

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

From The Editor's Desk.

Meditating recently on redemption some writings by Oswald Chambers stood out to me, although written nearly one hundred years ago it applies equally today and shows the inerrancy of Scripture as we observe our world today with in many cases a strident denial of God. Quote:

“The base impulse of mankind revealed itself in the time of our Lord in three great types of sin—the sin of the publicans, the sin of the Pharisees and the sin of the Sadducees.

In every country there is a lost class, a class that has given way to the sins of the flesh till its sin can no longer be concealed. What others do by stealth, they do openly. Such a class existed in our Lord's day in Palestine, and the popular names for them in that day were publicans and sinners, or publicans and harlots, or the lost sheep of the house of Israel. . . . The attitude of Jesus to this class was one of the most singular and characteristic features of His career, and, when fully understood, reveals more clearly perhaps than any other circumstance the secret of His mission. (James Stalker 1848-1927)

Sin is the independence of human nature which God created turning against God. Holiness is this same independence turning against sin. Sin is not doing wrong things, it is wrong being. Sins are wrong acts: sin is an independence that will not bow its neck to God, that defies God and all He presents, that will not go to the excellency of a broken heart. It is that class who stand for independence in art and culture; it is not for them a question of right or wrong, but of pleasing the senses.” End quote.

And for this great redemption from sin God, who is longsuffering to usward sent His only beloved Son (John 3:16) in fulfillment of His promise in Genesis 3:14-14 because He so loved the world and is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. (2 Peter 3:9).

O Word of God incarnate, O Wisdom from on high,
O Truth unchanged, unchanging, O Light of our dark sky!
We praise Thee for the radiance, that from the hallowed page,
A lamp to guide our footsteps, Shines on from age to age.

The Church from her dear Master Received the gift divine,
And still that light she lifted overall the earth to shine,
It is the Golden casket where gems of truth are stored;
It is the heaven drawn picture, Of Christ the Living Word.

William How

MINISTER'S CORNER*Recognising a Lukewarm Experience**From a message by Merle Ruth**Given at Valley View Mennonite Church Revival Meetings*

Behind the audible prayers that we offer may be silent prayers that we never articulate. Those silent prayers are an index to what our spiritual temperature really is.

I am about to read now an imaginary prayer of this kind, you may not appreciate the style that the writer has chosen but I urge you to be patient and to listen closely to the name that the writer attaches to this prayer.

Dear God,

This morning we made our triumphal entry at church in our new Buick. I wish, dear God, that You could have seen it. 20 years ago we would never have dreamt that such a car would be ours but You blessed us so wonderfully. Thanks again for the prosperity.

Anyway, everyone was visibly impressed except our pastor. I know his old car is rusting through but certainly he took that into account in choosing his occupation.

I guess that our pastor feels that You too would question the way we spend our money but Lord, when your Son chose His transportation it was no second-hand donkey, according to my exegesis it was the latest model and white, just like our Buick.

All the driving we do in our travels we need a good car. We get better mileage than most and since we are not so young any more we need the comfort, also in case of accidents the heavier car has the advantage.

Well, I could go on but I think You understand.

I must run now, we are driving over to the wake this afternoon so, until next Sunday,

Yours as always,

Luke Warm.

The question. Does a person in this condition recognise his own condition?

Why raise this question? One reason is because I plan to speak this evening on the theme Recognising a Lukewarm Experience.

I'm going to be using as the framework to this message a series of seven questions and without any further introduction we will move right now to question number one.

1] Where did the expression lukewarm originate?

If I were to ask is it a Bible word would your hand go up?

If I were to ask how many could name the only place in the Bible where it occurs would your hand go up?

If I were to ask for the name of the person who employed this term, again would your hands go up?

If not, that in itself might be an indication of lukewarmness.

Open your Bible now to Revelation chapter 3 beginning at verse 14 we have words addressed to the last of seven selected churches.

Revelation 3:14

"And unto the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write; These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God; ¹⁵I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. ¹⁶So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth."

There it is! The only occurrence of the word lukewarm in all the Bible. Furthermore this expression, lukewarm, translates a Greek word that likewise occurs only here and the King James translators evidently did a good job because in consulting a number of other versions and suchlike I discovered that they all retained this expression lukewarm.

Having answered the first question, the question of origin, let's move now to the second.

Question number two.

2] What is a lukewarm experience?

If a liquid is lukewarm its temperature lies somewhere between hot and cold, when the term is applied to something abstract something like one's experience it then has reference to the level of one's interest or the level of one's enthusiasm.

If you only have a casual interest in something then you can be said to be lukewarm toward that area of interest. In personal relations, friendships can cool off to the point where a one-time close friend becomes lukewarm toward you.

