

THE AUSTRALIAN ANABAPTIST

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

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

Matthew 5:15

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For A Conservative Mennonite Perspective

From The Editor's Desk.**THE WISE USE OF INFLUENCE**

"Ye are the light of the world.... Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven."-- Matthew 5:14-16.

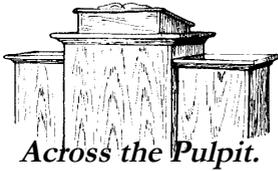
The dictionary defines influence as the power that somebody has to affect other people's thinking or actions. And that I believe is exactly what Jesus wants us to do when He calls us to be a light to those around us but there is one thing that we also need to remember that the source of that light is Jesus Himself - John 1:9 talking of Jesus says, that (He) was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world.

The first circle which we can touch and influence is that of our friends. Our counsel may be sweetness or bitterness, but whatever we do or say, we must see that we are absolutely true and faithful, Proverbs 27:6-9. Sincerity means to be without the wax which the cabinet-maker may put into the cracks of the wood to make it appear sound. It is the true and pure soul that most readily and willingly helps another. Do not be selfish in your friendship, but always give out as much and more than you expect to receive. Love is a tender plant, and needs culture. We must not suppose that it is able to thrive without light and truth.

The second circle of influence is that of our associates. The great world of men may not appreciate our reproduction of the Beatitudes of the Kingdom, but still reproach, persecute, and say all manner of evil falsely; nevertheless, we must continue to bless the world by the silent and gracious influence of holy living. Reviled, we must bless; Persecuted, we must endure; Defamed, we must entreat. We must be as salt to our persecutors and as light to our defamers. It is wonderful how love and consistent, patient, prayerful influence finally prevails.

We are to be as salt; i.e. our consistent holy living will act as antiseptic to arrest evil. We are to be the light of the world. Inconsistency and cowardice are like bushels which are put over the lamp. Let us put all these hindrances away, that the light which is within us may shine out on the dark world.

Grant, we beseech Thee, O God, that our behaviour may be as becometh the Gospel of Christ. May the sweet savour of Christ be in our influence, His light in our face, His love in our hearts. AMEN.



Danger of Obedience Without Conviction

From a message by Brother Lamar Garman

French Creek Mennonite Church 2012

Part 1 of 2

We greet each one in the name of Jesus Christ.

Aren't we so glad this morning that as we looked at the thought in the adult Sunday school lesson we don't need to fear the idea of being deceived, no, we don't need to walk in constant fear of that but yet we need to stay close to the Lord and we need to do what we were singing about; Walk in the light, so shalt thou know; that Fellowship of love the Spirit only can bestow; Who reigns in peace and light above.

We need to be walking in the light of the glorious gospel message. Well we need to be living to the praise and honour of our great God and we need each other's help don't we? Sure we do. That too is why, one of the reasons why we have gathered together on a morning like this to be instructed from the good things of God's word, to be built up and edified in the most holy faith and to be encouraged together to keep on striving for the cause of the gospel.

Open your Bibles now for this morning's message to second Corinthians chapter 3.

I have entitled this message "The Danger of Obedience without Conviction" and we do need constant fortification do we not from God's word to help us find our way. For a text I'd like to read the verses five and six in second Corinthians where it reads like this: "Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves; but our sufficiency *is* of God; ⁶ Who also hath made us able ministers of the new testament; not of the letter, but of the spirit: [now notice this thought] for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life." [2 Corinthians 3:5-6](#).

The danger of obedience without conviction.

I would like for you to consider this illustration as we think of living a Christian life and understanding why we do what we do and having a firm

conviction that this is the right way because it is God's Word, God commands us to live this way.

There is an ancient story of a sentry standing day after day at his post with no apparent reason for his being there.

One day a passer-by asked him why he was standing in that particular place.

I don't know, the sentry replied, I'm just following orders.

The passer-by then went to the captain of the guard and asked him why this sentry was posted in that place.

I don't know, the captain replied, we are just following orders.

This prompted the captain of the guard to pose the question to higher authority;

Why do we post that sentry in that particular spot? he asked the King.

But the King did not know.

So the King summoned his wise men and asked them the question, the answer came back that 100 years before Catherine the Great had planted a rosebush and had ordered a sentry placed there to protect it. The rosebush had been dead for 80 years but this sentry still stood guard.

Now that is an illustration of obedience without conviction or could we say obeying without knowing why or even caring why.

Do you think those sentries were good guards? I don't think they were, they were only in that position because they were being paid to be there.

