

THE AUSTRALIAN ANABAPTIST

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

Vol. 8 No. 10 – OCTOBER 2011



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 Mennonite Perspective

From The Editor's Desk.

Change.

A word that evokes many different thoughts and is applicable to many if not all circumstances of life.

Last month's "Across the Pulpit" focused on dealing with regrets and in this issue "Across the Pulpit" focuses on those things that we cannot change and some that we can.

For the new Christian the change is from a conscience burdened by the guilt of sin to freedom in Christ, for some the conversion experience is dramatic not only in their own experience but also in the experience of others, for some the conversion experience is a more gentler drawn out process of gradual changes in outlook and lifestyle. Scripture has no fixed rule, apart from baptism, as to how each sinner publicly expresses that conversion experience other than that it produces a moral conversion, a changed way of thinking and living which is discernible to all who know them.

As life goes on and our Christian walk continues we find that there are many areas of our life that still need changing even after our initial conversion experience.

Jesus Christ calls us to be perfect even as our Father in heaven is, Matthew 5:48, and that is a lifelong task, a task that demands continual change within us. Romans 12:2 calls us to be transformed by the renewing of our mind, again a lifelong process of change.

Change begins in the mind, change begins with a determination to be different to what we are now, and change when applied will show up or express itself outwardly.

If there is no renewal or change in the mind and even though we may change the outward expression through dress or relocation to another area that physical change is of little value and is generally of short duration.

Many who have dressed in what they professed to be a Christian manner led lives that fell far short of God's requirements. There was change but not in the inward man which Scripture requires to be renewed - changed day by day. 2 Corinthians 4:6.

We also need to accept the reality that none of us will ever arrive at full perfection until we are in the presence of our Risen Saviour who has made provision for us to sit in heavenly places in Him. Ephesians 2:6.

J.v.L



"Coping with Things We Cannot Change"

Bro. Earle Zimmerman,

Decker Lake Mennonite Church 2010

I'm going to be looking at the account in John chapter 5 that took place at the pool of Bethesda when Jesus came there and met this man that was handicapped, incapacitated, and unable to get around and Jesus made a change in his life.

Coping with things that we cannot change.

The implication of the title is that in life we might experience some things that we don't like and we would really like to change them but we cannot. Some of those situations and some of those conditions are things that we may bring on ourselves but there are probably many of them that we experience that are beyond our control.

This man we are looking at here that was at the pool of Bethesda was obviously not there because he loved it there, there was no other place that he would rather be but there, he was in a situation that was absolutely beyond his control.

I would like to read the first 16 verses of John chapter 5: *John 5:1-16*:

¹ After this there was a feast of the Jews; and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. ² Now there is at Jerusalem by the sheep *market* a pool, which is called in the Hebrew tongue Bethesda, having five porches. ³ In these lay a great multitude of impotent folk, of blind, halt, withered, waiting for the moving of the water. ⁴ For an angel went down at a certain season into the pool, and troubled the water: whosoever then first after the troubling of the water stepped in was made whole of whatsoever disease he had. ⁵ And a certain man was there, which had an infirmity thirty and eight years. ⁶ When Jesus saw him lie, and knew that he had been now a long time *in that case*, he saith unto him, Wilt thou be made whole? ⁷ The impotent man answered him, Sir, I have no man, when the water is troubled, to put me into the pool: but while I am coming, another steppeth down before me. ⁸ Jesus saith unto him, Rise, take up thy bed, and walk. ⁹ And immediately the man was made whole, and took up his bed, and walked: and on the same day

was the sabbath. ¹⁰ The Jews therefore said unto him that was cured, It is the sabbath day: it is not lawful for thee to carry *thy* bed. ¹¹ He answered them, He that made me whole, the same said unto me, Take up thy bed, and walk. ¹² Then asked they him, What man is that which said unto thee, Take up thy bed, and walk? ¹³ And he that was healed wist not who it was: for Jesus had conveyed himself away, a multitude being in *that* place. ¹⁴ Afterward Jesus findeth him in the temple, and said unto him, Behold, thou art made whole: sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee. ¹⁵ The man departed, and told the Jews that it was Jesus, which had made him whole. ¹⁶ And therefore did the Jews persecute Jesus, and sought to slay him, because he had done these things on the sabbath day."

Now you might wonder is this really a subject that fits into revival meetings?

Well a subject like this may not be one that is directly calling individuals to yield their heart to the Lord but the revival meeting is also for those of us who know the Lord and we know that learning to cope, to deal with the reverses in life does call for a resignation on our part and so I believe that it does fit. If there is anything that we can benefit from so that we can draw closer to the Lord well that is the intent of these meetings and so is coping with things that we cannot change.

