

THE AUSTRALIAN ANABAPTIST

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

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

Matthew 5:15

From The Editor's Desk.

Oh for a heart to praise my God! Many of us would probably know that hymn and hopefully give serious thought to the words written nearly three centuries ago. Offcourse there are many other hymns that we should give the same attention to because they can be an encouragement to us, they can be part of our praise and prayer, both public and private, they may also serve as warnings to seek an amendment of life from sin to salvation. And in this amendment of life lies the great mystery of how one Man's death could atone for not just my terrible wickedness but that of every person ever born or yet to be. In the book of Jeremiah, (7:3, 5, 26:13, 35:15) the warning to amend their lives was given four times to God's people so that God's judgements would benefit them rather than be the manner of their ultimate destruction.

It is the same today, if we do not amend our lives and forsake the other gods that scripture describes in so many places, then destruction will overtake us, if not in this life then with absolute certainty in the eternal life that all will have, saint and sinner alike. The New Testament may not use the words 'amendment of life' but it has many other phrases and lessons that leave us in no doubt that unless we change from sinner to saint to become a child of God then eternity will be something that we would desire never to have heard of or even desire it not to exist at all.

Eternity is here to stay. It existed at the beginning of creation, it is now, and always will be. In the scriptures (KJV) the word 'everlasting' is used some 103 times in both Old and New Testament. Our Lord Himself uses that word a number of times both to describe an everlasting habitation for both sinner and saved. The two habitations are diametrically opposed.

Truly the words used to describe those two inevitable destinations can and should either strike terror into our hearts or be the cause for great joy. The reality is that the destinations are real and the choice is ours. How will you set your course today? For tomorrow may never be mine or yours.

JvL.

MINISTER'S CORNER.

*Bro. Marvin Schwartz, Mt. Carmel Bible Fellowship, Mennonite Christian Fellowship
KY/TN, 2004.*

Preparing For Eternity

How many of us believe that we are heading for eternity? How many of us know how close we are? None of us know. Does it matter if we are prepared? God will open a door, and we will step into something that we know nothing about. However, the Word has much to tell us about that. Thus, the question is, are we ready? What does it take to be ready? Hebrews 10:37 says, "For yet a little while, and He that shall come will come, and will not tarry." This is the Word of God and it is what God says. He is coming. He is coming again. We sometimes sing that song. So what do we need? The next verse says, "Now the just shall live by faith: but if any man draw back, My soul shall have no pleasure in him." What is keeping this world from going under, as we use that term, or from coming to a close?

It is because men still believe God. The question was asked, "When the Son of man cometh, shall He find faith on the earth?" (Luke 18:8) There will be as there was when the first world went under. Yet, if I would write the question, "What kind of faith do you have?" What would I write? What does it take to be right with God? In Hebrews 11:6, it says, "Without faith it is impossible to please Him." Notice what it says, "For he that cometh to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that . . . seek Him." It does not say that does it? It says "diligently seek Him." This is the difference. I trust that those who have come to the age of accountability and have given their lives to God, believe. Faith is believing in something, but what does it take to please God?

When I come to God, am I diligently seeking Him? Or does that continue? I believe it continues. If it does not continue, what will take place in our lives? This is what the Word says. It makes a difference. We need a saving faith. We need to come to that knowledge of that saving faith. We also need that faith to continue, do we not?

What is faith? Verse 1 says, "Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." I cannot see your faith, and you cannot see my faith. We are speaking about something which we cannot see. We can see the results of the faith, can we not? When God made man, he was

made in a way that he trusts in something. When we are born, it is not very long before we trust our parents. We are made that way. We have faith in our parents, and on and on goes the list. We have a faith in something. However, it should not be only something. No, it takes a saving faith in God. To bring us to a saving faith, we must believe the reality that God is. It needs to be a reality in our lives. If it does not stay a reality, we lose out.

