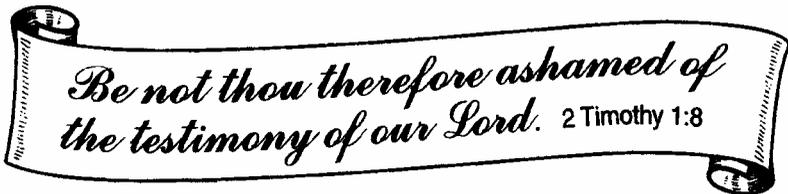


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Editorial.

Spiritually Stirring One Another.

Stirring up is a phrase that carries a negative connotation when it describes actions that produce unrest. Peter, however, uses the phrase in a very positive sense (2 Peter 1:13), even committing himself to stirring up his brethren as long as he lived. In stirring up his brethren, Peter was challenging them to faithfulness and spiritual growth. Some of these spiritual stirrings are given in 2 Peter 1.

We too are called to stir each other up spiritually. This is one of the rich blessings of being part of a Scriptural brotherhood. Failing to exercise this blessing is failing in our brotherhood responsibility and will undermine both our own spiritual well-being and the brotherhood's.

Why should we stir each other up spiritually?

Because spiritual life requires diligence (Peter 1:10). Contrast Peter's call to diligence with his lethargy at the high priest's palace as he warmed himself by the enemy's fire (Mark 14:54), forgetting his firm commitment to remain true to his Lord. We too have the native tendency to allow our fervor and commitment for Christ to gradually cool. We each need to be stirred from our natural tendency to in-

creasingly yield to the flesh.

Because we are facing the grave. Peter knew that he was nearing the end of his life and was facing the death that Christ had foretold (Peter 1:13, 14; John 21:18-19). Rather than pining about his impending death and fearing his coming suffering, Peter faithfully used the brief time that remained to stir up the spiritual life of his brethren. Today is our opportunity to stir each other up spiritually. We who are facing the grave are responsible to spiritually stir up others who are also facing the grave.

Because we have present opportunity to inspire future faithfulness (Peter 1:15). Peter desired that his brethren would continue growing spiritually after his death and that the church would remain faithful far beyond his time. We too have a present responsibility to stir the oncoming generation to remain faithful. Our spiritual stirring today can help provide building blocks for a faithful church tomorrow.

How can we stir each other up spiritually?

By personal faithfulness. Peter testified of his call to glory and virtue (Peter 1:3) and challenged his brethren to also grow in virtue (Peter 1:5-8). To stir each other up, we must first experience what we are

seeking to inspire in others. We cannot truly stir others to make their calling and election sure (Peter1:10) unless they sense that desire in us. Do our lives stir up others to be steadfast in obedience and victory? Do they challenge others to practice Gospel simplicity? If the Lord tarries, will the children and youth of today gain spiritual inspiration and fortitude as they, in the future, reflect on the examples we are presently setting?

By spiritual exhortation (Peter1:13). Peter exhorted his fellow believers to spiritual growth (Peter1:5-8). We too can stir each other spiritually by discussing spiritual matters with our brethren. Our discussions after worship services should reveal a healthy spiritual interest and should often center on blessings and challenges received during worship. Our Sunday afternoon and evening visits too should include discussion relating to the work of the church and the spiritual issues that we are facing. Are our brethren stirred spiritually by our fellowship? Do they gain incentives for spiritual growth from our conversation?

By reproof Spiritual exhortation includes reproofing each other when necessary. The flesh cringes from bringing these spiritual challenges, fearing that if we reprove our brethren, we are opening ourselves to them, inviting them to address

our weaknesses. In fact, we must open ourselves to their evaluation. This openness to the brotherly address provides blessings that we cannot afford to miss and that we should treasure rather than despise. Reproof, if given in love and humility, is an incomparable aid in our spiritual life. Are we keeping each other spiritually sharpened by brotherly reproof? Are we open to messages that deal with current issues and address expressions of the flesh? The danger is ever present to fail in these areas and to allow both ourselves and our brethren to go our separate ways to our mutual spiritual detriment.

We are stirring each other up, either for spiritual growth or toward spiritual laxity. Are we stirring up each others' minds by way of remembrance (2 Peter 3:1)? Are we encouraging faithfulness that prepares us for the day when "an entrance shall be ministered unto [us] abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ" (Peter1:11)? —*GEA*



Spiritually Supportive Viewings.