But what does it mean when it is applied to the spiritual aspect of life and at what point in one's pilgrimage can a lukewarm experience overtake him? Is it a pre-conversion possibility or is it a post-conversion possibility or might it be both? Technically it is true that a non-Christian who begins to show interest in the Bible, in the church, may be said to have a lukewarm interest in spiritual things but in its biblical context lukewarmness has primary reference to a condition found among those who have already made a Christian profession and who have already started out in the Christian walk of life.

The Laodiceans very definitely laid claim to the name Christian and there is a big possibility that at one point in their experience their spiritual temperature was up there where it ought to be.

The Laodicean church had been in existence for quite some time. Colossians 4:16 records Paul's instruction to have that letter to be Colossians read to the Laodiceans. It may have been 20 or 30 years since they had begun the Christian life. The lukewarmness or I should say the lukewarm condition is the New Testament counterpart of what is commonly called backsliding in the Old Testament and a backslider is surely one who once began to walk in the ways of the Lord but at some point lost interest.

There may be yet another situation in which this expression is applicable. Some people are said to have had a healthy conversion but some do not, they get off to a poor start in the Christian life, they grow very slowly, they may be sickly spiritually, these people to may be said to have a lukewarm experience but for them it is not a level to which they fell back to, but rather a level above which they failed to ever rise.

My aim in all this was to answer the question: What is a lukewarm experience?

In the biblical context it has reference primarily to someone who has experienced new life, who has been walking the narrow way but for one reason or another is growing cold and lukewarm or at least lost interest, is no longer enthused, no longer interested in the things of the Lord like he once was.

Let's consider now the third question.

3] How can a lukewarm experience be recognised?

Remember the theme is Recognising a Lukewarm Experience, how can a lukewarm experience be recognised?

In order to recognise anything we need sight of some kind, the lukewarm experience is no exception. To recognise it demands good sight and a particular kind of sight. Physical eyesight is a wonderful blessing, science will never be able to duplicate the ability and the efficiency of the human eye but the physical eye does have its limitations. Even in its own realm there are some things that the physical eye fails to recognise, some objects are too small, some are too distant and some move so rapidly that the eye cannot recognise them. The lukewarm experience is another thing that can escape the notice of the physical eye.

God has also equipped us with what is sometimes called the eye of the mind. With this faculty the carpenter for example can visualise how the structure that he is building will appear when it is finally completed.

But there is a still higher form of sight - spiritual sight, sometimes referred to as spiritual perception. This is the seeing faculty of the human spirit and it is this faculty that suffered most in the fall of man, the unregenerate person has very poor spiritual perception, not only because of the Fall but also because he is suffering the consequences of his own personal sin. For those two reasons his spiritual perception is virtually nil.

God said this to Ezekiel: "Son of man thou dwellest in the midst of a rebellious house which hath eyes to see but they see not." Ezekiel 12:2

Jesus when he was here spoke of the Pharisees as blind leaders of the blind. (Matthew 15:14)

Another faculty, or another factor contributing to spiritual blindness is the influence brought to bear upon an individual by the god of this world.

We are told very pointedly in second Corinthians 4:4 that the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them that believe not.

The point I'm trying to make is simply this; Lukewarmness goes unrecognised by many because they are lacking in spiritual perception, the only faculty that can recognise it. Lukewarmness is really an intangible thing, it is not an object, rather it is a condition, it is however accompanied by some observable symptoms and to recognise the symptoms and to rightly interpret them requires the perception that is often sadly lacking, either that lack

is due to one of two things - either it was never gained or after having been gained it was lost again.

In order to recognise of the lukewarm experience one needs to be spiritually healthy. He must be able to say: Once I was blind but now I can see! that person and that person alone will be able to recognise a lukewarm condition. John 9:25.

I now introduce another question, question number four.

4] Can the spiritually lukewarm person recognise his own lukewarmness?

The sermon title offers no clue as to whether the lukewarmness in view is someone else's lukewarmness or one's own lukewarmness. Really it is urgent to recognise it wherever it may exist. Being human I suppose that we are more inclined to see it in another person than in ourselves, even the person who does possess spiritual sight may have blind spots. You know that is pretty common but I guess on the physical level we all have blind spots. Spiritually, unfortunately, blind spots seem to be very common and the blind spot is usually something in one's own life.

David was quick to see the wrongness of that man in Nathan's story but he was blind, at least temporarily, to the same sort of wrong in his own life. To offset this natural tendency someone has suggested to follow this guideline: For every look at someone else look inward twice and upward thrice. That's good counsel.

Isaiah's experience along this line is very instructive. In Isaiah 5 we hear that Prophet pronounce woe after woe upon his fellowmen and rightly so, (Isaiah 5:8,11,18,20-22) but after that vision after which he saw the holiness of God and saw himself in contrast to that holiness then in chapter 6 we hear him pronouncing woe after woe upon himself. "Woe is me, woe is me for I am a man of unclean lips!" Isaiah 6:1.

It evidently took that vision to make Isaiah aware of the laxness that existed in his own life. Being an Old Testament saint he may however have lacked some of the powers of spiritual perception that are available today.