That is why in Thessalonians we read, the end “shall not come, except there come a falling away first.” (2 Thessalonians 2:3). A falling away of what? Somebody, somewhere had something, but they fell away from it. The potential is very real for everyone to fall away. That is what the Bible says. We are all taught that. It says in Hebrews 11:3, “Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear.” We cannot do that. Only God can. God has set in order things that they will not stop till “there should be time no longer.” (Revelation 10:6)

Sometimes we hear the question, “Why are children born where they are?” Children cannot help that. God established an order. When the conditions are right, and the connections made, there will be another child. That is God’s order. It does not stop. That is how things work. When God starts something, it follows that order. We know that man started trusting in something else. This is why there was the flood. They trusted something other than God. Do we see how necessary it is?

Let us just look at some things that took place by people that had faith. The Scripture says, “By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain.” That is what his faith did. “By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death; and was not found, because God had translated him: for before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God.” (verse 5) Is this not wonderful? Again, what would God write down? What kind of faith do we have? God has written down how our standing is before Him.

In Revelation 20:12 we read, “and the books were opened.” One is the “book of life.” I remember as a boy we had a motto on the wall at home. I often looked at that motto. It said, “The book of life, is my name written there?” I did not understand what that meant. Today, I understand. God will be doing the writing. It will be according to our faith, how God will have that written. It says, “By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his

house.” (verse 6) That is what Noah’s faith did. “By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed.” (verse 7) That is what his faith did. It continues by saying, “he sojourned in the land of promise . . . For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.” He was looking for something he could not see. It continues by talking about Sarah and then Moses. We could talk about Joseph, “By faith Joseph, when he died, made mention of the departing of the children of Israel; and gave commandment concerning his bones.” Four hundred years later they took his bones back to where his parents and different ones were buried. It really does not matter where we are buried. That is not what will make the difference when we meet God. It says, “By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter; Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season.”

People who do not have a faith in God, do not fear God. Then we lose the shame (God covered our first parents). We also lose the fear of God. This is what can easily happen in churches. I have asked the question already of quite a few different people, “What is the greatest danger facing or the threat facing the Church in America today?” I do not know what you would say. We can think about it, but I believe the fear of God will rank highly. I am not saying that is all that it is. There is a danger of losing our fear and reverence of God, and our faith goes with that. In Hebrews 10:23 it says, “Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; (for He is faithful that promised ;)”

Do we see that we can trust God? This was Paul’s testimony before he departed his life. He had “kept the faith.” (2 Timothy 4:7) That is why he said he is ready to meet his Saviour. In 2 Timothy 1:12, Paul, who suffered a lot for the cause of Christ, wrote, “For the which cause I also suffer these things: nevertheless I am not ashamed: for I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day.” Do we understand why I asked, “Are we ready for eternity — to go through that door? What I commit to God is in safe keeping. What I keep I will lose. *Reprinted by permission from The Pulpit Exchange.*

MODERN WARFARE

Christian life has always been and always will be a battle. Many times I have marveled at the experiences of our martyr brethren and felt unworthy to be counted among their ranks as a brother in the faith. These Christians had their faith challenged in a very real, physical way. As I wonder at the difference between the challenges they faced and the challenges I face in my own setting, an illustration comes to mind.

The Bible frequently speaks of Christian life as warfare. "This charge I commit unto thee, son Timothy, according to the prophecies which went before on thee, that thou by them mightest war a good warfare" (1 Tim. 1:18). "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith" (2 Tim. 4:7). "For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places" (Eph. 6:12).

When I think of those Christians of centuries ago, it seems like they fought their battle in an open, bright, loud battlefield. The foe stood clearly and boldly before them, like Goliath before the Israelite army. He was fearsome and violent and raged wildly against them. Many Christians facing persecution, I believe, cowered and trembled. Some fled and some were slain, but as the faithful turned in trust to their Captain, they were able to stand valiantly and defeat their foe. Many of those who were fighting on the enemy's side saw the Christians' courage and crossed the line to join the winning side. See Hebrews 11, especially verses 33-38, for an inspirational description of some of the soldiers in this type of battle.

Now, when I think of us Christians today, it seems like our battle is not fought in the open and the light. Much like secular modern warfare, much of the action and danger lies in stealth, carefulness, subtlety, and persistence. I can see us as Christians today walking faithfully, steadily, but very cautiously, down a path at dusk. The fog is rolling in on every side, and we know that the enemy soldiers are lurking somewhere in the dark. At any moment, fiery, poison-tipped darts may strike from the shadows. We must keep our shields of faith raised at all times. Sometimes the fog is tainted with sleeping gas, and we struggle against the temptation to relax our guard. We must remain ever ready with the sword of the Spirit to strike down any sneak attack through the long, tiresome night.

