



The *Pulpit Exchange*

It pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe. (1 Corinthians 1:21)

So they read in the book in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading. (Nehemiah 8:8) Iron sharpeneth iron; so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend. (Proverbs 27:17)

Volume 6, No. 7

Issue # 607

Anabaptist Distinctiveness

To lay a foundation for the message, I invite you to turn to 1 Peter 2. In this chapter the Christian is likened to four different things. First of all in verse 2, the Christian is likened to a “newborn babe.” As a new born babe desires milk, so the Christian desires “the sincere milk of the word.” Not only so that he simply knows it and can answer questions about it, but he desires the sincere word that he,

“may grow thereby.”

Secondly, in verses 5–8, the Christian is likened to lively stones. The picture that is drawn in verse 5, 6, 7, and 8 is that of a stone mason who in building a building of stone. He picks up a stone and chisels away at it. Finally, if he is not able to get it to fit, he will throw it aside and pick up another stone and start chiselling at that one. That is the way the Jewish elders and the

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Pharisees related to Christ. When Christ came, the Jews and the Pharisees could not get Him to “fit” their line of thought. Therefore, they chiselled away at Him and finally they cast Him aside because He did not seem to fit. That is the way a lot of people are having church today. Jesus does not seem to fit with their program. Therefore, they throw out the Gospel and go on with their way of having church and leave Christ out of the pic-

ture. However, Jesus never was intended to be a stone that was made to fit. Instead Jesus was the Chief Cornerstone and that is the Lord’s doings. Everyone must be fit to the Lord if they will be a part of the Church.

In verse 11, the Christian is likened to “strangers and pilgrims.” As strangers and pilgrims we are living the Christian life in a world that is sinful and hostile. That world is coming at us with various fronts. It comes

Vol. 6 No. 7, Issue # 607. The Pulpit Exchange is a compilation of written sermons without commentary, published as often as possible, in the interests of promoting sound preaching in our conservative Anabaptist churches. All sermons have been transcribed and printed with permission. Names are removed so that we can focus on the message and content rather than on a certain speaker or style. (Names will be published in the next issue).

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Published by Door of Peace Publications/Les Éditions «Porte-de-Paix» a conservative Amish Mennonite/Anabaptist publisher
c/o Keith G. White, P.O. Box 104, Blyth, Ontario Canada N0M 1H0

Cost per Issue \$4.95 + \$2.50 p& h Canada/ \$3.50 p& h USA

at us on economic, philosophical, medical, and technological fronts. We could go on with defining the various fronts that the world throws up to us. While we are living here, we really do not belong here. We are strangers and pilgrims. While we are living here, we need to “abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul.” As Christians we must never be comfortable here because once we become comfortable here, we lose our hope. We lose our prospects, because our focus is too low. Therefore, And so we live as strangers and pilgrims, and the world misunderstands us. Nevertheless, “in the day of visitation,” (verse 12) wickedness will be condemned, the righteous will be vindicated and God will be glorified.

In verse 25, the Christian is likened to “sheep going astray; but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of [our] souls.” As Christians, we follow the Good Shepherd, obey His commands, and we follow His example. We follow with great care because we “were as sheep going astray,” and are zealous lest we go astray again.

Where we have people who are so hungering and thirsting for the Word, are abstaining from fleshly lusts that war against the

soul, and are zealous in doing what is right lest they go astray, there we will have a peculiar people. I would like to use as our text verse this morning 1 Peter 2:9, 10. “But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light: (10) Which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God: which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy.” They are different — a people who are set apart. They are not only a people who are different. They are a peculiar people who are distinctive which means that their differentness is not merely an oddity. Their differentness is an identifying characteristic that marks them where they belong. The Christian is not merely an odd person. He is a Christian. He bears the marks of Christ. The difference that is seen in his life marks him as a disciple — “a peculiar people, zealous of good works” (Titus 2:14).

This message looks at Anabaptist distinctiveness. As I prepared for this message, I recalled a conversation that I had with a man from another state a number of years ago. He recognized that I represented a reli-

gious group, and so he asked the question, “What religious denomination do you represent?” Of course, my answer was, “The Mennonites.” Then, he asked, “Well, who are the Mennonites, are they like the Lutherans? Are they like the Presbyterians? Are they like the Anglicans? Who are you like?” “Well,” I said, “we are different from all of them.” Then his next question obviously was, “But how?” This message is an effort to try to define what it is that sets the Anabaptists (or the Mennonites) away from all other denominations that are classified under the name of “Christian.”

We have been blessed with an Anabaptist heritage and tradition that we do not want to lose. This is not merely because our Anabaptist tradition and history is historical, but because it is also Scriptural. Therefore, we want to go back to the Swiss brethren of 1525 and the Dutch Mennonites of 1536 and discover what it was that set them apart from the main flow of Christianity of that time. We are going back to that time because in that era there was a dividing of ways amongst the broader picture of Christianity. There were several Christian denominations that rose up over that time. What is it that causes Anabaptism to stand apart from the rest of the denominations of

that era?

There might be some here who would object to the idea of looking at the subject of Anabaptist distinctiveness and say that we would rather look at Scriptural distinctiveness. I can respect that concern because we do not look at the Anabaptists as a perfect model of church life. They were men. Instead we go back to the Scriptures and look at the teachings of Christ and the work of the apostles in the Early Church and their teachings in order to discover a perfect model for what Christian living and church life ought to be. Nevertheless, there is value in seeing how those in the past interpreted and lived the Scriptures. It has been observed that when a person separates himself from his Anabaptist roots, it is not long before he is no longer Scriptural. Therefore, we want to be historical. We also want to be Scriptural.

We observe that many who share roots with us in 16th century Anabaptism have gone afield. While we could look at the various directions where they have gone, I would like to mainly focus our attention on two of them. On the one hand there are those who share with us Anabaptist roots who have gone afield in the direction of Pietism with its emphasis on experience

and testimony. The Pietists are more concerned with personal salvation than the outworking of salvation and the maintaining of a pure Church. They emphasize the conversion experience and give testimony of how sinful they were, how they came to a terrible consciousness of sin, how they had an exhaustive mental labour within themselves and finally came to a crisis conversion. Now they have a glorious testimony of peace in their hearts because they have been saved. They emphasize the presence and work of the Holy Spirit in their lives and the proof that the Spirit is present in their lives they would tell you is the spiritual sensation that they sense within themselves. They testify how the Spirit leads them in daily activities. They see church as a gathering together of redeemed ones who have a parallel experience and therefore come together in order to share their parallel experiences in Christ. They respect the Spirit's presence and work in their lives as the ultimate authority, this means that in the extreme that respect even undermines the authority of the Scriptures because of the concept that because the Spirit of God dwells in my heart, I have the entirety of truth right here. Therefore, there is the diminishing of the

Scriptures.