There are many individuals who go through life and they become bitter because of circumstances in life. They don't become better but they become bitter and it is important that we learn to trust the Lord, put our trust in Him. This account of the man that was lying there, he was in a helpless situation, but he experienced the healing of the great Master healer, Jesus Christ.

Now I would like to look at a couple of verses in second Corinthians, we have Paul speaking, he is reflecting on the thorn of the flesh that he had. **2 Corinthians 12:7-9** ⁷"And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure. ⁸ For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. ⁹ And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength

is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me."

Now the Apostle Paul also had a difficulty and it says that he asked the Lord three times to take it away but he was told: My grace is sufficient for thee.

And so we are looking at these two accounts, the one experienced a miraculous deliverance and the other one experienced the grace that he needed to go through the circumstances.

It is natural that when we do face difficulties we always like to take would we consider the most comfortable road, the easy way, and sometimes the Lord does heal like this impotent man was, but probably in many of our lives experiences we might have circumstances that we would like to be different but that we must look at it like Paul did where he said: My grace is sufficient for thee.

We have the account of Jesus in the garden where it says that He prayed three times that God would take this away from Him, nevertheless not what I wilt but what thou wilt. And so Jesus needed to appeal to God for the strength three times, why surely He doesn't mind if we do it multiple times also!

A number of years ago we had the opportunity to visit a lady in Warrensburg Missouri, she was a woman of Russian Mennonite descent, she was suffering with Lou Gehrig's disease and as I understand that is a disease where the muscles become weaker and weaker and after a bit you can no longer do anything for yourself. In writing about her condition and what she was looking ahead as to what would eventually develop she made a statement she said: "Suffering is inevitable but misery is optional." Suffering is inevitable, you cannot avoid it, but misery is optional.

In other words one thing we cannot help but the other we can. We can't help the things that might come to us in our life but our response to those things is in our control. Now I realise saying that little phrase "Suffering is inevitable but misery is optional" it intrigued me when I heard it, it was interesting, it sounds good and I believe it is good but like some other things

it is probably harder to get a hold of it in your own heart and life, in your own feelings that is usually much harder than saying it, but I believe there is a lesson there that is important for us to learn.

When we meet individual sometimes we might ask them: “How are you doing?” And recently in the *Living Waters* there was a story in there about an individual that was asked: “Well how are you doing?” His response was: “Better than yesterday!”

Well it is good to have that kind of an outlook in life, better than yesterday. But this man that was down there by that pool I don't know that he would have felt like saying, Better than yesterday; because today is just like yesterday, I had nobody to put me into the water.

There are a number of questions that I would have about that story of the man at the pool of Bethesda, I don't understand how this all went but it does seem like there were miracles taking place on occasions and he was looking for that, he was hoping that he would be one that would experience that divine healing. Well he experienced divine healing but not in the way that he was expecting.

Now how we cope with the difficulties of life depends on how we think, our attitudes. We are prone to adopt the attitude of others sometimes, maybe we are a little bit like some lizards, chameleons, which change to the colour of the plant that they are sitting on, and maybe we have a tendency of being that way. Well we want to have that kind of response to the various circumstances of life where we are putting our trust in the Lord and are looking to Him to guide us and to undergird us with, as I said, by giving us the grace that we need.

Now what are some things that we can change? We will be looking at some more details of this account in a little bit. We are thinking about coping with things that we cannot change.

First I would like to look at some things that we can change.

What are some of these things?

Well one of the things that we can change is our attitude.

If we are not thinking right on something which can change our attitude, the older we get it seems like the more difficult it is to make changes and that is why the Scriptures admonish us that you are to remember your Creator in days of your youth (*Ecclesiastes 12:1*) because as you get older it is not as easy to change and so one of the things that we can change is our attitude.

An example is in parents disciplining children, sometimes the children's actions need correction and at other times their attitude might need some correction and so our attitude is one of the things that we can change.

Another thing that we can change is our direction of travel, our actions.

Whilst we are influenced by other individuals we cannot and should not place the responsibility on others for our actions. Sometimes we try to blame it on parents and take the attitude: Well those young people there they were a bad example to my children; or: My boy did this because the others did it.

Well there is a place of influence but we have to take personal responsibility for our own actions and if we see that we are not doing something right we can make that change, we need to.

The power of God is able to do that for us, working in us, *1 Corinthians 6:9-11*, Before that it lists a catalogue of things that it seems that people were involved in and then it says: "And such were some of you but you are washed, but you are sanctified, you are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God" and so by the power of God actions can be changed.

Well another thing that we can change might be our appearance.

