

THE AUSTRALIAN ANABAPTIST

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

Vol. 12 No.11 – NOVEMBER 2015



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

www.anabaptistmennonites.org

For A Conservative Anabaptist Perspective

From The Editor's Desk

In one of our daily devotionals we were inspired by the words of F.B.Meyer and felt led to share them with you with our prayer that they may be an encouragement and inspiration to you as well in your Christian walk.

WALKING IN THE SPIRIT

"Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh."

Galatians 5:16

WHEN WE walk in the spirit we shall be led by Him. In the early stages of life we are apt to be headstrong and impulsive, as Moses when he felled the Egyptian. But as we grow in Christian experience, we wait for the leadings of the Spirit, moving us by His suggestion, impressing on us His will, working within us what afterwards we work out in character and deed. We do not go in front, but follow behind. We are led by the Spirit.

The man or woman who walks in the Spirit has no desire to fulfil the lust of the flesh. The desire for the gratification of natural appetite may be latent in the soul, and may flash through the thoughts, but he does not fulfil it. The desire cannot be prevented, but its fulfilment can certainly be withheld.

When we walk in the Spirit He produces in us the fruit of a holy character. The contrast between the works of the fleshly--i.e., the selfish life.--and the fruit of the Spirit, which is the natural product of His influence, is very marked. In works there is effort, the clatter of machinery, the deafening noise of the factory. But fruit is found in the calm, still, regular process of Nature, which is ever producing in her secret laboratory the kindly fruits of the earth. How quiet it all is! There is no voice nor language. It is almost impossible to realise what is being effected by a long summer day of sunshine. The growing of autumn arrives with noiseless footsteps. So it is with the soul that daily walks in the Spirit. There are probably no startling experiences, no marked transitions, nothing special to record in the diary, but every year those who live in close proximity witness a ripening wealth of fruit in the manifestation of love, joy, peace, long suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, self-control.

PRAYER

Gracious Lord! May Thy Holy Spirit keep me ever walking in the light of Thy countenance. May He fill my heart with the sense of Thy nearness and loving fellowship. Order my steps in Thy way, and walk with me, that I may do the thing that pleaseth Thee. AMEN.



From the Pulpit

Why Does God Allow Suffering?

David G Burkholder

Conclusion

We could go through history, you know we could look at the prophets, we could look at people like Moses, you know had things gone the way he thought that they did the day that he killed the Egyptian and everybody would have thought that was a wonderful thing to happen would he have ended up leading God's people the way that he did?

Somebody said that Joseph being in an iron prison that it produced iron in his soul, that he became strong through suffering.

Is that a biblical concept?

Turn with me to second Corinthians 4, we are trying to understand some reasons why God allows suffering and I would not doubt that in eternity one of the blessings that God will have for us is that He will take us back and He will say do you remember when you went through that and you wondered what it was for and you wondered how could it be?

And God will show us this is what He was trying to do at that time.

2 Corinthians 4:17: For (suffering) affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding *and* eternal weight of glory.

It says that it works for us, God wants suffering to work. You see he calls it light affliction and Paul had his eyes turned in the right direction earlier in chapter 1 of this book he said we were crushed almost unto death to the point where I get the impression that they were about to die from their troubles, their suffering, but now he says it is our light affliction which is but for a moment it works for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.

Do you think that our children would always agree with us that they need to suffer and put upon them the pain we may inflict?

Well you see God is working to refine us, I come back and I ask the question: What is accomplished, what has been accomplished, what can be accomplished without somebody suffering somewhere?

Now you take the freedom we have in having our schools, it is not that many years ago a man who lived less than four miles from where I grew up went to prison because of refusing to send his children to public school and it was people like that who laid their freedom on the line, they laid so much on the line for the sake of what we have today.

And I think it is no doubt true and we could go back in church history we could go back to people who carried the torch of faith forward and it was always on the shoulders of suffering.

Do you think that is different in 2007 or for that matter at any time?

The third area we want to think about and that is the question: What does God want us to do when we suffer?

I'm sure you know the answer to that but in **John 16:1**, and this verse is sandwiched between the two verses we read a little while ago where Jesus had to say when He said in verse one chapter 16: These things have I spoken unto you that ye should not be offended.

Now the word offended here, and I understand it means to stumble, or when the scriptures speak in Matthew 18 of "offending one of these little ones" it is causing them to stumble and fall into sin what Jesus said here is what I'm talking to you about, suffering, so that when it does come you don't stumble and you don't fall and you don't become discouraged and wonder what happened but that you can say: Well yes it is for my eventual good.

With this, the scriptures talk about some lofty things that God wants suffering to do for us and it stretches my faith but this is foundational that God does not want suffering to cause us to stumble but sadly some people do, some people do stumble and they become bitter when suffering comes and they try to avoid it but Jesus said I'm telling you this so that you don't be offended so that you can know when it (suffering) comes it is not Me turning against you.