The Anabaptists believed in the new birth. Also, the Anabaptists believed in the individual conscience, they believed in church life, and they believed in the Holy Spirit indwelling. What we have described stands afield from Anabaptism.

On the other hand, there is a group of people who share with us in 16th century Anabaptism but who have swerved to the side of Protestantism. The basic thought of Protestantism is that man is, and always will be, a sinner and that living and life, is and will be, a failure. "The Gospel is an impossible demand." They emphasize that our only hope in living is because Christ died for us. Therefore, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved" (Acts 16:31), and we are, "justified by faith," (Romans 3:28; 5:1; Galatians 3:24). Whereas Pietism's emphasis is focused on the work of the Holy Spirit, the Protestant focus is on work of Jesus Christ who shed His blood for our atonement.

The Anabaptists believed in the sinfulness of mankind and they taught justification by faith, but they also believed in practical Christianity where doing God's will was an unquestioned possibility as well as a necessity. Therefore, what we have

described as Protestantism stands afield from Anabaptism.

Now, having looked at Pietism and Protestantism we want to look at several areas where the Anabaptists are distinctive. 1) *The Anabaptists are distinctive in their view of the Scriptures.* To the Anabaptists, the Scriptures were the sole authority. It was not only to be believed, where we say “yes, it is true,” but the Scriptures were to be obeyed. It is true that the Protestant reformers did seem to place a lot of emphasis on the Scriptures. Luther translated the Bible because he wanted every German and every plow boy to be able to read the Scriptures. Zwingli, when he was preaching in the church of Zurich, became convinced that he must preach from the Bible. Therefore, starting with Matthew and going verse by verse, he preached directly from the Word. He spoke against such things as hypocrisy, laziness, idleness, and too much eating and drinking. He insisted on repentance and love and faithfulness because he was preaching the Bible. Finally though, when he was confronted with the question, “When will you start living out in church life and in Christian life, what the Bible teaches?” He said, “We will wait until the State gives us approval to do so.”

Therefore, what was the sole authority?

In contrast, for the Anabaptists the Scriptures were the sole authority. They were most radical in viewing the Scriptures that way. They placed little emphasis on classical creeds. It is true. We could look at the Dortrecht Confession of Faith. We could look at the Schleithem Confession of Faith, but those confessions of faith do not define a theological system for the Anabaptists. Rather, they define in clear points some of the questionable issues that were addressed in the era which those were written. Really, the concept that the Anabaptists had, and the questions that the Anabaptists answered about what is holy, they needed to answer by having such a concept of the sole authority of the Scriptures.

If someone would ask the Anabaptists, “What is holy?” they would say there is no such thing as an holy object. Therefore, they put away the relics. There is no such thing as a holy place. They put away the concept that if you go to a certain place there you will be holy. They put away the concept of a person being a holy person apart from the fact that this person has yielded himself to full obedience to Christ and His Word. That is

what makes a holy person. Therefore, in order to be holy they searched the Scriptures to see what God's will was for their lives and they lived that way. On that basis they were able to call themselves holy brethren.

The Anabaptists were most radical in viewing the Scriptures as the sole authority. They did not content themselves with finding in the Scriptures comfort for fallen men. They took the Word in entirety. They found the comfort and the encouragement that were there for sinners but they also found commands to go and live by. The Scriptures gave them a new life. That life, though dangerous, was their only hope. Therefore, they searched the Scriptures to know how to live and they lived that way. The Anabaptists were "doers of the word, and not hearers only" (James 1:22).

In looking at their view of the Scriptures it is important for us to understand that the Anabaptists took a Christ centred view of the Scriptures which means that they did see the Bible as a "flat Bible." Rather, they saw the Old Testament pointing forward to Christ and they saw the teachings of the New Testament in light of the Gospel. That is a Christ centred view of the Scriptures. They rejected, as God's Word for their

day, anything that did not agree with the life and teachings of Jesus Christ, even if it was in the Bible.

In contrast, the reformers looked at the Old Testament and they could find reasons to justify why they martyred Christians, and why they martyred the Anabaptists. The Anabaptists could have done that too, but the Anabaptists looked at all of the Scriptures in light of the teachings and the life of Christ. In doing so they read the Scriptures that way. That is the way they interpreted the Bible. If there was something that applied in the old dispensation, where Christ said, "But, I say unto you," they followed Christ. That is a Christ centred view of the Scriptures. The Anabaptists were distinctive in their acceptance of the authority of the Scriptures and in their obedience to it.

2) *The Anabaptists were distinctive in their view of Christ.* Everyone, religious or non religious needs to answer the question, "What think ye of Christ" (Matthew 22:42)? There are various answers which people can give to that question. One person can say, "Well, He is a prophet. He is God's messenger. He is a moral teacher sent from God." A person can also say, "He is God and He must be worshipped."

That is the emphasis that is behind a lot of what the Catholics do. The Mass, the chanting, the sprinkling of holy water, the kissing of the book, the veneration, various ceremonies, the stained glass windows are all largely an effort to bring worship to Christ. The cross, the crucifix and all, are used in an effort to bring worship to Christ.

We could also say, "He is the Saviour. The sin bearer in whom we have forgiveness and are justified." That is necessary for the cleansing of past sins. That is the answer the Protestants give to the question, "What think ye of Christ?" They emphasize the greatness of our salvation, with its access to God and fellowship with Christ, and look at it as the essence of Christianity. They sing such songs as "Alleluia 'tis done, I believe on the Son. I am saved by the blood of the crucified one." For them that is the essence of Christian living. Justification by faith becomes so great that holiness of life, obedience to Christ, and transformation into Christ's image are all minimized. "What think ye of Christ?"

The Anabaptist's view of Christ was that He is everything. Christ is a messenger. Hebrews 1:1, 2 says, "God, who at sundry times and in divers manners

spoke in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, (2) Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son." They saw Him as the Saviour. Romans 5:1 says, "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." They saw Jesus as messenger. They saw Him as the Saviour, but they also saw Him as the King. They believed that His disciples must follow His example and must do what He says. Therefore, they believed that God's will for us is revealed in the life and teachings of Christ. The life and teachings of Christ became the base line against which they evaluated all of their activities. His life and His teaching were considered together. To focus on His example would have opened the door for the "What Would Jesus Do?" mentality where we try to think now, looking at Jesus' example, what would He do if He were facing life as I am facing life?" The Anabaptists did not only look at His example. The Anabaptists also looked at His teaching, and faced life not with the supposed *What Would Jesus Do?* mentality but, "What has Jesus commanded us?" He is King. He is Lord. His life is our example. In it we see God's will, but through His teachings, we also know God's

will, and what has Christ commanded us, that is what we live by.