From time to time, we meet travelers on the road. They scoff at our armor and assure us that there really is no enemy. "Why don't you stop and rest a bit and enjoy a nice meal at this nearby inn," they urge us. Several of our ranks, weary and stressed from the journey, accept the invitation and disappear into the fog. Occasionally, one of the enemies realizes that our side is still the winning side and bravely comes to join us on the path. This type of warfare is better described in Matthew 24:4-13. As the "love of many wax cold" all around us, can we remain faithful with the torches of our love still shining brightly and warmly into the mist?

Through this modern time, our victory, as always, lies in trusting our Captain. He knows the way through the darkness. He sees the enemy and warns us of coming attacks. If we can faithfully follow His every footstep, never straying from the path, we can safely make it through. This part, at least, will never change. Although the devil's tactics are constantly changing, our Captain, our army, our strategy, and our goal remain unchanged. Someday we will enjoy those mansions above with many other Christians who fought on many and varied battlefields. Together, we will sing songs of praise and victory to our Lord and Master who led us to victory on each and every field.

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SNAPSHOTS. Brief excerpts from Anabaptist publications.

Regarding the relation of the Old Testament Scriptures to the New Testament and how the Swiss Brethren and Mennonites differed fundamentally from state church Protestantism.

They believed indeed that all Scripture was given by inspiration of God and is inerrantly true in all its statements and doctrinal teachings. Nevertheless they recognized the fact that the relation of the Old to the New Testament Scriptures is that of promise to fulfillment, of type and shadow to reality, of the groundwork of a building to the building itself. God's promise under the Old Covenant was that a New Covenant was to be established at the coming of the Redeemer; and the New Testament Scriptures teach that Christ is "the Mediator of a better covenant."

Christ in the Sermon on the Mount literally quotes from the Old Testament and sets over against it His, "But I say unto you." He also declared that some features of the Old Law had their occasion in their "hardness of heart," using the same figure of speech as is found in Ezekiel 11:19 and 36:26 in connection with the promise that in the gospel dispensation "the heart of stone" is to be taken away. A "faultless covenant" was impossible before Christ's coming and His work of redemption. The Old Testament Scriptures were the rule of life for pre-Messianic times. The New Testament obligations ("the law of Christ," Galatians 6:2) are more far-reaching and perfect than the Mosaic Law. Whatever of the Old Law is obligatory for the Christian is repeated and taught in the New Testament Scriptures.

This was the position of the Swiss Brethren and Mennonites concerning the Old Testament. The theologians of the state churches, on the contrary, found themselves compelled to go back to the Old Testament for maintaining the points on which they differed from the Brethren. They believed that in the Old Testament Scriptures they had found ground for defending infant baptism, the union of church and state, the persecution of dissenters, and war, for the followers of Christ. They failed to make the distinction between the Old and New Testament Scriptures on which the Mennonites insisted.

The Swiss Brethren expressed themselves regarding the point in question as follows:

Truly believing Christians use neither the worldly sword nor war, seeing that we are not any more under the old Law.

Hans Pfistermeyer, a minister of the Brethren, in 1531, in a discussion with state church leaders, said:

The New Testament is more perfect than the Old, and the Old was fulfilled and interpreted by Christ. Christ has taught a higher and more perfect doctrine and made with His people a New Covenant. . . . I make a great difference between the Old and New Testament and believe that the New Covenant, which was made with us, is much more perfect than the Old that was made with the Jews.

In the debate of Zofingen (1532) the Brethren said:
 Since you demand of us to say what of the shadow is passed and put away, and what is light, we must go back to the foundation than which none other can be laid. We say that the Old is the shadow, and that which is in unison with the words of Christ is light. This is clearly set forth by Christ (Mat-

thew, chapters 20 and 5) when He states the order of the Old Testament and of the world and adds, "But it shall not be so among you."

