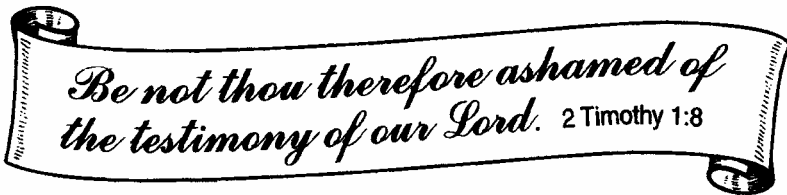


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Editorial.

Nonresistance and Pacifism

Nonresistance is derived from our Lord's command, "That ye resist not evil" (Matthew 5:39), and pacifism comes from His teaching, "Blessed are the peacemakers" (Matthew 5:9). Although both have Scriptural roots, pacifism has taken on a distinctly different connotation from nonresistance. Nonresistance emphasizes obedience to Christ's teaching and shuns political involvement. Its meaning is similar to "wehrlosigkeit" (defenselessness), the word historically used by Mennonites for this doctrine. Pacifism, in contrast, has been used to emphasize political activism in seeking peaceful solutions and in avoiding carnal warfare.

In recent generations, mainstream Mennonites have drifted from the historic position of Biblical nonresistance to pacifism. They rarely use the term nonresistance today and often align themselves with pacifists opposing war for humanitarian reasons. The article on "Peace" in the Mennonite Encyclopedia, *VOLUME V (1990)*, reflects and even emphasizes this shift. Its emphasis contrasts with the article on "Pacifism" in the original volumes published in the 1950s.

Biblical nonresistance and pacifism differ regarding the relation of the church and the state. Biblical nonresistance is intertwined with the two-kingdom concept that Jesus clearly defined. Christ's kingdom is altogether distinct from earthly kingdoms, and His servants do not involve themselves in the kingdoms of this world or resort to warfare (John 18:36). Pacifism has greatly blurred this distinction, teaching that there is only one moral standard for the church and the state.

How can we remain nonresistant and avoid drifting toward pacifism?

Remain free from political involvement. Pacifists often exert political pressure to promote national and international peace. This includes joining peace rallies and war protests, and pressuring the government to avoid military action. Offices have been established in national capitals to present this position to national leaders. Currently, pressure is being brought to withdraw troops from Iraq. In pursuing their peace agenda, pacifists often work with those who support policies that directly violate basic Bible principles.

The Biblical two-kingdom concept recognizes that, as Christians, we are part of a different kingdom.

We do not use political efforts such as lobbying to defend ourselves or to promote Christ's cause. We must also recognize that God uses government to keep order both in national and international spheres and authorizes their use of the sword. Governments are not called to follow New Testament principles, and we do not expect them to do so. Certainly we are glad when lives are saved and war is avoided. However, we are out of our realm if we endeavor to keep the government from fulfilling its responsibility. The sword we wield is the Word of God, our spiritual battleground is the world, and our goal is to win men to the kingdom of Christ (Ephesians 6:10-20).

Be submissive to civil authorities. Pacifists have protested wars by resorting to civil disobedience, even inviting arrest by trespassing onto or blocking access to military installations. They consider their protests to be "nonviolent direct action." Some refuse to pay the pro rata share of taxes that the government uses for military expenditures.

In contrast, we need to stand firmly on the Bible principle that the government is appointed by God as "a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil." We are commanded to "be subject unto the higher powers," and to recognize that "whosoever there-

fore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation." We are responsible to "render therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honour to whom honour" (Romans 13:1-7). Political protests, with the civil disobedience that often accompanies them, and tax avoidance violate these Scriptural directives. Only when government dictates require us to violate the Scriptures should we respectfully disobey them and "obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29).

Be willing to suffer wrong. Pacifists emphasize peaceful means of solving conflict. They promote binding arbitration both in individual and national disputes. However, this emphasis usually does not stem from the conviction that all the New Testament must be obeyed. The position is therefore somewhat philosophical and sometimes presents Christ's teaching on peace as primary and other New Testament teachings as secondary. Because of this tenuous relationship with the Scriptures, the pacifist will sometimes compromise and resort to "nonviolent" coercion to defend himself when threatened.

We need to consider nonresistance as part of New Testament obedience. We are nonresistant, not because we see it as the least de-

structive way to attain our goal, but because we see it as the right way regardless of the cost. We are called to reflect the love of God to others. We are called, by God's grace, to consistently follow Christ's command, "Resist not evil," and so fulfill His beatitude, "Blessed are the peacemakers." —
GEA



The Vanity of Living for Pleasure.

"This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be ... lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God" (2 Timothy 3:1-4).

This prophecy describes society today very well. Many in society are pursuing pleasure. They live for the weekend when they can go skiing in the mountains or can attend the next football or baseball game. Some become frustrated when their weekend plans are cancelled by rain or when their team loses. Many churches have gymnasiums much larger than their auditorium and are earthly playgrounds rather than spiritual fortresses.