Another clue to the answer for our present question lies right in the context where this term lukewarm appears.

One might ask did the Laodiceans recognise their own lukewarmness, did they? No! Our authority for that is no less than the Son of God Himself. Look at verse 17

“Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked:” Rev. 3:17.

What a contrast between how they saw themselves and how the Lord saw them. It certainly does not appear as though they recognised their own lukewarmness. Blindness to one’s own lukewarmness is also seen in other Bible characters.

While Samson was on the way down it was said of him: He wist not that the Lord had departed from him. Judges 16:20

The book of Hosea God says this concerning Ephraim, the northern kingdom, strangers have devoured his strength and he knoweth it not. Yea, grey hairs are here and there upon him yet he knoweth it not. Hosea 7:9

That is a figurative way of depicting spiritual decline and where they aware of it? No!

Again after their return from their Babylonian captivity God used the Prophet Malachi to bring against the lukewarm Jews one indictment after another. Remember what their response was? What was it?

“Wherein have we done this?” Again and again to every indictment that was their answer, Wherein have we done this? Doesn't that reflect spiritual blindness? They were blind to what had befallen them. (read Malachi 1:6-7, 2:17, 3:8.)

Now all this mass of biblical evidence points to the conclusion that there is something about lukewarmness that is extremely deceptive, it hides behind the very blindness that it produces.

I do believe however that in its initial stages lukewarmness can be recognised by the one whom it is threatening. The experience of Asaph recorded in Psalm 73 would support that view, Asaph makes this admission: My feet were almost gone, my steps had well-nigh slipped. Psalm 73:2

But he experienced a recovery. When? How? By going into the sanctuary of God.

If anyone is here tonight at that point may this be for you a time of recovery. You are in the sanctuary of God, the best place of all to recognise one's own spiritual condition, but be sure of this, if those early warnings

are not heeded a blindness will set in that renders the victim incapable of recognising his own lukewarmness. Perhaps it would be limiting God to say that there is no hope for such a person but their position is very, very precarious.

Question number five.

5] What is the most subtle, what is the most disarming thing about lukewarmness?

Sometime or other we have possibly all learnt what it is like to get used to the dark, by simply stepping through a doorway one can move from bright sunlight into the darkness of a dimly lit room, after a little stumbling and fumbling you gradually begin to make out the objects around you, slowly your eyes adjust and eventually you get used to the dark.

There is a lot of similarity between getting accustomed to the dark and becoming lukewarm spiritually. In both cases you adjust to a new situation.

The story is told as an illustration of adjustment of a frog placed in a pot of cold water which is slowly heated, the frog stays where it is because it is adjusting to a new situation but if that frog had been dropped into water that was already hot he no doubt would have splashed it all over and possibly jumped to safety.

It was the gradualness of the change that deceived that frog.

I believe that the most subtle, the most disarming thing about lukewarmness is likewise the gradualness with which it overtakes its victim. Although lukewarmness is very deceptive and consequently is not recognised by many it nevertheless can be recognised by the spiritually healthy Christian.

(to be concluded next issue.)



So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth.

Rev. 3:16.

THE CHAFF AND THE WHEAT

"The prophet that hath a dream, let him tell a dream; and he that hath my word, let him speak my word faithfully. What is the chaff to the wheat? saith the Lord" (Jer. 23:28).

The Lord wasn't asking an entertaining riddle with the question, "What is the chaff to the wheat?" He was deeply burdened and serious. Israel had come to a state where judgment was imminent unless the people came to their senses. So-called prophets were smoothing over and minimizing Israel's decay with their "dreams," and the people were buying it. In this atmosphere, the wheat, the truth and heart of God's law, was ignored. Instead, they gave ear to misleading vain dreams, chaff that ran counter to God's word. Weightless and pesky, the vain and valueless things with which Satan likes to dilute true religion and corrupt sound practice are like chaff. The Lord's question, then, was "Why do my people mix chaff with the wheat?"

When grain is thrashed, the chaff becomes evident. But a farmer is interested in clean, chaff-free grain. So when the threshing process takes the chaff away, there is no sense of loss, rather satisfaction. The good grain is now uncontaminated without worthless encumbrances. This is a good illustration of the continuing sanctification in Christian living. On the Day of Judgment, the separation of the chaff from the wheat will be absolute (Luke 3:17).

An experienced farmer knows the importance of properly setting the sieves and wind blast of his threshing machine. He makes adjustments until he gets good clean grain in the bin. His goal is all the grain with the least amount of chaff possible. If he opens the sieves too much, more chaff will be retained. If he closes them too far or applies too much air blast, good grain will be thrown out the back of the harvester. Likewise, the Holy Ghost moves upon the believer's spirit and soul (1 Thess. 5:23) to garner clean grain. His faithful counsel and reproof exclude the chaff—needless, vain, and fleshly things—as much as possible. It has no value when compared to the grain.