Now let's take the last verse of this chapter, **John 16:33** ³³ These things I have spoken unto you, [and there were other things in between] that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.

What does God want to do with suffering in us? Well He wants us to endure, He said I've spoken these things so that in me you will have peace, yes you will have tribulation, you will have suffering but be of good cheer I have overcome the world.

The next four scriptures we are going to take from first Peter and I think that it is very significant that God made Peter, I call him the apostle of suffering, I think proportionately Peter talks more often and he talks more straightforwardly about suffering than any of the other Apostles. Now this is just an idea of mine but the reason I think so is that God uses him. Why did Peter, going back to the night of the crucifixion of Jesus, why did Peter deny Jesus three times, why did he do it, why?

Well they had taken his Master captive and so when they said to him are you one of those? he may have considered what might have happened to him. Well he probably would have been in for suffering, he would have been in for suffering and so to avoid suffering he denied Jesus and that is what makes what he says now more precious to me.

I think Peter gives it because he knew from experience what happens when we are subject to suffering and what he did what we too can so easily do.

Now **1 Peter 2:21** ²¹ For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps:

He says you were called. Called to what?

Well he talks about suffering in the verses before but now he says you are called to suffer when you follow His steps.

And I ask the question again: Where would we be if Jesus would have refused to suffer?

Satan tried so hard first of all in the desert to get Jesus to take the easy way, he said if you worship me I will give you these kingdoms you could have it all by just by worshipping me.

What Satan was doing was trying to appeal to Jesus to avoid suffering.

Jesus knew that to really accomplish what He came for it would mean suffering, He knew that and Satan tried to get Him to take the easy way out and avoid the cross and the garden of Gethsemane.

But what would have happened if Jesus chose to avoid that suffering?

All right we have already read this but we'll read it again for effects sake,
1 Peter 4:1¹ Forasmuch then as Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves likewise with the same mind.

I can imagine Peter going back to the night of the betrayal, I can imagine him saying: Well I just wasn't ready for it.

You know to that point the disciples thought that Jesus was going to get His kingdom by might, by force and they wanted to sit on His right hand and on His left hand because they saw some magnificent expressions of power and might and they wanted to be a part of it.

Suddenly the One who was going to be the King of kings and Lord of lords right now was suffering and so I think Peter is saying: Don't be like I was, don't shrink if the time comes, don't be surprised.

Later in the chapter verse 13 now he becomes stronger yet he not only talks about enjoying suffering but what does he say in verses 12 and 13?

1 Peter 4:12-13¹² Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you:
¹³ But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy.

Now he says don't only endure it but rejoice in it.

That is strong language is it not, that is a lofty goal and if people are able to do that then they have come a long way have they not, to able to rejoice in the midst of suffering.

Now **1 Peter 5:10** he says: ¹⁰ But the God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle *you*.

Would not this verse read much nicer if it would say: But the God of all grace who has called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you.

We would quickly say I want that. But he said this would happen when? After ye have suffered a while.

You see God wants to use suffering to make us perfect, to stablish, strengthen, settle you.

And I'm not sure how it all works but I would not be surprised that if a person's character, a person's Christian character could be put on a scale alongside the degree to which he has suffered would that be a relationship? I think so. Not necessarily always kept up-to-date in the sense that they are always exactly even, God works with different people in different ways but I think we can conclude that this scripture is one of the ways that God works after ye have suffered a while.

And you know we could go back over now and say: Where have I suffered?

And I would expect that the very fact that you are here this morning and that we have chosen and committed ourselves to the Lord in the way that we have and that has brought us here has involved suffering, it involved suffering. There are, you know people who think it strange, you know there are ways in which we need to suffer and if from no other source we do suffer from the persecution of our own flesh, our own flesh that does not want to suffer. It does not want to suffer.

Well I would like just quickly to give a few thoughts about how are we to deal with suffering and I do not feel qualified to speak in depth about this but there are a few things I would like to share that I hope worth thinking about.

First of all we know the book answers to this question, we know the book answers that we need to trust God, that we need to love God, we need to yield ourselves to God, those book answers and they are right answers but I would like to mention a few things and I'm not sure if they brought me to this message or how it all happened but one of those is that we must indeed have the mind of Christ.

You know that if we are truly trying to live lives of self-denial and cross bearing.

Jesus said if any man will come after me let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me, **Matthew 16:24.**

And if we are going to be able to deal with this matter of suffering in the way that God wants us to and it would do the right things for us we must first of all have that as a bedrock conviction that we are willing to deny ourselves.

I come back again to this matter that our flesh is constantly begging and the world is begging and there are lots of other things that are begging for our attention and our energies and suchlike but if we are going to be able to have a right view and experience suffering we must be trying to live lives of self-denial and cross bearing.

If we are living selfish lives that centre around our own self-interests and if we are concerned about how much pleasure we can somehow get out of this life for the flesh and still stay on the right side of God and if we are trying to find an easy way through life we are not going to be ready and able to accept suffering and for that to accomplish its work.

