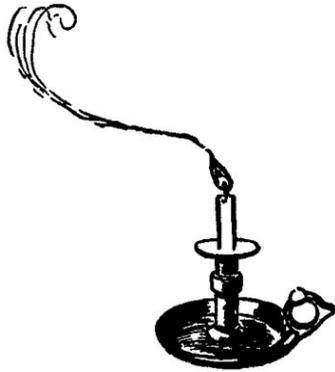


THE AUSTRALIAN ANABAPTIST

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

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

Matthew 5:15

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For A Conservative Mennonite Perspective

From The Editor's Desk.

The Apostle Paul in his 2nd letter to the Corinthians felt compelled by his love and concern for them to tell them of his own journey of faith and thus be an encouragement to them in that whatever they were suffering for the sake of Christ could be endured because of the promise of the prize that awaits all who endure to the end, they will be saved, Jesus says that in Mark 13:13 and the prize is revealed by Jesus in Revelation 2:10.

When we read 2 Corinthians 11 and verses 20 through 33 one may wonder at how Paul survived all those things and lived to tell the tale and further more went on to minister to the churches as he did.

Have any of us suffered any of those things?

Are we likely to suffer any of those things?

We may suffer some verbal abuse or rejection in our present circumstances but physical violence is pretty well unknown to us personally and yet there are believers in this world today who do suffer those things and even lose their lives for the sake of Christ.

Yes, we can ask questions as to why we suffer this or that but it is minimal compared to so many who have gone before and many even today.

What is the secret of their steadfastness in Christ? What is it that you or I can lay hold of today to remain steadfast in the faith we have chosen?

Paul had an unflinching faith in God, Paul had a burning zeal to be a true disciple and messenger of Christ Jesus.

The martyrs through the centuries they too had an unflinching faith and their testimony, often unto death, was a zeal for Christ, a love for their fellow man to see the message of salvation proclaimed to all who saw or heard them.

May we too have an unflinching faith in Christ and a certain knowledge that His grace is sufficient for us in all circumstances even when they look the bleakest and most desperate and indeed it seems threaten our very life.

It is our prayer that the articles this month may be an encouragement to understanding the why of suffering and a call to a deeper, stronger unflinching faith in our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. *J.v. L*



The Why of Suffering.
Brother Melvin Burkholder
White Oak Mennonite Church 2012.

We greet you in the name of Jesus Christ this morning, it is good to be here again.

First we all know that yesterday there was a funeral here and that colours my thoughts.

I thought I would speak this morning on the subject of the why of suffering, not that I have everything to say about it or know so much or not that all of us are suffering terribly but there is enough of it in anybody's life that I think it can be a benefit to look at it sometimes.

The whole world smiles and laughs and sings at times yet it is always bittersweet and it is just as true to say the whole world cries and weeps and wails and that is true too.

There is much to be happy about and much to be sorrowful for.

I suppose for every person transported by joy there is a person transported by sorrow, for every smile there is a tear.

And we wonder sometimes why so much suffering? And maybe we should wonder when we think what mankind is why so much joy? But the suffering and the sorrow hits us harder than the joy does. We talk about the blizzard of '76; we don't talk about the beautiful sunshiny day of '76.

God shouts in our sorrows and He whispers in our joys, the one makes more of an impact upon us than the other.

Why so much suffering?

That asking why, the why of suffering, that word why it can be one of the most distressing and pitiful words in any language.

I think of some happenings, a baby born without a brain -Why?

Or a tiny child stricken with leukaemia -Why?

Or a haemophiliac dying from AIDS that he contracted by a blood transfusion - Why? It was not his fault.

Or a driver crosses the median strip and snuffs out the lives of five innocent children or a whole family -Why?

We have a runaway horse, a dark night, a speeding car and a mother is gone - Why?

Why did we not leave a minute earlier? Why did we not leave a minute later? Why?

You think of those questions, you think that about fire, that sickness, that accident, about loss, those tragic deaths, bereavement, sorrow, weeping, anguish - why?

Why do bad things happen, especially why do bad things happen to people we think are pretty good?

There is one Bible character more than any other who asked why?

There is one whole book in the Bible devoted to the question of why suffering? It happens to be the book that we are reading in our family worship right now and I invite you to the book of Job.

Job has 42 chapters and we are not going to try and cover the book but I would just like to try and get a few thoughts from it, we won't necessarily stay in the book as we look at this question of the why of suffering.

I would like to begin though reading the first two chapters and I would like to read only the parts that Job and his friends can see, not the behind the scene events that Job and his contemporaries had no knowledge of that, only the parts that they could see and we will come back to the rest of that later maybe.

I would like to start off in Job 1 and keep in mind that we are reading what he could see, what was evident to him.