It is a disheartening inclination of man to corrupt the original intent and purpose of something pure and simple by superfluous additions. Bits of this and pieces of that are added here and there until the real purpose tends to be overlooked and forgotten. The chaff obscures the wheat. This was the

case in Israel when Jesus came teaching the gospel. But John the Baptist said Jesus would have His "fan in his hand" and would "thoroughly purge his floor" (Luke 3:17). Christ often had to first blow away the chaff. This caused consternation and resistance and provoked many false accusations against the Lord.

Unless we are zealously affected (Gal. 4:18) for the faith, we will hold to "chaff" with tenaciousness. A close analysis of chaff shows that it is usually self-serving, at the expense of the purity and simplicity of the faith. One must conclude that there is a root that taps the fleshly spirit realm in this matter. When this spirit prevails, the faith is not something to sacrifice for, and the beautiful fruit of temperance (Gal. 5:23) is lost.

Pure religion is a scriptural belief and the proper practice of that belief. The chaff problem usually shows itself first in the practice part, or the actual living of the faith. Unconverted people may not understand the ordinances and doctrines of the Word, but the humility and sincerity demonstrated when God's people conscientiously live them touches many. Practicing the principles and ordinances of the Word, with the good grain undefiled by chaff, speaks of godliness.

The practice of pure religion is not an end in itself, like setting it oil a pedestal for one's own admiration. True religion redounds to the praise of God and reminds men of their need of salvation.

For these reasons, sincere believers rejoice in the wheat and eschew the chaff.

Thinking about the beautiful ordinance of matrimony, and then all the activities that go with a wedding today, sparked the inspiration for this article. The doctrine of holy matrimony is one of the principal stones in the walls of the church. The "wheat" of this ordinance is preached and taught. It is in the activities surrounding the wedding where chaff is wont to appear. The Lord's question to Israel, "What is the chaff to the wheat?" seems fitting for us also when applied to this setting.

God has given the church a most precious and impressive way to contract marriages. Compared to the way the world does, it is unique, befitting a peculiar people (1 Pet. 2:9). The simplicity and purity of the church's manner of bringing about a marriage is good grain. It has spoken to many hearts that walk in another way. Certainly, we have nothing to be ashamed of; rather we are duty bound to praise the Lord for His provision to the church. The record of marriages in the church that endure until death doth sunder

the union has been good. One could say it has been nearly perfect. Of more recent times there is a growing concern that some homes are not as sound as they ought to be. Sadly, some have failed. While much more effort and activity is put into a wedding today than years ago, some of the additions are chaff and have subtracted from the wheat. This raises a question whether there is a correlation between these developments. We need more emphasis on the fear of God (wheat), preventing the spirit of having fun, bestowing and seeking honor one of another, and light sociality (chaff) that subtracts from the sacredness of the occasion.

If the Lord were to come on the scene today with His "fan ... in his hand ... and throughly purge his floor," would we resist Him like the scribes and Pharisees did? God forbid. Let us look at the matter realistically, with a burden for the true faith. If we sincerely seek God's highest honor and glory, and the best foundation for our new homes, we will value the wheat and be glad that the chaff is taken away. The Holy Ghost knows how to set the sieves and temper the wind blast so that all the grain is saved and the chaff excluded.

"He that soweth the good seed is the Son of man; The field is the world; the good seed are the children of the kingdom; but the tares are the children of the wicked one; The enemy that sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the world; and the reapers are the angels. Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father" (Matt. 13:37-43).



Angels Unawares.

From a message by Clair Z. Weaver at Blue Mountain Mennonite Fellowship, 2006.

Let brotherly love continue. ²Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares. Hebrews 13:1-2

It is important for us to focus on the positives of Christian faith. The powers of evil are preying on the minds of the fearful and the frustrated in this generation, they were in Job's day, they are today. The apostle wrote: "You are of God little children and have overcome them because greater is he that is in you than he that is in the world" (1 John 4:4) and truly as we

realise that that great one, greater than Satan, is indeed capable of supernatural things, yet he acts only by the permissive will of God as we learn from the lessons of Job, he is on a leash as it were, God alone is the all-powerful one, He is omnipotent. God provides His people though with weapons of offence and defense and as such we are not to be fearful ones, we are not to be distressed, we are not to be deceived, we are not to be intimidated by that great one, rather we are to be on our guard, calm, alert lest Satan should get an advantage and that we are not ignorant of his devices (2 Cor. 2:11) and one of his devices is to divert our minds from the help that is there, that God has in place in our struggles against the forces of evil, God has provided for us in this spiritual conflict. Scriptures testify to this, we are not alone in the world.

