

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.

Jesus taught, "Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 5:3). The entrance to this kingdom is a strait or very difficult gate which gives way to a narrow and difficult way. It is so difficult and unpopular that few are willing to surrender their pride and independence to walk on it. So that the glory of this kingdom would be His and not man's, God chose the "foolish"—people whom others considered weak or base—to be its participants.

As we look at current conditions in the world, we wonder that God can tolerate its sinfulness any longer. Iniquity of every description abounds. Man chooses money, pleasure, fame, the works of pride, and the lusts of the flesh above God and His love. Why does not God declare that it is enough, that it is time to thrust in the sickle and bring the world to judgment? It is because of God's love and mercy that He extends time. "The Lord is ... not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (2 Pet. 3:9).

God loves mercy more than judgment. He knows wrong choices will lead to hell and outer darkness, there to be eternally forgotten of God. God loves all of mankind so much that He wants to give everyone the opportunity for salvation. He knows how much more one soul is worth than the whole world, and all heaven rejoices over every soul who repents and finds salvation. God's perception of true value is so far above ours that we will never comprehend it until we are with Him eternally.

At certain periods of time the true children of God have been few in number. In Noah's day the number was reduced to eight souls. The prophets spoke of a "remnant" that would be left after Judah's captivity Paul referred to Christians as the "offscouring of all things" (1Cor. 4:13) But when the faithful of all ages are congregated in heaven, it will be a "great multitude, which no man [can] number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues" (Rev. 7:9). Even though it will be such a great throng we need not fear there will not be room for us. All are invited to the wedding feast. All who respond and have on the wedding garment will be welcomed. Jesus said, "Where I am, there shall also my servant be" (John 12:26). What wonderful, comforting words! Our limitless, omniscient God has planned heaven to amply accommodate all.

May we all live so we will be among the faithful few accepted of the Lord on that final day. "Let me die the death of the righteousness, and let my last end be like his!" (Num. 23:10). *Courtesy of Gospel Publishers, Kansas.*

MINISTER'S CORNER*Brother Paul Hollingshead.***Revelation 20.**

The Book of Revelation is a guide to history and to current events. By its portrayal of the spiritual struggle we understand the issues and temptations which confronted Christians in the past and which confront us today. It is a manual for the soldier of the cross.

As we go over Revelation 20 we will try to illuminate points and compare with other passages.

The bottomless pit is *abyss*, a word which is derived from the Greek word. Its original meaning was without bottom. This indicates always falling and never coming to a place of standing, it figures a state of constant uncertainty and confusion. It is the essential characteristic of the program and kingdom of Satan. Chapter nine of Revelation speaks of smoke coming out of the abyss and obscuring the sun. This we understand to be false teaching which obstructs the clear view of the Sun of Righteousness, Jesus. False doctrine beclouds who He is, His character, and His work; Menno Simons understood it so. It is to be observed in Luke 8:31 that the demons, whom Jesus was about to cast out, did not want to be remanded to the deep, that is, the abyss. They do not desire the natural and logical result of their activity.

The key to the pit, the chain, and the binding indicate a limiting of the power and activity of the devil. This is to be compared with the binding of which the Gospel writers speak in Mark 3:27 and Luke 11:21-22. In those passages Jesus used the illustration of a strong man having control of his goods. The strong man is evidently meant to signify the devil, and the goods, the souls under his power. Jesus is the stronger man and binds and overcomes the strong man and takes away the armour in which the strong man has trusted. This is the victory of the Lord in the spiritual warfare. In warfare the spoiling of the goods follows victory. That is the figure. Jesus takes the souls away from the devil, having limited his power.

It is very important that we insert here the truth that the souls involved must desire the benefit of the work of Jesus in triumphing over the satanic principalities and powers. If a soul in darkness and confusion recognizes

that he does not have such desire, he should pray to God to give him the desire that he might be freed.

In verse three of the chapter under consideration "should deceive... no more" is in the subjunctive mood. In grammar the subjunctive mood presents possibility while the indicative declares certain fact. The limiting of the power of the enemy makes it possible for people not to be deceived, if they have the desire not to be deceived. The nations of the saved, as it is put in Revelation 21:24 are those who have elected not to be deceived. The working of deception in the first place is a person deceiving himself in order to justify sin which he likes. Secondly the arch-deceiver helps in the process. Job and others who had severe trials were not deceived though they had things to learn and needed to submit to God.

As we compare the thousand years with Psalm 90:4 and 2 Peter 3:8 it is proper to think of it as a round number which is not meant to be an exact measurement but a period of time lengthy to the human point of view.

Bible believers generally believe that toward the end of time the forces of evil will grow more and more active. They will gather for a showdown in which, however, they are destined to be defeated.

This space of time in which those forces concentrate on the overthrow of the people of God will be short, a "little season." Mark 13:20 refers to the time of the Jewish war against Rome and the destruction of Jerusalem at which time God mercifully shortened the days for the sake of the elect. The judgment of Jerusalem and the final judgment, though there are a few differences in the signs preceding each event, nevertheless are parallel in this point of the time being shortened.

