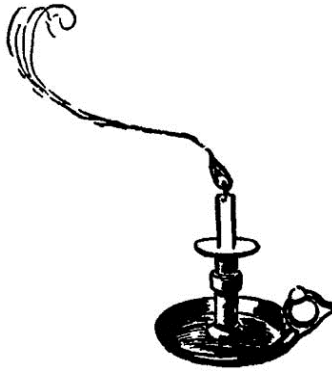


THE AUSTRALIAN ANABAPTIST

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 Anabaptist Perspective

From The Editor's Desk

We trust and God works.

These few words hinge on us having faith in God. I came across this phrase recently in my reading it said "Perfect obedience would be perfect happiness, if only we had perfect confidence in the power we were obeying."

To put it another way if we had perfect confidence in God, trusted Him completely for everything, then we would have no qualms about being in perfect obedience to His Word.

We often hear the words salvation, justification and sanctification each of which signifies an action by God as a result of our coming to Jesus Christ in repentance and being born again. When that happens salvation and justification through the blood of Jesus Christ are ours and the sanctification process begins.

We could say that it is man's part to trust and God's part to work, yes there is some work involved in our trusting in God, Hebrews 10:23 encourages us to hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering, that is us trusting God, the verse continues on for he, that is God, is faithful that promised. Philippians 2:12 tells us to work out your own salvation with fear and trembling and I believe that again this comes down to our implicit trust in God to carry out His promises to those who believe on Jesus Christ.

There are other verses which also indicate some action on our part in a continuing exercise of faith which I would see as complete trust in God.

Whilst pondering on this issue there is much in scripture that speaks of what God does for those that believe on Him, Romans 6:23 a familiar verse says for the wages of sin is death but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. Taking John 3:16 in conjunction with this verse we could say that the greatest work of God on our behalf was done through Jesus Christ our Lord.

And then 1 Corinthians 6:11 says but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God.

Here we have salvation, justification and sanctification clearly shown to be a work of God and coming to us as a free gift by the exercise of our trust – faith - in Him knowing that He is faithful in keeping all His promises.

J.v.ℒ



From the Pulpit

Editor: Part 2 of this message will appear in the November issue.

Why Does God Allow Suffering?

David G Burkholder

Part 1 of 2.

Certainly a privilege to be gathered in the name of the Lord this morning, am glad to greet you in His precious name.

I was planning to begin the message by saying that we are going to be thinking about something no one likes, no one looks for it, we try to avoid it, we try to get away from it yet we cannot, it is something that people seem to appreciate more after-the-fact rather than during the fact.

This morning I thought to preach about suffering something that is undesirable and yet God has used suffering in a way that many times. People say and I've heard it said that: As for suffering I wouldn't do it again for \$1 million, I wouldn't give it up for \$1 million but I wouldn't give five dollars to do it again.

Then we sang this song "More Love to Thee" (*Number 359 Mennonite Church Hymnal*)

Let sorrow do its work, send grief and pain

Sweet are Thy messengers sweet their refrain.

Asking to send grief and pain and then Brother Leon prayed that our love would go deeper.

I'm wondering this morning whether those things are possible without having a proper understanding of suffering.

I struggled over this message, there are other things that I would rather preach about but it does seem to me that it is something that we need to deal with in our lives.

There are two scriptures I am going to be using, I have probably about 20 scriptures written down in my notes, but there are two scriptures that I'm hoping that they will become like guiding stars to us but before that I think

that probably one of the biggest questions that people ever ask about God is:

Why does God allow suffering, why does God allow suffering?

Why does God allow innocent children to suffer?

Why does God allow people who serve Him to suffer?

And there are people who have lost their way because of that question.

One of the most well-known world evangelists early in his work had a partner who it appeared was even more gifted than he was but he became an atheist and he said it all started when he saw a picture in Life magazine of an emaciated woman holding a starving child.

And that question “Why does God allow suffering?” was used and he said in his younger days it was because could not answer that question why people suffer.

Do the Christians know the answer to that question, is there an answer to that question “Why do people suffer?”

And we easily say that a rose has to be crushed to be at its best fragrance.

Are there many good things that happen without suffering?

Turn with me first of all to Philippians 1 and verse 29.

Is it true that people who survive suffering seldom then regret it?

Now I for myself feel that I’m hardly worthy to speak as far as how much I know about suffering, I look around I see people that have suffered way more not and know much more about it but have you ever met a Christian who has survived suffering and regretted it?

I don’t think I have and I say who survived it as a Christian and I take courage in that.

But now **Philippians 1:29** For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake.

Apparently the Christians are called to suffer, why?

Why would God allow people whom He loves, people who love Him why would He allow them to suffer?

We’re not going to try and answer that now.

The next Scripture is in first Peter four the first verse.