You know if we are feeding the flesh, we are serving the flesh and we are giving the flesh a lot of room over here and then think that if suffering comes we can all of a sudden say No! to the flesh here and then be ready to suffer when we have been feeding it on this side, I don't think it works that way, I don't think it works that way and that leads me again to say that you know that if we are going to be dealing with suffering it is going to be affected by the degree to which we have declared ourselves for the Lord, to the degree to which we ourselves have died to the flesh, dying to self, dying to our own ideas.

The degree to which we are ready to deprive ourselves of things is going to affect our willingness to accept suffering.

If we take the easy way here we will take the easy way there.

Is that fair logic, does that make sense?

I'll take another step and I don't know if any of us is worthy to say this but this has to do with the soft life.

You know if we are trying to live the soft life and if personal comfort and personal pleasure is important to us how will we handle suffering? Because suffering cuts right into personal preferences, it cuts into personal pleasure, it cuts into personal comfort, it interferes with our lives and that is why our affluence puts us in strong danger of not being willing to suffer.

And I wonder parents are we putting our children into the right frame of mind if we live the soft life and if we try to protect them from any deprivations and if we try to protect them from every little suffering that might

come along and then I think it is going to be affecting their outlook on suffering.

I would like to go back to this question: Where would we be if Christ had not been willing to suffer?

The next question is: Where would we be if the saints and those before us had not been willing to suffer?

Where would we be?

The next one is: Where will we be if we are not willing to suffer and where will the Church be if we are not willing to suffer?

But the glory of it is, the glory of it is that where the saints are willing to suffer God uses that to build His Church, God uses that to lay a foundation upon which others can build.

This morning are you and I so sold out to God, are we so yielded to God that we are willing to trust ourselves to He Him in the time of suffering so that He can indeed as Peter said make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you. Then he says to Him be glory and dominion for ever and ever.

Dear ones let's see this life as the flash it is in the light of eternity, let us not let the things of this life rob us of the better things that God has for us even though in spite of suffering like the Bible says the light afflictions are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us if we are faithful.

May the Lord help us.



TRUE FAITH

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (John 1:1). There is an ageless feel to the gospel of Christ. It is a message that is changeless and promotes a feeling of security in us. "In him was life; and the life was the light of men. And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not" (John 1:4-5). So it is today: many people are not comprehending that light, even though it shines as in the beginning. God is not drawing a veil over the light in the end

time, but mankind has turned after his own ways and rejected the way of truth in its simplicity.

Could it be that this is happening in the church of God? Is it correct that the true preaching of the Word is the last thing to go when a people apostatize? Assuming that is correct, we can see that it is very important that living the faith follows hearing the Word in order for the true faith to continue among any given people. Jehovah is an impartial God who will not tolerate lack of commitment in any people, time, or place.

While on earth, Jesus taught the foundation of the new dispensation. Love was one of the principle stones in this foundation. First was love to God: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment" (Matt. 22:3-38). This was not a new commandment, but it was a reinforcement of the old (Deuteronomy 6:5). This love Christ demonstrated by His willingness to suffer and die at the hands of men.

In this same scripture, love for our fellowmen is also taught (Matthew 22:39). This was a new commandment in the sense that it now included everyone, even enemies and persecutors. This is a life-transforming doctrine all by itself.

Jesus also taught that God loves us and that He is a rewarder of them who diligently seek Him (Hebrews 11:6). He taught humility by word (Luke 14:7-11) and example. Consider His, together with the Father's, choice of who He was to born to: a couple of no reputation. The place of birth: a stable. The place that He called home: Nazareth of Galilee, a place of such lowly reputation that when Philip told Nathaniel that he had found the Christ and where He was from, Nathaniel asked in disbelief, "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?"

The order of Jesus' life was not happenstance. He didn't live in Nazareth by chance. Rather, the events and circumstances of His life were direct choices. The people He associated with: publicans and sinners, poor multitudes, the sick and the blind, the lame and cripples. The men he chose to be His disciples, the upper caste called unlearned and ignorant. The choice of a donkey on which to ride into Jerusalem was significant because it was prophesied. The death of the cross carried a curse of the law. The denouncement of the praise-loving upper caste Pharisees shows the tension

between pride and humility. All of His teaching, by word and deed, was a foundation for the new dispensation, the one we live in today.

Another fundamental and indispensable teaching was self-denial (Mark 8:34-37). This was an important teaching, because of the conflict between the way of the world and the way of Christ. The way of the flesh is so different than the way of Christ. As we look at the life of Christ, we see, if we are honest, that the flesh, as we know it, would not have chosen the simple way Jesus chose. At the very least, it would have chosen a modified, middle-of-the-road approach. Unbridled, it would have chosen the way of importance and prestige, of honor and fame, of ease and riches. Jesus could have taken that approach and said exactly the same things, but there wouldn't have been any lasting movement following after to this day.