Sometimes people do that, they make some drastic changes in their own appearance, it might be through their clothes or how they present themselves, those are some things that you can change. You can also change where you live and where you work and where you go to church, there are things that are in our control but now I would like to look at some things that we cannot change.

Again the title "Coping with things that we cannot change" those are the most difficult; those are the ones we struggle with. What are some of those?

One of the things that we cannot change is who we are.

Our own personality, who I am as an individual, I cannot change that. The colour of our skin, our age, you can't help that or when or where you were born, it is totally beyond your control. Some say: What I wouldn't give to be 18! or whatever else age they might say. Well you can make those kind of comments but there is absolutely no way that you can put time in reverse and be any other age, and you can't put it ahead either, but for many of us probably if we would say: Which way would you want to go, ahead a bit or back? Well many would say: Let's back up a bit.

Well we can't do that.

We cannot change our gender, you were born a boy or a girl, and you cannot change that.

You cannot change who your parents are or who they were.

You cannot change your physical make up, it might be some difficulties, some disabilities, it might be handicaps, there are things that that individuals would very likely change if they could, but those are things that we cannot change, it is beyond our control.

Another thing that we cannot change is yesterday or our past.

And I am sure that there are some here, probably all of us, that may have some things in the past that if we could change certain things we would say, Yes, I would like to change that.

But we cannot do that.

Another thing that we cannot change is the law of sowing and reaping.

The law of sowing and reaping says that whatsoever a man sows that shall he reap. Now there are some things that conversion might change on some of those things but the poor choices of the past that might have resulted in some of the children losing their way and oh, what you wouldn't give to change that. But we cannot change yesterday, we cannot change the past, we cannot change the law of sowing and reaping. *Galatians 6:7*

We cannot change words that are spoken.

Words that have been spoken have been likened to the tiny feathers of a duck that you throw in the wind and it takes them far and wide and you cannot gather them together again.

Another thing that we cannot change is that we cannot change other people.

Sometimes we think: Now if this brother or sister would change this and this and this then I could get along with them!

Well you probably have learned or at least you should learn that other people are not going to change just because you think they ought to. The only reason other people will change is that they feel the need for it and then make that change and so we cannot change other people, we can influence them and with children we can teach and train them but just by our own will we cannot change other individuals.

Another thing we cannot change is we cannot add more hours to the day.

Sometimes we would like it if a day would have 28 or 30 hours or 36 hours. Well a day will only have 24 hours in it, we cannot change that and so we need to adjust our schedule so that it blends in with the 24 hours that God established, and if we keep on fighting against that we will probably get ourselves burned-out.

Well another thing that we cannot change is that we cannot change the weather.

We cannot do that.

The story is told a couple of men that were talking one day, it was raining, it was cold and damp, the one man said: "Oh it is miserable out there!" Well the other one studied a little and he said: "Well it is cold out there, it is damp but you are the one that is miserable."

We cannot change the weather.

Again the need for us is for each one of us to adapt, and adjust our own attitudes, not expect everything to blend in to our situation but to find rest in the circumstances in which we find ourselves.

Another thing that we cannot change is that we cannot change the Bible. We cannot do that. The Scripture, the Bible is established for ever and it will not change.

Now in the last part of the message I would like to look at coping with things that we cannot change.

How do we cope with things that we cannot change?

There may be people here with physical ailments, physical handicaps, there may be those that find yourselves bereft of companionship, maybe those that may not have parents or at least parents like we would like to have, how do we cope with these things?

Well the first answer that I would have for that is that we cope with faith in God.

Now in the Scripture text it doesn't say anywhere that this man had faith in God, however his faith in Jesus was evidenced by his obedience to His command. Jesus told him rise up. Now if he didn't believe that there was any hope there he could have stayed laying there and said: "Well you don't know what you're saying!" But he exercised faith in Jesus' command and His words by obeying what He said and so we can prove our faith in Christ when we obey His Word.

And so we cope with things that we cannot change when we have faith in God, casting all your care upon him for he careth for you. *1 Peter 5:7*.

We can call on the One that can do something about our circumstances. We believe that God knows and God cares and so we have our faith in Him.

We also cope with things that we cannot change by being fervent in prayer. In James it says the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much. *James 5:16*.

We have the motto sometimes in our homes: Prayer changes things. Well it does, it can change things, it can also help to change attitudes, but be fervent in prayer.

We cope with things that we cannot change by exercising humble submission to the all wise providence of God not by complaining.

In our Sunday school lessons right now we are studying about the children of Israel how that they went into the wilderness and then they had a need and then instead of simply presenting this need to Moses they started complaining and pointing fingers, developing bitter attitudes. God was interested in helping them, He was interested in meeting their needs, He was interested in giving them what they stood in need of, and I guess it is the

mercy of the Lord that in spite of their complaining He reached out to them.