I do not think that this message is intended to try to make us go out and look for suffering, I'm not thinking this morning that we ought to be trying to see how much suffering we can bring upon ourselves but this is what Peter said in **1 Peter 4:1** Forasmuch then as Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves likewise with the same mind: for he that hath suffered in the flesh hath ceased from sin;

One of our goals this morning is to arm ourselves in our minds so that when suffering does come and the Bible indicates it, observation proves it, that rarely do people get through life without suffering.

And yet as I said at the out start it is something that no one likes, no one looks for it, we try to avoid it, people take tons of pills and do all kinds of things to avoid physical suffering, we do many things to try to escape all those things.

There are four points we would like to pursue on this subject this morning and it is a safe assumption that it is something that we must all deal with along life's way.

Now suffering comes in many forms, it comes in physical, it comes in emotional, it comes in persecution, it comes in many different forms but I'm thinking of suffering this morning about the things that intrude or things that are not according to our first preference, things that cause pain or struggle and wrench our souls and put us to the test about the quality of our Christian lives.

Now the first thing we want to see is what the Bible says about suffering.

And the first thing is in Genesis 3 what the Bible says about suffering and the first introduction and the first cause of suffering was sin.

Before Adam and Eve sinned there was no suffering everything was right, everything was perfect, everything was just the way you would want it to be but then sin came and God said this to Adam in **Genesis 3:17** And unto Adam he said, Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou

shalt not eat of it: cursed *is* the ground for thy sake; in sorrow [and I think we could say in suffering] shalt thou eat *of* it all the days of thy life; and then He goes on with a list of other unwelcome results of that sin. Suffering was a result of sin it is the result of the Fall and so the human race has suffered ever since.

I would like to take a Scripture from James that covers all the scope of history but again it gives us an idea, **James 5:10** Take, my brethren, the prophets, who have spoken in the name of the Lord, for an example of suffering affliction, and of patience.

Did the prophets through history through the Old Testament and through the New Testament did the prophets have a nice easy soft life, did they have the kind of security, the kind of predictable life that they could plan it, they could do it, they could live it? No.

Is it true that the things that happened in the past to people that God used is it true that suffering was such a normal part of their lives?

And suppose they had rejected, refused to suffer would their work have been accomplished?

James simply says: Take, my brethren, the prophets, who have spoken in the name of the Lord, for an example of suffering affliction.

The next one in **1 Peter 3:18**: For Christ also hath once suffered for sins,.....

What marked the life of Christ more significantly and more specifically than suffering? Travel with Him those three years, the deprivations, His life it was so much surrounded by suffering.

John 15, we are taking shortcuts here but we could talk about things a lot longer but what we are trying to discover now it started with the Fall, James said the prophets are examples of suffering, Jesus the supreme example of suffering, John 15 starting at verse 18, we are wanting to discover what He has to say to us about this matter.

John 15:18-21

¹⁸ If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before *it hated* you.

¹⁹ If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye

are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you.

²⁰ Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also.

²¹ But all these things will they do unto you for my name's sake, because they know not him that sent me.

What is Jesus promising to His followers? Ease, enjoyment, peace, prosperity, pleasures all those things?

It seems to be exactly the opposite doesn't it?

And that reminds me of history and of Winston Churchill, when Germany had almost wiped Britain out he was a statesman that rose up and he said: "I can promise you nothing but sweat and blood and tears for the sake of the united empire."

Nothing but sweat and blood and tears – suffering.

This is what Jesus is saying here.

Chapter 16 and verse two and I shrink from these scriptures, **John 16:2** They shall put you out of the synagogues: yea, the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service.

We are thinking this morning about arming our minds seeing what God is calling us to.

Romans eight, we can be like Hezekiah and hope it escapes our generation but you know I believe that according to the scriptures that every believer suffers in his own way.

After we have looked at some more scriptures we are going to try to at least take a few guesses at why God allows it.

Romans 8:17 And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with *him*, that we may be also glorified together.

Now do you think that if we just take out the words "if so be that we suffer with him" we can be glorified anyway?

Can we take it out and still be glorified?
Is that how God operates?

Second Corinthians, I'm taking the scriptures by sequence in the Bible and I'm tempted to move them around a bit but just for keeping our movement together in **2 Corinthians 1:7**: And our hope of you *is* steadfast, knowing, that as ye are partakers of the sufferings, so *shall ye be* also of the consolation.

Again we ask can we take the suffering out and the result be the same?
Is that how it works?

2 Corinthians 4:11 For we which live are always delivered unto death for Jesus' sake, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh.

Does that happen sitting in easy chairs, does that happen in the soft life, does that happen in living for ourselves? No.

Again you take that verse and the answer to it is suffering.

Read it again, for we which live are always delivered unto death for Jesus sake.

Being delivered unto death inevitably means suffering.