In the great discussion of Bern, in 1538, the Brethren said: We confess that the Old Testament is a witness of Christ. We accept it in so far as Christ has not abolished it and as it is in agreement with the New, and in so far as it pertains to faith, love, and a true Christian life.

Following is a quotation from a booklet of the Brethren: They [the leaders in the state church] have taken measures whereby force is used in matters of faith and conscience through a Mosaic manner of coercion. This is contrary to their first teaching and means that they have reversed themselves and gone back to Moses, that is to say from the light of the sun into the shadow (Hebrews 10:1).

In the great debate of Frankenthal in the Palatinate the Swiss Brethren said:

Since we have been asked concerning the relationship between the two Testaments, we would say that the Old Testament Scriptures offer strong proof that Jesus Christ is the true God and Saviour, the Son of the living God of whom all prophets have testified. Moses points us forward to Christ, our Saviour. . . . We believe that the New Testament surpasses the Old. So much of the Old Testament as is not irreconcilable with the doctrine of Christ, we accept. ... If anything that is necessary for salvation and a godly life was not taught by Christ and the Apostles but is contained in the Old Testament Scriptures, we desire to be shown.

Menno Simons says on the point in question: "All Scripture must be interpreted according to the spirit, teaching, walk and example of Christ and the Apostles." Dirck Philips, a leader of the Brethren in the Low Countries, wrote:

The false prophets cover and disguise their deceptive doctrines by appealing to the letter of the Old Testament consisting of shadows and types. For whatever they cannot defend by the New Testament Scriptures, they try to establish by the Old Testament, on the letter of the books of the prophets. And this has given rise to many sects and to the many false religious forms. Yea, from this fountain have flowed the sacrilegious ceremonies and pomp of the church of Antichrist and the deplorable errors of the seditious sects [Munsterites and Batenburgers] which in our day, under a semblance of the holy gospel, of the faith and the Christian religion have done great injury and caused much offense.

The citations given from the writings and recorded oral testimony of the early Mennonites indicate that they took the doctrine of the authority of the Scriptures seriously. They condemned the compromising attitude of those who, while defending in theory the sole authority of the Scriptures, made in fact the civil government the authority to be followed on questions of practical reformation. The theory that a principle or practice may be unscriptural and yet needful for safeguarding the best interests of the church was unacceptable to them. They held the New Testament to be the foundation and rule of faith and practice, for the Christians. They believed that God reveals Himself continuously through Christian experience, in accordance with and in confirmation of His Word, though such experience could never take the place of the Scriptures as the foundation of the Christian faith.

~~Excerpted from: Mennonites in Europe, J.Horsch. Published by Rod & Staff.

ANABAPTISM VERSUS PIETISM

By Bro. Leo Classen

Anabaptism and Pietism are not just historical names. They identify views of religious faith and practice that are still evident in the world today. We want to contrast the two and look at the effects both have had in the realm of Mennonite faith.

The name "Anabaptist" (sixteenth century) was given to those who rejected infant baptism, believing in an adult baptism following a true conversion. It was a faith that has been embraced and taught by persons in every century from the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ and the apostles. It is still in evidence today.

"Pietism" (Pietism should not be confused with the commendable quality of piety, as will be described later) was evident in some form or another throughout the gospel ages. Where the true Anabaptist faith came into decline, it began to be noticed and identified in the late 1600s. Therein it gained strength. While it had its effect on Central European Anabaptism, it was especially evident in the history of the Mennonites in Holland and the following generations.

The effort of this writing would be: (1) That we learn from history. (2) That we examine ourselves as to how much the effects of Pietism may have made an inroad among us, perhaps unawares, and that we recognize the danger it presents. "But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtlety, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ" (2 Cor. 11:3).

While many quotes and descriptions could be given in regards to the Anabaptism faith, a quotation from Mennonite Piety through the Centuries, by Robert Friedmann, will be used: "Anabaptism was essentially a movement which insisted upon an earnest and uncompromising endeavor to live a life to the deepest Christian faith, with full readiness to suffer in conflict with the evil world order. So long as this willingness to suffer as an expression of deepest faith, and this readiness to enter into a nonresistant struggle for salvation, was a living reality, just so long was Anabaptism a great and powerful movement. Fellowship and suffering were the outward marks, but an inmost Christian experience was the foundation which made the outward marks possible."