We cope with things we cannot change in humble submission to God.

We also cope with things that we cannot change with a reasonable acceptance of the circumstances.

Now here Jesus asked him: Would you like to be healed? And the man said: I don't have anybody to help me to the water.

It doesn't seem like he had developed a bitter attitude, at least I don't gather that there was a spirit, an attitude of bitterness here, but it does seem like he was just saying you know: What can I do?

I'm not sure but it seems like he would have at least developed a reasonable amount of contentment, not that he was satisfied staying this way if there is any hope for him, but at least he wasn't all engrossed in bitterness. The Apostle Paul said most gladly therefore he was ready to suffer. (*2 Corinthians 12:9*). In *Philippians 4:11* Paul said I have learned that in whatsoever state I am therein to be content.

Don't become bitter over these situations that we cannot change.

Another comment that this lady in Warrensburg gave, she said: "I have had great joy and reward in my life and if I did not question might right to that joy in life why should I question the opposite?"

We take it for granted that the pleasantries of life that they are owed to us but really they are not. Don't become bitter but rather accept those things that you cannot change.

How do we cope with things that we cannot change?

Well we do that by realising that the difficulties, the disabilities, the disease, whatever the circumstances are that they are just for time, they are not for eternity. When we are serving the Lord, when He is our master then we can be assured that these things are just for time.

We cope with things that we cannot change by creating a pleasant atmosphere for those whom our life touches.

In verse seven the impotent man answered Him: Sir I have no man when the water is troubled to put me in the pool. *John 5:7*

It seems like his answer was very respectable to Jesus, even though he didn't know what was going to happen. Sometimes individuals that are experiencing difficulties in life and then when someone might try to reach out to them they respond in bitterness or accuse them of trying to be nosy or trying to run their life, they develop a critical attitudes. Well we should create a pleasant atmosphere for those whom my life touches, we should be an encouragement by being cheerful and you probably have experienced that already where you might have gone to visit someone that was ill, someone that was having difficulties and instead of you feeling like you cheered them up they seem to have cheered you up and they were the one having difficulties.

Well isn't that how it should be? You know there are times when we need encouragement but let's be interested and careful that in situations that are not like we would like them to be that in spite of those circumstances we still want to be an encouragement and help to others. Allow God to receive the glory that He is looking for.

In verse 14 Jesus found the man in the temple: He findeth him in the temple. And it seems like this man had the right concept, he had the right attitude, he had experienced a healing and now he is giving God the glory. Let your thanksgiving be spontaneous. *John 5:14*

A little poem;
 If this bit of earth may be stronger for the strength I bring,
 Sweeter for the songs I sing,
 Happier for the path I tread, lighter for the light I shed;
 Richer for the gifts I give, purer for the life I live;
 Nobler for the death I die, not in vain have I been I.

May we be encouraged in the circumstances of life that come our way that we would not become bitter and overcome with sorrow but learn to put our trust, our confidence in the One that knows our lives and knows our days.

In a message like this it is probable that we can recognise areas in our own life that maybe we haven't responded the way we should have but through trust in the Lord and inspiration that we receive from the Scripture we can stand up and look ahead and do God's will.

If you have been struggling and living in defeat know that there is hope available for you.

Only trust Him.

We trust Him for our salvation, we trust Him for our daily sustenance as well.

May we go forth and receive inspiration and encouragement that in all these circumstances of life that may be ever so painful that we learn to put our trust in Him.

Proverbs 24:10: If thou faint in the day of adversity thy strength is small.

2 Corinthians 12:9, God told Paul: My grace is sufficient for thee.



DECIPHERING OPPORTUNITIES

To succeed in supporting ourselves and our families in everyday life depends a lot on seizing and redeeming opportunities. Some opportunities present themselves, other times we find them by diligent searching, by seeking counsel, and sometimes even by trial and error. There have been times in the past when job and business opportunities, and money, seemed to be as scarce as hen's teeth. Currently, here in North America there are usually lots of varied opportunities that come our way.

With opportunities come decision-making requirements. There are opportunities for work, for business, and for profit in many forms. Some are honorable, and some are not. It happens occasionally that a complacent American says, "There is nothing to do," and a foreigner will say, "Opportunity is everywhere!" The state of mind can make all the difference. My father told me that generally if a person is willing to work, he will have opportunity for a job.

Some people fail to see opportunity, and others may see far more than they can do. What some may see as an insurmountable problem, another may see as a golden opportunity. Some may not have sufficient interest in

finding the necessary opportunities, and others can hardly restrain themselves from trying to take on every opportunity they see. Some may ignore evident opportunity (perhaps unconsciously), seeking excuse for themselves and their circumstances. Others imagine unrealistic opportunities or try to force doors that are not open to them or that involve things not spiritually ethical.