We observe that judgment was given to a certain class of souls. The Spanish has included the word "faculty" concerning judging. This means the ability and capacity to judge. We want to consider what judging is and to whom it is given. First we may remember that the tenses of verbs (past, present, and future) in prophetic Scriptures are used differently from what we humans use them in our limitation. A well known example is in Isaiah 53 where the past tense is used in predicting the future-future at the time Isaiah wrote. The judging is to be compared with Psalm 122:5. It has to do with making decisions and keeping them. Decisions are not only necessary, they are unavoidable. Seeking to avoid decisions is in itself a decision and an unsatisfactory one. The Bible teaches that the saints will share

in the judgment which Christ will do at the end though He is not at all dependent upon them.

The judging is to begin now in time. Christians are to judge sin within the borders of their responsibility that means, first of all, in personal life and experiences. It is a blessed aspect of the power of God to be capable of judging and ruling over sin to the full extent of the responsibility which He has assigned us. Luke 12:57 speaks of judging what is wrong, or sinful. Matthew 7:1 is admonishing us to not judge people. We are to judge sin, not people.

The class of people who have the faculty to do this judging correctly are probably the potential martyrs. The passage mentions being beheaded. This does not exclude those burned, drowned, or buried alive. The implication is that in order to have the ability to judge now and later, one must have the martyr spirit (not complex), a willingness to remain faithful regardless of the cost. We must be potential martyrs and whether God gives the grace to be so literally is according to His wisdom.

These potential martyrs are absolutely faithful with reference to the beast, the system of the world, and steadfastly refuse to be identified with the working of iniquity. These persons are qualified to have power over sin and they have a testimony that condemns the world as Noah did by obeying God when so few people were doing that. Jesus, by His spotless life, condemned sin in the flesh and we are to do that also by His power and Him. And the blind perverted world complains that we judge them.

The question is reasonably asked: Who is judging whom? When I was about twenty years old I wrote former college friends that I was done with movies and dancing. There was no direct reply to that but it was reported later that they were irritated with me. I was judging the movies and the dance and they were judging the person turning away from them. The world thinks it queer when one stops running with them to the same "In excess of riot" and they speak evil of those leaving the uncleanness behind. They may complain of lack of love, never stopping to think that their gossip is the opposite of love and even tolerance. It is to be lamented deeply wherever a parallel spirit enters the professing Biblical church. May God have mercy!

Some of the levers used to move people from their steadfastness are the threat of the loss of goods, the threat of the loss of friends, and the threat of

the loss of life. When one yields to the fear of loss in earthly, temporal things, the true martyr spirit is lacking.

Again, it is necessary to have the martyr spirit in order to do the judging. It is necessary to suffer rather than to compromise. It is necessary to suffer (long-suffering) rather than to pass unjust or hasty sentence upon a person. The way is narrow. Only those who forsake all, even to the point of being willing to be beheaded will have the faculty to judge correctly. If they submit to any of the above mentioned "levers," they will be unable to deal with sin in the family, in the church, or even in their own lives. It has been recognized that persecution makes either martyrs or hypocrites. And persecution comes to all Christians in some form. If one is not willing to become a martyr one becomes a hypocrite.

More clarity concerning reigning is obtained by considering 1 Corinthians 4:8. "Reigned as kings" indicates a worldly way of exercising influence and power-being on top socially. When Paul wrote, "I would to God that ye did reign," he was longing for a possibility to be realized in them. They had not been reigning over sin and he longs that they might reign that he with his fellow-workers might reign with them, that is, over sin. Corinth was part of Paul's responsibility and he wanted to rule over sin to the full extent. In 1 Corinthians 5:12 he asks, "Do not ye judge them that are within?" This is a question which assumes a positive answer. The church is to rule over sin. "Sin shall not have dominion over you" (Romans 6:14). You shall "tread on serpents and scorpions... Nothing shall hurt you" (Luke 10:19)-spiritually. You can reign over sin and that now, and with that be the royal priesthood of which we read in 1 Peter 2:5.

The first resurrection of Revelation 20:5 we understand to be the new birth. Out of the throes of birth pains and crisis of the soul the decision is made either to be a willing judge of sin with the martyr spirit or be unbelieving. John 5:25 was for now when Jesus said it and continues to be possible yet. The dead spiritually who correctly hear the voice of the Son of Man live. John 5:28-29 refers to the future general resurrection when all live and go to opposite destinies. The wicked live then in having a lively sense of their deadness toward God and its consequences, a clear understanding which the wicked have at the final judgment. This clarity they rejected during their time of opportunity. Those not raised spiritually continue in their spiritual deadness until it is too late.

In Revelation 20:6, "hath part" is present tense as well as "having no power," referring to the second death. It is in order to comment upon the tenses in Greek language. They carry more significance as to the kind of action than we are accustomed to, The Greek present does speak of the present time and also of continuous action. We may say in English, "Continues having part," making a finer distinction as to the kind of action; the Greek has a tense which English and a number of other languages do not have, the aorist. This denotes point of action, completed at the time done. Revelation 20:6 is telling us those who continuously maintain the life given them in the new birth will be continuously safe from the second death, which is the lake of fire, eternal separation from God. It is the duty of newborn ones to maintain spiritual life.

Toward the end of time things become very bad. Satan is less limited, he goes out to deceive but cannot deceive everybody for there is still the camp of the saints, the beloved city against which the powers of evil are pitted unitedly. Gog and Magog are spoken of in Ezekiel 38-39. They were real adversaries at some time and the prophets had spoken of them but we do not have record of what all was spoken of them (Ezekiel 38:17). They are representative of opposition to the people of God throughout time. Toward the end there is a united concerted effort to overthrow the work of God. This is parallel with Revelation 19:19 and with Armageddon.