Spiritually speaking it won't work; there is great danger in obedience without conviction. Now we know, and we will touch that later in the message, that there is a blessing in obedience to the Scriptures, to a scriptural church without understanding the full implications of it, there is blessings in that but for that obedience to last and to prove to be a blessing to ourselves and to the furtherance of God's Kingdom and the longevity of the church we must know why we do what we do and we will have a conviction for it and we must endeavour to grow in our convictions for our Scriptural practices and thus being fully convinced of why we do what we do and why we live how we do.

Well in these verses the Judaizers were being spoken to.

No sooner did the gospel of God's grace begin to spread among the Gentiles then a counterfeit gospel appeared, a mixture of law and grace and wouldn't you agree that in religious circles today there are more counterfeit gospels being promoted than ever before? And we are told that in those last days it will be that way and it hardly matters what a person believes or disbelieves, some church somewhere will accept that person as a member and that is why we are told in the last days perilous times shall come. (2 Timothy 3:1).

What are perilous times?

Well they are dangerous time, dangerous to one's eternal never dying soul and this morning we want to be warned about one of those deceptions, one of those dangers and that is the danger of obedience without conviction.

Well the Judaizers of Paul's day taught that Christ must be proven by keeping Moses' Law, that was one of their beliefs, and their gospel of legalism was very popular, why? Because human nature finds it easy to justify one's self by external expressions rather than evaluating the true condition of the heart.

In other words do you obey the Bible and the authority of the church because you love the Lord, because you have the conviction that it is the right thing to do?

Or do you obey because you feel you have to? Or because someone else expects you?

That is what we want to think about.

What does it mean now to have convictions?

The dictionary that I consulted gave this thinking on the thought of conviction:

"A fixed, firm strong belief that helps one to do right. A belief that is unshakeable and undoubting."

I believe that is a description of conviction which must be coupled with obedience. Notice the coupling that must be, we must have conviction for obedience and obey with conviction.

Maybe some of you have heard me give this illustration before already.

Not too long ago I was speaking with an Amish friend of mine in Lancaster County and he described how he had just been in an accident, he was injured, he was going down the road in his horse and carriage with his wife and a speeding car came up behind them and crashed into the rear corner of the carriage and knocked the one wheel right off and it put the horse into a panic mode, the horse bolted and took off running out of control down the road. The Amish stayed in the carriage and he was trying to get that horse stop, he was pulling on the reins and he said they were heading right for a telephone pole and saw that this was not going to work so he guided the horse off the road away from the telephone pole.

When they dropped down over a little embankment from the road down into a freshly ploughed field that had soft dirt the front end of the carriage dropped down and what he didn't know was that the coupling pole was broken between the horse and the carriage and when they went into that soft dirt the front end of the carriage dropped down in the soft dirt and stopped abruptly, the back-end of the carriage came right up around - somersaulted, causing injury to the man and his wife.

My point is if we do not have conviction firmly coupled with obedience spiritual catastrophe will be the result, inevitably, inevitably. That is why we must know what we believe and have firm convictions for what is right.

Well let's read now some of these verses here in second Corinthians, maybe just read the whole chapter and then we will look at some of the dangers of obedience without conviction.

[2 Corinthians 3:1-18](#) ¹ Do we begin again to commend ourselves? or need we, as some *others*, epistles of commendation to you, or *letters* of commendation from you? [Remember Paul was writing to the Corinthians here] ² Ye are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read of all men: ³ *Forasmuch as ye are* manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart. ⁴ And such trust have we through Christ to God-ward: ⁵ Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves; but our sufficiency *is* of God; ⁶ Who also hath made us able ministers of the new testament; not of the letter, but of the spirit: for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life. ⁷ But if the

ministration of death, written *and* engraven in stones, was glorious, so that the children of Israel could not stedfastly behold the face of Moses for the glory of his countenance; which *glory* was to be done away: ⁸ How shall not the ministration of the spirit be rather glorious? ⁹ For if the ministration of condemnation *be* glory, much more doth the ministration of righteousness exceed in glory. [Talking about the advantages of the new covenant over the old] Verse 10: ¹⁰ For even that which was made glorious had no glory in this respect, by reason of the glory that excelleth. ¹¹ For if that which is done away *was* glorious, much more that which remaineth *is* glorious. ¹² Seeing then that we have such hope, we use great plainness of speech: ¹³ And not as Moses, *which* put a veil over his face, that the children of Israel could not stedfastly look to the end of that which is abolished: ¹⁴ But their minds were blinded: for until this day remaineth the same veil untaken away in the reading of the old testament; which *veil* is done away in Christ. ¹⁵ But even unto this day, when Moses is read, the veil is upon their heart. ¹⁶ Nevertheless when it shall turn to the Lord, the veil shall be taken away. ¹⁷ Now the Lord is that Spirit: and where the Spirit of the Lord *is*, there *is* liberty. ¹⁸ But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, *even* as by the Spirit of the Lord.