Vanity means "lack of substance or worth." As people seek after pleasure, its failure to fulfill is evident as more intense and more expensive and more frequent pleas-

ures are pursued.

Another meaning of vanity is "failure to yield the desired outcome." The vanity of living for pleasure is evident when people return from vacations more exhausted than when they left.

Vanity is a result of the Fall. "For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected the same in hope" (Romans 8:20).

Why is it vanity to live for pleasure?

Living for pleasure is seeking fulfillment in the wrong. "I said in mine heart, Go to now, I will prove thee with mirth, therefore enjoy pleasure: and, behold, this also is vanity" (Ecclesiastes 2:1). Solomon tried to find meaning in life by looking to pleasure, but in the end he identified it as vanity. He mistakenly thought that pleasure in itself could bring him fulfillment. If we, like Solomon, try to find fulfillment in life by looking to pleasure rather than meeting our needs in God, we too will be disappointed.

Trying to find fulfillment through pleasure seeking could be likened to jacking up a car so that the low air pressure in a tire is not so obvious. Doing this would not solve the problem; it would only make the situation less noticeable. The real solution to the problem is repairing the tire. When our hearts are full of

the things of God, we will not need the things of time and sense to fill our hearts.

Living for pleasures is living for the transitory.

The pleasures men seek are part of the earth and the works in it that will be burned up (2 Peter 3:10). Moses realized this when he made his choice to cast his lot with the people of God and gave up the temporal pleasures of sin. He chose rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, where he could find eternal blessings.

Living for pleasure is following the world.

"Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him" (1 John 2:15). Pleasure seeking appeals to men of the world. In contrast, this world's system of entertainment does not interest the child of God, because for him, "all things are become new."

Worldly pleasures choke out spiritual life.

God's judgments were pronounced on those who were feasting and were not regarding the work of the Lord (Isaiah 5:11-15). If we fail to take time for God because our other activities are robbing us of time, we are on the road to spiritual ruin. In the parable of the sower, the thorns that choked the seed represented the pleasures

of this world that choke out the Word of God (Luke 8:14).

Living for pleasure brings people to ruin. Billions of dollars are spent on vacationing, sports, and other forms of pleasure while many are starving or barely have the necessities of life. Even more serious is the threat of spiritual ruin. Should we, who are called to be strangers and pilgrims on this earth, spend money for things that bring us pleasure at the expense of giving to the Lord's work? Should we spend time in pleasure when so many about us are lost? We cannot afford to do so spiritually even if we can financially. "Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread?" (Isaiah 55:2).

What are some guidelines to help us avoid the vanity of pleasure seeking? Following are a few questions to help us evaluate our thinking and our lives.

Does this activity harmonize with our accountability to God? "Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth; and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thine heart, and in the sight of thine eyes: but know thou, that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment" (Ecclesiastes 11:9).

Could we conscientiously ask the Lord to bless this activity? Does it honor Christ and His Word? `And whatsoever ye do in word or deed,

do all in the name of the Lord Jesus" (Colossians 3:17).

Does this activity bring us into close association with the world? 'And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed" (Romans 12:2).

Will this activity help or hinder us spiritually?

Will it strengthen or weaken our eternal perspective? "Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you" (James 4:8).

As we, like Moses, reject the temporal pleasures of sin because we have respect unto the recompense of the reward, we will receive "an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away" (1 Peter 1:4).

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Thou That Inhabits the Praises of Israel"

"My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? why art thou so far from helping me, and from the words of my roaring? O my God, I cry in the daytime, but thou hearest not; and in the night season, and am not silent. But thou art holy O thou that Inhabits the praises Israel" (Psalm 22:1-3).

What could this phrase mean? Why has it been set in this context?

Psalm 22 is a Messianic Psalm,

written by David, it details his trying experience while at the same time prophetically describing the sufferings of our Lord. Some of the words of Jesus (22:1) and of His enemies (22:8) are recorded here prophetically. The piercing of Jesus' hands and feet (22:16) and the casting of lots upon His garments (22:18) are prophesied. Although there is no record of David experiencing all these, he too was "a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief." The words of this psalm express the deepest sentiments of a soul that is experiencing life's bitterest woes.

And yet, to our surprise, bright flashes of hope stream from among the shadows of this grief and adversity. In fact, in the last nine verses of this psalm, David breaks forth in an extended song of praise and triumph. No doubt the sweetest praise ever to pass mortal lips is the praise of the sufferer.

This figurative thought of God inhabiting the praises of Israel stirs the embers of our interest and raises heart-searching questions.

What places does God inhabit? The high and lofty One states that He inhabits eternity (Isaiah 57:15). Such a home certainly distinguishes Him from all other beings. The psalmist, however, observes that "the LORD hath chosen Zion ... for his habitation" (Psalm 132:13). This, along with a com-

plementary verse from the New Testament, "God dwelleth in us" (1 John 4:12), reveals that God's dwelling is not confined to the eternal heavens but that He also abides within the hearts of sanctified human beings. What a privilege!