The burden of this writing is the matter of the choices we have made and are making today. Do the choices I have made in the past and the choices I am making today reflect the gospel of Christ? For example, the place I call home, did I choose to live in the equivalent of Nazareth? Or did I choose to build the nicest house I could afford and get by with? When I chose a means of transportation, did I choose the equivalent of a donkey? Or did I look for a vehicle that had everything on it and made self feel good when I pulled into my destination and others saw me get out of it?

Isaiah 53:2 says that Christ would have no form or comeliness, nor any beauty, that we should desire Him. So He must have been a common person, perhaps even unattractive by human standards. This He also chose. Am I happy to be the way God made me? Or do I try to raise my standing among my peers by embellishing myself with fashions of this world and modifications to my person that would give me more so-called beauty?

Do I choose to write my things to remember in a notebook, or do I need a electronic device worth several hundred dollars? Did I choose a simple cell phone that would identify me as a basic person, or did I somehow rationalize a smartphone? The importance of the teaching on self-denial can be readily seen as we consider the choices the Christian must make. Will I follow in the steps of Christ, or will I please the flesh?

As Christians, looking back we see a reaching out for more. Easier, nicer, quicker, more satisfying, but the flesh will never be satisfied with surfeit-

ing. Although Satan is very impatient, he is willing to slowly broaden our circle to include more and more of the things of the world, because it seems to be his only hope to conquer the bride. Many of the things mentioned could be rationalized by human reasoning. But we would have to admit that they are a departure in principle from the way the followers of Christ have lived. In 2 Timothy 4:10, we read about Demas who, Paul says, loved this world. This is not a new or modern problem. But it still has the same effect: it takes us away from the side of the crucified Christ.

As we consider the need of the church today, we must admit that unless our faith is a justifying faith like that of the true believers of the past, we will lose strength to deal with sin until there is only an empty shell, a whitened wall that signifies an organization but not the truth. On the other hand, as we practice the faith in daily living, we will see an increase in power and direction and an opening of our eyes to our own nakedness and needs. Let us consider the matter of justifying faith a little. Why is Abraham called a hero of faith? Or why did his faith justify him? Because he left Ur when God asked him to. This strong belief in God did not consider human reasoning, which was presenting many legitimate arguments to such an action.

What about the faith of Zacchaeus? According to the writing of Menno Simons, the faith of Zacchaeus was proved when he said, "The half of my goods I give to the poor, and if I have taken anything by false accusation, I will restore it fourfold." This left him a poor man, perhaps penniless, but happy. Compare this with the faithless, rich young ruler who, when asked to sell all he had and follow Jesus, went away sorrowful because he loved not his life to the death.

As we consider the different and various circumstances in people's lives that Jesus encountered, we see that according to human reasoning, or the voice of the flesh, the remedies Jesus prescribed would have seemed unreasonable. If Noah would have consulted the flesh, would he have built an ark? Absolutely not. So we see the need for self-denial and God-given enlightenment to recognize the flesh. We must realize the truth of Jeremiah 17:9, "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked." So we see that justifying faith is only possible as we give God complete

control and are willing to deny the voice of the old man of sin. The issue of comparing ourselves among ourselves as we search for direction also stands in the way of proving what the Lord's will is. This is because it looks sideways instead of up to God. It does not come from justifying faith.

Consider the faith of the three young Hebrews as they faced the choice of standing or kneeling on the plain of Dura. There in front of them was the image we could compare to the flesh and the spirit of antichrist that is prevalent today. The worldly music played, and everyone else fell on their knees and worshipped the golden image. I would imagine that the three Hebrew men faced the rationalization of the flesh as it cringed at, first of all, being different and facing death. Their flesh must surely have rationalized how foolish it would be for them to sacrifice their lives here in this far-off country when they alone were in a position of kingly favor and could influence the king on the behalf of the rest of the Hebrew captives. How could they do that if they were killed?

Secondly, their flesh surely pointed out that there were many other people there who didn't believe that the king was immortal either. The rest were only kneeling to save their lives, and the whole thing was just a show of authority and power of the king, and weren't they supposed to honor and respect the authority of the land? Do we see the legitimacy of these fleshly arguments? They sound suspiciously like the same flesh we face today. What does the voice of justifying faith say about Deuteronomy 5:7? "Thou shalt have none other gods before me." And also verses 8 and 9, "Thou shalt not bow down thyself unto them."

In conclusion, let us consider the commitment of Thomas as the disciples considered Jesus' plan of going back to Judea again after the Jews had sought to stone Him there (John 11:7-16). Thomas said, "Let us also go, that we may die with him." Remember, in the position of compromising with the flesh, we will not remain at one spot but will surely backslide into perdition.

Brother Gordon

WHAT A SAVIOUR—WHAT A GOSPEL!