Now first of all the danger of obedience without conviction.

1]. My first point is that our freedom in Christ may be lost.

We just talked a little bit about liberty in Christ, freedom in Christ in the Sunday school lesson, but if we somehow think that we can get by with obeying and yet not have true conviction for that which is right our freedom in Christ is in jeopardy, it may be lost.

In Verse 17 above: Now the Lord is that Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.

We know that the Old Testament saints could experience God's blessing and approval by doing what they were commanded to do however in verse 14 it tells us about how they could not understand properly and then we go to Hebrews chapter 10 to help us to realize the beautiful privilege that we have to live in the era in which we live and in which Christ has now come to take away sin once and for all.

Hebrews 10 verse one: ¹ For the law having a shadow of good things to come, *and* not the very image of the things, can never with those sacrifices which they offered year by year continually make the comers thereunto perfect. ² For then would they not have ceased to be offered? because that the worshippers once purged should have had no more conscience of sins. ³ But in those *sacrifices there is* a remembrance again *made* of sins every year. [Hebrews 10:1-3](#).

But! but Jesus came, yes He did, Praise the Lord! Jesus came and gave His perfect life for us, He became obedient unto death even the death of the cross ([Philippians 2:8](#)) and right there in Hebrews 10 verses nine and 10 read: ⁹ Then said he, Lo, I come to do thy will, O God. He taketh away the first, that he may establish the second. ¹⁰ By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ [when?] Once *for all*. [Hebrews 10:9-10](#)

Once for all. Praise the Lord for the freedom that we have in Christ and in that glorious freedom that we have in knowing that our sins are forgiven and that we have God's blessing and approval on our lives as we obey Him with true conviction.

However if we somehow we think we are being obedient to God with anything less than wholehearted love and devotion it is going to come up short and soon our freedom will be lost and we will slip back into the bondage of sin if we are not careful.

2]. The danger of obedience without conviction results in loss of Christian testimony. Yes it does if we are not really convinced of why we live the way we do and what we do it will inevitably result in the loss of Christian testimony.

Back in [2 Corinthians 3:2](#): "Ye are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read of all men."

The apostle was rejoicing that he did not need to ask for character references from the Christians at Corinth, he did not need to do that.

If you apply for immigration status to live in a foreign country or if you want to adopt a child or sometimes simply in renting property or things like that you need a character reference, people want a reference of your

character, but Paul said he didn't need that, their very lives which were known and read of all men shows what kind of people they are.

Well how do people read your life and mine?

How can they read us, what do they see when they observe us in our families, in our congregations, what do they see?

Sometime ago there was a Jewish man in the store where I work, he was a salesman and he is very interested and quite discerning concerning Mennonites and Amish, he likes to observe them and he is just pretty discerning about them. Anyway this salesman was standing there and as I was talking to him a group of young people from a certain conservative group came into the store and it was quite evident by their demeanour and by their actions and their appearance that something was not quite right and this Jewish man just observed them for a little bit and then said to me: "They are trying to break away from the traditions of their fathers aren't they?"

You know he could see right through them and something did not ring quite true.

When people look at you and they look at me what do they see? Do they see a certain form of obedience without true conviction for it?

Well let's remember that one danger of obedience without true firm conviction is that it can result in the loss of Christian testimony and people will get to think: "Well if that is what Christianity is all about I have something that is just about as good as that anyway."

And they are not attracted to the true church.

3]. A third danger of obedience without conviction: It may lead to disobedience.

Yes it may, it could well lead to disobedience.

We know that a case in point is Saul in first Samuel 13, he thought he had a good excuse for offering the sacrifice before a crucial battle, his people were scattering from him, he had to do something, he had to take action, he thought! Apparently he didn't really have the conviction for this stipulation of the law that priests only were to offer the sacrifice and what was the verdict against this action?

Well if we go back to first Samuel chapter 13 we see the verdict against this action because he really didn't have conviction for what he was to do or not to.

1 Samuel 13:13-14 And Samuel said to Saul, Thou hast done foolishly: thou hast not kept the commandment of the LORD thy God, which he commanded thee: for now would the LORD have established thy kingdom upon Israel for ever. ¹⁴ But [now the verdict] but now thy kingdom shall not continue: the LORD hath sought him a man after his own heart, and the LORD hath commanded him *to be* captain over his people, because thou hast not kept *that* which the LORD commanded thee.

There was that verdict against him because his lack of conviction for what is right for the right way.

[Editor's note: The concluding portion of this message will be published ion the November issue.]