So how can a Christian sort out or prove what is acceptable to God and what is not? Can the pessimist and the over-optimist both tend toward becoming a God-conscious realist? A big portion of the answer can be found in Romans 12:1-2: "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, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God."

Some of the difference in perception of opportunity is talent and temperament related. Therefore, not all opportunity is equally suitable for all people. For some it will be like Jesus said, "For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more" Luke 12:48.

Circumstances certainly enter the picture. But from a Christian standpoint, just because one sees a wide-open opportunity, that by itself is not a "go-for-it" signal from the Lord. Being able to afford it is not necessarily acceptable sanction to move ahead, nor does the ability to borrow the funds prove anything either. Sometimes we need to think with the apostle Paul: "All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any" 1 Corinthians 6:12.

Often timing or age makes a big difference whether one should or should not do something. "To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven ... A time to get, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to cast away" Ecclesiastes 3:1-8.

Sometimes people are shown an opportunity but refuse to "go for it." The Israelites are an example of this when the message was to "go in and possess the land." But they chose to pay attention to the pessimistic spies and rebelliously concluded, "We can't do it!" This, in effect, took away their opportunity. Then they decided, "Oh, yes, we will" but they found out that the window of opportunity had passed them by. They needed to wait for

another occasion of God's timing. So it is yet today, both spiritually and naturally. Opportunity may come and go, and our attitudes, motives, and responses can greatly affect the conditions of our opportunities.

When we are in consideration of opportunities, it is spiritually healthy to think about the encouragement in Philippians 2:4, "Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others." Often our decisions and actions will have an effect on our families and others around us.

According to the scripture in Matthew 25:14-30, our faithfulness in discerning and redeeming the "good for us" opportunities at hand, whether great or small, can have a lot of effect on our future. Normally greater opportunities do not come our way if we are not willing to carry out the small ones committed to us.

On the other hand, it appears in history that many potentially fruitful persons have ended up with their lives and occupations in disarray because they tried to redeem too many opportunities, thereby not being successful at any of them. This may be one example of being "overcharged with the cares of this life."

And should we be ever so successful in the things of this life, perhaps beyond God's blessing, "what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" Mark 8:36-37.

One special opportunity we must not neglect is that of doing good and helping the poor. "For ye have the poor with you always, and whensoever ye will ye may do them good" Mark 14:7. "Trust in the Lord, and do good; so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed" Psalm 37:3.

If many opportunities have come our way and if things have really gone well, consider this: "Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not high-minded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy; That they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate; Laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life" 1 Timothy 6:17-19.

May God help us to properly sort out the opportunities in our path of life.

Brother Luke.



THE HINDERING VEIL

A veil hides from view or obscures vision.

The older generations remember well the "Iron Curtain." That was a much-used term during the decades of strife between the former Soviet Union (Russia) and the Western nations. Rendering understanding between the East and the West virtually impossible, the "Iron Curtain" seemed impenetrable. Similarly, Satan employs a curtain, or veil, that hinders man's understanding of God and the way of salvation.

After being with God on Mount Sinai and seeing His glory, the face of Moses shone, Exodus 33:18-23; 34:29-35. That brightness symbolized the glory that was to be revealed in Christ, 2 Corinthians 3:13-18. The children of Israel could not bear to look upon the brilliance of his skin, so whenever Moses spoke to the people, he put a veil over his face. Sad to say, that "veil" became a permanent fixture for the Jewish nation, with tragic consequences. "But their minds were blinded: for until this day remaineth the same vail untaken away in the reading of the old testament; which vail is done away in Christ" (v. 14).

Moses' veil also typified the state of people's hearts and minds when they persistently reject the will of God. The children of Israel "could not [or would not] stedfastly look to the end of that which is abolished" (v. 13). They knew the Law, but they never saw in it the One whom was the hope of Israel, John 5:39; Luke 24:25-27. Such are the results of obscure vision because of a veil.

The thick veil in the temple that blocked the public's view of the Holy of Holies reminds us that fallen mortal man cannot come into the holy presence of God. But one of the awe-inspiring events accompanying Jesus' death was the rending of that veil from the top to the bottom, Matthew 27:51. Thus God signified that the way into His presence was now open, through the rent veil of Christ's flesh and the sprinkling of His blood on the mercy seat. A penitent sinner finds that, upon believing in Christ Jesus, a veil is removed and he or she can say like Job, "I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee" (Job 42:5).