The gospel of Jesus Christ meant so much to the apostle Paul that he often used expressive and forceful wording in his writing. The Saviour and salvation were more real to him than to many others, perhaps due to the circumstances of his life. Once having seen himself as the chief of sinners (1 Timothy 1:15), he was bound in loyalty to Christ the Saviour. The gospel consumed him. He never lapsed into taking the grace of God for granted nor settled into a mediocre manner of living. We need more of his spirit of zeal and enthusiasm today.

When the Apostle (and not only him but other New Testament writers, also) spoke of the gospel, it was with reverence and awe and much thanksgiving. The following quotes will serve for our consideration here:

"But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them" (2 Corinthians 4:-4). Note especially the Apostle's description of the gospel as being "glorious."

"That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, May be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God. Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen" (Ephesians 3:17-21). Again, the revered writer goes beyond our customary norm of expression—"exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think... unto him be glory in the church."

But he was not overstepping the bounds of truth. What a Saviour! What a gospel!

Salvation is all about being delivered from sin's bondage. True deliverance from sin in order to live unto God's glory is only possible through Christ Jesus. Salvation is meaningless unless one is convinced (conviction by the Holy Spirit) that he is lost and doomed to eternal damnation because of his sin. It is just as clear that one's evaluation of the Savior's all-sufficient sacrifice loses its preciousness for the one who does not have a clear vision of his sin and sinfulness. A Holy Ghost-imparted conviction of personal sin and depravity is imperative in order for one to see the Savior

and the gospel as glorious.

For this reason, speaking of the purpose of the Law, the Scriptures say, "Was then that which is good made death unto me? God forbid. But sin, that it might appear sin, working death in me by that which is good; that sin by the commandment might become exceeding sinful" (Romans 7:13). One's sin being placed under the light of the divine judgment of God lays the foundation for the believer to magnify the Savior the more when he receives forgiveness. Here is another dimension of the Law being a school-master bringing us to Christ (Galatians 3:24).

If one were of the mind to minimize the merits of the Saviour, he would not need to directly discredit the character of Jesus. All he would need to do is downplay sin. He would merely contend that sin is relevant to prevailing ideas of society. Or that it is a concept of unenlightened minds, but now we know differently. In so doing, you have relegated the Saviour to being less than the divine Son of God, because what's the need of a Saviour? In this concept, there is nothing said about sin being the transgression of the law of a holy and righteous Father (1 John 3:4) or of the need of a heartfelt reconciliation with God. If one were to follow the excusing and explaining of sin that is offered today, Christ died more as a political martyr than the bleeding Lamb of God who alone could satisfy the holy law of God against sin.

Today we lament the eroding of moral standards and the world's increasing spiritual darkness. But let us know that the devil's real prize for which he is striving is to make the Saviour and the gospel less than glorious. And surely his primary focus is on the church, the people of God, who have vowed to forsake the world and all its lusts. Oh, how subtle Lucifer is! He often has a hidden agenda.

The above mystery of iniquity is perhaps the advanced program of Satan, which he is actively advancing in the darkened world. However, we must admit that fundamental Christians are also susceptible to the core of his strategy—minimizing sin. Pride, self-will, the love of money, following the fads and fashions of the world, seeking after pleasures of and fleshly indulgences, and lukewarm and casual living do not impress us as being utterly destructive to the soul, as they once were considered. The sin picture has become quite abstract, leaving a lot of room for each one's private interpretation. The fear of God is waning, and sin is not exceeding sinful.

The net result is that we may sing with less true feeling, "O what a Saviour,

O hallelujah, His heart was broken on Calvary; His hands were nail-scarred, His side was riven, He gave His life-blood for even me" (What a Saviour, by Marvin P. Dalton). One wonders if we would be willing to die for Jesus and the faith if we should see sin and its consequences as ambiguous.

Christ came not to minimize sin and make it "easier" for man. He came to deliver us from sin's bondage—He came to save us from sin. He brought salvation. Heaven views sin as death and spiritual darkness, the extension, by proxy, of Lucifer's initial rebellion against God. The divine strategy was not to placate sin but to strike at the very core of the matter. First by His teaching and perfect life, then by His atoning suffering and death, Christ entered into the "strong man's house" and bound him. Not stopping there, He spoiled the strong man's "goods" (Matthew 12:29). The joyful sound of grace and victory sounded forth.

Ours is not a watered-down gospel. What a Saviour—what a gospel!

Much of the weakness among Christians is only a state of mind, and too often it is used as a crutch for unwillingness. That which one is willing for is much easier done than simply to be submissive. To do good, one must be directed by the mind as well as the heart."

—Selected Editorial Courtesy *The Messenger of Truth Gospel Publishers Kansas*



ASSURANCE OF SALVATION

Assurance, as being considered here, is to confirm and give confidence to being saved. This is generally thought of as an experience during conversion. Some experiences are related to the physical while others are related to the spiritual. Many Christians are relying on experiences and confirmation and guidance; they are praying for experiences to edify and encourage them in their Christian life.