Philippians 3:10 and this is a scripture that ought to haunt us, Paul is crying out to know three things he says: That I may know him, Well who doesn't want to know Him, that's a good thing, but now notice: and the power of his resurrection, [and now this one] and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death; The fellowship of His sufferings.

2 Thessalonians 1:4 So that we ourselves glory in you in the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that ye endure:

You know the church at Thessalonica suffered horribly and suppose they would have refused to suffer that they had said no we are going to take the easy way, we are going to stop doing these things that bring suffering.

Would their history have been the same, would there have been any left to go and see the Anabaptists in Europe in the Reformation? (*See pages 365,366 Martyrs Mirror*) I think we know the answer to that.

2 Timothy 2:12 If we suffer, we shall also reign with *him*: if we deny *him*, he also will deny us.

If we suffer.

And now yet **2 Timothy 3:12** and we ask the question along the way of reading these verses: Could we strike out suffering and everything would be the same? Now he says: Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.

We cannot wriggle around that one and the more that we accept the reality of it, it seems to me that the way it all comes down to how suffering is handled.

Now the second thought I would like to pursue the question of “Why does God allow suffering?”

And this is human speculation perhaps, some observations, we can ask the question: Does God plan suffering, does He?

I’m not sure I know the answer to that but we do know that He allows it.

Now I’m going to offer a number of things that seem to me that may have the question will help to answer the question “Why does God allow suffering?”

Well first of all suffering shows the destruction, the devastation and the destiny of sin.

You know it shows, and we went through the Sunday school, it shows that the ways of the flesh in our effort to believe produced suffering if not in this life in the next life.

I believe that God uses suffering to create a separation between His own and those who reject Him.

But I think also that God allows suffering to keep us aware that we are very temporary in this life and that we are very vulnerable. You know if we

would have no physical suffering and you and I know what it is like to look back there is a period in a person's life when you are apt to think you're indestructible you think you can go through anything and you feel like you might live for ever because of how good you feel but God allows suffering to come into our lives physically and in other ways but it is to show us that we are temporary and that life does not stay the same.

Beyond that He allows suffering to come to prove that we are unable to control the circumstances around us, you know if we could control the circumstances that would take care of suffering but you see God is constantly trying to loosen us from the earthly grip and to detach us. You know when a person suffers enough you know people actually come to the place where they want to die to escape their suffering; well you see the detachment that takes place.

I think that God wants suffering to draw us to look to Him because we no longer have the answers, you know God allows things to come into our lives that we are not capable handling ourselves, we cannot control them and so consequently the Christian flees to Him.

And I think that it is also true that God that suffering causes us to draw from God in a way that we don't when we are not suffering.

You know we say sometimes we don't appreciate a health until we don't have it, we take so many things for granted we just expect them you know we just expect them and we are apt to feel bad if they don't happen like we expect but you know God uses suffering to draw us.

Another one is that God uses suffering to make us better, I said better not bitter; some people become bitter when they suffer but God wants to use suffering to make us better.

In closing I would like to share some words penned by another writer titled "God Knoweth Best"

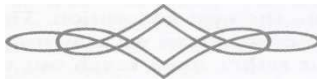
God Knoweth Best

If we could push ajar the gates of life,
 And stand within, and all God's workings see,
 We could interpret all this doubt and strife
 And for each mystery could find a key.

But not today. Then be content, poor heart!
 God's plans, like lilies pure and white, unfold.
 We must not tear the close-shut leaves apart;
 Time will reveal the calyxes of gold.

And if through patient toil we reach the land
 Where tired feet, with sandals loose may rest,
 When we shall clearly see and understand,
 Then we shall know and say, "God knew the best."

-Anonymous



CHANGELESS IN THE MIDST OF CHANGE

A believer by the name of John Bowring (1792-1872) penned the words that comprise the hymn, "God Is Love, His Mercy Brightens." The second stanza notes: "Chance and change are busy ever; Worlds decay, and ages move; But His mercy waneth never; God is light, and God is love" William Cowper (1731-1800) surely would have said Amen to those sentiments, for he wrote, "God moves in a mysterious way, His wonders to perform; He plants His footsteps in the sea, and rides upon the storm"

A mighty storm appears to be gaining intensity on the vast sea of humanity. Jesus foretold that such things would happen before His second coming. Thus we see His perfect foreknowledge of all things, and this gives the true Christian comfort and stability. Consider what the Lord said and compare that with the present distress: "And there shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars; and upon the earth distress of nations, with

perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring; Men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth: for the powers of heaven shall be shaken" (Luke 21:25-26).

Had our Lord stopped there, His words would have been on a negative note. But He continued, "And then shall they see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. And when these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh" (Luke 21:27-28).