The centuries of time from approximately A.D. 900 until the Reformation is sometimes referred to as the Dark Ages. It was as though a curtain of spiritual darkness descended upon the world, and the light grew dim. The light of the true faith was severely oppressed, but never vanquished. Due to the political and religious turmoil leading up to and during the Reforma-

tion, the Anabaptist faith began to show itself more and more. It had been there all along, but now the curtain began to lift, and countless men and women saw the light. Unashamed of their faith, thousands died with their eyes fixed on Jesus, like Stephen did Acts 7:56. For them, the veil had been taken away and they "looked up stedfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God" (Acts 7:55).

That period of time was a watershed for the Christian world in general. We who claim roots in the Anabaptist faith look back to that time and confess a common faith with the martyrs. We have believed that their doctrine was scriptural and their faith worthy of following. We see in them clearly the faith of Jesus Christ and the apostles shining brightly, not vaguely as through a veil.

That unveiled faith was brought to the New World beginning in the later 1600s. Despite adversities, opposition, and even persecution, it flourished. One of the first major concerns that arose among the Mennonites in the Colonies was that the church in America might lose her roots of faith. The translation and printing of the Martyr's Mirror at the Ephrata Cloister in Ephrata, Pennsylvania, in 1748-49, was a fruit of that concern. The Colonies were facing impending strife with England, and the early Mennonite leaders did not want any veil of unfaithfulness to the faith to mar the testimony of Jesus.

Several centuries have now passed since that time. The history of the Anabaptist-Mennonite faith in America over the years has occasioned both rejoicing and sadness. Today the larger Mennonite churches have lost the true Anabaptist vision, having incorporated themselves with the worldly way of thinking. That which was once clearly prohibited is now sanctioned, and even championed, in violation of clear Scriptural teaching. The historic opposition to all strife has been largely abandoned and justified. It is as though a thick curtain, a veil, has descended before their eyes, and light is called darkness and darkness is called light.

The renewed religious accent heard in America today is a paradox. There is a part of that which is appreciated. Yet, it bears the hallmark of looking at the truth with a veil in between. Few are willing to look steadfastly into the Scriptures and take the "radical" way of true discipleship. They cannot bear to look upon the brightness of a radical Christianity that means being crucified by the world and unto the world, Galatians 6:14.

We are not exempt from the danger of a veil coming between the truth

and us. The veil we are speaking of spares the flesh, and the flesh naturally appreciates it. The vivid vision of the glory in Christ Jesus, and how that translates into everyday living, is sometimes felt to be too bright for mortal beings. But to mute the prophetic note in preaching and teaching about sin, repentance, and righteousness is part of the fabric of that veil.

The lack of loving truth and a zealous appreciation for the faith of the fathers is part of the veil that Satan would lower before us. We have reasons to pray earnestly that the Mighty God would lift the veil of worldliness and self-centeredness that is obscuring the vision of Calvary.

The hindering veil fosters a form of religion but not the true faith. But it is always taken away when one yields wholly to Christ as Saviour and Lord. What the church needs today, as always, is a fresh relationship with Jesus Christ. Only He can prevent a veil from becoming a permanent fixture in our lives.

"Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free ... If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed" John 8:31-32,36.



The Unpardonable Sin

Clifford Weaver, The Eastern Mennonite Testimony January 2003

Pardon. What a wonderful thing to experience! When God pardons, He forgives, and the debt of sin is no longer charged to our account. To know the sweetness of pardon and then to slowly and surely, but unexplainably, feel the crushing weight of sin once more — that is terrifying.

What is wrong when a Christian sins and takes the steps that the Bible outlines for restoration and forgiveness, yet peace seems to evade him? Has he done something that God is not able to forgive? Has he sinned away the day of grace? Has he committed the unpardonable sin?

The term *unpardonable sin* is not a Biblical term. But the Bible does have something to say about it. We will examine various Bible passages that address this subject.

“Verily I say unto you, All sins shall be forgiven unto the sons of men, and blasphemies wherewith soever they shall blaspheme: but he that shall blaspheme against the Holy Ghost hath never forgiveness, but is in danger of eternal damnation: because they said, He hath an unclean spirit” (Mark 3:28-30).

These words come from the lips of Him who said He came to seek and save the lost. This One who was able to save men and women whom others had cast out as hopeless, here declares that there is an attitude of the human soul which is hopeless! “He . . . hath never forgiveness.” This person has, according to the strong language of Jesus, stepped across the line of no return. What has he done? Let us go to a parallel passage.

“And whosoever shall speak a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him: but unto him that blasphemeth against the Holy Ghost it shall not be forgiven” (Luke 12:10).