Spiritual experiences are really not a source of life, but they are believed by many to be a proof that they are in the favor of God. They believe that if experiences are not made occasionally, it is a sign of a lukewarm or even a cold condition.

That many are experience-minded is seen in many Christian writings, as well as public testimonies. The church paper seems to bring them out more than daily conversation. It is also standard that converts, or those asking for

baptism and church membership, tell of a conversion experience.

It seems that a growing number of young converts are troubled because they do not have the experience they believe it will take to assure their salvation. Has the church raised an image that is not required by Scripture?

The conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus (John 3:1-21) deals directly with becoming a Christian—being born again of water and Spirit. The new birth is not a product of man, but it is an act of God upon the heart, a work that gives one a change of attitude, affection, and desire. The change is a complete one, not saying, however, that he will never sin again. The new birth is not dependent upon joining a church or upon the observance of ceremonies. Neither is one justified by an experience, but one is justified on faith in Christ's accomplished work on the cross. When one completely surrenders to God and entirely trusts in Jesus as Savior, the Holy Ghost gives him a new nature. This new nature is necessary; for the old nature is enmity against God.

It is through the Holy Spirit that man becomes convinced about his sins. It is through the Holy Spirit that such a one is directed to Christ as the One who will forgive. And it is through the Holy Spirit that man becomes aware of sins forgiven and of being a child of God. This awareness is an assurance of peace and, in turn, produces joy in the heart.

Review the recorded conversations of the New Testament and see how few refer to the type of experience some are seeking today. Paul's conversion was very dramatic, but what particular part of it would one take as evidence that he was now a Christian? There is no personal statement or testimony of sins forgiven, of peace in his heart, or of joy in his life. However, no one doubts his conversion. The account in Acts 16:25-34 is also a thrilling one, where in a very pronounced way the jailor and his house were saved and baptized in a course of hours. But again, there is no recorded testimony of sins forgiven and peace. They believed on the Lord Jesus Christ.

While Paul was preaching outside the city of Thyatira, a woman named Lydia believed the gospel. She and her house were baptized. All this is recorded without comment about an experience. She believed what Paul preached. Think of the three thousand at Pentecost as giving testimony through an experience of conversion! Those who gladly received the word were baptized in the name of the Lord.

Sometimes today the convert is pressed for an experience: "Do you have a day, a spot, an occasion where you believe the Lord forgave you and ac-

cepted you as His child, where peace and joy came into your heart?"

Yes, some are definite on when and where, but not everyone is. Because some can and others cannot, it frustrates those who cannot. They believe to have made necessary corrections; they have prayed for forgiveness, promising to love and serve God all their days, but they have no particular assurance of being born again. They hear and read experiences of some others and have come to accept experiences as a norm, and when it doesn't come, they are perplexed.

The conviction of being a sinner creates a burden in the heart. The burden is because of sin on the heart. This causes condemnation and a fear of being lost and separated from God in eternity. Moved by this fear and unrest, a sinner seeks forgiveness through Christ. He approaches Jesus repenting, asking forgiveness, and pledging himself to the Lord completely. Upon this, forgiveness is received, the burden is lifted, and the condemnation is gone. Along with this, the attitudes, affections, and desires are changed. There is a mind to deny self, the world, and all evil. For this change, there is only one explanation: old things are gone, and new things have come forth, proving that a new creature in Christ Jesus is born. This is salvation and the proof of it.

The most important point is not a pointed experience but a change in one's attitudes, affection, and desires. The details may not be clear, but "one thing I know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see" (John 9:25).

Salvation is by faith in Jesus Christ, believing His promise that whosoever will come to Him, He will in no wise cast away but will honor his request to forgive and receive him as His child. When this promise is truly accepted in the heart without a reserve, then comes a feeling of peace with God, and joy springs forth as a result. Peace and joy are not the source of salvation but are the fruits of it by faith.

The change of attitude, affections, and desires is in itself an experience that man alone does not develop. This is the grace of God bestowed only upon His children. To ask and see an assurance when the requirements are met is casting a shadow upon faith in the promises of God.

Brother Reuben Koehn (1907-1995)



A CAKE NOT TURNED – HALF BAKED CHRISTIANS

"Ephraim, he hath mixed himself among the people; Ephraim is a cake not turned" Hosea 7:8

The mental picture that this verse provokes should be quite clear. God was telling the tribe of Ephraim that they were not true through and through to Him. Their doings did not match their heritage in Jacob and their experience at Mt. Sinai, which were well known to the nations of that region.

This tribe of Jacob's family was failing to keep the separation from other peoples like God had commanded. Israel was to be a people that would "dwell alone," and "not be reckoned among the nations" (Numbers 23:9). Having a distinct outlook, goal, and creed, they would not be like nations around them. They were to be separated unto the Lord as His peculiar possession. "Israel was holiness unto the Lord" (Jeremiah 2:3). All this was for the purpose of furthering redemption's plan and God's honor and glory. In the face of this divine purpose and calling, Ephraim was sending a mixed signal.