Job 1:1-5 ¹ There was a man in the land of Uz, whose name *was* Job; and that man was perfect and upright, and one that feared God, and eschewed evil. ² And there were born unto him seven sons and three daughters. ³ His substance also was seven thousand sheep, and three thousand camels, and five hundred yoke of oxen, and five hundred she asses, and a very great household; so that this man was the greatest of all the men of the east. ⁴ And his sons went and feasted *in their* houses, every one his day; and sent and called for their three sisters to eat and to drink with them. ⁵ And it was so, when the days of *their* feasting were gone about, that Job sent and sanctified them, and rose up early in the morning, and offered burnt offerings

according to the number of them all: for Job said, it may be that my sons have sinned, and cursed God in their hearts. Thus did Job continually.

Then verse six we are going to skip because that Job could not have seen that and we will continue in verse 13:

Job 1:13-22 ¹³ And there was a day when his sons and his daughters *were* eating and drinking wine in their eldest brother's house: (we will assume that was his birthday, I think it was properly) ¹⁴ And there came a messenger unto Job, and said, The oxen were plowing, and the asses feeding beside them: ¹⁵ And the Sabeans fell *upon them*, and took them away; yea, they have slain the servants with the edge of the sword; and I only am escaped alone to tell thee. ¹⁶ While he *was* yet speaking, there came also another, and said, The fire of God is fallen from heaven, and hath burned up the sheep, and the servants, and consumed them; and I only am escaped alone to tell thee. ¹⁷ While he *was* yet speaking, there came also another, and said, The Chaldeans made out three bands, and fell upon the camels, and have carried them away, yea, and slain the servants with the edge of the sword; and I only am escaped alone to tell thee. ¹⁸ While he *was* yet speaking, there came also another, and said, Thy sons and thy daughters *were* eating and drinking wine in their eldest brother's house: ¹⁹ And, behold, there came a great wind from the wilderness, and smote the four corners of the house, and it fell upon the young men, and they are dead; and I only am escaped alone to tell thee. ²⁰ Then Job arose, and rent his mantle, and shaved his head, and fell down upon the ground, and worshipped, ²¹ And said, Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither: the LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD. ²² In all this Job sinned not, nor charged God foolishly.

Now we are going to have to skip chapter 2 at the beginning because Job would not have seen that and go down to verse seven,

Job 2:7-13, the middle of the verse where it says Job was smitten, or to change the grammar a little bit, Job was smitten with sore boils from the sole of his foot unto his crown. ⁸ And he took him a potsherd to scrape himself withal; and he sat down among the ashes. ⁹ Then said his wife unto him, Dost thou still retain thine integrity? curse God, and die. ¹⁰ But he said unto her, Thou speakest as one of the foolish women speaketh. What? shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil? In all

this did not Job sin with his lips. ¹¹ Now when Job's three friends heard of all this evil that was come upon him, they came every one from his own place; Eliphaz the Temanite, and Bildad the Shuhite, and Zophar the Naamathite: for they had made an appointment together to come to mourn with him and to comfort him. ¹² And when they lifted up their eyes afar off, and knew him not, they lifted up their voice, and wept; and they rent every one his mantle, and sprinkled dust upon their heads toward heaven. ¹³ So they sat down with him upon the ground seven days and seven nights, and none spake a word unto him: for they saw that *his* grief was very great.

Job 3:1: And after this Job opened his mouth and cursed his day.

So there is the story as Job saw it, the rest of the book is a discussion of what happened.

This is what happened; Job was a good man, he was upright, he was honourable, respected, it says he was the most prominent man of the East, he was wealthy, cattle meant wealth, he had a family, a wife, seven children, he had everything going for him and then in one day everything changed! Tragedy upon catastrophe upon calamity. Lost his wealth, his servants were killed, his children died, theft, murder, lightning, the fire of God fell from heaven, tornado what took the house down, maybe I'm not sure but a great wind came.

In one day all this wealth and all his family was taken all except his wife and ironically it says that that day was the birthday of his oldest son. That day of rejoicing became a day of sorrow, birthday became deathday.

And a short time later disaster strikes again, he had sickness, he had pain, he had boils head to toe, I don't know if you've ever had any, I have, I know what one feels like and I cannot imagine being head to toe with boils, loathsome, painful, itchy, why he was scraping himself with a potsherd I don't know, ugly, probably fevered and aching with that.

And so three of his friends came to see him, three men wise, renowned, friends of the most prominent man of the East and they were horrified to see that they could not even recognize him, that says something about his physical condition, and they sat there in silence for seven days.

You wonder what Job was thinking during those seven days of silence and I can guess what he was thinking because when he opened his mouth he cursed the day of his birth.

I think he was trying to, he was asking why; he was trying to figure out the reason for this unparalleled string of disasters, I think that is pretty clear.

And you know we talk about the suffering of children and how it is terrible, and it is, but there is one thing that children do not have to do yet, they don't have to ask why and have to figure out why?