I appreciated the opening meditation on friends, how we need them and we would like to look at how angel forces are our friends. The Bible teaches that the Holy Spirit is our friend, the one who goes alongside to be our helper, our comforter, our guide, the one who gives us power. And in nearly 300 other places we are taught that God has countless angels at command. He has commissioned these messengers to aid His children through life, in the struggle of life. We do not have a whole lot of information about them like we might like to have but yet what we do have we can glean as a source of comfort and strength through every circumstance of life. They are available to all Christians, hosts of angels are at God's command and service as we make our way from earth to glory. So let's look up and take courage our redemption is at hand. Angels are nearer than we think, after all God has given His angels charge over thee lest at any time we should dash our foot against a stone.

Just think of it, multitudes of angels, mighty in power at the command of heaven and the scriptures speak to that in:

Psalm 68:17:

“The chariots of God are twenty thousand, even thousands of angels: the Lord is among them, as in Sinai, in the holy place.

Also in 2 Thessalonians 1:7-8

“And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, ⁸In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ:”

And in the book of Revelation chapter 5 verse 11:

“And I beheld, and I heard the voice of many angels round about the throne and the beasts and the elders: and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands.”

Christians are joint heirs with Christ if it be that we suffer with Him. Angels are not joint heirs and must step aside or stand to the side when believers are introduced to the eternal riches yet these angels have never lost their original glory and their original relationship with God those who fell not and thus they have an exalted place in God's creation.

By contrast Jesus identifies Himself in His incarnation as being made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, He chose to taste the death that we deserve showing how holy angels do not share in its sinfulness nor our need of redemption. There is always a thrill of the joy of salvation when one responds to the gospel and the local church assembly of the believers represent in the human sphere the highest order of the love of God on this earth, no love can go deeper, as we heard about these close friends, it cannot rise higher or extend further than the amazing love that moved God to give us His holy only beloved Son, our Redeemer.

And the angels are aware of the joy that goes with that salvation to those to respond to it, that response to the love of God and when a person accepts that gift angels are rejoicing, we have those words recorded, and yet when they rejoice when men are saved and glorify God that He has saved them they cannot testify personally to that which they have not experienced and will not experience, they can only point to the experiences of the redeemed and rejoice that God has saved man.

Similar to a person who has never experienced the loss of a father or mother they cannot fully understand what that loss means and so the angels, great as they are, cannot fully testify to salvation the same as those who have experienced it. Man alone throughout eternity will be praising God for salvation, the angels will have to stand by although they will be joining in around the throne praising God.

Also in Scriptures we have nowhere to indicate that the Holy Spirit indwells angels as He does redeemed people. Since He seals the believers when they accept Christ such sealing would not be necessary for those angels who have never fallen. There is another reason for the difference there

that redeemed men on earth have not yet been glorified but the angels of heaven are glorified beings. So there again there is a vast difference.

The angels excel humankind in knowledge.

When King David was being urged to bring Absalom back to Jerusalem Joab asked a woman of Tekoah to talk to the King. She said: “My Lord is wise according to the wisdom of an angel of God to know all things that are in the earth.” (2 Samuel 14:19) And angels do possess knowledge that men do not have yet their knowledge is not omniscient, they do not know everything, Jesus bore testimony to that when He was speaking of the second coming “but of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven.” (Matthew 24:36).

Yet angels may know things about us that we may not know, for they are ministering spirits and in a day when few can be trusted with secret information it is comforting to know that angels will not divulge their knowledge to be a hurt to us, but we can acknowledge them as friends, they will use their knowledge for good, they go ahead as it were sent by God, they use their knowledge for the good of the believer.

Angels also enjoy a power far greater than men and yet they are not omnipotent they are not all-powerful, angels who are great in might, 2 Peter 2:11, let's notice that thought there of fleshly ones walking after their own lusts: "Whereas angels, which are greater in power and might, bring not railing accusation against them before the Lord."

These angels do not revile, do not rail on even those who are under the judgment of God. And also as far as their power we should also take note that it was one Angel that slew the first born in Egypt and it was one Angel that was sent to shut the lions' mouth for Daniel.

Revelation 20:1-3 brings out the power of an angel also:

“And I saw an angel come down from heaven, having the key of the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. ²And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years, ³And cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal upon him, that he should deceive the nations no more, till the thousand years should be fulfilled: and after that he must be loosed a little season.”
How great is the power of one of God's mighty angels?

I would like to go now to an Old Testament account of a miracle where angels played so great a part in the announcing of the birth of Samson in Judges 13:1-21:

“And the children of Israel did evil again in the sight of the LORD; and the LORD delivered them into the hand of the Philistines forty years.

²And there was a certain man of Zorah, of the family of the Danites, whose name was Manoah; and his wife was barren, and bare not. ³And the angel of the LORD appeared unto the woman, and said unto her, Behold now, thou art barren, and bearest not: but thou shalt conceive, and bear a son. ⁴Now therefore beware, I pray thee, and drink not wine nor strong drink, and eat not any unclean thing: ⁵For, lo, thou shalt conceive, and bear a son; and no razor shall come on his head: for the child shall be a Nazarite unto God from the womb: and he shall begin to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines.