Also, Harold S. Bender, writing *The Anabaptist Vision*, quotes a Roman Catholic theologian in a critical writing against the Anabaptist: "Among the existing heretical sects, there is none which in appearance leads a more modest or pious life than the Anabaptist. As concerns their outward life, they are irreproachable. No lying, deception, swearing, strife, harsh language, no intemperate eating and drinking, no outward personal display is found among them, but humility, patience, uprightness, neatness, honesty, temperance, straightforwardness in such measure that one would suppose that they had the Holy Spirit of God."

Pietism, as Webster describes it, is: (1) "a seventeenth century religious movement originating in Germany in reaction to formalism and intellectualism and stressing Bible study and personal religious experience" (2) pietistic: "an overly sentimental or emotional devotion to religion."

Robert Friedmann again writes, "Pietism in the larger sense is a quiet *conventicle Christianity* which is primarily concerned with the inner experience of salvation and only secondarily with the expression of love toward the brotherhood, and not at all in a radical world transformation." I "Over and over Pietism will place a heavy emphasis on an individual experience and devotion to God with 'the independent individual conscience being the ultimate authority.'" Therefore a brotherhood does not become a

necessity, whereas the Anabaptist felt a keen desire for and a great need of the fellowship of believers. [*Editor's Note: **Conventicle Christianity** is defined in Webster's Dictionary as: An assembly or meeting; usually applied to a meeting of dissenters from the established church, for religious worship. In this sense it is used by English writers and in English statutes. Hence, an assembly, in contempt.*]

Anabaptism and Pietism have some basic similarities: (1) Both teach a repentance experience, with Pietism putting the emphasis on the "work" of the experience. Anabaptism emphasizes bringing forth fruits of repentance in everyday life. (2) Both would teach a new-birth experience. Pietism again places the emphasis on the emotional side of the experience and the enjoyment that it brings. The Anabaptist stresses the experience as a foundation for a changed life. (3) Both would profess the need of having the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

It is interesting to note that in writings of Anabaptist history, such as, Martyrs Mirror and Menno Simons Complete Works, very seldom are the conversion experiences of brethren recorded (Menno's conversion experience is recorded in his biography). What is found is their emphasis on the Word of God, the effects it had on them, and their faithfulness to it. They expressed this by willingness to accept the cross of Christ in suffering and persecution by the seal of the outward sign of baptism, love for the brotherhood and for those who hated them.

The Pietist did not find himself in the tests that the Anabaptist did. This was due to the Pietist, tired of the persecution of many years, seeking to be accepted by the world around him. This he carried even to the point of being apologetic when he realized that his belief did not set well with his neighbors. In contrast, the Anabaptist did not compromise when the state religion asked of him that which was contrary to the Word.

The effect of Pietism was very evident in Holland. As freedom from persecution came, along with prosperity, they became known as the "Stillen im Lande" (Quiet in the Land). This was due to the fact that they sought to avoid the cross and sought for toleration. "The ease of the outward life gradually changed the mind of the people; the records of old were now either read with a new interpretation or were completely neglected. Religious life as a whole had turned to a new emotional inwardness and subjectivity completely unknown in the age of the Reformation and therefore not to be found in books of that time ... A well regulated respectability was now un-

derstood as the true pattern of Christian life" (Friedman).

Another comparison is written by David G. Burkholder in the booklet, *The Inroads of Pietism*: "Anabaptism was born out of a compelling conviction to apply the Scriptures to all areas of life. The Brethren were not satisfied to merely hold the Truth—it had to be lived. They understood the call of discipleship as a radical, revolutionary experience of obedience—even to death. To them, commitment to Jesus Christ was the motivating force. The Scriptures, energized by the Holy Spirit, became the supreme authority. The fellowship of the believers was a binding authority whose Scriptural voice was held high. Personal feelings and enjoyment were incidental and not highly esteemed. The Christian life was a calling to surrender, sacrifice, service, and suffering. On their poured-out lives, the fire of the gospel of Jesus Christ burst into a flame, calling men and women everywhere to a like experience in Jesus Christ. We are among the grateful recipients.