We could summarize the Anabaptist view of Christ and say like Menno Simons said, “Whoever boasts that he is a Christian, the same must walk as Christ walked.” He is Lord. He is our Saviour. He is our Messenger. He is “King of kings, and Lord of lords.” (1 Timothy 6:15; Revelation 19:16) They saw God’s authority in Christ and gave their lives in obedience to Him. The result was that their lives were distinctive. They were Christians following after Christ.

3) *The Anabaptists had a distinctive view of the Christian.* The Anabaptists accepted that no man was without sin. All had sinned. All needed Christ’s atonement. Due to man’s sinfulness and hopelessness, they rejoiced in the Gospel of Jesus Christ that brought salvation. However, to them, a Christian was more than one whose sins were forgiven. The Christian was one who followed Jesus in daily life. To them, saving faith and life went hand in hand. To them faith and practice were inseparable. To profess a new birth meant to live a new life. To claim cleansing meant to lay off the sins of the flesh and to “put

on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness” (Ephesians 4:24). To be a disciple was to do what the Master said. To take up the cross meant to be in conflict with the world, and the world’s ways, to “Fight the good fight of faith” (1 Timothy 6:12), and to gladly take the buffeting from the world.

For the Anabaptists, Christian discipleship was a way of living and it affected every area of life. It affected their home life, business life, and their social life. Although they believed in salvation through Christ and justification by faith, we do not find them speaking so much about that. Instead if we read Anabaptist writings, we will find them speaking mostly about keeping the commandments of Christ and obedience, because without obedience there is no discipleship. That is a concept that we must keep alive if we will keep alive Anabaptist concepts in our churches today. The Protestants value their testimony of salvation. The Pietists value their testimony of the Spirit’s leading. However, a person living contrary to the law of Christ in not a disciple no matter how glorious his testimony of what God has done for him may be.

The Anabaptists lived under the law of Christ. As a result of

that there were times when they were accused of having a works religion. People accused them of looking at the New Testament similar to what the Old Testament law was. It is simply that it is a different way of describing the Law. To bring yourself under the requirements of the New Testament is to bind yourself under Law like the Old Testament saints were bound under law. The Anabaptists replied that we believe in atonement through the blood of Christ. There is nothing that we can do that would make us holy before God, except for the fact that Christ died for us.

Without His shed blood there is no forgiveness. We are forgiven. However, that forgiveness is not merely a cleaning up of our experience, where God no longer sees our sins anymore. Rather, that cleaning up is that liberating of our hearts so that we can live a life that is acceptable before God. The Protestants emphasized the atoning and the cleansing. The Anabaptists emphasized, yes, there needs to be a cleaning, but there needs to be new birth. There must be a change of heart within so that as we go out and our lives can be accepted of God. Perhaps we could say it best by using the words of Romans 12:1. After outlining the doctrine of

salvation, the apostle Paul says, "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service." Presenting our bodies speaks of our daily life. How is it acceptable to God? It is acceptable to God because Christ first gave Himself so that our sacrifice could be acceptable.

Therefore, it is not that we are pushing ourselves into the Kingdom of heaven. The Anabaptists were sometimes accused of being "heaven stormers," which means they were trying to push themselves into God's favour. No, that is not the way they looked at it. They looked at it as God working through Christ to provide a propitiation for them, to make it acceptable and possible for them to be accepted with God, acceptable of God. "Transformed by the renewing of your mind."

The question could be raised, "What did the Anabaptists believe about the Christian in sin?" Well, they did not believe that a person could live in sin and that grace would cover it. If they would have believed that, it would have spared them much suffering. They could have continued in the Roman Catholic church doing what they knew

was wrong but God would take care of that and they would not have needed to suffer at all. But God forbid, instead they committed their necks to the sword so that they could live in obedience to Christ's Word. They willingly suffered because they knew that the grace of God did not overlook disobedience.

Neither did they believe in sinless perfection beyond the reach of sin. Instead, they recognized that they "were as sheep going astray; but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of [their] souls" (1 Peter 2:25). They faced the responsibility to earnestly walk the narrow way and to take heed and to examine themselves, "lest any root of bitterness [spring] up troubl[ing them]," and any of them be defiled (Hebrews 12:15).

The Anabaptists believe that the Christian had help to live godly in this present world. First of all, the Christian had the Word, and the Christian had the Holy Spirit — Christ within, but also the Christian had the Church. The Anabaptists believed that discipleship and obedience to Christ and His Word could only be realized in the context of a faithful gathered Church.

4) *The Anabaptist distinctive view of the Church.* It is true that

the Anabaptists gave an individual emphasis to Christian living. The salvation of our soul does have a personal meaning. However, an individual's faith attains meaning only in the context of a believing community. "A person," the Anabaptists said, "cannot be a Christian by himself." That concept is foreign to the individualism of our culture. It is being threatened by the individualism of our culture, but, Jesus' followers are not on their own. They are not guided merely by the sincerity of their personal motives. Rather, the Christian takes their cues from the Bible as mediated by the community of God's people, the Church. Here, he finds the help of others to walk the narrow way. In the community of faith, under the Lordship of Jesus Christ, the threatened disciple discovers how he is to live and act. In the brotherhood he finds wisdom and helps to moderation, discipline and love to help him as he endeavours to follow Christ in this hostile world.

The concept that one can only be a Christian in the community of believers, in the Church, is a distinctive Anabaptist concept. Protestants and Catholics emphasize that church life is to help men to be saved. Anabaptists not only concerned themselves with

helping men to salvation (though that was a part of their work) they also concerned themselves with keeping one another in the fellowship of the saints and without blemish unto the coming of the Lord. To the Anabaptists the church was not merely a place where we come together to hear preaching. Therefore, they did not call their places of meeting a "church." This was a meeting-house. Instead, the Church was the people. They saw the Church as a body of believers endeavouring to grow in Christ likeness. The linkage between the members in that body was not an incidental linkage that we happen to bump together because we live close to each other and we will worship together on Sunday morning.

The Church was not an incidental coming together. Neither was the church merely a free association of adults who recognized a similar sinfulness, a similar salvation through faith, a similar religious experience that we have something in common. The Church was not merely a free association of adults who had a similar experience. Neither was it a mere social curiosity, where here we all come together, we all enjoy agriculture, we all enjoy working hard, we enjoy the principles of simple frugality and

so we are all here on one level. It was not simply another community within the larger community doing something religious in a slightly different way. That was not what the Church was. Instead the Church was the community of those who deliberately resolved to follow Christ and to live out His will here on the earth.

The church was where there were people who realized they were sheep gone astray and needed to return to the Shepherd and Bishop of their souls. They knew that they not only needed to straighten out a relationship this way [God to man] but they also had to straighten out a relationship this way [man to man]. Until one has both relationships straightened out, he is not saved. Therefore, we cannot separate the concept of one becoming a Christian, and becoming a member of the Church, because one is not saved until he has identified and has been added to the Church. The Lord adds to the Church those that should be saved.

