they said, Nay; but we will have a king over us; ²⁰That we also may be like all the nations; and that our king may judge us, and go out before us, and fight our battles." Well, they got their king but their real need was still unmet.

We have now traced the steps by which this once-liberated nation returned to a life of bondage. They must now endure the humiliation of depending on the services of their enemy. They suffer as the enemy then spoils the fruit of their labour.

Thus far, the most important truth that we should have gleaned from this: in 1 Samuel 13, Israel's most serious problem is not the absence of a metal working smith, nor the absence of spears and swords. Her most serious problem is the absence of faith in God! Had she maintained that, she would not have gotten into this predicament.

Now then, we read in Romans 14:4 that "For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning."

What should we learn from this?

1) In the first place, I believe that God is here wanting to show us that after a one-time liberation experience we still need to maintain an attitude of spiritual vigilance. I dare not forget the one to whom I owe my liberty. Neither dare I grow soft toward my enemies, the world, the flesh, and the devil and allow them to invade my life and dwell within my borders. God's Word to every newly-liberated soul is: "Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof" (Romans 6:12). "For of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought in bondage" (2 Peter 2:19).

Among those twelve tribes who settled in Canaan, there were too many Israelites who stopped short of full obedience. God had warned them that failure to drive out all of these enemy people would have consequences. That warning is recorded in Numbers 33, to which I am not turning. Numbers 33:50–52-55, “And the LORD spake unto Moses in the plains of Moab by Jordan near Jericho, saying, ⁵¹Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, When ye are passed over Jordan into the land of Canaan; ⁵²Then ye shall drive out all the inhabitants of the land from before you, and destroy all their pictures, and destroy all their molten images, and quite pluck down all their high places. . . . But if ye will not drive out the inhabitants of the land from before you; then it shall come to pass, that those which ye let remain of them shall be pricks in your eyes, and thorns in your sides, and shall vex you in the land wherein ye dwell.”

Allowing those Philistines to co-exist with them was a spiritually fatal mistake. The sad plight depicted in 1 Samuel 13 is precisely what God said would happen as a consequence of stopping short of full obedience!

2) Secondly, God is here acquainting us with the ways of the world and the tactics of our enemies. Whether or not we realize it, we too are living in close geographical proximity to a lot of “Philistines.” Some of them are hard to recognize because they are wolves “in sheep’s clothing” (Matthew 7:15). In Philistine-like fashion, the ever-present evil world seeks to regain its lost control over the child of God. It seeks to persuade us that without its services we cannot make out.

“You simply must have our radio and TV sets. You must have a home computer. You must use our video productions. You must join our organizations. You must ‘sign up’ for this and that. You must operate like we do.” “Come down to us. We will put you in business, and at the same time we will supply you with all kinds of security.” But the ways of the world are a master-minded scheme to weaken our resistance, to rob us of everything distinctly Christian, and to leave us spoiled and unfit for God’s use.

3) Thirdly, I believe, God recorded this irregularity (if I may call it that) so that succeeding generations would be moved to examine their own ways. The reading of this account ought to provoke some heart-searching questions related to our own involvements. How much should we be going down to the Philistines? When are we too dependent on the world? Is it not true, that the spoilers of God’s people are still very often the Philistine-like people with whom they too-freely patronize?

Maybe it would be in order to inject right here this parenthetical note. The setting in 1 Samuel 13 may not be an exact parallel of our day. Today, God's program has moved beyond the stage at which it was then. The Old Testament depicts God training a people in the seclusion of Canaan in order that when the training was completed they might come out of that sheltered place and carry the Gospel to the ends of the earth.

But even then already, Israel was to be a light to the surrounding nations. Although we are "not of the world" (John 15:19; 17:14, 16), we are "in the world" (John 17:11; Philippians 2:15), and for a purpose. Nevertheless, the Old Testament principle of separation from the world carries over into the Christian era. The people of God are still a called-out people. We must still very much guard our interaction with the world.

I have a list of pertinent observations.

1) We may not need the skills of the Philistine world as much as we think we do. We have already been shown that with a properly-placed trust in God, Israel could rise above Philistine oppression. This fact received further confirmation in the very next chapter where, due largely to the faith of Jonathan, the Philistines were successfully driven out of Israelite territory. Later on, when David faced the Philistine giant Goliath, the armour that Saul offered him was probably made by a Philistine metal worker. By laying aside that armour, David delivered himself from the snare of trusting in a Philistine product rather than God!