And that is what grown-ups have to do with their own suffering or their children.

And I think that is what Job was doing and I think that is what his friends were doing too in those seven days -Why, what is going on here?

Trying to make sense of senseless events.

And then he opened his mouth and cursed his day, the day of his birth, the rest of the book is the argument of Job and he and his friends as they struggled to answer the question of why.

In his anguish Job says many things that are unwise, exaggerated, out of place, almost blasphemous but he never renounces God, he never blasphemed God.

And Job was not the only one trying to figure it out, his wife was too and his friends were also and they were arriving at different conclusions as people do today and as they've always done.

And I would like to look at answers to this question of the why of suffering, why suffering? Some answers and maybe we will start with Job's wife answer there; **Job 2:9-10**: Dost thou still retain thine integrity? Curse God and die!

Now that is a common answer, Job's wife was saying that God is unfair, this is God's fault. There is the reason, God is unjust, suffering is His fault. And many, many people have come to that conclusion, they say: Well either God number one; is unfair, number two; He does not care or number three; He is unable to do anything about it.

Those are the only three options people often see: Either He (God) is unjust, or a He does not care or He is powerless to do anything about it.

And many, many turn away from God because of suffering, they say really the right answer is that He does not care and He is unjust and He is to blame for suffering.

And this answer Job rejected, he said: Thou speaketh as one of the foolish women speaketh! That just isn't right, shall we receive good at the hand of God and shall we not receive evil?

And yet as you read through the book of Job it seems he comes pretty close to that answer himself sometimes, it does seem that way, he wishes for, he almost demands a hearing with God, he says I would reason with God if He would just show up, if He would just show up, if I could just talk to Him I would reason with Him and he says I would set my arguments in order before Him!

The implication of that kind of language is that God is not being reasonable, God is hostile toward me, it is useless to be a friend of God because the righteous suffer and the wicked prosper, and he does say bluntly how he feels.

And that is probably better than a dishonest denial of angry feelings, at least he is being honest about how he feels, God knows how we feel anyway but he never comes to the point where he renounces God, his deepest feeling, he always comes back to something better, he always comes back to more solid ground. His deepest feeling is that behind all the senselessness there is a reason and therefore he concludes on one of the high points: Though He slay me yet will I trust in Him, [Job 13:15](#).

That is tremendous faith.

He is not saying: So kill me if you want to! But he is saying even if You kill me I trust that you love me and mean it for good. I'm on your side, even if I die.

That is a good thing to say, it's a good attitude, I'm on your side even if I die.

And this is wisdom, Job is showing his wisdom, trust God even if we are facing death because the fact is that sometimes God does will the death of those He loves, Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints, [Psalm 196:15](#).

And it does not mean that He has rejected us, it does not mean He is a sadist who enjoys inflicting suffering. Lamentations says that He does not

inflict willingly nor grieve the children of men, [Lamentation 3:33](#), but it means that He has some purpose, some good in it.

And I think, I wonder if God does not look at death the way we do, I'm sure He doesn't, I'm sure God does not look at death the way we do.

I wonder if to Him the death of His sons and daughters is not more like a birth, an escape from confinement and limitation and darkness into liberty and prospects and growth.

But you know to us it is frightening and it is cold.

At birth the parents rejoice but the baby cries, and that is the way at death, God rejoices, we weep.

But God knows we are being delivered and He knows it's much, much better to move on than to stay here forever.

And God is fair, let us just have that settled that God is fair, God is reasonable, God wills our best and death, well we have to note too that death and sorrowing and suffering are not His ideas, He permits are by necessity because of the nature of the fallen universe but they were Satan's ideas not His and He is going to bring it all back again to perfection - and so we trust Him.

Though He slay me yet will I trust in Him. I think my father-in-law said that on his deathbed if I remember, though He slay me yet will I trust Him.

Well that was Job's wife's answer, it is God's fault, and it is many people's answer today.

Job's friends had an answer too and that is found in chapter 4, verses one through eight when Eliphaz begins to speak and he says: If we assay to commune with thee, will thou be grieved? But who can withhold himself from speaking? [Job 4:2](#). He did for seven days but he was finished now.

³ Behold, thou hast instructed many, and thou hast strengthened the weak hands. ⁴ Thy words have upholden him that was falling, and thou hast strengthened the feeble knees. ⁵ But now it is come upon thee, and thou faintest; it toucheth thee, and thou art troubled. [Job 4:3-5](#)

You can't take it yourself Job!

⁶ Is not *this* thy fear, thy confidence, thy hope, and the uprightness of thy ways? ⁷ Remember, I pray thee, who *ever* perished, being innocent? or

where were the righteous cut off? ⁸ Even as I have seen, they that plow iniquity, and sow wickedness, reap the same. [Job 4:6-8](#).

Job there is my answer, I know what's going on here Job, suffering is your fault, you are bad!