OUR MISSION

Matthew 28:19 says, "*Go ye therefore, and teach all nations...*"

To fulfill Jesus' commission, the first requirement is an experience of the new birth. Together with this comes a fervent, God-given love through being filled with the Holy Spirit. God so willingly gives us this for Christ's sake. He gives us power and expects us to continue in the way.

But often we feel a certain coolness, or we drift away from our first love. While this is a natural inclination of man, we should be alarmed when we find our burden for mankind ebbing away. May we then put forth a special effort, by humbly seeking God's face in fasting and prayer, to regain what we have lost, not forgetting to read and meditate on the Word of God. When we ask for God's illuminating searchlight to reveal our need, the Spirit tugs at our hearts and sanctifies us. He whispers, "My child, what about this area?" The first response might be that it is completely unrelated and does not affect our first love. However, when we follow through in obedience, we find ourselves washed anew and ready to share the gospel with everyone.

Our next responsibility is toward our families. We have no greater mission then this. Our wives should feel our love. We should be willing to do our part first. I have found that as I do this, I feel her support as I reach

out to the lost and dying world. When there is disunity in the home, it would be better for that brother not to be going on the tract route, to the jail, singing at the nursing home, or whatever other outreach the congregation might have. But it is important that we are ready at all times to meet our Maker. If there are problems in our homes, let this be the first mission. Jesus says in Matthew 7:5, "Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye." As husbands, we are to first ask God to show us our needs, then we will see clearly how to help our wives.

If God doesn't give us the wisdom to deal with the family, how do we think He will give us proper direction to help others? At the best, wouldn't our outreach efforts be a form of hypocrisy? When there is unity and godly child nurture in the home, our children are secure, our wives are happy, and we can leave for the evening, a day, or a week, knowing all is well with our family. As much as possible, we should include our families in witnessing, be it near or far.

We need to be willing to let finances suffer for the sake of Christ, but if our finances are a reproach, we would want to clear our way before going out. Mission work is enjoyable, and we need to keep a proper balance. After going out, it often requires real self-denial to get back to work. If we find ourselves depressed when going about the daily duties, wishing we could be in an outreach, it is a sign that we need to put self under foot. I have found that when I am thankful to God for my job, contentment soon blesses me.

Another area for mission work is in the everyday walk of life. Are we always ready to give an answer of the hope that is within us? Some of us may be in too big of a hurry to listen to the cry that silently comes from those we meet. Our personal appearance and demeanor is important.

I want to say a little more on our outreach beyond our normal business realm. There are times when we live too unconcerned. We're just satisfied with attending church services. But God's blessings do not rest on this condition. God created us for His service, and it isn't humility to be a bench warmer. May we each be willing to do our little part, even if that is unnoticed by others. There are some who desire new vehicles, big houses, and large farms. This keeps them busy from early until late just to meet temporal obligations or wants. Others live a conservative lifestyle but get wrapped up in their own little world.

One hindrance to the gospel outreach is man-consciousness. Our witness is brighter when we can forget what man thinks and, with a pure heart, do all for the honor and glory of God. When we consecrate our lives vision and enthusiasm for the work return. The Spirit fills our hearts. This makes it so much easier to volunteer our time. May our love for God reach out to others in ever-widening ripples as we sanctify our hearts.

Fellowship with our home congregation is important. Having families in our homes, giving no place to cliques, is needful. Let us do all for the welfare of the kingdom. May we pray for the prodigals and visit them when the Spirit prompts us.

Not everyone is equally able to go because of many circumstances. Whether God asks us to go or stay, I wish all His overflowing cup.

Brother Byron



Self-Righteousness Revealed

For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God. Romans 10:3

There is something about the holiness of God that makes man feel very insignificant and undone in His presence. If we are not clothed with the righteousness of Christ, we will improvise a covering by insisting on some virtue of our own, knowing in our hearts that this is not sufficient before our heavenly Father. Adam and Eve attempted this unsuccessfully, as also did Saul and other Bible characters, including the mistaken workers of righteousness referred to in Matthew 7:22-23.

However, like the Pharisees and countless others, we can still cling to the hope that we can somehow avoid acknowledging our unworthiness, admitting our sin, and humbling ourselves before our Lord and Master. Only by accepting the gift of redemption through Jesus' blood can we hope to stand in the presence of God. It is one thing to go on in ignorance, but it will not

work to deliberately reject Him and attempt to clothe ourselves in any righteousness except "the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ" Romans 3:22

In the gospel of Matthew we find these words of Jesus to some of the cities and people that He had ministered in and graced with His presence

Matthew 11:20-24 ²⁰ Then began he to upbraid the cities wherein most of his mighty works were done, because they repented not: ²¹ Woe unto thee, Chorazin! woe unto thee, Bethsaida! for if the mighty works, which were done in you, had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. ²² But I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the day of judgment, than for you. ²³ And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven, shalt be brought down to hell: for if the mighty works, which have been done in thee, had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. ²⁴ But I say unto you, That it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment, than for thee.