Even though "mixed" among the people, the Ephraimites, most likely, still had a certain identity with greater national Israel. Other people knew them to be children of Jacob, espoused unto God at the burning Mount in Arabia. It was this very knowledge among the nations that made their shortcomings troubling to God. Their inconsistencies caused God to call them "a cake not turned." On one side, they had a profession of being the favored people of Jehovah. That was the truth. But on the other side, that of practice and demonstration of God's will and purpose, they were deficient. These two aspects comprised a discrepancy, even a contradiction.

Leaving aside for a moment the possible reactions such a condition tends to cause in men, let us first focus on the most important consideration: How does God feel about such a state?

Being like a cake baked only on one side is similar to the situation of the church at Laodicea. To them the Lord said, I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth" (Revelation 3:1-15-16).

Jesus once spoke a parable with a similarly strong import. That parable was about the nobleman who planted a vineyard and let it out to husbandmen. In due time, he sent servants to them to collect his just due. The nobleman was always rebuffed, and he finally sent his very own son, thinking

they would surely reverence him. But him they slew, with the thought of appropriating the vineyard to themselves. Jesus made the point that the nobleman would destroy those unfaithful husbandmen and rent out the vineyard to others. The people apparently caught what He was implying, and their reaction was, "God forbid" (Luke 20:9-18). The truth registered in their minds, but there was no change of course. They, too, were baked on one side but still cool and unheeding on the other.

Ephraim's condition millenniums ago is Christendom's problem today. It sounds forth the claims of the gospel of Jesus Christ: "Jesus is the answer! Christ has power to heal society's ills!" Furthermore, Western civilization is generally acknowledged to be founded on Judeo-Christian ethics. All this is good—the cake is, in some respects, baked on one side. But unless the cake is turned and the power of divine truth produces that which is professed, what shall the world say?

It is to be feared that, in the so-called Christian setting of North America (*and most western nations*) humanism, materialism, and striving to satisfy the lusts of the eye and the flesh indicate a cake not turned. Such a "cake" is not palatable to the minds and hearts of men. Solomon said, "Dead flies cause the ointment of the apothecary to send forth a stinking savour: so doth a little folly him that is in reputation for wisdom and honour" (Ecclesiastes 10:1). One can understand that claiming to follow Christ but not living His teaching doesn't make sense to a world steeped in unbelief and false religions.

What may be learned today from Ephraim's condition? Perhaps the paramount message is that Christians must be sincere and consistent, true to their divine calling. They must be genuine, showing forth the love of God as they live for Jesus. Whenever we fail in this, we disappoint the Lord and frustrate the grace of God (Galatians 2:21). This is the number one consideration. And a "cake not turned" has such serious consequences. The spirit realm is agitated in these last days, and no opportunity to charge and oppose the truth because of discrepancies is missed. There are many critics who are quick to note any irregularities and take occasion to speak against the faith. For this reason, the Scriptures exhort us to so behave and do "that the word of God be not blasphemed" (Titus 2:5).

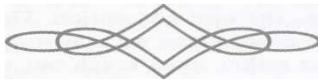
The true faith is unique in its doctrine and power to save, deliver, and keep those who believe in Christ. When people give heed by the Spirit to God's Word, the "cake" is baked on both sides. This means that the spirit one

manifests and his living of the doctrine is consistent throughout. That is true religion. It all ties together and makes "sense." Without any reservation, we say there is no religion like it. This is the only faith that saves, keeps, and satisfies.

Of course, not everyone will agree with the belief of a true Christian. But reasonable people will not gainsay sincerity and consistency and the love of God in the heart. There are those tenets of the faith that are particularly offensive to the flesh, such as, church discipline and avoiding the apostates. Considering these areas and others, it is especially important that brothers and sisters be genuine, consistent, and "abstain from all appearance of evil" (1 Thessalonians 5:22). A circumspect life often takes the accusations out of an offended person's mouth.

With the welfare of the souls of men in mind, the spirit of carefulness and sacrifice indicates a "cake" that is turned and pleasing to God and generally accepted of men.

"We go to Jesus because He has the words of eternal life. When our lamp of life is extinguished and the new dawn breaks forth, Heaven shall be the reward, all because we came to Jesus and found our all in Him."



NONCONFORMITY

Nonconformity to the world is one of the most rejected and neglected doctrines of the Word. There is an idea of man that teaches that right and wrong are relative prevailing standards and mores. This has blurred the lines between Christian discipleship and worldliness to the point that, in nominal Christianity, it is superfluous to speak of "the world." Nevertheless, nonconformity is one of the most soundly scriptural tenets of the true faith, and the church must teach and practice it to remain on a solid ground. One scripture, among many others, suffices as a summation of what follows: "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind" Romans 12:1-2

The doctrine of nonconformity deals with the heart's affection and the expression thereof. The nonconformed Christian's heart is completely at home in the kingdom of God and is fully satisfied there. In contrast, the heart of the worldly-minded believer has, to one degree or another, transferred from the kingdom of Jesus Christ into the realm of the world. How many professors of the name of Christ consider themselves to be in the kingdom by virtue of being baptized and having their names on the church roll but are spiritually weak or dead because their hearts are not where the profession is?