The demand for "change" has reached forceful proportions in the world (and it can and does bring suffering to many) change is insisted on, and change is promised. Just what all this will eventually mean is uncertain. Segments of the larger Christian community are particularly alarmed about changing values. Indeed, powerful persuasions are slowly but surely cutting this beloved nation (and others) loose from its moorings in traditional Christian values which were once held as sacred. For many in Christendom this has a pronounced political angle. In contrast, the apolitical, defenseless people of God ponder how it might affect the spiritual welfare of the church of God. They believe the words of Jesus, "My kingdom is not of this world" (John 18:36), and thus look at things from a different perspective than nominal Christianity.

Where does the Christian go for a sure footing in times of storm? To the Word of God, the only sure revelation of truth, unmoved by changing times. There we read God's affirmation, "For I am the Lord, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed" (Malachi 3:6). The significance here is that from the beginning of the Bible to the end, God reveals Himself as holy, almighty, all wise, all knowing, loving, understanding, and merciful. More could be added. How comforting to believe that this God will never change! The drumbeat of change (which many times is just another word for decay) might seem to give cadence to the world's march, but the Christian hears the quiet assurance of the Lord, "I am the Lord; I change not."

In the New Testament, we read a parallel to the verse from Malachi, but in the blessed context of salvation by faith in Christ Jesus. Hebrews 13:8 reads, "Jesus Christ [is] the same yesterday, and today, and forever." This means, in part, that the basis of salvation from sin through faith in His sacrifice and the power of His blood will never change. Men must be saved, and He is the only way (Acts 4:12). Today there is an all too obvious effort

to downplay Christ's divinity and scoff at the validity of His teaching. More and more openly atheism, humanism, and not believing in Christ (arguing instead the good of Islam, Judaism, and other religions) is being presented as worthy of consideration. In the face of such a tidal wave of change that appears to be gathering speed, the Word says, right following Hebrews 13:8, "Be not carried about with divers and strange doctrines" (v. 9). Hear again, "Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and today, and forever."

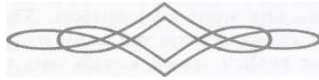
How are true Christians to do in a changing world? Jesus made it clear that Christians are in the world, but not of it (John 17). The reality is, however, that we are more "in" the world than ever before. Not saying that we are of the world more, but we are more exposed to and meshing with the world in daily business and social camaraderie. We are no longer a somewhat protected agricultural group of people, enjoying, as it were, a degree of innocence relating to the larger world. Business ventures (of many and varied fields), professions, technology, and more social interaction with the surrounding community may exert an imperceptible pressure for change in our belief. None of these things necessarily constitute being "of" the world, but we certainly are more "in" the world in the sense that it presses all around us from myriad points.

Generally speaking, we are sound in the conviction that because God in Christ Jesus is unchanging, the faith "once delivered unto the saints" (Jude v. 3) is also unchanging. It cannot be compromised to accommodate the change taking place around us. But Christians will need to adapt to the challenge of the world's changing values and disrespect for God and truth. This adapting does not imply "adjusting" the faith so as to lessen the built-in tension between the world and the believer, which is sure to increase. It rather means applying earnestly for "more grace" (James 4:6) and being firmly established in the faith (1 Peter 5:10) as our exposure to the evils of the day increases. If the Lord should tarry longer, Christians will either make such adaptation or be swallowed up.

"The preparations of the heart in man and the answer of the tongue, is from the Lord" (Proverbs. 16:1). Let us note that "Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the law of the Lord, and to do it, and to teach in Israel statutes and judgments" (Ezra 7:10). The pertinent emphasis here is on the preparation of the heart. The personal victory over humanistic and sinister forces advocating change will not be won without preparation in the heart. Has one adapted his heart to suffering for Christ? Has one adapted his heart to

be loyal to Christ and His church, regardless of scoffing and ridicule? Is the heart adapted by pure love to forgive and forebear one's enemies?

The Scriptures clearly tell us that troublesome times shall come in the last days. Likely, as true faith diminishes and the world grows colder toward God, the contrast between the true Christian and unbelievers will grow more pronounced. But if the adapting to this condition is made by preparing the heart to cleave to the Savior, we will remain "in" the world while not becoming "of" it. When the Lord convenes the Great Judgment, such Christians will present the true faith back to Him unchanged, just as it was first delivered to the saints.



REMOVE NOT THE ANCIENT LANDMARK

The scripture that forms the above title is found in Proverbs 22:28. Written or collected by Solomon, it apparently had reference to an instruction that was given to the children of Israel before they had taken possession of the land of Canaan. The original law is in Deuteronomy 19:14, a direct "Thou shalt not remove thy neighbour's landmark."