Matthew 12:38-42 ³⁸ Then certain of the scribes and of the Pharisees answered, saying, Master, we would see a sign from thee. ³⁹ But he answered and said unto them, An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given to it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas: ⁴⁰ For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. ⁴¹ The men of Nineveh shall rise in judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: because they repented at the preaching of Jonas; and, behold, a greater than Jonas *is* here. ⁴² The queen of the south shall rise up in the judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: for she came from the uttermost parts of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and, behold, a greater than Solomon *is* here.

Matthew 23:23-28 ²³ Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier *matters* of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone. ²⁴ *Ye* blind guides, which strain at a gnat, and swallow a camel. ²⁵ Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees,

hypocrites! for ye make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full of extortion and excess. ²⁶ *Thou* blind Pharisee, cleanse first that *which is* within the cup and platter, that the outside of them may be clean also. ²⁷ Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead *men's* bones, and of all uncleanness. ²⁸ Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity.

We have no indication that Chorazin and Capernaum were particularly wicked cities or that their inhabitants were much worse than others. The Lord, who knows all things, was confident that if Sodom, wicked as it was, had been given the opportunity that Chorazin and Bethsaida had, they would have repented. Their condemnation was not only for their sinfulness but for failing to be affected by the works done in their presence, things that were clearly wrought of God.

The point Jesus made is that there are those who did not have the opportunity given to these cities and He will condemn those who did but lacked the willingness and desire to avail themselves of the chance when it was offered. The sin of these citizens of Galilee was not so much that they were exceedingly wicked as that they spurned God's mercy.

The Pharisees and scribes sought signs and miracles of Jesus and ignored His divinity and the spiritual content of His teaching. The Ninevites will condemn Christ's generation because the people of Nineveh repented at the preaching of Jonah, while some people of Christ's time did not even heed the teaching of the Son of God.

It is possible to pay attention to detail and miss or avoid the greater issues. The scribes and Pharisees were experts at matters of the law and were recognized for their exactness. This is the direction self-righteousness often takes. Formalism, often done by self-effort, may win approval. The blindness evidenced by the Pharisees was of this kind, and Jesus took serious issue with it. "For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven" Matthew 5:20

Do we listen when Jesus speaks to us? Or do we react like those of His time? They believed that when He spoke of sin and sinners, He was speaking of others. When we ask for direction, is it from a sincere desire to understand God's leading for us, or is it to prove that we are righteous? Do we have Him as our constant companion, or is He an occasional visitor that we recognize only in supernatural events, rather than in the issues of everyday living?

Self-righteousness is to be convinced of one's own righteousness, especially in contrast with the actions and beliefs of others. "A people ... Which say, Stand by thyself, come not near to me; for I am holier than thou" Isaiah 65:3-5.

Pride is the root of self-righteousness. Humility is a difficult virtue to achieve. The desire to think well of ourselves dies hard. We read, "For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hash dealt to every man the measure of faith" Romans 12:3

Genuine experiences of repentance include remorse and abhorrence of sin. As we are brought face to face with our sinfulness and recognize our helplessness, Christ lifts our burden, and we are deeply grateful. As we let go of our righteousness and put our faith in Jesus Christ, He clothes us with His righteousness. With this comes a desire to be obedient to Him in all He enjoins in the Scriptures. A lack of obedience to the gentle promptings of the Spirit will cause us to lose the simple dependence on God and can lead us to establish our own righteousness.

With release from the bondage of sin comes a feeling of freedom the Christian treasures. But as knowledge of the Word and the Christian way increases, it is possible for self-confidence to set in. Satan tries to pervert and corrupt everything good for his own evil purposes. When men become self-satisfied and dogmatic about their own particular interpretation of Scripture and their own practice of scriptural principles, it leads to self-righteousness and is not acceptable with God.

Self-righteousness may be such a part of us that we ourselves are unable

to perceive that our life has become what appears to God like a whitewashed tomb. Outwardly it appears favourable, but inside it is filled with all manner of things that are corrupt and defiled. Like the Pharisees, we believe that our form is absolutely correct. That is, we say and do all the right things because we know how to do so and find comfort in doing so. Just as the hypocrisy of the scribes and Pharisees incurred the Lord's sharp displeasure, so is insincerity on our part judged by God.

Self-righteousness is a sin we can identify in others but not so readily in ourselves. It is for this reason that dealing with it is difficult. The possibility is real that careful, conscientious Christian living may be labelled as self-righteousness. This may happen especially when there is some envy or carnality present in the person making the judgment.