Blasphemy is in general the utterance of a presumptuous insult toward God. It is not a careless slip of the tongue. It is not a thoughtless, reckless statement. Blasphemy springs from fully conscious and stubborn hatred against God. Such an utterance, says Jesus, “shall not be forgiven.”

Jesus makes special reference to blaspheming against the Holy Ghost. The Holy Spirit is tender and sensitive. When a person is guilty of blasphemy the Spirit abandons him. He then lives in a state of hardness and utter indifference to spiritual things.

Jesus addressed the Pharisees with similar words in Matthew 12:31-32. These men had already made up their minds about Jesus. Even though they could not deny His miracle-working power (Matthew 12:22-24), they refused with stubborn pride to accept the plain facts. They tried to invent a theory (verse 24) to neutralize the facts. They displayed a persistent, determined, and blind rejection of the Spirit’s demonstration of heavenly power.

In all three accounts that we have noted, Jesus declares the sin against the Spirit to be the worst of all sins. Jesus forgives many who misunderstand Himself, as we can observe in the life of Saul of Tarsus. But the man is perilously near the unpardonable point who — out of malice, a rooted dislike for the good, or selfish preference of wrong because of the advantage it brings — heaps vicious words upon a good man or a good cause. There was no lack of emphasis in Pharisaic comments about Jesus. They hissed out their wicked words at Him, being not heartless but bad hearted.

Thus Jesus uses these Pharisees as an illustration of this terrible sin against the Holy Ghost. They were approaching the point of wilful, personal, and final rejection of the Spirit's testimony by their words which expressed the decision of the heart.

The following Scripture also uses strong wording: "For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift . . . if they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame. For the earth which drinketh in the rain that cometh oft upon it, and bringeth forth herbs meet for them by whom it is dressed, receiveth blessing from God: but that which beareth thorns and briars is rejected, and is nigh unto cursing; whose end is to be burned" (Hebrews 6:4-8).

This person had a relationship with God from which he fell away. He can become guilty of actions and attitudes that make it impossible for him to be restored as a Christian.

"For it is impossible . . . to renew them again unto repentance." Is this impossible on God's part? Or is it impossible on men's part?

It could be either. When considered with the illustration of verses 7 and 8, these verses seem to declare the utter folly of trying to convert the old man. We may plan interviews, preach mighty sermons, carry out careful discipline, and make more rules. But none of these can bring good fruit out of a carnal heart. All the "dressing" man does cannot possibly save the soul unless God has first performed His miracle of grace in the heart.

On the other hand, the writer to the Hebrews tells us that "dressing" is necessary. The Christian is responsible to cultivate spiritual fruit. It is impossible for God to work His good work in the heart that was converted but ceases to exercise itself in the way of discipleship. If he is hindering the process of sanctification in his life, he is stunting his spiritual growth. He has made it impossible for God to save him. He has become a spiritual runt.

By comparing this passage with other Scriptures, we conclude that this sin is unpardonable, not because the grace of God is not sufficient, but because it springs from the heart in which there is no inclination to repentance and faith in Jesus Christ. At whatever point that soul inclines itself to repent, the forgiveness and pardon of God returns. Were this not true, Christ's call to repentance in Revelation 2 and 3 would be a mockery.

But remember it is a foolish thing to presume on the grace of God. Those who plan to get right with God at the eleventh hour, often die at 10:55. (or 10.59)

We will note another Scripture that relates to the subject. “For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries” (Hebrews 10:26-27).

Here is one who deliberately goes against God and against right. He will not listen to counsel (verses 24-25). He spurns the most sacred and precious realities of the Gospel. He despises *scripturally based* time-held and time-proven traditions. When he does that, he renounces all part in spiritual things. He cuts himself off from Christ, his only hope.

Another Scripture that is sometimes misunderstood is “If any man see his brother sin a sin which is not a sin unto death, he shall ask, and he shall give him life for them that sin not unto death. There is a sin unto death: I do not say that he shall pray for it. All unrighteousness is sin: and there is a sin not unto death” (1 John 5:16-17).

John gives two categories of sin: “sin not unto death” and “sin unto death.” The sin is committed by a brother in the church, in full fellowship with Christ and with fellow Christians. John recognizes the potential for failure in the Christian, and he charges other Christians to make it their business to intercede for such as fall into “sin not unto death.”

The “sin unto death” is sin that is preceded by a wicked disposition. It cuts the bond of fellowship with Christ. Whatever breaks that bond is unto death, for apart from Christ there is no life (5:12). While John does not forbid intercession for such sin, he does not enjoin it, for such sin is unforgivable as long as the sinner’s disposition remains hard and impenitent.