This community was made up of those who resolved to live, in the present, God's will for man. That made the Church, as the Anabaptists understood it, the Kingdom of God, where God reigns. This was the holy city.

Here there was concord. Here there was holiness. Here they were “follow[ing] peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord” (Hebrews 12:14). This was the New Jerusalem come “down from God out of heaven” (Revelation 21:2). This was the place God had chosen out of all the nations of the earth to put His name there. That was their concept of the Church. This was a “chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that [they] should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light: (10) Which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God: which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy” (1 Peter 2:9, 10). This was “the pillar and ground of the truth” (1 Timothy 3:15). This was the lantern of righteousness “in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom [they shone] as lights in the world” (Philippians 2:15). That was the Anabaptist’s concept of the Church.

With this distinctive concept of the Church the Anabaptists emphasized several things. A) *They emphasized voluntary membership.* No one was coerced to join the Church. Anyone who

was in the church who chose to no longer be united with them was free to leave. Of course, they preached the Gospel and they called sinners out of the world and gave warning. Nevertheless, they believed that church life was a voluntary institution. They taught that entrance into the Kingdom called for repentance and saving faith. That was the way in. “enter in at the strait gate” (Luke 13:24), they preached. “Enter in at the strait gate and that gate is so narrow that you must hang all your flesh on the gate posts.” For the Anabaptists that meant actually giving up their bodies. There were very few of them that came through with even their bodies. That was their concept of the Church. In the Church was a group of people who had all left their flesh hanging on the gate post, and here we do what Christ says. Here we live for Christ. Here we live for each other in living for Him. That was the Church.

B) *They taught believer’s baptism.* When a person believed the Gospel and repented he was baptized upon the confession of his faith. However, that baptism was not seen as an ordinance for cleansing flesh, or washing away sin, but was “the answer of a good conscience toward God” (1

Peter 3:21). That baptism signified a change of life by the virtue of Christ's death. That baptism was not an individualistic right, where a person knelt down and he testified of his faith and then he was baptized and now he had a relationship with the Lord because he had been baptized. Baptism, to the Anabaptists was not an individualistic right. Baptism meant that this person not only was committing himself to Christ, but was also committing himself to the body of Christ. In baptism, he was declaring himself ready to participate in dealing with sin in a new and redemptive way.

He declared himself to be one with the body, with all of the binding and loosing that the body performed in his life. To the Anabaptists the binding and the loosing of the body as it dealt with sin was an integral part of being the body of Christ. He committed himself to submit to Christ and His Word and agreed to give and receive active help in living out the teachings of Matthew 18, which was highly emphasized in Anabaptists writings. Baptism to them was not divorced from Church membership.

The emphasis of Pietism in our day is that one can be baptized and full of the Holy Ghost and

then he decides which church he wants to be a part of. Not to the Anabaptists. For the Anabaptists, baptism and Church membership were never divorced. When one was baptized, he was baptized into the family of God. When he gave himself to Christ, he gave himself to Christ's Church. That was not a vague large body out here some place that now he is a part of Christ's Church universal. The Anabaptists saw themselves as baptized into the local congregation and submitted themselves to the binding and the loosing of that local congregation. That was their concept of the life of the Church.

I would like to look at Acts 4:32. This is the Anabaptist's concept of the Church and it is Scriptural. "And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common." That one heart and one soul represent what the Anabaptists believed. Here we are baptized, one heart and one soul with the people of God.

C) *They also emphasized the Lord's Supper. They observed it as an ordinance — a memorial act. The bread and cup were symbolic of Christ's body in His*

death. By sharing it they were not simply testifying of the fact that I have taken Christ's broken body and His shed blood into my life and it means something to me. The Anabaptist's concept of Communion was that in sharing the Communion, we are confirming our oneness with the body. "We are members one of another" (Ephesians 4:25). Therefore, in our Communion services there is the sense in which we are grateful that He died for me. We sing songs about that. Above all we must maintain the concept that our communion services are a time of us testifying to one another that we are members together of His flesh, His body, and of His bones. We are members together in that. They also emphasized oneness under Christ. They were a body of members.

D) *They emphasized Church government.* As the Church laboured to keep sin on the outside, it required the need to set standards according to the Word and the working of the Holy Ghost. The Anabaptists took this concept that we must obey the local congregation — the binding and loosing of the local congregation. There is only one reason

why it is wrong for us to obey and that is whenever what is asked of us is in direct violation to what the God of heaven asks of us. There were times when the Anabaptists found themselves in local congregations that began to go contrary to the God of heaven. In that case the Word of God was the sole authority in their lives. However, where there was not that conflict, there was no question but that to be one with the people of God meant that "I obey," and that obedience is essential to my salvation.

Those four aspects of Christian faith set the Anabaptists apart. Their view of the Scriptures. Their view of Christ. Their view of the Christian and their view of the Church. May we follow their examples as "a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light: (10) Which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God: which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy" (1 Peter 2:9, 10).

The Subtle Sin of Cynicism

The Word “cynicism” is not a Bible word. It is not found in the Bible. It is not a commonly used word even among us in our vocabulary. My observation is that we meet and visit with one another time after time without ever using this word once. Perhaps then, cynicism is not a problem among us? I suppose the answer to that is that it is not a problem in the sense that we are addressing it over and over again and need to be talking about it all the while as we might about some other things. It is not a problem in the sense that we are dealing with people or disciplining people for being cynical. We have not done that with these kinds of things, whether it is cynicism, covetousness, or some other what we might think of as problems with attitude or sins of the Spirit.

However, once we know the definition and what cynicism means then we are able to see and identify the spirit and the attitude in ourselves perhaps and, no doubt, in someone else with whom we are going to church, or someone else with whom we are dealing and relating to.

Therefore, since this is a strange word as it is and we do not know right what it means I

think our first main point then needs to be 1) *What is cynicism?* I will first give a dictionary definition of it and then go on to describe it further and look at some Bible examples of this. I said, it is not a Bible word but we surely can see cynicism in various instances in Scripture. What is cynicism? It is derived from the word *cynic*. Cynics were, first of all, a group of Greek philosophers known by that name. They were called cynics. However, we are not talking about that this afternoon.

A dictionary definition that fits us where we are is that the cynic is “a fault finding, captious critic.” It is one who believes that human conduct is motivated wholly by self-interests. A cynic is “one who is contentiously distrustful of human nature and motives.” Now, the word *captious* as it was used in our first definition means “marked by an ill-natured inclination to stress faults and raise objections.” That is cynicism.