Jesus' teaching clearly defines the world. To many people today, the term world is only understood as in the sense of John 3:16: "For God so loved the world...", meaning the whole of the vast realm of the lost souls of men. But Jesus also taught of a "world" that is the sphere of Satan's rule among men. In the following quotation, Jesus identifies the existence of this system within the physical world: "If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you" (John 15:1-19). Christ equates the devil and this "world" by using the pronoun his in verse 19. This world is the possession of the evil one.

Within this evil realm, Satan rules by appealing to the inherent lusts of man and by winning the affection of a person's heart. The devil is too shrewd to demand that men openly worship him, but he accomplishes the same end by causing people to lust after the things of the world (1 John 2:15,16). Working much like David's son Absalom did, Satan makes his ways seem so right and reasonable by appealing to the flesh. "And on this manner did Absalom to all Israel that came to the king for judgment: so Absalom stole the hearts of the men of Israel" (2 Samuel 15:6). Worldliness, in simple terms, is stolen affection—affection that belongs to God.

One cannot speak of nonconformity without considering coming out from the world and being separated unto God (2 Corinthians 6:17). God's insistence on a separated people is from the beginning and has its roots in His very nature. He has espoused a people to be His Son's chosen bride, and Christ is jealous of this people. Because of His love for His bride, He is

"apprehensive of the loss of exclusive devotion" and "zealously vigilant" of her. When God gave the Ten Commandments, He said, "Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them [other gods], nor serve them: for I the Lord thy God am a jealous God" (Exodus 20:5).

Later, as Moses renewed the covenant with Israel, he warned them: "Take heed to thyself, lest thou make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land whither thou goest, lest it be for a snare in the midst of thee: But ye shall destroy their altars, break their images, and cut down their groves: For thou shalt worship no other god: for the Lord, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God" (Exodus 34:12-14).

Let us remember that it is God loving His people and tenderly winning their affection that causes His jealousy. God's jealousy is not hurtful or born out of mistrust, but it comes from intense love, having His honor and glory (rightly so) and the happiness of His people in mind.

In Old Testament terminology, the above verses and accounts of an earlier dispensation contain the pattern for a nonconformed Christian. Too many Christians are allowing some of the inhabitants of the world to remain in their hearts. "The dividing line between the Christian and the worldling is where the choice is made between walking after the Spirit and walking after the flesh ... But the moment that pride, lust, vanity, egotism, etc., enter to influence decisions, you reach a line that separates the worldling who walks after the flesh from the Christian who walks after the Spirit" (Doctrines of the Bible, by Daniel Kauffman). It is sad to see youth and adults alike bowing down to the profane altars and images of the world and there sacrifice Biblical principles for a little fleshly satisfaction.

God is reasonable (Isaiah 1:18). Yet who would dare say that a young groom was unreasonable to expect all of his bride's affection? And the young bride would not think of doing and taking to herself such things that would even hint of another love. A popular argument says that "things" should not be emphasized because it's the condition of the heart that counts. There is much truth in this view, but Jesus did say, "... that which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God" (Luke 16:15). Furthermore, it must be admitted that an element of truth, when taken out of context, can become an accessory of a larger scheme of untruth.

The practical application of the doctrine of nonconformity will be lost if it is applied to a vague definition of the heart.

How does one explain Jesus' condemnation of vain and empty speech in Matthew 12:34-37 if that which is seen and heard outwardly has no relevance to the heart? Jesus' audience that day could have also retorted, "But it's the heart that counts." The truth is that the heart of man is a very real entity, and what is felt and manifested visibly is a sure indication of what the heart contains.

The heart that is at home in the Kingdom of Jesus Christ will respect the jealousy of God and not reach out for the "things that are in the world" (1 John 2:15).

(Reprinted by permission from Vol. 84, No. 7 The Messenger of Truth, Gospel Publishers Kansas upon a brother's request; slightly edited and amended.)



Morning Prayer

Each day I turn my heart to Thee
And bring my morning prayer
I tell Thee all my problems
And cast on Thee my care.

I cannot heal the heartache
Or others' burdens bear
But I know God can and will
Solve all their grief and care.

Through all my nights You have kept me
While I sleep unmindfully
Of Thy great power and wisdom
That watches over me.

*Gertrude Grace Sanborn 1904-1988
Bible for Today Press*

Compiled & Edited by: J van Loon

E-mail: shimara2@iprimus.com.au

Web: www.anabaptistmennonites.net