Most of us would be reluctant to point out a brother's self-righteousness to him. If in humility and sincerity we would submit our own lives periodically to the scrutiny of our brethren and be willing to accept counsel, we would receive help. The faithfulness of the Spirit, in harmony with the love of God working in the hearts of concerned brethren, will make us overcomers over this troublesome sin.

Wandering Sheep

*Like wandering sheep o'er mountains cold,
Since all have gone astray;
To life and peace within the fold,
How may I find the way?
To Christ the Way, the Truth, the Life,
I come, no more to roam;
He'll guide me to my Father's house,
To my eternal home.*

The Remedy for Empty Religion

Various teachings of Jesus were recorded only by Matthew. Before he met Jesus, Matthew was a publican, a tax collector. When Christ called him he left all his vocational duties and followed Him. Matthew was acquainted with the Old Testament prophecies, for he referred to them about sixty times in his gospel. As he saw them being fulfilled in his Master, he was satisfied that this was indeed the world's Redeemer.

Matthew personally witnessed the dawn of a new kingdom. In this kingdom, each one has heard and answered the call of Jesus, experienced His forgiveness, and is then commissioned to share the gospel with others. Christ has given the keys of the kingdom to His church, along with the authority and wisdom to use them. A childlike, teachable spirit is found in these citizens, and, like their King, they do not resist evil.

There are treasures in the kingdom that can be obtained by diligent searching and placing all other interests aside. Jesus tells us to prepare for His return by using the talents He has given us, for some day we will give an account to our Lord. If we do not have oil in our vessels, we will be denied entrance to the marriage feast. Let us not be ashamed to be identified with our Lord but gladly confess Him before men.

It is important to determine whether our religion is alive in our hearts. The Pharisees and Sadducees thought they had the real thing. We like to think the way we believe is right! Each of us needs to look into our own heart and honestly consider if the Holy Spirit is leading our lives. Is there more to our religion than merely appearing pious and holy to the people we meet? Is our relationship with God close enough that nothing is hindering our communion with Him? Do we have an inner calmness assuring us that we are completely the Lord's?

Let us consider what we need to do to have the peace of God in our hearts by looking at some of what Matthew wrote for our encouragement and admonishment.

Matthew 3:1-12 ¹ In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judaea, ² And saying, Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. ³ For this is he that was spoken of by the prophet Esaias, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. ⁴ And the same John had his raiment of camel's hair, and a leathern girdle about his loins; and his meat was locusts and wild honey. ⁵ Then went out to him Jerusalem, and all Judaea, and all the region round about Jordan, ⁶ And were baptized of him in Jordan, confessing their sins. ⁷ But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees come to his baptism, he said unto them, O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come? ⁸ Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance: ⁹ And think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to *our* father: for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham. ¹⁰ And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees: therefore every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. ¹¹ I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and *with* fire: ¹² Whose fan *is* in his hand, and he will throughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.

And from chapter 5 of Matthew,

Matthew 5:17-20 ¹⁷ Think not that I am come to destroy ¹⁷ the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil. ¹⁸ For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled. ¹⁹ Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach *them*, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. ²⁰ For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed *the righteousness* of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.

John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness, seemingly from nowhere, preaching that people should repent and get right with God. Upon the confession of their faith, he baptized them with water. A man appearing as a prophet, preaching and baptizing, was a great attraction to the Pharisees

and Sadducees, considered the most religious people of their time.

The Pharisees always portrayed themselves as pious people when they were in public. Even the clothes they wore were supposed to portray the piety they thought religious leaders should have. Their robes were sewn to utmost perfection. Their aim was to make an impression of religious fervor before man. They loved to be called Rabbi by the people. They forgot they needed to keep their hearts rather than their forms with all diligence.

When John saw these perfectly dressed religious men, he saw past their facade. He knew that their hearts were far from what their forefathers had believed and taught. He warned the Pharisees that they could not depend on their heritage to save their souls from eternal damnation. They needed to repent of their pride. He knew they acted piously and yet were without compassion for the less fortunate people around them. He urged them to repent and bring forth fruits manifesting a penitent heart.

John preached that the kingdom of God was at hand. Anyone who was not prepared could not be part of the kingdom. The unprepared would be hewn down and cast into everlasting fire. The only way to be prepared was to bring forth fruits of repentance.

When Jesus preached on the mountain, He gave instructions for everyone. He said, "Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted" Matthew 5:4. The person who has a penitent heart and mourns for his sins will find forgiveness and be comforted. Such a person will be at peace because he knows everything is open between him and God. It is a blessing to live in such a state, and one desires to share this experience with others.