I leave the dictionary definitions now except to say that I have found pessimism, a word that is quite considerably more common among us. The word *pessimism* is a synonym to cynicism. It is a word that, as I said,

we use considerably more, and we are more familiar with it. It was interesting for me to notice that pessimism and cynicism can be used interchangeably.

Cynicism is an attitude that questions whether anyone is really sincere. The cynical attitude habitually questions the motives of others. We know that God takes motives very seriously. We know that what motivates us to do what we do is important to God. However, the Bible does suggest that it is not for us to always decide on what motive might have been behind what another has done. Many times we really cannot see that and are best to try to study it. James says, "Who art thou that judgest another" (James 4:12)? "Who art thou that judgest another man's servant? to his own master he standeth or falleth" (Romans 14:4). He is saying that there are things that we do not have business with in this regard.

Thus we see the cynical attitude is that which questions the motives of others. It tends to think that whatever is done, no matter how good it is, whatever is done is done out of ulterior or selfish motives. Cynicism is the attitude that loves to frown upon the ambitions and enthusiasm of eager youth. One example is saying disdainfully "Oh, I

thought all that too when I was your age. You will find out it is not that way." You see, as someone has said, a cynical person not only puts out their own fire, but they have a bucket of water always ready to put out the fire of another.

The psalmist recognized this cynical attitude when in Psalm 4:6 he says, "There be many that say, Who will shew us any good?" "There is no good around. Show me some good." There will be those who say that. Or, at a later time in Psalm 116:11 the psalmist said, "I said in my haste, All men are liars." "There is not one that is genuine. They are all liars. There is not one that is really sincere every time."

Now, in more modern language it might be said this way, as people sometimes say, "The church is full of hypocrites." Well, the church is full of sinners because the church is looking for sinners saved by grace and the true Church does not take people in unless they have acknowledged the fact of sin in their lives. However, the church is not full of hypocrites. An attitude that some people will say is "If this is what Christianity is — if this is what people are — then I do not want anything to do with it." That is a cynical attitude. Or, it may be

expressed in this, “There is more behind the scenes than meets the eyes.” Cynicism is a negative, suspicious, and sometimes bitter outlook on life and other people.

2) *Some Bible examples of this trait, or sin as it is called in the title.* Nabal, in 1 Samuel 25 was such a fellow. He was quite cynical. Nabal servant conversing with Nabal’s wife said of Nabal that “he is such a son of Belial, that a man cannot speak to him” (1 Samuel 25:17). His wife very evidently knew that very clearly herself. She agreed with that. She did not argue with him. She went to work to try to save the situation which needed saving as we know the story. He was such a son of Belial that a man cannot speak to him.

I believe, the servant had become aware that his master was so wise in his own conceits and had such a poor attitude toward his contemporaries that he could not be reasoned with. I am sure we have met people like that. If we have lived long enough and have seen enough, why we have known such individuals. When David’s men came seeking reward for their service to Nabal in that they were protection to Nabal’s servants and flocks, Nabal flatly refused them and he said in effect, “There are lots of runaways

nowadays and David is like all the rest of them. I do not intend to give any help whatsoever to him.” He was wrong, but he could not be reasoned with. David determined evil upon his household which Abigail averted.

Satan was cynical when he told God (putting it in my own words) “I know why Job serves you. You pay him. You pay him so well. You remove his pay and he will curse you to your face.” Now, he was very wrong. God gave him two opportunities to test this and he was proved to be very wrong in his notion. By what God allowed Satan to do to Job, it was clearly demonstrated that Job was not self-serving at all. He was genuine his motives for serving God, and after experiencing the deepest of trials that we think anyone could have experienced (other than our Lord Jesus Christ) Job says, “Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil” (Job 2:10)? “the LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD” (Job 1:21).

Job’s friends were cynical in their outlook (at least one of them) when he said to Job putting it in my own words, “Now let us get this thing straight . . . ‘who ever perished, being innocent’ (Job 4:7)? “Job you need to

repent because you know well enough that you are guilty of something or God would not have done this to you.” Now they were wrong in that evaluation. It is true that Job did come to the point where he said, “Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes” (Job 42:6), and God received that well. He did not tell him though, “You should not be saying that about yourself.” It was a good attitude for Job to have. Job’s friends talked this way so much to Job that Job eventually said, “No doubt but ye are the people, and wisdom shall die with you” (Job 12:2). We can see that they were quite cynical in their counsel to Job.

The ten spies, in returning from Canaan were quite cynical. There were twelve that went. Two of them were not cynical. However, the ten spies returning from Canaan were quite cynical. They said, “[Here] is a land that eateth up the inhabitants thereof” (Numbers 13:32). That is an interesting thing. That might have been true if they had not said what else they had said. They said, “There are people that have grown so big in that land that when we saw ourselves alongside of them we thought that . . . we were in our own sight as grasshoppers, and so we were in their sight” (Numbers 13:33).

They did not know that, I do not suppose. They probably ran for their lives, maybe they did, but the point is that this land that is supposed to have eaten up the inhabitants did have some very large people in it.

They questioned God’s motive for ever bringing them to this land. They got the people of Israel upset and questioning that with them. Caleb and Joshua said, “Let us go up at once, and possess it; for we are well able to overcome it” (Numbers 13:30). “If the LORD delight in us, then he will bring us into this land” (Number 14:8). This attitude of the ten spies was not very optimistic, rather it was a pessimistic outlook.

One more in the Old Testament — Elijah, a great man of faith seems to have had a cynical moment, at least one of those in 1 Kings 18. To God’s question, “What doest thou here, Elijah” (1 Kings 19:9)? Elijah’s answer was, “I have been very jealous for the LORD God of hosts: for the children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant. . . and I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away” (1 Kings 19:10). The cynicism appeared in that he was saying that by this time in Israel there were no other genuine people. He was the only one and

once he was gone, he was the last champion of truth. When he is gone, it is all over. That is what he implied. This was instead of saying "I am afraid of Jezebel. That is what I am doing here," which would have been the truth.

God showed to him, by the time God was finished with him, that there were still "seven thousand in Israel, all the knees which have not bowed unto Baal" (1 Kings 19:18). Thus he was not quite all alone like he thought. Sometimes we too hear some expressions as though there are only a few people who are championing the cause of truth and when they do not do that anymore, the cause will be lost. Well, we are glad for those who champion the truth, but likely the number is not quite as few as what we sometimes put on or think in our more cynical moments.

In the New Testament — I am thinking now of Diotrephes whom the Bible says loved "to have the preeminence" (3 John 9). One of the ways that he showed that is that he did not believe in other people. He did not believe in John and he did not believe in other brethren within his church. Therefore, that he refused those that wanted to enter and refused those who were coming to visit a while. That is what

I would gather John is saying there. He was quite a cynical individual. In those examples we can see a glimpse of cynicism by definition and by illustration.