Death is inevitable. Life on earth is "like grass which groweth up. In the morning it flourisheth, and groweth up; in the evening it is cut down, and withereth" (Psalm 90:5, 6).

Death may come like the gentle fading of a golden sunset or like a bolt of lightning from a threatening storm cloud. Regardless of the circumstance, death brings a painful separation.

Viewing the body is one way for the living to deal with the harsh reality of death. Children and adults alike may tend to fantasize that the person is really not dead. Viewing the lifeless body is an important step in achieving total psychological adjustment and healing. The viewing also has spiritually therapeutic value. The Bible instructs us to "weep with them that weep." As friends and relatives gather to share their sympathies, the healing process begins. A viewing held separately from the funeral allows more people to share their regards with the grieving family. A Christian viewing communicates the acceptance of death with peace and dignity.

A public viewing helps to extend the call and pain of death to the brotherhood. The pain of death reaches beyond family and friends. The grieving family needs the support of the brotherhood in this time. Members of the local congregation should sense a responsibility to attend viewings and funerals. Even though youth may not be well acquainted with the aged, brotherhood ties will be strengthened.

All the activities surrounding the viewing and funeral should be "spiritually supportive" (Rules and Discipline, Art. 5, #2). Nothing should be done that detracts from the solemnity and dignity of the occasion.

Most of our viewings are held in the meetinghouses. This is certainly better than using the funeral home, because it brings the church relationship into focus. We should always be careful to maintain a spirit of reverence in the house of worship and prayer. Loud and boisterous talking should be avoided. The extended family should sit by quietly. When families are large and acquaintances are many, the atmosphere can easily degenerate until it sounds like a celebration or a family reunion, defeating the primary purpose for the viewing.

When our turn comes to share with the family, we should keep our comments brief, especially when the family is large and the crowd is overflowing. It is best not to ask for details surrounding the death but rather to briefly share a few words of comfort. Our presence at the viewing likely means more than the words we speak. The family can also help to keep the crowd moving by doing more listening than talking. Generally the line of people waiting to meet the bereaved moves on better when the family remains seated.

Words of comfort should be appropriate and spiritually up building. Even when the spiritual condition of the deceased may be questionable, words of comfort can be shared with the living. We need not judge the life and destiny of the dead. We should rather reflect upon the brevity of life, the goodness of God, and the need for committing the soul of the departed into the hand of the righteous Judge.

The practice of displaying photographs or family keepsakes at viewings is a recent innovation in some groups. We are negative to this practice because it detracts from the purpose of the viewing, comforting the bereaved and pondering the seriousness of life and the reality of death. It also places too much emphasis on the person, so it is not consistent with our religious heritage. When the body cannot be viewed, a picture may become a consideration. Also, in keeping with these concerns, photographs should not be included in the memory folder.

The standards we expect for our funerals should also be applied to our viewings. They should be characterized by simplicity and economy. Flowers should not be used.

In the past, dying and death were more closely linked to the living. People often died at home, surrounded by their family and

friends. Having the body at home with the family was not a fearful thing. After the body was prepared for burial, it was returned to the residence. By having the body in the home, the family dealt more realistically with the fact of mortality.

Today our society has secularized life and institutionalized death. Modern medical care often separates life from the dying process. Most people die in hospitals or old people's homes, often among strangers. The funeral industry "takes care of everything." People tend to think, "Let's get the funeral finished quickly. We don't want a long service." With this mentality often comes the trend toward no viewings. In contrast, the Christian does not fear or deny death.

Although we appreciate the services of funeral directors, we should not accept all they offer. We do not want them to cushion the reality of death. Embalming the body supports the value we place on the viewing. We should not, however, favor excessive cosmetizing of the body. The body does not need to appear as lifelike and youthful as possible. This will actually militate against the real purpose of viewing the body.

Facing the reality of death is a mark of Christian maturity. Viewing the body of a departed loved one should help to remind us that

life is fragile and fleeting. We are just passing through this world which is not our home. We confess anew that we are "strangers and pilgrims on the earth." We desire a better heavenly country.