So the “sin unto death” is by far the more serious of the two categories of sin. This does not mean that sins “not unto death” will be overlooked by our holy God. When the convicting voice of the Holy Spirit upon our conscience or the reminder of a faithful brother makes us aware of such sin in our lives, we must humbly acknowledge it and repent. This is God’s plan for keeping the stumbling Christian in fellowship with Himself.

In conclusion, we must come to God in His time and on His terms. It is dangerous folly to wait for a more convenient season to repent. God is eager to forgive the penitent heart. The very fear of a penitent man that he

has committed the unpardonable sin is full demonstration that he has not done so.

Human intercession can influence at what point the line of no forgiveness is crossed. Abraham prayed for Lot, Genesis 18:23-33, Moses prayed for Israel, Numbers 14:19-20, and Jesus prayed for those who crucified Him, Luke 23:34.

So pray on! It may keep you and your friend from committing the unpardonable sin.



Meeting God

Great God, in public and private, in sanctuary and home, may my life be steeped in prayer, filled with the spirit of grace and supplication, each prayer perfumed with the incense of atoning blood. Help me, defend me, until from praying ground I pass to the realm of unceasing praise. Urged by my need, invited by Thy promises, called by Thy Spirit, I enter Thy presence, worshipping Thee with godly fear, awed by Thy majesty, greatness, glory, but encouraged by Thy love.

I am all poverty as well as all guilt, having nothing of my own with which to repay Thee, but I bring Jesus to Thee in the arms of faith, pleading His righteousness to offset my iniquities, rejoicing that He will weigh down the scales for me, and satisfy thy justice. I bless Thee that great sin draws out great grace, that, although the least sin deserves infinite punishment because done against an infinite God, yet there is mercy for me, for where guilt is most terrible, there Thy mercy in Christ is most free and deep. Bless me by revealing to me more of His saving merits, by causing Thy goodness to pass before me, by speaking peace to my contrite heart; strengthen me to give Thee no rest until Christ shall reign supreme within me in every thought, word, and deed, in a faith that purifies the heart, overcomes the world, works by love, fastens me to Thee, and ever clings to the cross.

From a collection of "Puritan Prayers"

THE FOLLY OF BEING UNPREPARED

"While they went to buy, the Bridegroom came; and they that were ready went in with Him to the marriage: and the door was shut." **Matthew 25:10.**

THE FOOLISH virgins made five great mistakes.

(1) They made no provision for the continuance of their light. It is not enough merely to have the lamp; it must be lit and maintained, because there is something for the fire to feed on. How many there are who are on fire and in earnest during the first stage of their religious life, but they have made no provision for maintaining the flame which has been kindled by the grace of God. They have lamps, but have neglected to take oil. The oil stands for fellowship with the Lord Jesus, for the grace of the Holy Spirit, for the daily study of the Bible, for the kindling communion of worship with fellow-Christians.

(2) They slept. There was a difference between the sleep of the foolish and that of the wise. There are two kinds of sleep. The one arises from a sense of security and trust. Every preparation has been made; all has been done that could be done, and we resign ourselves deliberately to the care of God. So Peter slept in the prison, before the angel came to deliver him. But there is another kind of sleep. The sleep of the sentry, when the foe is stealing up the pass; of the pilot, when the ship is making for the serried teeth of the rocks; of the nurse, when the patient's life is quivering in the balance. These foolish ones had no right to sleep, when they were so utterly unready to meet the Bridegroom. We must not take things for granted, or say "Peace, peace, when there is no peace!"

(3) They thought they could procure oil from the wise. But the appeal was in vain. Each must bear his own burden of responsibility in the sight of God. We may "buy without money and without price," but each must appropriate the living grace and power of Jesus for himself.

(4) They thought they could get in; "Lord, Lord, open to us!" But the door was irrevocably closed! "How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation?"

(5) They thought that the Bridegroom would recognize them. But He said: "I know you not." Let each ask himself: "Does Jesus know me? Will he recognize me at last?" The only way to be sure, is to kneel at the foot of His Cross until He seals us with the Holy Spirit, and says: "Fear not, for I have redeemed thee; I have called thee by thy name, thou art Mine."

O Lord, we pray that our lives may be lamps to which Thou shalt supply oil. Help us to be burning and shining lights for this dark world.

Obedience.

To obey is better than sacrifice,
The Lord hath said,
Than harken when He commandeth,
Than an offering be made.

All ye who say: “There is naught to do
Since Christ doth save”

Remember what He commands
In the Book He gave,

Remember only doers of the Word
Are blessed,

‘Tis well to hear it and believe,
But to do is best.

F.E.Belden.

Compiled & Edited by: J van Loon

E-mail: shimara2@bigpond.com

Web: www.anabaptistmennonites.org