Let us take an honest look at our lives today. Is there any indication that we are like the Pharisees? Are we basing our salvation on the fact that we go to church regularly and dress modestly? Do we do things to appear righteous before men?

The Pharisees believed that putting on an outward show of living by the law, and making no deviations, would make them children of God. They prayed loudly and often in public. They fasted and gave alms regularly. All this was done to bring honour to themselves. They were righteous in their own eyes, even though their hearts were far from God. John told them that God could raise up children unto Abraham from the stones on the ground.

There is no value in living the law without a penitent heart.

The tendency to have a form of religion but deny the power thereof is always with us. Simply patterning our lives according to the traditions and ways of our fathers will not save us. The Pharisees were deceived in placing too much emphasis on being in the lineage of Abraham. They also placed too much importance in keeping a form they had developed. This can happen to us, too, when we do not allow the Spirit of God to direct our lives.

Where am I today? Do I come to church because my parents taught me to? Do I study the Scriptures during the week, or do I neglect it? Have I visited any widows or any people with special needs? When was the last time I initiated a spiritual conversation with anyone? When I give to the Lord, whether time or money, am I concerned that I might give too much or that I might not give enough? If I am doing these things because I want to appear godly to my fellow church members and friends, I have lost the vision of the Lord's way. My righteousness will not exceed that of the Pharisees, and I will find myself with the chaff that will be burned with unquenchable fire on Judgment Day.

If my life is led by the Holy Spirit, the urge to pray and to study the Bible or Sunday school lesson will be heeded with pleasure. These are activities I enjoy. Visiting the less fortunate is a pleasure, and I wish I could do it more often. I am concerned that I am not able to give enough to God. I know Jesus was humiliated, beaten with stripes, and nailed to the cross so I could be saved and enjoy peace in my heart. This makes me want to share with others in a humble way.

When I am completely surrendered to God, I experience peace and rest. This makes my religion real, and I long to pass it on to my fellowmen. I will want to be an example to them and will not fight against the leading of the Holy Spirit. If the Spirit prompts me to take care of something in my life, I will do it immediately. It is usually pride that makes it hard to follow the Spirit.

Does my life agree with my claim of having the peace of God in my heart? Is my life consistent with Bible teaching? Is my occupation a

Christian occupation? Do my appearance and dress portray modesty and humility? Is my home such as a pilgrim and a stranger should have? I need to be completely honest with myself in all areas of my life and realize that what is highly esteemed among men is an abomination to God Luke 16:15. The Holy Spirit is a safe and constant guide in all areas of life. May we be keen in listening to Him.



CAST UP THE HIGHWAY

That wonderful old allegory, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, tells an alarming story of three men Christian overtook on his journey toward heaven. He had just lost his burden by a view of the cross and was rejoicing greatly in the preciousness of his salvation. With the mark of sonship upon his forehead and the roll of assurance in his hand, he willingly addressed the road ahead for better or for worse.

Immediately he came upon Simple, Sloth, and Presumption asleep close by the road with fetters on their feet. Christian, with the warmth of love burning in his heart, could not carelessly go on. He awoke them with urgent admonitions and warnings. He told them of the lion who could easily devour them if it found them in this condition. Each of the sleepers reacted according to his nature. Simple said, "I see no danger." "Yet a little more sleep" Sloth slurred. "Every tub must stand upon its own bottom," responded Presumption, meaning, "Mind your own business."

These three were on the way, apparently having come through the gate at the beginning of the way. They had survived the difficulties of entering in and beginning the Christian life. Now here they were, asleep and bound, yet unconcerned and resistant to help. Christian went on his way, and these sluggards were never heard of again. We presume that they were indeed devoured by the roaring lion who "walketh about, seeking whom he may devour" 1 Peter 5:8.

As in the allegory, so in real life. Christians will encounter those who are in spiritual danger. How are we to react to the needs we see? Isaiah reveals God's heart with these words: "I have set watchmen upon thy walls, 0

Jerusalem, which shall never hold their peace day nor night: ye that make mention of the Lord, keep not silence" Isaiah 62:6.

In the allegory, Christian often spoke boldly and clearly to the erring.

The error of sinners and the danger they were in were obvious to him. It is the nature of Christians to see sin clearly. The Holy Spirit in our hearts makes sin exceedingly sinful and righteousness most appealing. Some are accused in their spirits of being critical when right and wrong are so clearly distinguished to them. Not true. Criticalness usually comes when we have not faithfully relieved ourselves of the burden God placed there. Criticalness makes us spectators. It tends to make us cynical. Love gives vision and a desire to help.