We know from Bible history that each of the twelve tribes, except the tribe of Levi, whose portion was the priesthood and whose place was taken by half of the tribe of Joseph, received a portion of land. This, in turn, was divided among the families of the tribe. Although God was known to be the owner of all the land, it was important to Him that each family preserved its inheritance of land. In order to be sure that each family kept its land, a law was given that even when land was taken as settlement for a debt, it eventually must be returned to the family that owned it. Provision was made for land to be redeemed that was thus lost. In most cases, it returned to its owners in the year of Jubilee (Lev. 25:23-28).

With such a system of land ownership, boundaries must have been very important, and they were supposed to stay the same permanently. However, the unholy inventiveness of man found means of exercising his covetousness. This was where the removal of landmarks came into the picture.

In contemporary language, we often understand the word remove to mean the complete taking away of something. At the time of the translation of the King James Bible, it is probable that the primary meaning would

have been more like "to set over or to set back." This brings to mind a much more sinister and deceptive situation in which boundaries were removed under cover of darkness and in the absence or lack of watchfulness of the rightful landowners. This removal of the landmarks brought about confusion and strife.

Today we often think of landmarks as identifiable objects that serve as a way to know that we are rightly following a certain route. Good directions for finding a place often include landmarks. If someone tells you to continue straight for a specified distance on a certain road until you arrive at a corner where there is a tree of a recognizable description, then turn left and go to the first house on the left side of the road, you will be relieved and even elated to see the landmark. It is comforting to know that you are on the right way.

For many years, there have been social guidelines in the world around us. Certain boundaries of what was considered acceptable social behavior were known and appreciated by many people. In recent years, these landmarks have been "removed," that is, they have been set back more and more. Today we see a society around us that is at loose ends, because there are few boundaries.

In the midst of this, God's church stands as a landmark, an enduring reproof to a world in need of being reminded. It has always been that way since God chose to have a people called by His name. However, there is a driving force behind the anarchy in the world. This is the evil one, and he would like to bring about the same setting back of the landmarks in the church. This is why there is a special emphasis on the effective doctrine of separation, or nonconformity to the world.

The most important landmark in the life of an individual Christian is his conversion. That is when his heart was broken and made soft. That is when his life was changed and his mind was renewed. That is when there was joy and peace and love in full measure. That is when there was tenderness of conscience and an acute awareness of the guidance of the Word and the Holy Spirit.

All later developments in the life of a Christian ought to and must be of the same essence, so as to correspond with the experience of conversion. If you desire to buy something and it is incongruous with the landmark of conversion, then you should not buy it. If you would like to go somewhere and that place doesn't fit in with the life in Christ begun at conversion, then

you should not go there. On the positive side, if an activity fits in with the landmark, it is safe and desirable to perform that activity.

What has happened when we go along in our lives as Christians and find ourselves as having crossed the line into possessing things or doing things our brethren question? Perhaps in our hearts we have not regarded the landmarks of "modesty, simplicity, and economy." These are old guide-posts, but they are relevant today.

The kingdom of the world, governed by the god of this world, has no regard to the landmarks of Christ's kingdom. They look like restrictions that would not allow one to enjoy desired pleasures. The idea of self-denial stands in direct opposition to the narcissism that is commonly indulged in. Today we are surrounded by the "me" generation, in which self-realization and self-assertion are thought of as positive things. People say that "you have to believe in yourself," and they think of this as a spiritual truth. This runs totally counter to the whole subject of the cross of Christ.

The cross of Christ stands as a mighty landmark for God's church. To the flesh, this "emblem of suffering and shame" is undesirable, but to the renewed mind, it is a great comfort. We sing the hymn, "Jesus I Keep Me Near the Cross." When the spiritual walk of the church passes the foot of the cross, each member of the body is comforted to know that we are still on the narrow way that leads home.

It is true that times change. We must face new things in our day. Technology continues to race onward in its course, and we suppose it will be so until Jesus comes. In the world about us, the fashions will continue to change. Things will pass away and later return to make another attempt to lure the sight of men away from the simplicity that is in Christ. Let us, however, resolve that, in our day, the landmarks of truth and sound doctrine shall not be removed. Let us seek true, Spirit-led conviction in our lives. Will it be enough when we stand before God if we I passively comply with guidelines but have no spiritual direction and conviction?

Brother Roland

"I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture" (John 10:9).



GOSPEL BASED TRADITIONS

Tradition sometimes carries a distasteful meaning, especially as some people relate it to religion. This might be buttressed by Jesus' denunciation of the Pharisees' annulling the commandments of God by their man-made traditions (Matthew 15:1-20). The Apostle Peter, also, warned about a vain manner of living, "received by tradition from your fathers" (1 Peter 1:18). But there is a "traditional" aspect that developed with time as people believed the gospel and embraced Christian principles. This has served the people of God well. In a broader sense, in so-called Christian nations the influence of godly tradition placed some restraint on licentious living, which is to be appreciated.