How can God inhabit praise?

A dwelling place denotes a place frequented and well-known, a place that refreshes and revives, a place loved and cherished. It is the place called home. Can it be that praises that flow from mortal lips provide all this for God? While we know that God never experiences a need such as weariness, yet He derives supreme delight and satisfaction from "the praises of Israel." He is familiar with praises that are regular. He is comfortable with praises that extol His supreme being. And He is satisfied with praises that spring from sincere gratitude. Praises are expressions that He can inhabit.

What hearts yield praises that God will inhabit?

Sanctified hearts. "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me" (Psalm 66:18). God cannot cohabit with sin. Only hearts that are cleansed from iniquity are fit for His dwelling. Only those who have been freed from the slavery of sin can sincerely praise their great Emancipator. Praise from the heart of one still in

bondage is empty and meaningless if not impossible.

Grateful hearts. Praise is born of gratitude; the two are synonymous. A dwelling for God is never provided by ungrateful, grumbling, begging hearts. Rather, grateful hearts are those that are sincerely thankful for all that God has done, is doing, and will yet do in the future. One grateful heart penned it this way—"Perpetual blessings from Thine hand / Demand perpetual songs of praise."

Confident hearts. How could David praise while walking such dark and lonely paths? Part of the key was his confidence. Though he could not understand the present trials, he had confidence that his Shepherd could. This gave him reassurance that yielded praise even when walking through the valley of the shadow of death. Today, God still eagerly tunes His ear to the song of confidence.

Harmonized hearts. "In the midst of the congregation will I praise thee" (verse 22). The richest beauty in music is achieved by the harmony of many voices complementing each other. Solo singing cannot match a beautiful harmony. Likewise, God inhabits the praises of Israel rather than of a single Israelite. A single heart full of praise pleases Him, but His preferred habitation is in the collective praises that rise in one great har-

mony from the lives and lips of His saints. Personal ego militates against this harmony. Any desire to show off one's ability to sing or pray or serve disqualifies a person for praise that God can inhabit.

Committed hearts. We are enjoined to offer up "the sacrifice of praise" (Hebrews 13:15). To sacrifice is to give up something cherished to serve a higher cause. Praise is a sacrifice. It requires commitment and self-denial. The same verse in Hebrews also exhorts us to praise continually. This too demands commitment. How can God abide in praise if our song vanishes when the sunshine wanes? How can He make it His dwelling if praise dies with the passing of the years? In fact, should not the song we begin in this life continue until we can sing the nobler praises of eternity? God hears the praises of committed hearts.

With Solomon we cry in humility, "But will God in very deed dwell with men on the earth? behold, heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain thee; how much less this house which I have built!" (2 Chronicles 6:18). Yet God has chosen to inhabit the hearts and praises of His saints.

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Beatitude Series (Part 1)

"Blessed Are the Poor in Spirit"

Sincere children of God carefully consider the Beatitudes (Matthew 5:3-12). What does my Master expect of me if I would follow Him? How can I best please Him whom I love? What attitudes of heart do I need to make it to heaven? Jesus, so simply, yet so profoundly, answers these questions for us in the Beatitudes.

"Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." Poor in spirit—what does this mean?

"Poor in spirit" is what we are not by nature. Strong, healthy, and self-sufficient—these are what we want to be. And Western culture urges, "Stand on your own two feet." It is not hard for us to think that we could get along very readily without God or the advice of others. If we do so, we join the Laodiceans in thinking, "I am rich... and have need of nothing" (Revelation 3:17).

But Jesus pronounces the blessing on the "poor in spirit," not the self-satisfied soul. God answered the publican's prayer, and He answers the prayers of those who are overwhelmed with a sense of their failure and very aware of their pitiful condition. If a man does not sense, deep in his spirit, a profound need for God, what are the chances of his coming to God? They are not

very good. Yet God Himself in His mercy puts the void into men's hearts so that they do seek Him.

Our sense of need is what turned us to God in the first place, and this is also what will keep us close to God throughout the Christian life. How easily we wander off on a self-confident path! We constantly need to be reminded of how little we can withstand without help from the Almighty. Throughout our Christian walk, we need "a broken and a contrite heart" that pleads to God for forgiveness.

"For theirs is the kingdom of heaven." What is this reward? Jesus said, "The kingdom of God is within you." The kingdom of heaven could be thought of as the government of God in a person's

life. The reward is all the blessing that comes upon a Christian who is controlled by the Spirit of God. But the kingdom of heaven is eternal too. It carries into the bliss that is to come.

Do you know how it feels to cry out to God in the disappointment and despair of your own helplessness and sin and realize that God has not rejected you?—that He has heard and is holding out His hands in forgiveness to you? He does not despise a broken and a contrite heart (Psalm 51:17). He is nigh to and saves such (Psalm 34:18).

"But to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and that trembleth at my word" (Isaiah 66:2).

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