Worldwide nuclear destruction would be a small trial for the saints because they would be consumed in a moment. But the severe and tricky trial lies in the concentrated working of the mystery of iniquity in such areas as: education, psychology, philosophy, industry (in the kind of seminars they have for greater efficiency), the healing arts (which readily have an admixture of harmful superstition), politics, religion, entertainments, banking, and finance. The press and various forms of communication are especially crucial.

The fire of God's Word destroys the evil (Jeremiah 23:29). Also Revelation 19:21 shows that it is His Word that completes the victory, it is not a physical power but the power of the divine truth. It is not a physical power which brought physical things into existence and it will not be a physical power which accomplishes the final correction of the misuse of the said physical things. Jesus has His armies with Him but He does not need them. The sword from His mouth does the job. The eternal destiny of all

His adversaries is the lake of fire "prepared for the devil and his angels" (Matthew 25:41)

In Revelation, from chapter six through twenty, there are, figuratively speaking, seven murals or large paintings upon the walls. Each section tells of things such as spiritual issues, the struggle of the saints, the provision made for them, and the way the enemy works. As we discern the sections (which are of unequal lengths) we see each contains, usually toward the end of the section, some aspects of the final, complete destruction of evil or the final victory of Christ, usually both these things. Things depicted in the seven grand word "pictures" are fulfilled, in the process of being fulfilled, or are yet to be fulfilled. Those described aspects of the consummation concerning the complete destruction of evil and the victory of Christ and His faithful followers, those aspects occur at the same time, or nearly so, at the day of the Lord.

When Jesus returns, in that day He will judge the devil, the beast, Babylon, the false prophet, together with all unbelievers, disobedient ones, and liars, who willingly gave in to evil. In that day the righteous will be clothed in white, have palms of victory in their hands, sorrow no more, have reward, stand on the sea of glass, be at the marriage of the Lamb, be with Jesus in victory as the members of the heavenly host, and they will have their names in the book of life. For each group-those condemned and those victorious-that day is the beginning of a never ending state. Amen, Even so, come Lord Jesus.

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CONFIDENCE

Confidence: firm belief or trust that one will act in a right, proper and effective way; a commitment of trust, as expressed by a vote of confidence; something that gives a feeling of security.

It is a known but understated fact that the foundation of a healthy society and economy is confidence. Confidence is at the epicenter of our relationships, whether in a personal way one to another, in business affairs, or as it

would relate to the brotherhood of believers. We don't have to look far or examine many headlines to recognize that in our present day, the deterioration of confidence has reached epidemic proportions, destabilizing and placing at great risk the established social and economic order.

We will examine a few general illustrations of confidence, but the overall objective is to consider confidence in the context of a spiritual brotherhood.

The investor entrusts his capital to a money manager because he has confidence there will be a return on his investment and he will not be defrauded. A bank lends us money because it has confidence we have presented a proper business plan and will repay at the appointed date. The farmer or tradesman begins his endeavor with the end in mind; he has confidence that there will be a harvest or completion of the project and, most important, payment for the product or services rendered. The underpinning of all this is also confidence related; we, the people, have confidence that the government- issued paper in our possession is valid for any economic transaction.

The church of God also has an economy. This will be defined as "the association of the members within the body: how they relate one to another, how these members as individuals and as a whole organize and carry out their activities and utilize their resources. These members of the body work together. Whether it be in the spiritual or the temporal, their goal, by and large, being unselfish, they seek the good of others first. They desire to create value for each other that could not be created by working alone." The point we wish to make is this: The economy of the church of God will be hindered and may cease to function if we do not have confidence one to another.

A fulfilling relationship with God and each other is very dependent on confidence. Our sincere pledge to be a person of confidence will be demonstrated by our commitment to act in a right, proper, and effective way. Confidence of this sort will never be found on the bargain counter. It has a high price, but it is worth every cost and sacrifice. It is expensive because it requires consistent Christian living throughout the year.

Confidence in the brotherhood is a treasure without price, but it is a treasure that can be trod underfoot. Sometimes we may be of the opinion that confidence should be extended regardless of outward appearance or spiritual performance. May we exercise care in being judgmental or holding

others to our standards. But is there not a reason, is there not a cause when we are unable to extend confidence or feel a lack thereof from the brotherhood?

Confidence is a privilege extended one to another and not something to be demanded as a right. Confidence from the brethren is attained (and returned) by an uncompromising stand for the truth in all areas of life. Standing for the truth is not always the popular choice, but we can rest assured that it will win respect. For confidence to grow may mean laying down our own way of thinking and submitting ourselves to the care and proving of others. We are soldiers engaged in battle, and I need you to watch my back so that the enemy doesn't sneak up on me. I must exercise the same care for you. For this mission to be carried out successfully, we must have confidence in each other.

The person who is infused with godly confidence is willing to be a "nobody." This person doesn't feel the need to prove anything to himself or others; he is aware of his imperfections but, nonetheless, is comfortable with how God has made him. His self-esteem is contingent on his relationship with the Lord instead of the approbation of men. This person can quietly live his convictions without making a big "splash." Humble brothers and sisters often fall into the category of a nobody, but they don't consider this derogatory or a putdown. Their modest and unassuming behavior does not prevent them from being loved and appreciated in the congregation. The paradox is that being a nobody makes us somebody, perhaps not in the eyes of men but certainly in the eyes of God.