And he says it and his friends say it over and over and over again, Job, you know you just were not living right, we don't know what it is, it all looked all right to us but we know that there has to be something there and it is all your fault Job!

And you say: Was that a good answer, is that the answer to the reason for suffering?

Sometimes maybe it is, Hebrews 12 talks about God chastening His sons because of their needs, because of their wrongdoing and they are suffering there because they need it, deserve it. ([Hebrews 12:11](#)).

First Corinthians talks about people partaking unworthily or undeservingly, and many are weak and sickly and this might be a judgement ([1 Corinthians 11:27-32](#)).

And therefore we should search our hearts in suffering and Job did and he talks about that in the 31st chapter he says well if I did this, if I have done that, and if I've done another thing and I've done this, and he's going down over his life and saying now just exactly what have I done, where was I out of step with God?

And I think that is all right to do when we are suffering because God may mean to teach us some lessons about ourselves but it is not always accurate to say suffering is a result of sin.

It is a simplistic theology which states that God always rewards the good and God always punishes the wicked right now, that there is always a direct and immediate connection between right doing and blessing, and wrongdoing and suffering, that is an overly simplistic theology.

It is bad theology, it is held by many people today, the health and wealth gospel people.

Job's friends held bad theology and therefore they were miserable comforters ([Job 16:2](#)) and I think Job held that bad theology himself and that is why he struggled so much, that is why he had such a hard time figuring it

out because it just did not make sense, he thought this is the way it was and it did not seem like it was any more and he was trying to figure it out. And really his earlier experiences had confirmed this theology and now this experience was contradicting it and he could not figure it out.

The disciples of Jesus held that bad theology too in a modified form, you see it in John nine with them, with the man born blind and they came to Jesus and said: Master, who did sin, this man born blind, it is hard to see how he would have sinned, but anyway this man born blind or was it his parents? [John 9:2](#).

Well the obvious answer was his parents have sinned, not the man born blind.

And Jesus said: Neither this man nor his parents but that the purposes of God might be fulfilled in him. [John 9:3](#).

So He is saying neither one, your theology is wrong, it is not a case of somebody sinning and that's the answer and this is the consequence.

God has purposes for suffering other than punishment, there are purposes for suffering other than punishment.

Now thirdly, the third answer, Elihu had an answer too.

Elihu is a younger man, he was not one of the three friends, he was a fourth man who showed up maybe a little later, maybe at the same time, but he was a younger man and so he waited to speak until the older friends had finished, he started in at chapter 32.

He listened and he listened and finally Job said I'm done, his friends were finished too, they had said everything there was to say ([Job 31:40](#), [Job 32:1-5](#)) and finally Elihu starts up and he scolds the friends who were accusing Job and he scolds Job for justifying himself rather than God and he scolds Job for daring to question God and he suggests that the reason for suffering is not necessarily punishment but purification.

And that is an interesting idea.

Is that accurate? And I think we would have to say that sometimes Elihu is right, sometimes suffering is for purification rather than punishment and we have justification for that in the new testament, Romans 5, we glory in tribulations also known that tribulation, the suffering, worketh patience, and patience, experience, and experience, hope. [Romans 5:3-4](#).

And there it is, this suffering is doing something to us, it is purifying us. James also speaks about that in chapter 1 where it says: Count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations knowing this that the trying of your faith will give patience, but let patience have her perfect work that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing. **James 1:2-4.**

So there it is, that is justification for Elihu.

It is too many times that the purpose of suffering is purification, where would we be if we had no suffering in our lives.

We talk about things going wrong and things going right and when life is difficult things are going wrong and when life is easy things are going right.

Where would we be if everything always went right?

We would be insufferable, we would not be fit to live with, that is where we would be.

Would we grow? No.

Would we be strong? No.

A plant sends down roots in dry weather, the tree not sheltered by forests has little strength.

You cut all the other trees down around, I remember that a friend of mine built a house in the woods and he cut down all the trees and he said this one here is a nice for here, and we want that tree over there so we had these toothpick trees sticking up there, then after while the toothpicks fell down to the ground, they had no strength.

And that's the way it is, something that is sheltered, if we are sheltered from all the things we call wrong, going wrong we have no strength.

Plants grown in a greenhouse must be hardened by being exposed to sun and wind before being placed in the garden. And you know things like dryness and wind and scorching sun are afflictions to a plant but they are necessary if that plant is to fulfil its purpose.

And so likewise some suffering is needed to make us strong, to toughen us, to purify us.

And then a fourth answer, the writer of Job had an answer and maybe we ought to go back to chapter 1 and 2 and read the passages we missed, I

don't know if the writer was Job or not but let's notice what was going on behind the scenes.