Usually, one's first responsibility when seeing a deficiency in the church is to lay his concern at the foot of the cross in prayer. As Jesus intercedes continually on our behalf so there is a great work to be done in lifting the weak to God in prayer, Hebrews 7:25. Let us not belittle the hours in the secret closet. They are of inestimable value. Are these not the prayers, treasured in God's warehouse until the right time, to be offered together with much incense to accomplish His purposes, Revelation 8:3-5? Many times our hearts are at rest with having interceded for the needs we have seen.

Sometimes, however, a burden of loving concern continues to return to our heart. Often this is an indication the Holy Spirit has additional work for us to do. Too often, at this point, we allow Satan and our flesh to hinder God's purposes. Instead of accepting the challenging work of a watchman, we fall into one of many pitfalls. Some of us are greatly hindered by thoughts of our own failings. The fear of rejection looms, and we are daunted with the thought that our efforts will do no good. The thought that others could do it better than we can makes us cower. Yet, despite these objections, we have to admit that the burden remains on our heart.

What can we conclude but that the Lord wants us to do our part?

If we neglect, we will almost certainly suffer spiritual loss. No matter how sound our excuses may seem, we have become disobedient.

Too often the work of being watchmen is deferred to the leadership of the church. It is true that the ministry has a special responsibility as overseers, but if the work is left to them alone, we will suffer great loss. Those closest to the problem are the best able to give timely help. They are

the ones whom God will usually send first.

Children are most effectively taught when they are young. The older they become before their problems are addressed, the harder they are to correct. The same is true when we begin to err spiritually. When one has become accustomed to wrong attitudes and small disobediences, he has begun to harden his heart. The sooner deviation is detected and encouragement is given, the more effective it is.

The ones who need help often don't want it. Simple, Sloth, and Presumption wanted to be left alone. Self saving and carnal sympathy are ready accomplices to keep us from getting involved. Christian didn't give in to those weaknesses. He saw the terrible danger the sleepers were in, and love compelled him to raise his voice. Would to God we always had that keen vision of the terribleness of sin, small or great. Sin should shock our soul. If it does not, the world is too much with us.

A few verses, after laying out the work of the watchmen, are these words: "Go through, go through the gates; prepare ye the way of the people; cast up, cast up the highway; gather out the stones; lift up a standard for the people" Isaiah 62:10. They contain five directives for us.

The first is, "Go through, go through the gates." All watchmen, in order to be effective, must be inside the city. They must be first partakers of the fruit, 2 Timothy 2:6. All ministers, deacons, and all brethren and sisters who will join in the work of the Lord must be assured that they are fully identified with the faith once delivered to the saints. Any secret reserves will soon become a hindrance to their effectiveness. They must be convinced of the validity of the doctrine and practice of the Word of God as it is revealed to God's people.

Second: Prepare ye the way of the people. The work of God's servants is not to make a way for themselves. It is to serve the people. Whether exhorting, teaching, or reproving, our object is always to serve. Can we offer anything that will make Christian life more successful? If we are reproving, it is for the intent of aiding toward a more harmonious relationship with God and His children.

When our efforts have the intent of promoting our own personal agenda, we greatly hinder God's work.

Thirdly the repeated command, "Cast up, cast up the highway," is an emphatic call to not compromise the holiness of the way. In chapter 35, the same writer speaks of the highway of holiness that would be brought in with the Gospel era. Often, Christian workers are tempted to dilute or corrupt the way of holiness by permissiveness. We become unwilling to speak of issues we are seeing in our brother but which we really wouldn't feel comfortable with in our own lives. Fears of hurting others' feelings, unwillingness to risk our popularity or personal friendship can so easily hamper us from building up the highway of the Lord. For older sisters to fearlessly bridge the generation gap and teach the younger, they must die to self. Yet a wonderful bond develops when we humbly put ourselves to such tasks. God's work can properly be done only when we die to self.

Fourth: The stones must be gathered out. When we are open to God's leading the Holy Spirit will clearly show that He is calling His people to a renewal of the holy life, unspotted by the world. It would be very easy to go on with business as usual. It will take prayer and fasting, together with a willingness to put our hand to the plow, if we are to retake the ground already usurped by the enemy. The stones of worldliness, love of luxury, selfish living, pride, and permissiveness must be clearly identified, not at a distance but where we live. No one wants stones on the road, but who is willing to stop his vehicle, get out, and cast them away?

Fifthly we are to lift up a standard for the people. This is done by our godly commitment to the truth in teaching and practice. We must be willing to advocate and live the plain old way. Intimidation must be cast aside. Unbelief, that cowering demon that causes us to doubt that God will be able to accomplish His will in the Church, must be judged. In so doing we will be elevating the flag of faith and truth that heartens the people of God.

Brother Keith



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