But some of us are hardly willing to be a nobody, because pride gets in the way. Our confidence and esteem is derived from the recognition and admiration of our fellowman. This causes us to be man-conscious, to feel sorry for ourselves when we are supposedly left out, and to be suspicious and critical. We are unwilling to look past the imperfections of our brother and sister and extend confidence and allow them to be used as God would see fit. In a certain sense of the word, we are unwilling to grant confidence to ourselves. We thereby bury our talent and produce no gain. When it is this way, we not only hurt ourselves but the brotherhood at large. Instead of edifying and building one another up in the holy faith, the spirit of dissension comes forth, and we find it difficult to recognize and grant confidence to the gifts and callings among us.

What causes our confidence in one another to be tested? We can only an-

swer in part, but a major ingredient is when we become independent and self-sufficient, holding ourselves aloof and apart. Like the Laodiceans (Rev. 3:17), we wear the facade of being rich and increased with goods and having need of nothing. Self-sufficiency is commendable in that it enables us to carry our fair share of the load and not be an unnecessary burden to the local or group economy. But self-sufficiency carried beyond moderation yields itself to isolation and withdrawal, quickly compromising unity. If we have a tendency to draw into a shell, may we find the grace and will-power to come out of the bubble and correct the inclinations that hinder confidence.

And how do we build confidence? One of the key building blocks is the veracity of our word, that our yea be yea and our nay be nay (James 5:12). Our word and how we keep it is a critical test in determining whether we are worthy of confidence. Another basic requirement is humility. A great confidence-builder is simply opening our hearts one to another and not being so worried about how we come across. Some of this may sound simplistic, but it is so real. When we humbly and freely share our hearts, we are able to clear misconceptions. Oh, to have that freedom to express our concerns and opinions without fear of censure. Taking it a step further, instead of talking behind each other's backs, we will practice the honorable virtue of meeting our brother or sister face to face.

The principle of opening our hearts one to another can hardly be overemphasized. The applications are many, and not nearly all can be noted. It may mean an older brother explaining to a younger one why he operates his business in a particular manner. It may mean a sincere conversation among sisters about the mode of their dress. It may mean an honest sharing with a fallen brother or sister, not attempting to make excuses and spare the flesh. To engage in such candid communications is a great challenge. Not the least is the fact that a fair percentage of us are too sensitive and others are not sensitive enough. An important point is that when we are willing to share our hearts, we are opening ourselves to correction. May we ever keep in mind that no true child of God is ever above correction. If we disallow correction, it is a maxim that we will drift off course. In parallel to the deadly pride of self-sufficiency, a further indication of the lukewarm church surely must be the unwillingness of the members of the body to sincerely open their hearts one to another.

It has been correctly stated that it is easier to lose confidence than to re-

store it. Our human nature is such that it is difficult to completely forget and forgive and bury the hatchet. Our first tendency is to be critical rather than seeing the good in others. It is unrealistic to believe that we will never experience a lack of confidence, but, nonetheless, it should not diminish our love one to another. When we come to a "crisis of confidence" over an issue, instead of wringing our hands and looking for a place to lay the blame, may we see it as an opportunity to repair the breach in the wall, strengthening not only our brother and ourselves but the church as a whole.

This is where unity comes into play. A sanctified unity among believers gives us confidence that, despite our imperfections, we are headed in the right direction. Those on the outside will observe that there is a united, undivided brotherhood of true believers. This will inspire confidence in the onlookers—although they may be loath to admit it—that there is a ship headed in the right direction on the stormy seas of the present day.

Issues of confidence affect each one of us in a very real and personal way. The writer can only mention a few items close to his heart. May the reader likewise be encouraged to honestly examine his heart:

⊕ Can I have confidence that the Lord will release me from the spirit of fear and give me courage for the troubling days in which we live?

⊕ Can I have confidence in the office of the ministry, not regarding the brethren in this office as demigods but, rather, as brethren with the same makeup as the rest of us but, nonetheless, deserving of deference and respect because, in a very real way, they are specially anointed of God and the church?

⊕ Can you, my minister and deacon, grant me confidence as a brother or sister whom the Lord has asked you to be the overseer of; can you treat me with patience and gentleness and take the time to really get close to me so that I can open up my heart to you?

⊕ Can we as brethren, despite what appears to the carnal eye, extend confidence to each other that we are simply doing our little part in service to the Lord and are not on the campaign trail?

⊕ Am I willing to honor congregational or conference decisions and thereby uphold the confidence that we place in each other as brethren, even if some wouldn't see the matter so clearly?

⊕ Am I willing to build a bridge to my fallen brother or sister, confidently portraying the beauty of the church, beginning with my words but

much more so with the witness of my life?

✚ Am I willing to do whatever it takes so that my children, whatever their age, will have confidence that their father and mother are doing their best to lovingly bring them up in the fear and admonition of the Lord?