"Pietism was not born in such tumult. Rather it was born in the palled stillness of a religious graveyard. While its birth was stimulated by the awakened awareness of the need for inner spiritual life, its emphasis almost totally surrounded personal experience. Experience became an end in itself rather than the springboard to obedience and service. Inner light and personal revelation were exalted. There was no emphasis on the brotherhood of believers being the Body of Christ. The general practice was to remain within the nominal church and to simply exist as an island of Christianity wherever one happened to be.

"Pietistic literature and theology were more devotional than practical. Satisfaction stemmed from 'good feelings' rather than conscious awareness of submission and commitment to Jesus Christ. Responsibility to discipleship was not stressed. Persecution was rare for Pietists because of the avoidance of conflict.

"Especially obvious was the rejection of any form of outward guide and discipline in the Christian life. These were regarded as mechanical and anti-spiritual. Personal conviction and revelation were held forth as the highest authority and final judge. Group voice was not needed in their estimation of the personal inner light.

"Because Pietism overlooks the foundational element of on-going group life and survival, solidarity never develops. Groups embracing this doctrine usually do not exist for any great length of time. The individualistic, loose approach to fellowship offers no protection within the body. Consequently,

even though the language of spirituality is heard, very little group interpretation and direction is given on how to live. This results in many such groups drifting into disillusionment and worldliness. Liberalism sets in, and the spirit of Pietism stalks its next victim ...

"There are numerous situations which have potential for the spirit of Pietism to easily take hold. The first is when the church is not as spiritual as she ought to be. Separation and form may be as well ordered as in the church at Ephesus (Rev. 2), but spiritual vibrancy is missing. The congregation may be ever so dutiful in the rituals and the practices of the church discipline but yet be devoid of an inner relationship with Jesus Christ. One reaction to this dearth may be to fling aside the outward practices because they appear to be the culprit. Spiritual experience may be sought without an accompanying spiritual practice. This is no solution, because the inner emptiness will eventually be just as great and the victims find themselves in the world."

Much more could be written to describe both sides, but let this suffice for now.

The question is asked; Why do many have good and clear experiences today, yet, too often, they do not last but for a short period of time? Is the impression given that the Christian life is only an "enjoyable" life, with freedom and joy receiving the emphasis? Then when the tests of life, the assaults of temptation, the battle with the will, and the responsibility and duties of a true soldier of Jesus Christ come, they do not understand, become discouraged, and lay down their faith, disappointed. This is not to say that true conversion does not bring peace and happiness. But again, have the effects of Pietism given the thought that the experience is the total sum of Christian living? To the Anabaptist, it was the foundation upon which to build. "For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 3:11).

The Messenger of Truth, January 17, 1990, carried an article called, "The Foreign Spirit." Quote: "Satan comes with power, signs, and lying wonders. He is able to give an imitation joy and peace and remarkable answers to prayer. Yet deep down inside is a proud and usually offended heart. If this person is required to repent, the foreign spirit can bring forth dramatic 'repentance' experiences. However, as these experiences are related to faithful brethren, they fail to touch the heart ... "Careful questioning will reveal further manifestations of the foreign spirit."

This last part brings us to the realization that not all "big" and "dramatic" experiences are from the Lord. Rather, if the experience does not produce the effects of grace and truth in the person's life, that of a changed life bearing witness to the truth in everyday living, hating evil, giving a love for the brotherhood and a desire to be one with them, it will not stand the test of time and eternity.

Other questions come to mind: Is the temptation to be at peace with the world and to have a good rapport causing us to also be the "quiet of the land?" Is it easier to compromise than to stand for the truth when it comes to a conflict of right or wrong?

With prosperity, it is easy to blend large operations, the best in clothes, homes, and machinery, and pride in accomplishment with the "good feelings" of the Pietistic experience. It feels so good to be a Christian, but the "baptism" of the cross is shunned, and we have another casualty. What prosperity did to the Mennonites in Holland, Russia, and other lands is a sad part of history. Will we be able to withstand it? Only by the grace of God and faithfulness to His Word can we overcome.

"But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them; And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus" (2 Tim. 3:14).