3) *Why cynicism is subtle — the subtle sin of cynicism.* Why is cynicism so subtle? It is subtle because it comes so gradually on us. Young people are generally not troubled with cynicism. Young people are more trusting. They believe in other people quite readily. They believe that issues would not need to be nearly as complicated as what older ones make them sometimes. This outlook, in the opinion of older ones, we think needs some sobering down, and no doubt it does. Sometimes we refer to the outlook of those who are younger as idealistic or unrealistic or even naïve.

The word naïve is described in Proverbs when he says, "[I] And beheld among the simple ones, I discerned among the youths, a young man void of understanding" (Proverbs 7:7). Someone who has not seen as much of life as what they have will need to see to make good deductions. As we grow older, we are disappointed with other persons and with ourselves more than once. Having learned that some people are not as trustworthy as we once thought they were, we are in dan-

ger of becoming cynical about life and about other people. We are inclined to imbibe the faulty notion that first the ones who betrayed our trust can no longer be trusted, and secondly that no one should be trusted entirely. When we have come to that we have become cynical.

We think that no matter how kind the deed or how genuine the motive appears, there is a self-serving, unspoken motive behind it. Therefore, we say things like, "Oh he or she made that change only to get in good with the ministry." Perhaps if you will listen to somebody express their motive and heart desire maybe you will find that was true. On the other hand, that may be a false accusation. Or, someone might say, "There is a hidden agenda here. There is something else going on." Again, that is a possibility. Another one that we use quite often is, "This is just the tip of the iceberg," suggesting that there is a whole lot more about this individual or this situation that is beneath the surface that has to be dug out sometime.

Again, these things could be true in specific instances, but they are the expressions of cynicism. Sometimes we hear someone say, "Well, if you knew what I know about that person, you would not think so kindly about

them as you do." Or, "I would never live in the heart of the Mennonite community in Pennsylvania because that is a bad place to live. The Mennonites are so thick there and so conceited and so . . ." whatever you know, whatever you might say there that I would not want to live there. Of course, those of us who live in the heart are inclined to think about the same thing of those out and about. These could be cynical, and are often cynical attitudes because what we will find all around the world is that human nature works the same way no matter which state, province, or country you are in. The same kind of things and carnalities that are in one place will be at another. These statements, as I said, could sometimes be true in specific cases, but they are not always true at least in a general way. Nor can we make them justifiably and lump one instance that we know of, with the whole and say, "This is what you have. This is it the whole way around." I think that is when we are becoming cynical.

How shall I close on this point? I think it is like this. The awareness that people may not and do not always come through transparently honest or trustworthy is a proper awareness to have.

However, this awareness that people are not always as honest as what we expect they were, becomes cynicism when it turns into an attitude of suspicion and mistrust that refuses to let another redeem himself in our eyes. See, when someone says, “I so distrust that individual,” they are so suspicious of what another is doing, in their heart they are refusing to give the benefit of the doubt and give him the opportunity to redeem himself where he might have gone wrong. That is the cynical, contentious attitude that we saw in the dictionary definition.

4) *How is cynicism sin?* Is cynicism or pessimism a harmless, rather innocent, natural disposition or outlook that about half of us have and the other half does not struggle with? We sometimes talk about this — the difference between the optimist and the pessimist. We often do it quite lightheartedly supposing that the pessimist gets along quite well in life seeing the dark side and is justified in doing so. The optimist, no doubt, is not realistic either. That may be how it is in one regard. On the other, when you look at cynicism and pessimism as synonyms then you begin to understand that a pessimistic outlook, though it means looking at the dark side, really

tends toward suspicion and mistrust of anything that is happening and also toward what we may call paranoia. That is where we think that in everything, there is something, where we are being “set up” and that we are about to be trapped in one way or another. I say that is what we are inclined to do.

No, I do not think that pessimism and cynicism are harmless dispositions. Perhaps in the sense of hereditary traits some are more inclined in that direction than others, but the way it is with all the traits that we could call hereditary where they are plain carnalities, we are supposed to gain victory over those. This is true whether it is anger, cynicism, or any other form of carnality that the Bible speaks about. We must find victory over those.

Cynicism is a sin in that it assigns bad motives to others without good evidence. When cynicism does that and says that here is someone now that I am sure has a selfish reason behind what he is saying or doing, if we do not know that for sure, and we are assigning those motives without good evidence, we are becoming slanderous really, or we are being slanderous or bearing false witness. Slander is sin.

Cynicism is sin in that it vio-

lates the golden rule. The golden rule is in all things “And as ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise” (Luke 6:31). The golden rule is violated when we are cynical in this regard: that none of us enjoys being suspected and suspicioned all along the way. Nor, does any one of us enjoy being suspected and suspicioned even at times when we do not do so well. We are glad when other people have a more congenial and merciful outlook toward us. Though they do not approve of what we have done and realize that it is not a good thing to do, and may rebuke us (and rightly so) they still remain gracious. That is how we want it. A cynical person (someone who suspects others all the while, and believes that others are up to no good) cannot really practice the golden rule.

It is sin also in that it amounts to a critical fault-finding attitude. The New Testament is full of admonition against such a spirit. An outstanding reference against such a spirit is the one that Jesus gives in Matthew 7:3, when He raises the question, “And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother’s eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye?” The mote and the beam — it is a log and a splinter. It is a comparison there. It is an exag-

geration. We cannot carry a beam or a log in our eye, but it is so instructive for us when Jesus puts it this way because we are so inclined to think that I am looking at the other brother’s log through my beam, through my splinter, through my mote. Jesus says, “It is not that way. You have got a log in your eye and you are looking another splinter.” Does that not mean we should be discerning one. Well, not at all. We should be discerning what He is referring to there — the critical, fault finding spirit. As I said, the Bible has much to say about that.

Cynicism is sin in that it is a violation of true Christian love. You ask, “How is that?” First of all the Bible commands, “Let each esteem other better than themselves” (Philippians 2:3). That is a hard assignment, but it is one that we are called to. Also, the other thing about Christian love is that Christian love remains vulnerable though it is hurt sometimes. When we become cynical because we have been hurt, we are no longer vulnerable. We withdraw. We say, “I was hurt once and I will make sure that I do not get hurt that way again.” It is true that if we got hurt because we have failed then we ought to learn how to avoid that. On the other hand,

often that is said with a touch of bitterness that someone else has done us wrong and we are not about to trust them anymore. That is not Christian love.

Christian love is vulnerable. It is vulnerable in that it is open to forgive and be hurt again. It is open to that. That is our Lord. If you do not believe that, look at

our Lord's example as one of those. As we come to conclusion, stay alert for cynicism in your own lives. You might see it in others, but you might see in your own life. That is the only place, probably where you can really work at eliminating it. If you do not eliminate it, it will do you spiritual harm.