E.B. Lititz, PA



Lessons From the (Halbtaufer) Halfway Anabaptists

*[A note by the web publisher: The term (Halbtaufer) Halfway Anabaptists is of German origin and for the ease of our English readers it has been added to by the English translation **Halfway Anabaptists** where it occurs in this article]*

During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, a large proportion of the population in Switzerland appreciated the Anabaptists. Many even contributed to their safety in the midst of persecution by providing food and shelter and sometimes warning them of the approach of authorities seeking to arrest them. These people, known in German as (Halbtaufer) Halfway Anabaptists (Halfway Anabaptists), generally attended the Reformed state churches but sometimes also attended secret Anabaptist meetings. (Halbtaufer) Halfway Anabaptists

were people, mainly from Switzerland, who sympathized with and supported the Anabaptists without ever joining them.' To the Swiss Brethren, they were known as die Treuherzigen Menschen (the true-hearted people) or die Gutherzigen Menschen (the goodhearted people).

While it is difficult to quantify the prevalence of the Halfway Anabaptists, there is no doubt that their numbers were very strong in some of the rural districts of Switzerland in the seventeenth century. "In some Swiss villages, the majority of the people were Halfway Anabaptists." Evidence of their prevalence comes from this quotation from a 1670 meeting of the ministers of the Protestant state church in Burgdorf, a district in the Emmental region where many American Mennonite families originated. The word sectarians in this quotation refers to the true Anabaptists.

The number of these sectarians increases daily; for instance nine members of the little Reformed Church at Shanghais have withdrawn this year. The half Anabaptists, who differ in that they still attend our services at will, are so numerous that it is to be feared that in some places there are more of them than of Ours.

Conviction

The price of conviction is high,
'Twill send you in secret to cry
Or stand there alone
When others have flown
With arrows of doubt sailing by.

The strength of conviction is strong,
Though hard is the struggle and long,
Through blackness of night
We go in God's might,
Uplifted by His holy song.

The friends of conviction are good
For helping, as any friend should;
Truth, honesty, peace,
Effect God's release
Where trembling, we battle-scarred stood.

Rewards of conviction are sweet—
Through having been led to His feet,
Who laboured and wept
While other men slept,
The Father's desire to complete.

—Fred F. Stoltzfus

Characteristics of the (Halbtaufer) Halfway Anabaptists.

The (Halbtaufer) Halfway Anabaptists exhibited a wide variety of beliefs and practices. Some had little interest in identifying with the Anabaptists; they rather appreciated their high moral standards and work ethic and therefore would not assist the authorities in their efforts to exterminate the Anabaptists. Others understood the Anabaptists to be correct in their interpretation of the Scriptures and in their way of life and desired to be part of them, but did not join with them. "They refrained from uniting with the Brethren for the reason that they were not willing to live a life of self-denial to the extent of a willingness to bear severe persecution." In 1693, a Reformer wrote, "They remain with us [within the established church], but are fully persuaded that it would be better for them to cast their lot with [the Anabaptists]."

The Halfway Anabaptists "became transgressors of the civil law and made themselves liable to severe punishment." They refused to assist the Tauferjager (Anabaptist hunters) in apprehending and persecuting the Anabaptists. They assisted the Anabaptists in avoiding arrest by providing them with food and shelter and by warning them of impending danger. They sometimes made their houses or barns

available for Anabaptist meetings. All of these actions made the work of the authorities more difficult. As a result, edicts and mandates were signed condemning these sympathizers and decreeing that they be fined for assisting the Anabaptists.

The (Halbtaufer) Halfway Anabaptists risked their own safety to help the Anabaptists for varied reasons. Most were convinced by their knowledge of the Anabaptists and by their exemplary lives that the Anabaptists had experienced true saving faith. Some of the (Halbtaufer) Halfway Anabaptists were motivated by dislike for the state church clergy and the inconsistencies they saw in the state churches. Many were driven by opposition to the state's methods of persecuting the quiet and peaceable Anabaptists. The Tauferjager were often men of ill repute such as rogues and former criminals, and they received little respect from the common people.

Some of the (Halbtaufer) Halfway Anabaptists believed that their own salvation depended on their association with these people of God. Perhaps they felt that God would show them mercy because they had helped the Anabaptists.