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Separation

We should take heed with whom we join in league and amity. Before we plant our affections, consider the persons what they are; if we see any signs of grace, then it is good; but if not there will be a rent. Throughout our whole life this ought to be our rule; we should labour in all company either to do good or receive good; and where we can neither do nor receive good we should avoid such acquaintance. Let men therefore consider and take heed how they stand in combination with any wicked persons.

—Richard Sibbes

The Church Walking with the World

The Church and the World walked far apart
On the changing shores of time,
The World was singing a giddy song,
And the Church a hymn sublime.
“Come, give me your hand,” said the merry World,
“And walk with me this way!”
But the good Church hid her snowy hands
And solemnly answered “Nay!
I will not give you my hand at all,
And I will not walk with you;
Your way is the way that leads to death;
Your words are all untrue.”

“Nay, walk with me but a little space,”
Said the World with a kindly air;
“The road I walk is a pleasant road,
And the sun shines always there.
Your path is thorny and rough and rude,
But mine is broad and plain;
My way is paved with flowers and dews,
And yours with tears and pain.

The sky to me is always blue,
No want, no toil I know;
The sky above you is always dark,
Your lot is a lot of woe.
There’s room enough for you and me
To travel side by side.”
Half shyly the Church approached the World
And gave him her hand of snow;
And the old World grasped it and walked along,
Saying, in accents low:

“Your dress is too simple to please my taste;
I will give you pearls to wear,
Rich velvets and silks for your graceful form,
And diamonds to deck your hair.”

The Church looked down at her plain white robes,
And then at the dazzling World,
And blushed as she saw his handsome lip
With a smile contemptuous curled.
“I will change my dress for a costlier one,”
Said the Church, with a smile of grace;
Then her pure white garments drifted away,
And the World gave, in their place,
Beautiful satins and shining silks,
Roses and gems and costly pearls;
While over her forehead her bright hair fell
Crisped in a thousand curls.

“Your house is too plain,” said the proud old World,
“I’ll build you one like mine;
With walls of marble and towers of gold,
And furniture ever so fine.”
So he built her a costly and beautiful house;
Most splendid it was to behold;
Her sons and her beautiful daughters dwelt there
Gleaming in purple and gold.

Rich fairs and shows in the halls were held,
And the World and his children were there.
Laughter and music and feasts were heard
In the place that was meant for prayer.
There were cushioned seats for the rich and the gay,
To sit in their pomp and pride;
But the poor who were clad in shabby array,
Sat meekly down outside.

“You give too much to the poor,” said the World.
“Far more than you ought to do;
If they are in need of shelter and food,
Why need it trouble you?
Go, take your money and buy rich robes,
Buy horses and carriages fine;
Buy pearls and jewels and dainty food,
Buy the rarest and costliest wine.
My children, they dote on all these things,
And if you their love would win
You must do as they do, and walk in the ways
That they are walking in.”

So the poor were turned from her door in scorn,
And she heard not the orphan’s cry;
But she drew her beautiful robes aside,
As the widows went weeping by.

Then the sons of the World and the Sons of the Church
Walked closely hand and heart,
And only the Master, who knoweth all,
Could tell the two apart.
Then the Church sat down at her ease, and said,
“I am rich and my goods increase;
I have need of nothing, or ought to do,
But to laugh, and dance, and feast.”

The sly World heard, and he laughed in his sleeve,
And mockingly said, aside—
“The Church is fallen, the beautiful Church;
And her shame is her boast and her pride.”

The angel drew near to the mercy seat,
And whispered in sighs her name;
Then the loud anthems of rapture were hushed,
And heads were covered with shame.

And a voice was heard at last by the Church
From Him who sat on the throne,
“I know thy works, and how thou hast said,
“I am rich” and hast not known
That thou art naked, poor and blind,
And wretched before My face;’
Therefore from My presence cast I thee out,
And blot thy name from its place.”

From: Best Loved Poems by Matilda C. Edwards

*Garden City, NY: Garden City Publishing, 1936), pages 345-347.
This poem was not listed among those that required reprint permission.*

The "Hundredfold Now in This Time"

In His teaching in Mark 10, Jesus discussed material goods and our relationship to them. In this chapter a young ruler came to Jesus, desiring eternal life. Jesus laid His finger on the young man's god, his wealth, and the young man departed in sorrow.