We need that confidence in each other, born in love, that despite our many weaknesses and failings, despite the tests and trials we cause each other, we will not look down on each other. We must settle it that no sacrifice will be too costly, that we will help each other make it through this life and on to the Promised Land. The Lord has seen fit that this is not a solitary journey: "For none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself" (Rom. 14:7). God created us in such a way that we would be helpers to each other, participating in His divine economy, creating value for Him first and then for each other. To the best of our ability, may we be faithful in the discharge of this duty. And someday, surely in the not too distant future, there will be no greater joy than to experience the confidence of our dear Lord in a personal way: "Well done, thou good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of thy lord."

Brother Matthew, Mississippi.



SNAPSHOTS.

Brief excerpts from historical publications.

Church Discipline

Virtually all the **Anabaptists** we know by name had experienced church discipline at the hands of the Catholic and Protestant church authorities. We know their names precisely because they appear in official records which describe the disciplinary action. What we today call persecution was regarded in the sixteenth century by those who did it as church discipline. **Anabaptists** were always regarded as members of the church, Protestant or Catholic, who had gone astray. The church authorities therefore felt responsible for them.

This discipline was often severe, involving imprisonment, torture, exile, deprivation of property, and even death. The death sentence as the ultimate

act of discipline had a long history. In a society in which everyone was regarded as Christian there was no longer a world into which the offending member could be excommunicated. The only way of getting rid of an incorrigible heretic was to put him to death. This was duly justified from the Scriptures. (*Further reading The Martyrs Mirror by Thieleman van Braght*).

Anabaptists said that physical violence was not permitted the Christian. Therefore torture, imprisonment, and death were rejected as legitimate means of discipline. Moreover, **Anabaptists** saw a clear distinction between church and world. When, therefore, someone was excommunicated, that person was sent out of the church, God's kingdom, into the world, the kingdom of Satan. In this they followed the practice of the pre-Constantinian church which, too, had not resorted to violence in its church discipline.

Anabaptists argued that the physical sword has no place in the church since it belonged to the function of government. The function of government was strictly separated from that of the church. Government officials, therefore, had no right to exercise discipline in the church in their official role. That was the prerogative only of the congregation itself. Moreover, the sword was a punitive instrument. Church discipline, however, should not be punitive in its final purpose, but redemptive. Any disciplinary action, therefore, was designed to bring an erring member back to the fold of the church.

The following selections, however, reveal a considerable variety of views on the question of discipline. All accept its necessity; they do not agree on the manner of carrying it out. There was always a strong tendency to legalism, in part because the unity and purity of the church were such high priorities.

History shows that within North German and Dutch Anabaptism too, questions were raised about the degree to which church discipline ought to be exercised. The argument of Menno Simons and Dirk Philips that commitment to the church outweighed commitment to the marriage partner is specifically rejected. Among the Dutch the practice of discipline became excessively legalistic, even to the point of completely avoiding a spouse under discipline. There, too, the process seems frequently to have neglected the first, private stages of the "rule," and moved immediately to the public stage where it produced anger, dissension, and separation. Thus, even though physical violence was rejected, what we today call psycho-

logical violence was very much in evidence.

It must be remembered, however, that the motive for discipline was the preservation of the integrity of the church. It must always be in the context of their time. Compared to the disciplinary measures of the established churches, **Anabaptist** church discipline was relatively benign.

Interrogation of Hans Bichter, 1525.

If anyone transgresses against the promise and commandment which they give to those whom they baptize, him they exclude and put out from among them.

Michael Sattler, Schleithem Confession, 1527.

II. We have been united as follows concerning the ban. The ban shall be employed with all those who have given themselves over to the Lord, to walk after [him] in his commandments; those who have been baptized into the one body of Christ, and let themselves be called brothers or sisters, and still somehow slip and fall into error and sin, being inadvertently overtaken, The same [shall] be warned twice privately and the third time be publicly admonished before the entire congregation according to the command of Christ (Mt. 18). But this shall be done according to the ordering of the Spirit of God before the breaking of bread, so that we may all in one spirit and in one love break and eat from one bread and drink from one cup.

Hans Denck, "Concerning True Love and the Love of God." 1527.

For the children of love may not for the sake of love act against love. Here all the wise need wisdom and all the friends of God need love so that they do not prefer the love of man to the love of God. For whoever loves someone, but not according to God's truth and love, hates him. But if someone hates another for the sake of divine love, he loves him more than the former. But for the sake of love one may not hate another beyond earnestly admonishing him, and if he will not hear, to avoid him with a sorrowing heart. This is also loving in truth. Herein consists the separation of the children of God from the children of the world, and also the ban or exclusion of false brethren. This too must happen only for the sake of true love, unless indeed one wishes to deny the basis of the covenant of the children of God.

When you hear your brother say something that is strange you do not immediately argue with him, but listen to see whether may be right and you can also accept it. If you cannot understand him you must not judge him, and if you think that he may be error, consider that you may be in greater error.

Menno Simons, "Admonition on Church Discipline," 1541.

Dear brethren, this is the true nature and mind of the children of God, who are by grace converted in their hearts and with Christ born of God the Father. Therefore I beseech you as my sincerely beloved brethren, by the grace of God—nay, I command you with holy Paul, by the Lord Jesus Christ, who at his coming will judge the living and the dead—diligently to observe each other unto salvation, in all becoming ways teaching, instructing, admonishing, reproofing, warning, and consoling each other as occasion requires, not otherwise than in accordance with the Word of God and in unfeigned love, until we increase in God and become united in faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God, into one perfect man and according to the measure of the gift of Jesus Christ. Ephesians 4:7.