Scripture References

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From the Previous Issue:

History Interests That Serve the Church

From a message by Glenn M. Sensenig

Thursday, December 1, 1994

Twenty-Eighth Annual

Ministers' Bible Study Fellowship
Numidia Mennonite Bible School
Christian Simplicity: Dressing Our Children
From a sermon by Mark Hostetter
Sunday, October 02, 2005
Centerville Mennonite Church

Book Reprint (Continued)
One Hundred Lessons In Bible Study

LESSON 44.

Christian Duties. — Worship.

I. True worship.

1. God alone to be worshipped. — Matthew 4:10; Luke 4:8; Acts 10:25, 26; 14:13–18; Revelation 19:10.

2. True worship enjoined. — Exodus 20:3; 1 Chronicles 16:29; Psalm 99:5.

II. False worship. — (Idolatry).

1. Forbidden. — Exodus 20:4–6.

2. Folly of. — 1 Kings 18:26–29; Psalm 115:2–9; Jeremiah 2:26–29.

3. Some modern idols. — Colossians 3:5.

III. Man has power to say whom or what he shall worship. — Joshua 24:14, 15.

NOTE. — As in all other Christian duties, man has the power to say whether he shall do his duty in worship. Our duty to worship God is plain; our power to disregard this duty is equally clear. We have the choice between true worship and salvation, and false worship and perdition. There is no question as to whether man shall or shall not worship something. All *men are worshippers*. The only question is, shall we be true to the purpose for which we have been created and worship the true God, or shall we turn aside to worship one of the numerous gods of this world. The power of choice fixes upon us the responsibility of consequences,

IV. Place of worship.

1. No preference in locality. — John 4:19–23.

2. Assembling for worship enjoined. — Hebrews 10:24, 25.

3. A few examples. — Acts 2; 4:23–33; 20:7–12.

V. How to worship. — John 4:23, 24; Jude 20, 21.

VI. Prayer.

1. When to pray. — Luke 18:1.

2. Where to pray.

a. In secret. — Matthew 6:6; 26:41.

b. In the home. — Joshua 24:14, 15.

c. In public. — Matthew 18:19, 20; Acts 4:31.

d. Everywhere. — 1 Timothy 2:8.

3. How to pray.

a. In faith. — Mark 11:24; James 1:5, 6; 1 Timothy 2:8.

b. Perseveringly. — Luke 11:5–13; Genesis 32:24–28.

c. Not hypocritically. — Matthew 6:5; Luke 18:9–14;

James 1:6, 7.

4. Subjects of prayer.

a. The church. — John 17; Ephesians 6:18.

b. The brethren. — Acts 12:5; 2 Thessalonians 3:1, 2.

c. Rulers. — 1 Timothy 2:2–4.

d. Enemies. — Matthew 5:44; Luke 23:34; Acts 7:60.

e. All men. — 1 Timothy 2:1–3.

5. Objects of prayer.

a. More light. — Psalm 13:3; 119:18.

b. Increase of faith. — Mark 9:24; Luke 17:5.

c. The Holy Spirit. — Luke 11:13.

d. Our daily wants. — Matthew 6:9–13.

e. The prosperity of the cause. — Acts 4:29,30; 2

Thessalonians 3:1.

f. Security from harm. — Matthew 26:41; 2

Thessalonians 3:1, 2.

g. Mercy. — Luke 18:38.

6. The promise. — Matthew 7:7–11; Acts 2:21; Romans 10:13;

James 1:5–7.

1. What is meant by “praying without ceasing?”

2. What influence has prayer, (1) over the individual? (2) over the household? (3) over the church?

3. Of what value are prayer books?

4. In what ways besides prayer can God be worshipped?
5. Discuss the relations between individual worship, family worship, and church (corporate) worship.

LESSON 45.

Christian Graces.

[Text: Galatians 5:22, 23.]

I. Love.

1. God's love for humanity. — John 3:16; 1 John 3:1,16.
2. His children's response. — 1 John 4:19.
3. The basis of true religion. — 1 John 4:8, 16; Matthew 22:36–40.
4. Whom to love.
 - a. God. — Matthew 22:37; 1 John 4.
 - b. Jesus Christ. — 1 John 5:1; Revelation 2:4.
 - c. The brethren. — 1 John 3:14; 4:7 Hebrews 13:1.
 - d. Husband and wife. — Ephesians 5:33.
 - e. Parents. — Ephesians 6:1–3
 - f. Children. — Ephesians 6:4.
 - g. Our Neighbour. — Luke 10:25–37.
 - h. Friends. — Matthew 5:43; John 15:13.
 - i. Enemies. — Matthew 5:44.
 - j. Not the world. — James 4:4; 1 John 2:15.
5. What love does for its possessor.
 - a. Casts out fear. — 1 John 4:18.
 - b. Excludes hatred. — 1 John 3:14, 15; 4:20, 21.
 - c. Secures obedience. — John 14:15; 1 John 2:4; 3:24; 5:2, 3.
 - d. Cultivates a spirit of sacrifice. — John 15:13; Acts 4:35, 36; 21:13.
 - e. Leads into higher spiritual life. — Ephesians 3:14–19.

II. Joy.

1. Occasions for joy.
 - a. The advent of our Saviour. — Luke 2:10–14.
 - b. Christian fellowship. — Philippians 1:3–7; 2 Corinthians 7:13.
 - c. Spiritual feasts. — Acts 2:41–47; 4:31–33; 2

Corinthians 3:18

- d. Victory over temptation. — James 1:2–4.
- e. Strength to endure persecution. — Matthew 5:11, 12;

Acts 5:41.

- f. When sinners return to the fold. — Luke 15:7, 10
- g. Knowledge that others walk in the light. — 2

Corinthians 7:13–16; 3 John 4.

- h. The cross of Christ. — Galatians 6:14.
- i. Hope of immortal glory. — Luke 10:20; 2 Timothy

4:6–8; 1 Peter 1:8.

- 2. Joy does not end with this life. — Revelation 19:6, 7.

III. Peace.

1. With God. — John 14:27; Acts 10:34–36; Romans 5:1; Philippians 4:7; 2 Thessalonians 3:16.

2. With man.

a. In the home. — Ephesians 6:1–9; Colossians 3:18–25; 1 Peter 3:7.

b. In the church. — 1 Corinthians 7:15; Ephesians 4:8; 1 Thessalonians 5:13; 2 Timothy 2:22; James 3:13–18.

c. In society or business. — Romans 12:18; 14:19; Proverbs 16:7.