⁶Then the woman came and told her husband, saying, A man of God came unto me, and his countenance was like the countenance of an angel of God, very terrible: but I asked him not whence he was, neither told he me his name: ⁷But he said unto me, Behold, thou shalt conceive, and bear a son; and now drink no wine nor strong drink, neither eat any unclean thing: for the child shall be a Nazarite to God from the womb to the day of his death.

⁸Then Manoah intreated the LORD, and said, O my Lord, let the man of God which thou didst send come again unto us, and teach us what we shall do unto the child that shall be born. ⁹And God hearkened to the voice of Manoah; and the angel of God came again unto the woman as she sat in the field: but Manoah her husband was not with her. ¹⁰And the woman made haste, and ran, and shewed her husband, and said unto him, Behold, the man hath appeared unto me, that came unto me the other day. ¹¹And Manoah arose, and went after his wife, and came to the man, and said unto him, Art thou the man that spakest unto the woman? And he said, I am. ¹²And Manoah said, Now let thy words come to pass. How shall we order the child, and how shall we do unto him? ¹³And the angel of the LORD said unto Manoah, Of all that I said unto the woman let her beware. ¹⁴She may not eat of any thing that cometh of the vine, neither let her drink wine or strong drink, nor eat any unclean thing: all that I commanded her let her observe.

¹⁵And Manoah said unto the angel of the LORD, I pray thee, let us detain thee, until we shall have made ready a kid for thee. ¹⁶And the angel of the LORD said unto Manoah, Though thou detain me, I will not eat of thy bread: and if thou wilt offer a burnt offering, thou must offer it unto the LORD. For Manoah knew not that he was an angel of the LORD. ¹⁷And Manoah said unto the angel of the LORD, What is thy name, that when thy sayings come to pass we may do thee honour? ¹⁸And the angel of the LORD said unto him, Why askest thou thus after my name, seeing it is secret? ¹⁹So Manoah took a kid with a meat offering, and offered it upon a rock unto the LORD: and the angel did wonderously; and Manoah and his wife looked on. ²⁰For it came to pass, when the flame went up toward heaven from off the altar, that the angel of the LORD ascended in the flame of the altar. And Manoah and his wife looked on it, and fell on their faces to the ground. ²¹But the angel of the LORD did no more appear to Manoah and to his wife. Then Manoah knew that he was an angel of the LORD.”

We see here this Old Testament miracle and as we think about the surroundings of the birth of the Lord Jesus how angels ministered there and announced even that birth it is of a great encouragement, there are even various aspects in this account where the Angel would not accept worship and would even not name himself so he could be remembered by name, but God has his ministering servants, messengers, ever busy.

God's angels often protect from potential enemies. As Bible readers I believe we are well familiar with Elisha the Prophet, and as the Syrians had dispatched their army and Elisha's helper exclaimed excitedly as to what was going on, how the countryside was covered with the armies and the implements of war but Elisha then prayed to God that He would open the servant's eyes and let him see the spiritual forces that were before them, the hosts of protective angels, and surely this is one of those accounts of great assurance and comfort to Christians in any time of life and especially when we feel the spiritual forces raging within. (2 Kings 6:17)

Angels minister in times of hardship and danger.

We find this in Paul's life as he was on his way to Rome, he faced shipwreck and there were many lives on board and all very fearful maybe except for Paul. He said "...this night there stood by me an angel of God

whose I am and whom I serve.” (Acts 27:23) And with that message they were able to sail on and even in the midst of shipwreck there were no lives lost.

Some would believe strongly that each Christian is assigned a guardian angel to watch over them and this may even begin in infancy as Jesus said: “Take heed that you do not despise one of these little ones for I say unto you that in heaven there are angels that do always behold the face of my Father who is in heaven.” (Matthew 18:10) Whether that is so or not the most important characteristic is that we must understand that they do work on our behalf. They are motivated by our love for God and jealous to see that God's will is worked out in the Christian's life. I would tend to think that there is more than one angel that accompanies Christians, that there isn't just one assigned per individual. God has His spiritual forces working for us.

I don't know if any have read Frank Perretti's books which are somewhat of the novelty variety we might say, where he would paint the picture of little beings running across the peak of this roof right now while the believers are assembled within, we should not allow our minds to go into fanciful stories like that but yet to have that calm settledness and assurance that angels are watching, they are marking our path.

Your believing cry should be encouraged and strengthened with the thought of God's protection, God is jealous, His angels are jealous for us. They superintend the events of life and protect the interests of the Lord God daily, moment by moment, working to promote His plans and to bring about His highest will for God's people, we even saw that in the Old Testament account of Manoah and his wife, the Angel was simply delivering a message from the Almighty.

Angels are interested spectators and mark all we do, for we are made a spectacle unto the world and to angels and to men, (1 Corinthians 4). God assigns the angelic powers to watch over us, maybe not individually named angels, but His angels.