The Anabaptists' View of the (Halbtaufer) Halfway Anabaptists

How did the Anabaptists regard the (Halbtaufer) Halfway Anabaptists? As with the (Halbtaufer)

Halfway Anabaptists themselves, there was a range of opinions. The attitude of the Anabaptists toward the (Halbtaufer) Halfway Anabaptists was an issue in the Amish division of 1693. The Amish tended to feel that the (Halbtaufer) Halfway Anabaptists could not be saved in their halfway belief, while the Mennonites were hesitant to judge them one way or the other. Certainly, the Anabaptists appreciated the help they received from the (Halbtaufer) Halfway Anabaptists and asked God to bless them for their kindness. Although they generally did not think of the Halfway Anabaptists as saved persons, most Anabaptists did not condemn them as lost persons. They desired that they would have the courage to join the Anabaptists and prayed to this end. A 1739 Mennonite prayer book contains a prayer which reflects this attitude:

O Holy Father in heaven, we pray Thee for all true-hearted people who love us and do good unto us, and render us services of mercy by providing for us food and nourishment, housing and shelter. O Lord, do Thou recompense them richly with all that is good. And since they hear Thy word gladly but have little strength to surrender themselves to obedience, we pray Thee to grant them that they may through Thy Holy Spirit have engrafted in them Thy word which is

able to save their Souls.

Differences Between the Anabaptists and the Halfway Anabaptists

Many of the Halfway Anabaptists attended the state churches and even received Communion there, especially if that was necessary to avoid being detected as being sympathetic to the Anabaptist cause. The (Halbtaufer) Halfway Anabaptists generally had their children baptized in the state churches, although some of them waited until their children were older and could understand its meaning. Halfway Anabaptists tended to believe that having faith and an inner experience was satisfactory and that the Anabaptists' distinctive doctrines that made them easy to identify were not necessary. When questioned or pressured about their beliefs, they were much more likely than Anabaptists to deny having Anabaptist leanings and to recant. They sometimes mumbled through oaths or gave vague or ambiguous answers to avoid detection. In contrast, the true Anabaptists would not do these things."

Because of persecution by the state, the Anabaptists frequently had to hide or move to other areas. This they saw as a part of the price of maintaining their faith and practice. However, the (Halbtaufer) Halfway Anabaptists rarely had to flee their homes and possessions

and move to other areas because of their faith.

Lessons for Today

We marvel that God used the Halfway Anabaptists to help preserve the true Christian faith through a time of severe persecution. Our hearts go out to those who endangered their own lives in order to help the Anabaptists. John Horsch wrote, "The remarkable fact that for more than two centuries the combined efforts of both the state and the heads of the national church in Switzerland signally failed of the attempted extermination of the Taufer [Baptist, here meaning Anabaptist] people must be ascribed, under God, to the influence and efforts of the (Halbtaufer) Halfway Anabaptists."

We are moved with compassion at the suffering of conscience these people must have experienced as they halted between two opinions. They must have faced considerable anguish of spirit as they knew in their hearts that the Anabaptist faith was true to the Scriptures, but "they did not have the courage of their conviction."

Like almost all Mennonites, we claim identity and kinship with the true Anabaptists of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. How can we avoid the (Halbtaufer) Halfway Anabaptists type of thinking in our own lives and in our own

congregations? Consider the following tests:

Test of my view of salvation.

Do I believe that being associated with the people of God will be enough to save me? The (Halbtaufer) Halfway Anabaptists, at least some of them, believed this. Today, it could be the thought that if I am a church member in good standing, then God will accept me even if I do not have a vibrant relationship with Jesus Christ or even if there are secret sins in my life. To think that salvation is possible by being a friend with God's people or a member of a good church is to have a halfway view of salvation.

Test of commitment and loyalty.

Am I fully committed to the lordship of Jesus Christ and loyal to His church? Do I have more confidence in the people of God than in those in the community who are not part of our church? Am I submitting to church requirements willingly? One may not be interested in the church simply for

the benefits received without being willing to also assume the responsibilities, the stigma, and the suffering that it may bring. That suffering may be physical, emotional, or financial. To desire membership in the church without being willing to accept the challenges that come with it is to have a halfway ap-

proach to church loyalty.

Test of identification.

Am I willing to be identified with the people of God? Do I gladly wear plain clothing that makes me easily recognizable as a non-conformed Christian, not only when going to church but also when going to stores, meetings, and family gatherings and when traveling? Appreciating separation is not enough; it must also be practiced. To appreciate the nonconformity of spiritual forefathers or of other Plain People today without being ready to practice it is to have a halfway attitude toward the commandments of God.