Therefore take heed. If you see your brother sin, then do not pass him by as one that does not value his soul; but if his fall be curable, from that moment endeavor to raise him up by gentle admonition and brotherly instruction, before you eat, drink, sleep, or do anything else, as one who ardently desires his salvation, lest your poor erring brother harden and be ruined in his fall, and perish in his sin.

But do not have anything to do, as the holy Paul has taught and commanded, and do not eat, with people who being of age and driven by the Spirit were baptized into the body of Jesus Christ with us, that is, the church, but afterwards, whether through false doctrine or a vain and carnal life, reject and separate themselves from the body and fellowship of Christ, no matter whether it be father or mother, sister or brother, man or wife, son or daughter, no matter who he be, for God's Word applies to all alike and there is no respect of persons with God. We say, avoid him if he rejects the admonition of his brethren, done in sighing, tears, and a spirit of compassion and of great love, and if he nevertheless continues in his Jewish doctrine of sword, kingdom, polygamy, and similar deceptions; in the doctrine of shameless confession to each other, of no shame [for shameful acts], of nakedness; as well as a doctrine that contradicts the cross of Christ, as, for

example, that impurity is pure to the pure—all fellowship with evil work such as attending the preaching of worldly preachers, infant baptism, worldly Lord's Supper, and similar abominations, as also drunkenness, avarice, fornication, adultery, unseemly conversation, etc.

But if he affectionately receives the admonition of his faithful brethren, confesses his fall, is truly sorry, promises to do better, and brings forth fruits worthy of repentance, then no matter how he has transgressed, receive him as a returning, beloved brother or sister. But let him beware lest he mock his God, for restoration with the brethren does not avail without restoration before God. Let him be sure that his heeding the admonition, his sorrow, his promise of reformation, and his penitence, are sincere before God who searches the hearts and reins and knows all inward thoughts of men. If his heeding the admonition, his sorrow, promise, and penitence, are not sincere and from his heart, but halfhearted, put on, mechanical, and of a hypocritical exhibition, just because he does not want to be thrown out of the community of the brethren, he is still excommunicated by Christ, and is a hypocrite in the sight of God. Nor will he be rated or judged by God as anything else. For God the righteous Judge does not judge according to the outward appearance, but according to the inward intention of the heart.

Wherefore, brethren, understand correctly, no one is excommunicated or expelled by us from the communion of the brethren but those who have already separated and expelled themselves from Christ's communion either by false doctrine or by improper conduct. For we do not want to expel any, but rather to receive; not to amputate, but rather to heal; not to discard, but rather to win back; not to grieve, but rather to comfort; not to condemn, but rather to save. For this is the true nature of a Christian brother. Whoever turns from evil, whether it be false doctrine or vain life, and conforms to the Gospel of Jesus Christ, unto which he was baptized, such a one shall not and may not be expelled or excommunicated by the brethren forever.

But those whom we cannot raise up and repentingly revive by admonition, tears, warning, rebuke, or by any other Christian services and godly means, these we should put forth from us, not without great sadness and anguish of soul, sincerely lamenting the fall and condemnation of such a straying brother; lest we also be deceived and led astray by such false doctrine which eats as does a cancer (2 Tim. 2); and lest we corrupt our flesh which is inclined to evil by the contagion. Thus we must obey the Word of

God which teaches and commands us so to do; and this in order that the excommunicated brother or sister whom we cannot convert by gentle services may by such means be shamed unto repentance and made to acknowledge to what he has come and from what he is fallen. In this way the ban is a great work of love, notwithstanding it is looked upon by the foolish as an act of hatred.

Peter Riedeman, Account, 1542. Concerning Exclusion.

Paul says, "Put away from among yourselves what is evil." Therefore in the fear of God we observe and watch over one another, since the one would protect and keep the other from all wrong and from such evil as deserves exclusion. Therefore do we watch over one another, telling each his faults, warning and rebuking with all diligence. But where one will not accept the rebuke, but disregards it, the matter is brought before the church, and if he hear not the church, then he is excluded and put out.

If, however, one be discovered in the gross and deadly sins of which Paul says, "If any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or a thief or a robber, with such an one ye must not even eat." Such an one is put out and excluded or separated from the church without admonition, since the judgment of Paul is already spoken.

And if one is so excluded, we have nothing to do with him: have no company with him, that he may be ashamed. Yet is he called to repentance, that perchance he may be moved thereby and return the more quickly to God; and where not, that the church may remain pure and innocent of his sin, and bear not guilt and rebuke from God on his behalf.

In all cases, however, a distinction is made, that he who sins willfully be punished according to the weight of his sin; and the multitude of sins (1 Pet. 4-8) and judges all things in the best light. Even though it is concerned about evil appearances and evil fruit, it nevertheless always hopes for the best.

In the same way, Christ covers our sin and shame in the love and grace which leads to improvement. Whoever presumes to decide and judge, before the revealing of guilt, is a thief and a murderer (John 10[1]). He runs ahead of Jesus Christ, who alone is the revealer of good and evil in the heart.

On the other hand, if the sin and wickedness, evident from the revealed

fruit, is revealed through wrath in the righteousness of Christ, one must be ready to judge and decide with Christ, the true Judge; otherwise, he too, is a thief and a murderer. He runs behind Jesus Christ and not with Christ. All the elect of God, with Christ, judge in this time with the sword of the Spirit through the Word, and not, as the world does, with the carnal sword. They will also decide at the last judgment.