Hagar, Sarah's maid, had fled from the tents of Abraham and it is ironic that Abraham after having scaled to the heights of faith as he did should have yielded to his wife's conniving and scolding and even to the custom

of the day and father a child to Hagar the maid. And it is also ironic that Sarah his wife should be so jealous that when their own son Isaac was born years later she wanted to get rid of both Hagar and the child and so that situation led to sorrow, Hagar was thrust out of the home as we know, but nonetheless God sent His angel to minister to Hagar, he spoke as the oracle of God and turned her mind from the hurt and injury of the past with a promise what she might expect to see if she placed her faith in God and this God is the God of the faithful and the God of the faithful Arab as well, the very name of her son Ishmael means "God hears", she was sustained on that thought that God heard her cry in the wilderness and God promised that the seed of Ishmael would multiply and that his destiny would be great upon the earth as he went out on that restless pilgrimage that was to characterize the rest of his descendants. (Genesis 16, 21 and 25)

The Angel of the Lord revealed himself as the protector of Hagar and Ishmael and she in awe exclaimed: God seeth me! Or translated another way: I have seen Thou who seest all and who sees me.

One of those verses in the Psalms that is a comfort to the believer is Psalm 34:7: "The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them."

Again underscoring that thought of angels protecting and delivering. Many can recall some incident in life where they have experienced that in times of critical danger, or almost accidents, or even a fierce temptation where we were preserved. We may not have seen an Angel or even known their presence and yet the tragedy was averted, we should always be grateful to God for this who uses angels to protect us unawares. Evidence from Scripture as well as personal experience confirms that guarding angels attend our ways over us as it were.

Paul admonished the Ephesians to put on all the armour of God (Ephesians 6:10-17) and our struggle in the life is not fleshly and bloody but as with the spiritual forces, wicked forces in heavenly spheres, and Satan is the Prince and the power of the air promotes religion but not through faith, he provides false prophets, he has false prophets and so the powers of light and darkness are locked in conflict. And let's be thankful to God for those angelic forces who are fighting for the Christian who are given as God directs for our strengthening.

Acts 12, we are familiar with Peter being in prison and as he lay bound in prison awaiting execution, we are familiar with how the angel came right in there.

“And, behold, the angel of the Lord came upon him, and a light shined in the prison: and he smote Peter on the side, and raised him up, saying, Arise up quickly. And his chains fell off from his hands. ⁸And the angel said unto him, Gird thyself, and bind on thy sandals. And so he did. And he saith unto him, Cast thy garment about thee, and follow me. ⁹And he went out, and followed him; and wist not that it was true which was done by the angel; but thought he saw a vision.” Acts 12:7-9

An Angel unawares.

James, the brother of John, had already been executed and there was little reason to suppose that Peter would not escape the same end, a fact the magistrates had intended. And an Angel came in there through the closed bars and doors and let Peter out and these doors and bars then swung open through their own accord so Peter passed through. What a mighty deliverance!

Many experiences both Old and New Testament grow out of these imprisonments from time to time of God's saints, as they called to God they were delivered directly or the angels intervened acting in God's name and many today who are captive in chains can take courage to believe in the prospect of deliverance, spiritual deliverance, God has no favorites and declares that His angels are there to minister to all the heirs of faith. We dare not though place our faith in angels, we place our faith in God who rules the angels and then we can have peace.

Hebrews 11 contains a long list of those who were faithful men and women and for most of them God performed miracles delivering them from disease, calamity, accidents and even death, angels helped them to subdue kingdoms and obtain promises, stopped the mouth of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword but the story changes part way through that faith chapter, in fact it is the 35th verse of Hebrews 11. "Women received their dead raised to life again: and others were tortured, not accepting deliverance; that they might obtain a better resurrection: " (Hebrews 11:35).

Those now mentioned are of equal faith, strength and courage, they had to endure the trials of cruel markings and scourges, they suffered bonds they suffered imprisonment, they were stoned, they were sawn asunder,

they was slain with the sword, they wandered about in goatskins being destitute and afflicted, tormented. Time after time they surely must have called on God to send His angel of deliverance to help but no delivering Angel came, they suffered and endured to the end.

I believe we can see in our Lord Jesus at Calvary this same affliction and the answer to many question - Why? As He prayed at Calvary: "If it be possible let this cup pass from me" but then He added, "Nevertheless not mine will but thine be done." Luke 22:42.

And in these sufferings and death of these saints that were not delivered God has a mysterious plan and is performing His will. They suffered and died by faith, those who endured by faith and died it would seem that Hebrews 11 here is indicating that they went the better way. God having provided some better thing as they enjoyed the ministering of angels even as they carried them to the throne of God. Revelation speaks of those under the throne who were martyred.

So the charge to live righteously in this present world should sober us as we realise more and more than walk and the warfare of our pilgrimage here is the primary concern of heaven and the angels in heaven.

1 Timothy 5:21

“I charge thee before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, and the elect angels, that thou observe these things without preferring one before another, doing nothing by partiality.”