The apostle Paul says, "Therefore, brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word, or our epistle" (2 Thessalonians 2:15). These traditions were not those of the Jewish religion but were ways of doing and believing that derived from having embraced the Christian faith. The Apostle further says, "Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us" (2 Thessalonians 3:6).

There is a distinction between traditions. Some are of men (like those of the scribes and Pharisees) and began with a mere whim or idea. Then there are those rooted in the practice of Christian doctrine. Even in this sense, a tradition, despite having a seeming righteous intent, never supersedes the Scriptures (see Mark 7:7-13).

In proper perspective, Christian tradition is an expression and commentary of the permeating effects of the living Word of God. It helps govern one's way of living so that it "becometh the gospel of Christ" (Philippians 1:27). The apostle Paul obviously believed that such tradition should not be disregarded or despised. It was not just a mere precept of men.

The setting at Thessalonica furnishes an example of the value of gospel-based tradition. Paul had written the believers there in his first letter that the coming of the Lord was at hand (1 Thessalonians 5). Thereupon some stopped working and became busybodies (2 Thessalonians 3:11). Paul called this "disorderly" (vv. 6 & 11). He cited his and his fellow laborer's example of working to provide for themselves while among them (v. 8). He instructed that "if any would not work, neither should he eat" (v. 10). This teaching has formed the foundation of "the work ethic," which has

blessed those who have embraced it. Here is the validation of the tradition of hard work, honesty, and providing for one's own household (see also 1 Timothy 5:8). This ethic is Christian tradition and is quite universally associated with Mennonites.

This has become a part of traditional Mennonite family life. While it is true that it can be abused and is sometimes used to cover up a craving for gain, who would say that we can disregard this tradition without serious consequences?

The Mennonite faith has traditionally placed a high value on family life. This emphasis has been such that it has been noted by many people, even governments. It has been a powerful witness to many seeking a better way. What is sometimes referred to as the "nuclear family" is still held by us to be sacred. The nuclear family is one where a devoted father and mother form the heart of the home, wherein children are taught love, submission, and obedience. The home is a place where God is known and respected. This purpose, arrangement, and cooperation are traditional to the point that we tend to take them for granted. But when we stop and think of it, we say the traditional family home is priceless. Surely, the Scriptures enjoin us to "keep the traditions which ye have been taught."

Of all the institutions of sound values and principles that have come under attack in these last days, has not traditional family life suffered the greatest haemorrhage? Sad to say, an element in society is trying to redesign the concept of family. One fourth of the children born in the United States are not born into a nuclear family, being ushered into this world out of wedlock. The world will say what it wants to, but these children are disadvantaged. It is no wonder that we read such heinous things in the media today. Oh, that America would wake up to the value of the traditional family! And the much the same applies to other Western nations.

But now, what about the old Mennonite traditions of family life and of respect and obedience to father and mother? What about the tradition of home life among us?

Many are the pressures and voices that are saying we're living in a different time. In society, traditional values are reinterpreted or disregarded or even denigrated as being legalistic and oppressive. Some of this wants to affect us also. But behind all the din of noise and striving, the Word of God still so divinely says, "Keep the traditions which ye have been taught." They are based on the Holy Writ. How precious is the tradition of family

life to parents and to children?

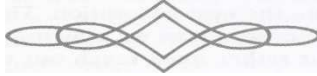
Inasmuch as has rightly been said for a long time that as the homes, so the church, we disregard the matter of the traditional home and its values with multiplied consequences. If the danger confronting our traditional values is not being understood, it is time for every watchman to sound the warning now. Wide awake, concerned Christians know that the tradition of respect, deference, and cheerful obedience to fathers and mothers' oversight is often undermined by the unrestricted communication and planning that are employed today. This has fostered an independent spirit in children and youth, which is not part of the Christian family home tradition. It is to be admitted that we are in challenging times, but the Scripture-based traditional values are needed all the more.

Mention must be made of the Bible-founded tradition of a plain and simple manner of dress for Christians. The Scriptures give an ample foundation for a humble manner of dress for believers (1 Peter 3:2-5; 1 Timothy 2:9-10). The Bible does not contain a "dress code" as such, and thus neither does the church have a prescribed cut of clothing. Customs vary from country to country and from time to time. But based on the above cited scriptures and others, a tradition of modesty and simplicity relating to dress has existed in the church of God. As brothers and sisters have been keen to the Spirit, they have valued that tradition. In former years obedience to the Holy Spirit produced a remarkable sameness of practice in the brotherhood, and it will today. Thus a scriptural tradition of unpretentious and simple dress, for Christ's sake, has been strong among us in the past. Today the church is hearing the voice of the Spirit saying, "Keep the traditions which ye have received."