2) The practice of going to modern-day Philistines to get our tools sharpened raises this question: Might we be using tools that are unbecoming for God's people? There are Philistines "in sheep's clothing" (Matthew 7:15) who offer church-going people a wide range of services. Gladly they will teach you how to sing like a professional so you can sing solos in your worship service. They will teach you the "ins and outs" of drama so that your congregation can mix in a little entertainment with its worship. They will show you clever ways of raising money to finance your church program. They will supply you with the names of Christian artists who are eager to perform for your congregation. They will offer your junior department the service of Christian clowns. Whether we hire them, or learn from them, should we want Philistine like tools and skills? The answer I think should be obvious.

3) For some things we definitely should not go to the Philistines. This truth is declared quite clearly in 1 Corinthians 6:1-6. "Dare any of you, having a matter against another, go to law before the unjust, and not before the saints?"

²Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world? and if the world shall be judged by you, are ye unworthy to judge the smallest matters? ³Know ye not that we shall judge angels? how much more things that pertain to this life? ⁴If then ye have judgments of things pertaining to this life, set them to judge who are least esteemed in the church. ⁵I speak to your shame. Is it so, that there is not a wise man among you? no, not one that shall be able to judge between his brethren? ⁶But brother goeth to law with brother, and that before the unbelievers.”

Here, the inspired writer is protesting because the Corinthians were patronizing unbelieving judges to settle disputes that they themselves should have resolved. The solving of spiritual problems, the meeting of brotherhood needs, and the educating of our children — these are typical functions that God’s people should never hand over to the Philistine-written textbooks that do not reflect a truly Christian mentality.

4) Whenever God’s people become overly depend upon modern-day Philistines, the principle and practice of separation from the world stands in jeopardy. What happens during our interaction with the Philistines? Which way does the influence flow? Who is being changed the most? And in what direction?

Evidently, the practice of going down to the Philistines for the services they offered did have some undesirable consequences. I am grounding that assertion on what I find when I go back to 1 Samuel 14:21. Here is a note about a development that occurred as God intervened for the benefit of Israel. “Moreover the Hebrews that were with the Philistines before that time, which went up with them into the camp from the country round about, even they also turned to be with the Israelites that were with Saul and Jonathan.” Here is evidence that prior to this battle some Israelites had actually chosen to identify with the Philistines, and I suppose they reasoned this way: “If we cannot beat them, we may as well join them.”

5) In our setting, a measure of interaction with the Philistine world is inevitable. In 1 Corinthians 5, Paul explains that he does not expect his readers to avoid all contact with sinners, and he ends up by saying in verse 10: “for then must ye needs go out of the world.” Since it is that way, we must take measures to safeguard ourselves against the dangers to which we are exposed. Most of us would need to admit that we may be wearing some Philistine-produced articles of clothing. Are we sufficiently alert to the dangers inherent in that practice?

Do we have in place sufficient safeguards? If I operate a store, how much dare I cater to the wishes of my Philistine customers? If I am in the landscaping business, am I prepared to say, “No” when my customer indicates that he wants me to construct a swimming pool? We rightly lament over the way that Christmas has been commercialized; is it then consistent to in any way cater to the Christmas shopping crowd?

The consensus of opinion is that we can conduct normal business transactions such as buying and selling without necessarily suffering any spiritual loss. I may even allow a Philistine to cut my hair provided he follows my specifications. But when the modern-day Philistines offer to entertain us, we must say, “No.” When he offers to make us his partner we must likewise say “No.” When he offers to transport our children to even our own school, we again say, “No” because God has taught us that the more we depend on him the more we become obligated to him.

When the king of Sodom offered to Abram the spoils of a war in which they had both participated, Abram’s response was “I will not take from a thread even to a shoelatchet” (Genesis 14:23). We need the wisdom of Abram to know when to say, “No” to the offers of the world.

I am glad for a church fellowship that supplies us with much-needed guidelines. In 1 Corinthians 7:31, we are instructed to use the world in a temperate way but when you go beyond that, you get drawn in, and soon the world is controlling you! Things like money and fire can serve you well as long as you keep them your servant. But, they do have a tendency to overpower us. Many of the skills and services that exist in the Philistine world are like that. It is therefore imperative that we restrict them to the level of a servant and use them only if and when they can be used to the glory of God.



Compiled & Edited by: J van Loon

E-mail: shimara2@bigpond.com

Web: www.anabaptistmennonites.org