Job 1:6-12 ⁶ Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan came also among them. ⁷ And the LORD said unto Satan, Whence comest thou? Then Satan answered the LORD, and said, From going to and fro in the earth, and from walking up and down in it. ⁸ And the LORD said unto Satan, Hast thou considered my servant Job, that *there is* none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil? ⁹ Then Satan answered the LORD, and said, Doth Job fear God for nought? ¹⁰ Hast not thou made an hedge about him, and about his house, and about all that he hath on every side? thou hast blessed the work of his hands, and his substance is increased in the land. ¹¹ But put forth thine hand now, and touch all that he hath, and he will curse thee to thy face. ¹² And the LORD said unto Satan, Behold, all that he hath *is* in thy power; only upon himself put not forth thine hand. So Satan went forth from the presence of the LORD. And then all these calamities befell.

Then you go down to verse one of chapter 2 and Job suffered all these things and came through it all right, then Satan shows up again:

Job 2:1-6 ¹ Again there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan came also among them to present himself before the LORD. ² And the LORD said unto Satan, From whence comest thou? And Satan answered the LORD, and said, From going to and fro in the earth, and from walking up and down in it. ³ And the LORD said unto Satan, Hast thou considered my servant Job, that *there is* none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil? and still he holdeth fast his integrity, although thou movest me against him, to destroy him without cause. ⁴ And Satan answered the LORD, and said, Skin for skin, yea, all that a man hath will he give for his life. ⁵ But put forth thine hand now, and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will curse thee to thy face. ⁶ ^{And} the LORD said unto Satan, Behold, he *is* in thine hand; but save his life. ⁷ So Satan went forth from the presence of the LORD, and smote Job with sore boils from the sole of his foot unto his crown.

So there is what was happening behind the scenes. And we see from that that the answer as to why Job was suffering from the viewpoint of the writer of the book of Job, it is that Job's suffering was to make a powerful point to Satan, a point that could be made in no other way, that Job's suffering was part of the battle between good and evil.

You know we would all like to be soldiers in that battle, we would like to be on God's side and win victories for Him, we would like to see Satan defeated and thrown back, put to flight.

Well Job was doing just that but he was not doing it by preaching powerful sermons or converting the pagans or debating Satan's agents or casting out demons or even by striving in prayer!

He was doing it by living an upright life and suffering patiently.

Job did the living and the suffering and God did the talking and the arguing, and Satan was defeated.

The fact is that Job's friends had that exactly backward.

Job was not suffering because he was bad or even because he needed to be strengthened. He was suffering because he was outstandingly good and outstandingly strong already.

He was the one man on earth good enough and strong enough for God to use in this way to defeat Satan and Satan was defeated because of the suffering of Job.

I sometimes think that the reason I have had life so good is that I am not good enough or strong enough for God to use me in that way.

And the reason that some people have had so many trials is that God was using them as He used Job.

Well did Job ever know about this victory?

I'm not sure he did but I would just call our minds to the possibility that God is making powerful points when we suffer, points to Satan, points to family, points to neighbours, points to hospital personnel, maybe even to the whole nation.

You think of the Schrock family deaths and how that went across North America.

You think of the Nickel Mines situation and how that shot across the world and the points that were made by those people suffering.

We may win victories for God unknown to us as the were to Job, simply by being patient in difficulty. Being the kind of people that God can use in such a difficult, excruciating manner.

And then I would like to give one more answer as to why suffering, and this is the fifth, and it is God's answer, in the final part after everybody is done talking then God shows up and God speaks and He gives lists and lists of unanswerable questions, one after another and as He asks Job these questions one after another, after another, after another and Job says Lord, Why don't you show up? I want to tell you, I want to discuss this with you, I want to argue with you about this. And finally God does show up and He asks how many questions, I'm not sure, I did not count them up but dozens of questions I suppose and Job does not know the answer to any of them.

But as those questions come one after another God's answer dawns upon Job and God's answer is:

Job, you don't know very much and I know it all and I know what I'm doing. There is a lot you do not need to know, there is a lot you will never know perhaps, but trust me, trust me, I'm in charge, I know what is best, I know what I'm doing, just trust me.

And that is where Job came to, God never explained why, He usually doesn't, He usually doesn't but He brings us to the place where we trust in difficulty, trust that He knows what He is doing and you know James says: You have heard of the patience of Job and you've seen the end of the Lord that He is pitiful and of tender mercy. **James 5:11.** Job says: Though He slay me yet will I trust in Him.

His trust is well placed, God is pitiful, God is of tender mercy. We are not orphans in a cold world of fears and unfeeling forces but we are children in the loving hands of the heavenly Father who is tender and pitiful and merciful.

May we, may we accept that answer and rest in the Lord and His provision and trust in Him.