No one may judge except he who has first judged and sentenced his own life through the grace and mercy of God, whereby he has pulled the beam out of his eye. Then, very properly, in patience, humility, meekness, and love, he may with the greatest care pull the sliver out of his brother's eye without hurting or irritating the eye. That is, after all, how he has been treated by God. And whoever brings someone to Christ in a different way for judgment, as the Jews brought the adulteress to him in the temple, will find himself, together with the hypocritical Jews, running from Christ and the adulteress in the temple. Open sinners will enter the kingdom of God before these do. Christ tolerated them less than the adulteress. All transgression is adultery before God, to whom man is betrothed.

Even the world does not judge anyone on the basis of hearsay, suspicion, or appearance, but only on the words of the accused and of reliable witnesses. Christ also commands his own that all testimony must be substantiated by two or three witnesses. Only when evidence has been presented before the church, and he will not hear, does the judgment begin with tribulation, anxiety, sorrow of sins, reconciliation with God, and eternal life to all who truly repent and believe in Jesus Christ is proclaimed and promised. On the other hand, disfavour, wrath and damnation are threatened and announced against all unbelieving, rebellious, and obstinate people.

This word, together with the Holy Spirit, is the judge in the church of all false brothers (1 Cor. 5:5; Rom. 10:16; 2 Tim. 2:3; Tit, 3:19[10]), against all heretics, who after sufficient admonition do not improve, and all disorderly and disobedient persons. On the Lord's Day no other sentence will be pronounced, as the Lord himself says. The church has received this word from God, by which, in the name of Jesus Christ, and in the power of the Holy Spirit she testifies, judges, receives and expels. Whatever on earth she thus binds or looses with the word and Spirit of the Lord, is bound or loosed in heaven.

Then again brotherly love is shown in this that among us we serve one another with active goodwill, not only in spiritual matters, but also with

temporal gifts. We have received them from God in order to minister liberally to the necessity of the saints (Rom. 12:13), according to our ability. Just as it was done in Israel of old, namely, he that gathered much manna had nothing over, and he that gathered little had no lack (Ex. 16:18; 2 Cor. 8:15). Thus the rich, who have received many temporal possessions from the Lord, are to minister to the poor therewith (Rom. 15:27; 1 Cor. 8:10) and supply their need, so that the poor in turn serve them as they may have need of their services.

Letter of Zylis and Lemke to Menno Simons, 1557.

Concerning shunning of brothers and sisters that have fallen away we should act as follows. First, the nature of the sin ought to be considered, and that any action is compatible with the Word of Christ and his apostles. We must make determined efforts for the purity and preservation of the church, and that the fallen brother and sister is prepared for repentance. This must be done with moderation according to the witness of Scripture, with aid, mercy, and helpfulness to them when necessary. Therefore, dear brothers, it is our fervent prayer, and request to you that, for the sake of God's honour and praise, you will be satisfied and content with this solution. Thus we may finally be one people, at unity and peace with each other. Then we may with one voice praise God, through Jesus Christ. Amen.

We also fervently desire that the brothers in the Netherlands do not counsel husband and wife to separate in the ban. Damage and vice will follow from it rather than God's praise and the welfare of souls. The commandment regarding marriage outweighs the one regarding shunning.



THERE IS A DIFFERENCE

"One basket had very good figs, even like the figs that are first ripe: and the other basket had very naughty figs, which could not be eaten, they were so bad" (Jeremiah 24:2).

"And that ye may put difference between holy and unholy, and between unclean and clean" (Leviticus 10:10).

"For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart" (Hebrews 4:12).

"But my servant Caleb, because he had another [different] spirit with him, and hath followed me fully, him will I bring into the land where into he went; and his seed shall possess it" (Numbers 14:24).

The above scriptures are correlative with the theme and tenor of God's holy Word. This is for man's happiness and salvation.

God's created world and "mother" nature are replete with distinctly marked differences. Some examples are light and darkness, heat and cold, sweet and bitter, and north and south. These opposites never change but retain the same principle. So also much of God's Word centers on teachings and examples of good and bad, righteous and unrighteous, pure and impure, and carnal or spiritual.

One of the greatest spiritual contrasts is the wrath and hatred of Satan versus the love and mercy of God. Who can really know and understand the depths and far-reaching effects of the wickedness and evil intent of the devil and his angels? On the other hand, the song, "The Love of God," expresses the contrast so well: "Could we with ink the ocean fill, And were the skies of parchment made; Were ev'ry stalk on earth a quill, And ev'ry man a scribe by trade; To write the love of God above, Would drain the ocean dry; Nor could the scroll contain the whole, Tho' stretched from sky to sky" (Christian Hymnal, No. 82).

The Laodicean church was reprov'd and asked to repent because of their lukewarm condition (neither cold nor hot). They apparently had lost the proving of the difference between righteousness and evil. Being lukewarm is a very evident danger today.

God, His Word, and the Holy Spirit never change. In God's books, the things that were sin two hundred years ago have the same depth of evil today. But the devil is a great master-blender, mixing truth and untruth. This was his scheme in enticing the first couple upon the face of the earth, and his tactic was successful. Due to the multiplicity of human inventions, knowledge, affluence, and progressive technology, the evil one has a certain advantage to deceive multitudes, because there is no clear demarcation line of right and wrong. "And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world: he was

cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him" (Rev. 12:9).