Christian traditions are part of the "ballast" in the bottom of the ship of faith, keeping it stable and upright in stormy seas. Because they are Bible-based, we cast them overboard at our peril. It is not often that they are discarded quickly or by decision. Usually traditions are lost slowly and by default. But the loss of identity as "a peculiar people" (1 Peter 2:9) separated unto God is real. The loss is in proportion to our thinking becoming "free style" and traditional mores being laid aside.

Keeping gospel traditions is not legalism. If it were, then the apostle Paul was guilty. Neither should believers be ashamed of godly traditions nor intimidated by those who might oppose them. However, we must be spiritually minded in whatever we do. It should always be kept in mind that tradi-

tion is not an end in itself but only reflects values and practices supported by Scriptural principles. Let us be determined to know only Christ Jesus and Him crucified (1 Corinthians 2:2), and our traditions will be kept with a spiritual accent.



ARE WE COMPROMISING

The burden of this article involves the method that Satan is using today to break down the saving faith of the gospel. Relaxing in the battle against Satan gives way to compromising with our flesh and sin. In 2 Corinthians 6:14 and 15 we read, "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel?" This scripture clearly teaches us that there is distinct separation between the church and the world, and between spirituality and carnality.

We hear the thought that there are so many gray areas in Christian living today. However, one receives clear direction when living close to God. Spiritual vitality does not come through the intellect but through an intimate relationship with Christ. We are living in a time when communication and access to our wants exceed any time in history. Therefore it is important that we listen to the Holy Spirit and the direction He gives the church, because the spirit of compromising is always present.

One definition of compromising is "coming together by mutual concession." The following allegory explains compromising with Satan:

A hunter raised his rifle and took careful aim at a large bear. When the hunter was about to pull the trigger, the bear asked in a soothing voice, "Is not it better to talk than to shoot? What do you want? Let us negotiate the matter." Lowering his rifle, the man replied, "I want a fur coat." "Good," replied the bear. "I want a full stomach; so let's compromise." They sat down to negotiate, and after a time the bear walked away alone. The negotiation (spirit of compromise) had been successful. The bear had a full stomach, and the hunter had his fur coat.

Satan says to Christians, "Let's compromise," but there are some things that cannot be compromised. We will always lose when we compromise

with evil.

For this spirit to work, what must be the condition of the heart? One real example is found in Revelation 3:14-18, which is the message to the church at Laodicea. The Lord told them that they were lukewarm because their attitude was one of feeling self-sufficient. They felt they were rich and increased with goods and had need of nothing. History describes the city of Laodicea as a well-ordered, energetic, and pulsing center of trade, evincing coldness that was fatal to spirituality. It had qualities that contributed to making it a successful trading city of bankers and finance. It could adapt itself to the needs and wishes of others, ever pliable and accommodating, full of the spirit of compromise. This spirit had an impact on the Christians living there, and they could not thoroughly reject the temptations and allurements of the world. A deceptive spirit had made an inroad into their lives. They had become complacent and felt satisfied. It is very evident why the Lord asked them to repent.

Does the condition of the Laodicea church compare with the time in which we are living? According to the concerns and admonitions voiced through the recent years, one would agree that there are many similarities. We sense the urgency of this concern in many of our meetings. Following are excerpts from five different general conferences that express the concern of compromising with the world's influence. Already as early as 1944 a great awareness was present.

It was said then, "We agree to endeavor to stem the world-ward trend wherever threatening our faith, beginning in our homes and local congregations."

Another concern expressed in the 1950 conference: "The ministers and parents, as well as all members, in the face of a decided drift toward worldliness, should make it their concern to prayerfully study the cause, and remedy it by acknowledging their mistakes wherever most beneficial, whether to individuals or in congregations."

In the first article of the 1983 conference, we read, "Due to the more recent drift among us, we recommit ourselves to resist permissiveness in our personal lives and to exercise spiritual care for one another as we have formerly promised, practicing careful and firm discipline in our homes, our congregations, and throughout the Church, being careful to involve sufficient counsel."

The 1993 conference stated, "We therefore resolve to find the necessary

renewal of first love, bringing our lives, homes, and operation into a true moderation, and disciplining our lives to have time for the Lord's work in the Church."

And the conference in 2003, "Resolved, that we adopt the following statement: '(A) Since a drift toward the world has been clarified, holy fear has come upon us as ministry, parents, and laity. Our burden is to fulfill our obedience by willingly going to the foot of the cross so we may take a stand by discipline and fearless teaching against all lust of the flesh, lust of the eye, and pride of life. Sports involvement, love of affluence and luxury, and general permissiveness are issues we must face in the consecration God is asking of us. We look to the Holy Ghost for power and direction to perform our task.'" There was a real concern at that time in the area of "love of affluence and luxury, and general permissiveness." The Holy Spirit spoke and gave clear direction for us in all of the above concerns.