Keep Yourselves in the Love of God

But ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost, ²¹ Keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life. Jude 1:20-21:

The love of God! We have lost it today; we have turned our back on the ocean and are looking out over barren colourless hills for the ocean's fulness. We need converting again—turning around, and there basks the ocean's fulness, whose waves sparkle and ripple on fathomless deeps and fulnesses. We are too introspective today, we mourn and wonder, then lifted on waves of feeling we glow and say we love God, but again our feelings ebb and flow and we mourn. Christianity is not a thing of tides and seasons, but of God and faith. Drink deep and full of the love of God and you will not demand the impossible from earth's loves, and the love of wife and child, of husband and friend, will grow holier and healthier and simpler and grander.

But there are initial stages to be considered before we come to the glorious exhortation. The love of God is not revealed by intellectual discernment, it is a spiritual revelation. What ups and downs we experience because we build not on faith but on feeling, not on the finished work of Christ but on our own work and endeavour and experience.

“But ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith . . .” Is that what *you* are doing every day? Do you have family worship? Do you have private devotions? Do you read your Bible more and more? Can you answer “Yes” to these questions, or is an hesitant “No” given by your spirit to God? Family worship is so far off, so remote, you remember your father and mother who prayed and talked of sin and righteousness and judgment to come, but you have other things to heed; you, forsooth, are more enlightened, you read sceptical books, controversial books, that attack the foundations of your faith. If these things have crept in unawares into our hearts, let us get back in penitence and consider what is the foundation on which we must build our most holy faith, viz., that “God so loved the

world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on Him should not perish, but have everlasting life” John 3:16.

Let us get down to the Cross, to the broken heart of our God, down to the propitiation for our sins; let us put away the books that have sapped our faith; let us cut off the interests and the companionships that have weighed our lives down to the dust, and looking to Jesus, let us build ourselves up on our most holy faith “praying in the Holy Ghost . . .” (Jude 20) That is the next step after laying the foundation of faith. Nothing is so hard as to pray aright.

Do *you* pray for God’s servants till your heart glows?

Do you ask for your minister that he may be set ablaze with Divine fire?

Do you pray Sunday after Sunday that souls may be converted to God?

“Praying in the Holy Ghost”—have you ever asked for the Holy Spirit?

We can only keep ourselves in the love of God by building up ourselves on our most holy faith and by Holy Ghost praying, and by nothing else. If we try to fight God’s battles with our own weapons, in our own moral resisting power, we shall fail, and fail miserably; but if we use the spiritual weapons of implicitly trusting in God and maintaining a simple relationship to Jesus Christ by praying in the Holy Ghost, we shall never fail.

“. . . keep yourselves in the love of God.” We know how to keep ourselves in health, how to keep ourselves in knowledge, and so on; but to keep ourselves in the love of God is a big order, and our minds are exercised to know what Jude means by this exhortation. Does it mean by relaxing all stringency and carefulness to slip out into a broad, humanitarian spirit—“God is love”: “God’s in His heaven—all’s right with the world”? No, it cannot mean anything so natural as that, otherwise we had no need of an inspired writer to tell us to do it, and beside, Jude strikes terrible notes of warning (see vv. 17-19 in Jude). “Keep yourselves in the love of God” refers very clearly to something distinct and special, something revealed in the direct will of God; a spiritual endeavour that we must consider, and consider carefully with the Holy Spirit’s help.

“Keep” means work. It is not a lazy floating, it is work. Work, or you will depart from the love of God. Begin to trace the finger of God and the love of God in the great calamities of earth, and in the calamities that have be-

fallen you. In sweat of brain and spirit, work, agonise at times, to keep yourself in the love of God. It is our wisdom, our happiness, our security to keep ourselves in the love of God. How do I keep myself in any sphere but by using every means to abide in it? If I wish to keep in the spiritual sphere of the love of God I must use the great organ of the spiritual realm, faith. “God loves me”—say it o’er and o’er and o’er, heedless of your feelings that come and go. Do not live at a distance from God, live near Him, delighting yourself in Him. Remove all barriers of selfishness and fear, and plunge into the fathomless love of God.

“Keep yourselves in the love of God,” not “keep on loving God,” none can do that. When once you have understood the truth about your own heart’s sinfulness, think not again of it, but look at the great, vast, illimitable magnificence of the love of God. Oh may we be driven, driven further and further out into the ocean fulness of the love of God! only taking care that nothing entices us out again.

“Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?” Romans 8:35. Oh, the fulness of peace and joy and gladness when we are persuaded that nothing “shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” Romans 8:39.



Have Faith in God

But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him (Hebrews 11:6).

Humans are physical beings. We relate to what we can see, feel, and understand, but God has chosen to limit our insight into the spirit realm. But deep down we are convinced that there is more to life than what we can see. We seek to relate to an unseen God because we believe that He is and that there are no limits to Him.

The gap between God and man can be spanned only by faith. By faith truths are revealed that are more reliable than the opinions and conclusions of learned men.

By faith man finds security in a God he cannot see. The person who chooses not to believe God is blind to spiritual values and the operations of God.