Paul was stirring up Timothy, and us, to remember that the elect angels are constantly watching how we serve the Saviour, how we live the Christian life. What a motivation for us to live righteously, live godly in Christ Jesus and I must remind myself angels are watching, be careful.

I read an account of an elderly minister who was up late into the night preparing a sermon for a small congregation and his wife questioned that he spent so much time to preach to so few people and his answer was: “You forget my dear how large my audience will be.”

In closing may these words be a comfort and encouragement to us:

Hebrews 12:1-2

“Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us,
²Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy

that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.”

Surely angels are included in this cloud of witnesses that is compassing the believers and encompassed even about us and we have that encouragement in these two passages from Hebrews 12.

Hebrews 12:18-19

“For ye are not come unto the mount that might be touched, and that burned with fire, nor unto blackness, and darkness, and tempest, ¹⁹And the sound of a trumpet, and the voice of words; which voice they that heard in-treated that the word should not be spoken to them any more:”

Hebrews 12:22-24

“But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, ²³To the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, ²⁴And to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel.”



The Character of Redeemed Experience

By Redeemed Experience is meant eternal life manifested in the fleeting moments of temporal life. What is not meant is the consciousness of feeling good, or the consciousness of the presence of God. If we mistake these feelings for eternal life, we shall be disillusioned sooner or later. When we are being initiated into a new experience we are conscious of it, but any sane person is much too wise to mistake consciousness of life for life itself. It is only the initial stages of new experiences which produce consciousness of themselves, and if we hug the consciousness of God's blessings and of His presence we become spiritual sentimentalists. God began to introduce us to life, and we would not go through with it.

1. The Unique Character of This Life.

“Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me hath everlasting life.” John 6:47.

What is eternal life? “And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.” John 17:3.

“Eternal” has reference to the quality of the life. Our Lord says very distinctly what eternal life is not—e.g. “But he answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.” Matthew 4:4 and also: “He said unto them, Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth.” Luke 12:15.

Whenever Our Lord speaks of “life” He means eternal life, and He says, “Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you.” John 6:53.

Men have natural life and intellectual life apart from Jesus Christ.

The life which Jesus Christ exhibited was eternal life, and He says—anyone who believes in Me, that is commits himself to Me, has that life. To commit myself to Jesus means there is nothing that is not committed. Belief is a twofold transaction—a deliberate destroying of all roads back again, and a complete surrender to Our Lord Himself. God comes in with a rush immediately a soul surrenders to the Lord Jesus Christ. The only barrier to God's love is unbelief working sentimentally, i.e. brooding around the shores of an experience which produces consciousness of itself, but life is not there.

2. The Upward Character of the Life

“Then they took away the stone from the place where the dead was laid. And Jesus lifted up his eyes, and said, Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me. ⁴²And I knew that thou hearest me always: but because of the people which stand by I said it, that they may believe that thou hast sent me.” John 11:41-42.

The upward look towards God of eternal life is an indication of the inherent nature of the life; that is, it is not attained by effort. Natural characteristics, natural virtues and natural attainments have nothing to do with the life itself. A blackguard and an upright man both commit themselves to Jesus Christ and receive eternal life; will the latter have freer access to God?

No! Eternal life works the same in both. There is no respect of persons with God. The manifestation of eternal life is, however, a different matter.

3. The Outward Character of the Life.

“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”

This verse gives the outlook man-ward of eternal life as exhibited in Our Lord. The only way to react rightly on men around is to let eternal life react through you, and if you want to know how eternal life will react you will see it in Jesus Christ. Our Lord was in no wise a hard worker; He was an intense reality. Hard workers are like midges and mosquitoes; the reality is like the mountain and the lake. Our Lord's life was one of amazing leisure, and the presentation of His life as one of rush is incorrect. The three years of public life are a manifestation of the intense reality of life.

Acts 10:38 says: "How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him."

When the passion for souls obscures the passion for Jesus Christ you have the devil on your track as an angel of light. Our Lord was never in a hurry, never in a panic. "There are no dates in His fine leisure." Our Lord's life is the exhibition of eternal life in time. Eternal life in the Christian is based on redemptive certainty; he is not working to redeem men; he is a fellow worker with God among men because they are redeemed.

4. The Downward Character of This Life.

"For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him." 2 Corinthians 5:21.

The downward look of eternal life is manifested by Our Lord—a fearless, clear-eyed, understanding look at sin, at death, and at the devil—that is the unmistakable characteristic of the downward look of Our Lord. The devil's counterfeit is no sin, no hell and no judgment.

We can choose to be redeemed in Christ or choose to follow the "angel of light" "And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light." (2 Cor. 11:14) As in Old Testament times we too are given a choice whom to serve. (Joshua 24:15) Let us therefore have the attitude and mind of the Apostle Peter who, after some of Jesus' disciples chose to leave Him and Jesus asked those who stayed if they would also leave Him, Peter replied: "Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life." John 6:68.



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