3. Christ, the Prince of peace. — Isaiah 9:6; Luke 2:14; John 18:36; Ephesians 2:14–17.

Love, Joy, Peace. — When the love of God is shed abroad in the heart, there springs up a joy which can not but strengthen the bonds of peace, not only with God, but also with man. Love is the sunshine of God's grace which drives away the gloom of doubt and fear, makes duty a pleasure, and turns sadness into joy. Joy, as a natural outgrowth of love, and as one of the fruits of righteousness, constitutes the flowers which God has graciously strewn along life's journey for the encouragement of pilgrims. The peace of God begins with the reconciliation; but the satisfaction is deepened by the joys of Christian experience. The peace of God "which passeth understanding" [Philippians 4:7], is reflected in peaceful relations with everything but sin. Love, joy, peace! the great triumvirate which makes a paradise of earth!

- 1. Name several tests of true love.

2. How does love affect the trials of life?
3. Compare the joys of a Christian with the joys of the worldling.
4. Should a quarrelsome disposition in home, church, or neighborhood be considered conclusive evidence of a lack of peace with God?
5. Distinguish between love and alliance.

Children's Book Reprint *continued*

The Little Woodchopper

The book the little girl has on her lap is grandmother's old Bible. She is just reading a chapter to father, who is listening in quietness, rejoicing over the blessed words which the young girl is reading with a clear and pleasant voice. A little noise just now is drawing William's attention, and turning to the side he sees, to his astonishment, five poorly-dressed men come out of the forest in slow and tired steps approaching his cabin. They wore neither shoes nor stockings, and their ragged clothes would hardly cover their body. It was indeed a very sad sight. The men were not young any more; two of them had white hair, and the youngest seemed to be at least fifty years of age. Gradually they came nearer; upon reaching the garden gate, one of the old ones uncovered his head and asked humbly for a piece of bread. William rose to meet them.

"We are poor people," said the

old man, "and for several days have had no food but berries and roots, which we found in the forest. At night we slept on the bare ground. We are in misery and homeless."

"I feel sorry for you," replied William, "for I know from my own experience what it is to spend a day and night in the forest, to be without food and drink, and without a home. When I was a little boy I too was a day and a night lost in the forest, and doubtless would have been torn to pieces by wolves, had not my faithful dog saved me."

When William said this, the men looked at each other. He noticed this, but did not know what it meant, and continued:

"You must be very hungry and thirsty if you have been so long a time in the forest. Come in and lie down on the grass; I will bring you something to eat."

So saying, he turned toward the house; but his wife, who had

listened to the conversation, had gone in before him. Moved by pity, she had gone to get bread and butter ready. Her husband went down to the cellar to get a large bowl of milk, and the two boys brought the things to the men.

They had followed William's invitation and were resting on the lawn. When the boys came out, they fell greedily over the edibles and milk. One could see they had not had such a relish for a long time. When they were almost through with the meal, the oldest one stood up and thanked William for his kindness, asking him at the same time if he would not allow them to sleep in the stable.

"We have," he said, "for several days slept outside and have not had decent sleep; in our young days we did not mind where we would spend the night, but now we are old and weak, and to sleep outside is hard for us."

"There is hardly room enough for all of you in the stable replied William, "but I have a small barn, in which I keep the hay for my goats. There is room enough in it; you can sleep in the soft hay, and I will give you some blankets to cover yourselves with. Just sit down and eat till you are satisfied."

"He that hath pity upon the

poor, lendeth unto the Lord; and that which he hath given will He pay him again." Proverbs 19:17.

The old man made a low bow and sat down with his comrades. William got his chair and sat near them. After enjoying for a while their hearty appetite, he asked:

"Now tell me where you come from, and why you five travel together? What are you intending to do tomorrow and where are you journeying to? You cannot go very far, for some of you look very poorly and seem to be sick."

The men did not answer immediately. At last one of them commenced, a sigh escaping his lips:

"Sir, it is a sad story: We are five brothers, all sons of one father. We were woodchoppers and lived on the other side of the forest about three days' journey from here. Our father died more than thirty years ago. For a small yearly sum we had the right to gather all the dry wood in the forest and to cut down trees marked by the forester. But a number of years ago, we lost the favor of our landlord; they burnt our cabin, took all our possessions and put us in prison. Many years we were kept in a damp dungeon, which undermined our health and strength. When at last released, we were unable to do hard labor;

besides, nobody would give us any work. We were in great need, and in order to keep alive we were compelled to beg. We travelled from place to place, and concluded at last to come to this district where nobody knows us, with the hope to find work and help in our need. In our travel through the great forest we suffered unspeakably, because we are destitute of everything. We have been hungry and frozen, and have at last come this far.”

The man stopped, and William looked from one to the other. A thought arose in his heart: Might not these ragged old men be his brothers, who had once treated him so cruelly? Was it not possible that God had sent them in their misery to him, that he might show them love and return good for evil! To be sure of this, he continued his questioning and asked:

“What was the cause of losing the favor of your landlord? Did you do anything wrong?”

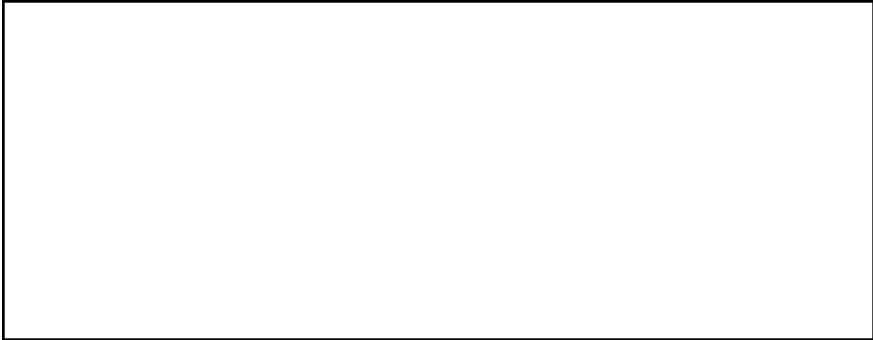
It was quite a while before an answer came. Finally the oldest of the men said with a trembling voice:

“Yes, sir, it is as you have said. We had been poaching for many years and had killed many deer

and other game. They had been suspicious of us for a long time, but could not prove it. At last the whole thing came to light through a dealer to whom we had sold venison. We were, as my brother already stated, arrested, and, having carried on the poaching so long a time, we were punished severely. At first we were full of anger, but by and by other feelings arose in our hearts. We remembered our father, who had often admonished us, because of our evil doings, and reminded us of the righteousness of God. This righteousness had overtaken us now, we felt; but at the same time, we saw that instead of being angry and rebellious, we had every reason to condemn ourselves and to confess our sins to God. After our release we desired to live honest lives; yes, sir, it was our earnest desire so to do; but nobody would have anything to do with us; not so much as a few hatchets would they loan us so we had to give up the plan of going back to our old occupation.”

“Be not deceived; God is not mocked; for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.”
Galatians 6:7.

“Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers.” —
Ephesians 4:29



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