Do I do things to avoid being recognized as a believer or as a conservative Mennonite? Do I believe that God is satisfied with those who profess to have an inner experience without living a life of good fruits to accompany the profession? "In areas where Halfway Anabaptists were common in the 1600s, there were many Pietists in the 1700s.... Pietism provided a theological escape route for such people." To focus on internal matters of faith and personal experience without accountability for external obedience to God's Word is to have a halfway perspective on what God requires.

Test of attachments.

Am I free of the attachments to home, possessions, land, business,

family, and lifestyle so that I can respond to God's call to serve Him? Am I willing to leave my home to move to another community or country if the church asks that of me? Halfway Anabaptists were not willing to move away from their homeland to escape persecution. True Anabaptists fled from their homes and in some cases wandered from place to place. "True to their faith, the Anabaptists sacrificed their kin and homeland, went out into the unknown, depending on God and the help of the Brethren." To be willing to serve God as long as I can live where I want to live is to have a halfway response to Christ's call to discipleship.

Test of persecution.

Am I willing to suffer for the cause of Christ? Under pressure, would I deny my Lord and recant? Would I be willing and able to endure torture for my faith without giving up? It is difficult to answer questions such as these when not facing persecution, but true faith is confident that God will enable those who trust Him. "Halfway Anabaptists believed Anabaptist doctrine but did not join the Anabaptists, because of persecution." To serve God faithfully when the way is easy but draw back when facing persecution is to have a halfway commitment to the cost of following Christ.

The Scriptures call God's people

to live in complete obedience to His Word. Partial obedience and partial commitment are not acceptable. "The greatest tragedy of modern Mennonitism round the world has been, not that some of us have failed to achieve the vision, but that many of us have surrendered the vision altogether."

May we do all we can to represent the true, steadfast Anabaptists of our day lest we too surrender the vision and practice. The blessings and rewards of faithfulness attend those who are faithful to the end at all cost.

C.C. Hyde Park, VT

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PRAYER POINT

*"The effectual fervent prayer
of a righteous man availeth much."*

*Pray for the many peoples throughout the world
affected by widespread disasters and political unrest.*

Seasoned Speech (Part 2)

Choice Silver ---- *BY M.S.G.*

"The tongue of the just is as choice silver" (Proverbs 10:20).

"When Brother Joseph speaks, people listen." Brother Harold was recounting a meeting twenty-five years before when Brother Joseph had spoken one sentence that moved the committee to action. Why were Brother Joseph's words so weighty? Because his words were thoughtful and few.

The value of a commodity usually rises in proportion to its scarcity. If we want our words to be as valuable as silver, they cannot be as plentiful as iron. The less we talk, the more we listen, and the wiser our words will be when we do speak. The less we talk, the more we think, and the more astute our words will be.

As currency, silver is valuable as a medium of exchange. Words also serve as currency—they are the medium of exchange of thoughts. Words can be used to exchange ideas, instructions, inspiration, knowledge, and truth. Words can also be used in the exchange of foolishness. Such words are nearly weightless. Spoken lightly, they fly about as a handful of feathers thrown into wind. But words chosen thoughtfully are weighty with valuable cargo.

Silver is valuable for its usefulness. For thousands of years, silver utensils and vessels were valued for their durability and beauty. Today silver is used in the electronics industry because it is an excellent conductor. Godly speech is useful in helping men know how to

live on earth and invaluable in preparing men for eternity. Sometimes the most useful words are those that are not pleasant to give or receive. "Let the righteous smite me; it shall be a kindness: and let him reprove me; it shall be an excellent oil, which shall not break my head" (Psalm 141:5).

The words of the just are compared to choice silver. Choice means "tried and true." This silver is chosen because of its excellence. How does silver become choice silver? Very little silver occurs naturally in its pure form. Usually it is found in ore mixed with other elements. The ore is smelted through a process using high heat to separate the silver. The silver then is further refined to remove impurities.

What about our speech? Does it need to be refined to become as choice silver? The word just, which means "righteous," implies a cleansing from all that defiles. Words proceeding from a regenerated heart will always be pure and true.

But there may be further refining needed to remove some dross from our speech. Idle words should be purged from our conversation. Slang words will decrease the value of our speech. Flattery, empty and worthless, will not stand the heat of the refining fire. Complaining also falls far short of the silver standard.

Every word should be tested, tried, and found true and pure before it passes our lips. Then our speech will be choice—valued by man and God