In Revelation 20:7, we read, "And when the thousand years are expired, Satan shall be loosed out of his prison." Following are some thoughts that may help us understand this better. We believe that it is the time just prior to the return of our Lord. To the vast majority of people, and, sad to say, even to some of the so-called Christians, it will be a time unnoticed. Why? Because it is a time when Satan will work unhindered without restraint and in a deceptive manner.

In the booklet, *The Peaceful Kingdom of Christ* Peter J. Twisk writes some very interesting thoughts on this verse. First, he refers to the time of the martyrs. He then continues his discourse on his understanding of what the time will be like when Satan is loosed: "'And shall go out to deceive the nations which are in the four quarters of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle: the number of whom is as the sand of the sea' (Revelation 20:8). This going forth of Satan into the wide world clearly signifies that it is the time when the witnesses of God lay dead in the street [referring to Revelation 11], in which men did eat and drink, bought and sold, married and were given in marriage until the day that Noah entered in the ark and the flood destroyed them, and as it was in the day of Sodom, when Lot went out of the doomed city, and fire and brimstone devoured the place, so shall it also be in those days.

"Christ the Lord himself shows us again and again that the last time before His second coming will be a time in which no one will be able to work any more (John 9:4), in which, indeed, the gospel will be preached in the whole

world—but understand, as a dead letter for a witness only, in accordance with Matthew 24:14. And thus this time may rightly be compared to the time of Noah before the flood, as also to the time spoken of by the prophet, when the witnesses of God lay dead on the streets, when high living and giving of gifts one to another seemed to be the chief work of men."

Twisk goes on to say that it is a time of continued liberty, favorable to the enemy of souls, and this time of liberty will continue in the world until the second advent of Christ.

This prophecy details a few points that are outstanding: (1) This time will be a time of high living, enjoying sensual living, living in self-gratification and with excess in the field of entertainment. The gospel will be preached, but it will have little effect on many lives, because men will be taken up with the above described lifestyle. (2) It will be a time of liberty, meaning that mankind will not be held back by physical restraint or moral standards, thus taking liberties beyond normal limits. (3) It is a time of freedom, meaning men covet the financial resources to do whatever their flesh desires, which will be granted. It indicates a world that is not held back by material or physical restraints. This lack of restraint will have a direct effect on the church.

We must keep in mind the lukewarm condition of the Laodiceans. When the spiritual temperature of too many members of a congregation or the church in general is lukewarm, compromising convictions that at one time were clearly defined this creates an atmosphere in which we cannot unitedly do disciplinary work. We then find an open field for offences and for sin to remain within the church, which causes a weak brotherhood. In some cases, it almost seems impossible to do disciplinary work. Could this be included in the meaning of John 9:4, where Jesus says we should work, for the night is coming when no man can work? Oh, may we be diligent, brethren, in keeping house within the beloved church of God, lest we find ourselves wanting on that Great Day.

The method that Satan is using today is well described in the Martyrs Mirror, page 8, which reads as follows:

"He reveals himself on the one hand as an angel of light, 2 Corinthians 11:14-15, as a kind, pleasant, yea, even divine messenger, with humble countenance, downcast eyes, plain garb, and living in seclusion from the throng of the worldly-minded, even as the holiest people, yea, the martyrs of God, formerly did. His words are modest, trembling and full of contri-

tion—seemingly coming from deep meditation, inward fear and apprehension, lest he might speak amiss or untruthfully. Meanwhile, and before one is aware of it, he seizes hold and tears like a wolf in sheep's clothing, robbing the innocent lambs of Christ of their precious faith, which he pretends to be of small importance, but without which faith it is impossible to please God ...

"As the first design is aimed at the faith, so this is directed against the true Christian life. Here lies great danger. Who shall escape these snares? He that would at no time be taken unawares by it must indeed be cautious and watchful. But our very flesh is prone to it."

Sometimes we chafe under the guidelines and warnings the church brings to us. Really, this should create thankfulness in us, and we need not look at warnings negatively. Rather, we can rejoice that the spirit of prophecy is active today in the church of God, giving His children clear guidance as how to live in the eleventh hour. Thanks to God for the true faith that has been "once delivered to the saints." The strength and victory lies in keeping our spiritual house in order. The Word of God gives clear direction in the evil day in which we are now living. Following are a few of those verses. Jesus said, "When a strong man armed keepeth his palace, his goods are in peace" (Luke 11:21).

In 1 Peter 5:5, we read, "Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder. Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble." The spirit the prodigal son possessed and of which David writes in Psalm 51 will ensure for us spiritual power to withstand the evil days.

The third verse of Jude reads, "Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints."

In conclusion, the faith the Word teaches, the faith of our forefathers, and the faith that is alive today will keep us in the dark days we are living in and will keep us unto the end.

Brother Errol

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