Here are three examples from Matthew's gospel of faith in people who had a need and came to Jesus and had their needs met because of their faith:

Matthew 8:5-13 ⁵ And when Jesus was entered into Capernaum, there came unto him a centurion, beseeching him, ⁶ And saying, Lord, my servant lieth at home sick of the palsy, grievously tormented. ⁷ And Jesus saith unto him, I will come and heal him. ⁸ The centurion answered and said, Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldest come under my roof: but speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed. ⁹ For I am a man under authority, having soldiers under me: and I say to this *man*, Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh; and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth *it*. ¹⁰ When Jesus heard *it*, he marvelled, and said to them that followed, Verily I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel. ¹¹ And I say unto you, That many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven. ¹² But the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. ¹³ And Jesus said unto the centurion, Go thy way; and as thou hast believed, *so* be it done unto thee. And his servant was healed in the selfsame hour.

Matthew 9:27-31 ²⁷ And when Jesus departed thence, two blind men followed him, crying, and saying, *Thou* Son of David, have mercy on us. ²⁸ And when he was come into the house, the blind men came to him: and Jesus saith unto them, Believe ye that I am able to do this? They said unto him, Yea, Lord. ²⁹ Then touched he their eyes, saying, According to your faith be it unto you. ³⁰ And their eyes were opened; and Jesus straitly charged them, saying, See *that* no man know *it*. ³¹ But they, when they were departed, spread abroad his fame in all that country.

Matthew 15:22-28 ²² And, behold, a woman of Canaan came out of the same coasts, and cried unto him, saying, Have mercy on me, O Lord, *thou* Son of David; my daughter is grievously vexed with a devil. ²³ But he answered her not a word. And his disciples came and besought him, saying, Send her away; for she crieth after us. ²⁴ But he answered and said, I am

not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel. ²⁵ Then came she and worshipped him, saying, Lord, help me. ²⁶ But he answered and said, It is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast *it* to dogs. ²⁷ And she said, Truth, Lord: yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters' table. ²⁸ Then Jesus answered and said unto her, O woman, great *is* thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt. And her daughter was made whole from that very hour.

These three accounts are of people who were in desperate need and today there are many who also have need. They came to Jesus because they could not find help anywhere else. Having a vision of Jesus, the miracle worker, they resolved that to Him and Him alone they would turn. Any serious problem, one which has no answer but in the Lord, is an opportunity for the Lord to do His work.

In the first case, Matthew 8:5-13, a centurion's servant was grievously tormented by palsy. Medical help probably was limited. This man believed that his help was in Jesus. Perhaps he had heard that Jesus performed the impossible. Something deep down in his heart inspired him that there was hope and help in the Lord.

Two blind men who came to Jesus had a difficult life, Matthew 9:27-31. How does a blind person make a living? Usually the blind are at the mercy of others. But when these men heard of Jesus, they believed their lives could be different. They did not believe that Jesus would turn His back on their plea of faith.

And in Matthew 15:22-28 the Syrophenician woman had a daughter who was plagued with a devil. This mother felt her utter helplessness. Where could she go? Acknowledging her unworthiness, something in her heart settled on Jesus as the solution to her problems.

Faith in God is not a mysterious process, nor is it something imaginary. It cannot be manufactured by an act of the will. Rather, faith is the result of accepting what is and what has been, of accepting God and His fullness, of accepting the truth of His power. Such acceptance of God's omnipotence and omniscience brings trust and dependence on God into our lives.

Jesus tells us to have faith in God, Mark 11:22. We are also told in Scripture that faith cometh by hearing, and hearing the Word of God, Romans 10:17. We are also told in Ephesians 2:8 that by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: *it is* the gift of God.

We can see from these few Scripture examples that faith is important and there are numerous other references also in God's Word that bring that out, faith is essential to salvation, we must have faith in God and the sacrifice of His Son on Calvary that through that we can and will have our sins forgiven. Faith is the substance of things hoped for the evidence of things not seen. Hebrews 11:1.

In our progressive society, great gains have been made in science, transportation, education, and the raising of living standards. This progress, however, is not evident in matters of faith. Social attainments frequently make man feel self-sufficient and less dependent on God. Has our faith in God grown, or is it becoming weaker? Are we more willing to make sacrifices for the invisible things of God? Is there in our hearts a growing personal awareness of lost souls?

Faith seems to be a New Testament word. It is interesting that when Jesus came, people were admonished to have faith. It would seem that with God appearing in a visible form there would be less need for faith, but just the opposite is true. The gospel can be experienced only by faith. Today, as we see God working in the church and in our brethren, there is a need for encouraging each other to faith in God.