In general, the moral principles of right and wrong are so grievously broken down compared to one hundred, or even fifty, years ago that it causes one to wonder what the future holds. The worldly system of permissiveness, blending truth and untruth and justifying sin is a chaos system that results in much heartache, sadness, and ruined lives. The thought or idea that there are no clear absolutes, but everything is relative to how and why it came about, is opposed to true Christian living.

We will need a sure foundation and anchor to stand amidst all the confusion and deception of our day. Who would not admit that God's people are affected today? It is so much easier and comfortable to compromise and go with the crowd. If we are only religious, human reasoning tells us we're not so bad but about average. This pleases the flesh and is the way of least resistance. Where are the Josephs and Daniels who will stand for the right regardless of the cost?

The standard of right against wrong has always been the hallmark banner of God's chosen people. It must be the same today. "Go through, go through the gates; prepare ye the way of the people; cast up, cast up the highway [the way of truth]; gather out the stones [the sins]; lift up a standard for the people" (Isa. 62:10). The weakness of conviction and clear direction is usually progressive. What will a weakness in us today do for our posterity and future generations?

There is a vast difference between the narrow way that leads to eternal life and the broad way that leads to eternal death. The road of the Christian and the worldling are miles apart, yet in some aspects we walk side by side—so beware!

Some pertinent matters today are pride, carnality, worldliness, and spiritual shallowness, versus humility, spirituality, sobriety, godliness, and spiritual depth. Has God spoken to you on any of these matters, and do you discern the difference? How can we sharpen our perception of vision and conviction about sin, righteousness, and judgment to come?

There needs to be clear teaching and examples lest we fall prey to the devices of Satan. The Word warns us that in the end time, he will encompass the camp of the saints. This he is certainly doing today; so the watchmen must sound the trumpet. "And they shall teach my people the difference between the holy and profane, and cause them to discern between the unclean and the clean" (Ezek. 44:23).

Finally, as the end of time draws near and is even at the door, Christ and the apostles give very sound teaching, sharply dividing between truth and error. The true seeker can know and live the more abundant life regardless of the pace and darkness of the world. The biblical examples of the proud and the humble, the wise virgins and the foolish, and the sheep and the goats are inspirational warnings to induce us to godly living. Yes, we can very well know that there is a difference.

On the Judgment Day, when every eye shall see Him and every knee shall bow, the righteous will behold His glory and be wafted up to their heavenly home. Oh, how beautiful heaven must be! The wicked will be rejected, left behind, sink lower and lower into the bottomless pit, the lake of fire that burns with fire and brimstone. What a tremendous difference! We should never doubt, therefore, that the whole realm of Christian living from the starting to the finish line is totally different from the way of the flesh.

Brother Richard, Kansas.



Seasoned Speech (Part 4)

Matthew S. Garman Myerstown, PA.

An Honeycomb

"Pleasant words are as an honeycomb, sweet to the soul, and health to the bones." (Proverbs 16:24)

Envision fresh honeycomb dripping with pure wild honey! What delectable, mouth-watering sweetness! Honey is not only delectable but also healthful.

Both the sweetness and healthfulness of honey illustrate pleasant words. What are some pleasant words that are as sweet and wholesome as honeycomb?

The words of God are pleasant words. Of all words ever spoken, these are the sweetest and most beneficial. The psalmist declared that God's words are "sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb" (Psalm 19:10). Most sweets are best enjoyed in small quantities. But the more we feast on the Bible, the sweeter it becomes.

Jesus' words were pleasant words. When Jesus walked on earth, all "wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth." While some of His words of rebuke pricked guilty hearts, all His words

were motivated by love and wisdom. We marvel at the compassionate helpfulness of Jesus' speech. Jesus is indeed our flawless model of pleasant words.

Words of wisdom are pleasant words. The verse preceding our text, Proverbs 16:23, reveals the role of wisdom in pleasant speech: "The heart of the wise teacheth his mouth, and addeth learning to his lips." When wisdom teaches us what to say, our words will be pleasant. With wisdom's help, even difficult things can be communicated pleasantly.

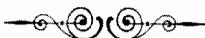
Friendly words are pleasant words. A genuine interest in others is expressed by inquiring about the welfare of them and their family. A friendly person is skilled at discovering the other person's interests and steering the conversation in that direction. Friendly words of greeting and parting are always in order. Too easily we omit the friendly words that help to brighten life.

Kind words are pleasant words. When another makes a mistake, a few kind words can make him feel better. What do we say when a family member causes us to be late? or when a cup of water is spilled in our lap at mealtime? Is our speech always patient and kind?

Encouraging words are pleasant words. The roughness of life's pathway may discourage even the strongest saint. Are we ready with encouraging words to support the discouraged? When a brother is given additional responsibility, assurance of our prayer support will help to strengthen him. When a mother is burdened with the care of sick children, encouraging words, accompanied by helpful deeds, will brighten a dark day. Encouraging words to our children assure them of our love and understanding.

"My son, eat thou ... honeycomb, which is sweet to thy taste: so shall the knowledge of wisdom be unto they soul" (Proverbs 24:13, 14). As we feed on the sweetness of God's words, our words will be made sweet.

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