The Bible teaches that without faith it is impossible to please God. Principles involved in attaining a redemptive relationship with God are such that only faith will achieve this. To come to God requires that we believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him, Hebrews 11:6. Scripture reminds us that "we walk by faith, not by sight" 2 Corinthians 5:7. Experiencing self-denial as taught by Jesus can be done only through faith. The vision of being purged of the covetousness of our nature is only realized in a deep faith in God. Our trust in Him enables us to be detached, as the Scriptures teach, from the affections for possessions. Giving as the Lord prompts us is an exercise of faith. Filling our place in

witnessing, reproof, and praying all require faith in God.
May we always have the faith to labour victoriously for the Lord.

The degree of our faith in God is reflected in the purity of our Christian walk. A man of faith will understand his failings and be a humble person. It is impossible to really know the Lord and be proud. It is, however, possible to be very religious and yet be proud. The man or woman of faith will not be attracted to the things of the world. Because God holds the place of highest importance in his life, his eyes are open to the vanity of all the world's promises. Paul writes, "For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith" Romans 1:17.

So the righteousness of God is revealed in the gospel through faith. That faith is progressive and desires to know more of the marvellous righteousness of God.

True faith embraces the belief that the Bible is the divine will of God delivered to man. We believe the Bible means just what it says and that it contains the answers for all our problems. A deep reverence for the Word causes us to devote ourselves to its study and to order our lives according to the precepts of the Word. Many people are seeking other answers for their lives. The intellectual and humanistic view advises individuals to explore other possibilities such as counsellors, drugs, and other things that money can buy to solve their problems. The people in our opening scriptures from Matthew had this settled in their hearts that Christ was the only answer to their need. A delayed response from the Lord did not alter that conviction.

That is faith!

To live our convictions in the face of our peers is at times a supreme test for youth. (And can be so for older ones too) The young Christian cannot draw from years of experience to reinforce his belief that God will generously reward the faithful doer. But such a one does have the reliable promises of God. His voice is trustworthy as He speaks to His followers.

It takes faith to do what we really know we should do. When choosing a life's companion, the Lord will give the blessing of peace and rest as well

as a natural attraction. The upward look of faith in the Lord inspires us with the needed courage and conviction to move ahead.

Faith in God puts us on a different course from those around us. Moses, for example, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter. Personal ease, economic advantage, and social status were sacrificed. Maybe it was a hard choice to make, but it was a clear choice: enjoy Egypt or enjoy the blessings of God. "He had respect unto the recompense of the reward ... he endured, as seeing him who is invisible" Hebrews 11:26-27. His faith was an effective antidote for peer pressure. Here was a man who looked beyond convenience and personal desire and persevered in performing God's will.

A testimony was once given of a young man who had some Christian training as a youth. But his life took the course of the flesh and resulted in disappointments as well as a broken home. When illness struck, a seriousness ensued that made him remember the seeds planted in his heart as a child. He searched the Scriptures and stepped out in faith to embrace a faith that was unpopular to his friends and family. With joy he was able to separate himself from the things he once held dear. His faith left a clear witness to the church and others who observed his change of heart and life. Even though illness claimed his life, he was the winner of a greater prize.

Some points for us to ponder:

In what ways is our faith in God tested most today?

Does a lack of activity in testifying and witnessing reveal a lack of faith?

How can we promote a greater faith in God in our children?



The Funeral of All Your Sorrows.

At death, you shall gain full freedom and liberty from all your enemies within and without—namely, sin, Satan, and the world!

Death will free you from the indwelling power of sin. In this present world, sin plays the tyrant; but in heaven there is no tyranny—but perfect felicity.

As in hell there is nothing but wickedness, so in heaven there is nothing but holiness.

Death will free you from all provocations, temptations, and suggestions to sin.

You shall be above all Satan's assaults.

The old serpent is cast out, and shall be forever kept out of the new Jerusalem above!

Death will free you from all the effects and consequences of sin—namely, losses, crosses, sicknesses, diseases, disgraces, sufferings, etc.

When the cause is taken away, the effect ceases.

When the fountain of sin is dried up, the streams of afflictions, of sufferings, must be dried up.

Sin and sorrow were born together, live together, and shall die together. Death will free you from all bodily infirmities and diseases.

Death will free you from all your sorrows, whether inward or outward, whether for your own sins or the sins of others, whether for your own sufferings or the sufferings of others.

Now, it may be, you are seldom without tears in your eyes, or sorrow in your heart.

Oh, but death will be the funeral of all your sorrows!

Death will wipe all tears from your eyes, "and sorrow and mourning shall flee away!"

Dear friend, death shall do that for you, which all your physicians could never do for you.

It shall both instantly and perfectly cure you of all sorts of weaknesses and maladies, both inward and outward, of both your body and your soul!

Oh my dear friend, is it not better to die,

and be rid of all sin;

and be rid of all temptations;

and be rid of all sorts of miseries;

than to live, and still carry about with us our sins, our sorrows, our burdens, and our constant ailments?

Thomas Brooks (1675)

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