Following the rich young ruler's departure, Jesus spoke to His disciples about the difficulty of a rich man entering the kingdom of God. Peter then reminded his Lord that they had forsaken all. Jesus gave the promise of reward, beginning with these words: "But he shall receive an hundredfold now in this time" (Mark 10:30).

We often think of our reward in the future world when we will be in the very presence of our Lord. We anticipate the time when we will have total freedom from sin and experience total fulfillment. We will sing praises to our King throughout all eternity as we share all the glories of heaven with our fellow pilgrims.

But in this passage Jesus said, "Now in this time." He was teaching that these hundredfold blessings are to be a present experience. We look forward to our future reward, but He also has much for us now—"houses, and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands."

Does that mean that for every dollar we give, we will receive one hundred dollars? For every house, a hundred houses? For every family member, one hundred relatives? No, the Scriptures do not teach that our reward is material wealth and a life of ease. The martyrs gave up their wealth, their lands, their family, and even their very lives. Did they receive houses or lands? Not in this world. We conclude that the reward is not in physical prosperity. No, material prosperity rather leads many to their ruin.

The Bible teaches that material things are a snare to us as they were to this rich young ruler in Mark 10. It tells us that riches can bring difficulty and that they can very quickly fly away. It also mentions the lack of fulfillment and the anxieties to which they can lead. We are thankful for the material goods God gives us as His stewards, but we do not look for material blessings as the reward for our sacrifice.

Key blessings we receive now in this time are the joy and peace of knowing our sins are forgiven. Our lives can be pleasing to the Master now. We know we have the hope of eternity with our Lord. These things are worth more than material possessions. We must be willing to give up our possessions gladly if we are to have an eternal reward.

Family relations are perhaps a more literal interpretation of the reward we receive. If we need to separate ways from our family because of their lack of faith or unscriptural views, God does bless us with many faithful brethren and sisters in the Lord. They are here for our encouragement, strengthening, and personal friendship. They are here to gird us up; to hear and understand us; and to comfort, admonish, and rebuke us. What a blessed relationship we can have! Their help to our spiritual lives is a blessing we must never underestimate.

Property, houses, and lands are also shared through the brotherhood. Goods and resources are shared with those in need. We open our homes in hospitality to fellow believers. In this way there are hundreds of houses across the world that are "ours" through the Lord's faithful followers.

These blessings of kinship and hospitality are something we may take for granted. But they are blessings from God that we should always value. We can meet a stranger yet feel a kinship through faith. We can trust a brother we have never met. This is so different from the general populace with whom we share this world. They are skeptical and fearful of all—from family to stranger. Spiritual kinship is a blessing we enjoy now in this time.

There are rewards now in serving our Lord and in sharing with others. In Christian service, life takes on meaning. We have purpose and can see clearly and spiritually. The material tends to cloud our vision. When we keep these earthly things secondary, the Lord has so much more for us—"an hundredfold now in this time."

The Lord desires to bless us. But we will receive these blessings only as we give up those things that hinder our race. The Lord's desire is to give us abundantly more than we give up. And the blessings are in things that will help, rather than hinder, us. Whatever we are asked to give up is a small cost. Christ is promising us rewards we will never lose if we are faithful. As we read Mark 10, questions come to mind. Do we know how to let go of these earthly things? Are we so comfortable here that we would never consider the level of sacrifice spoken of here? Is any spiritual risk worth the possible material gain?

Our souls are worth too much to lose. Christ offers a risk-free investment, so let us not hesitate to fully follow the Lord. This will not happen naturally in this land of material abundance, but only as we diligently seek the Lord and place our all on the altar before Him.

Bro. Ryan Martin Kenton, OH. From: The Eastern Mennonite Testimony.

"Father, We Thank Thee"

Our bountiful material blessings provide abundant reasons for thanksgiving to God, and it is fitting to set aside a day of special thanksgiving. We have even more reason to praise God as we consider the spiritual blessings and the religious freedoms that we enjoy. We should also remember that God is ever deserving of our thanksgiving and that its appropriateness does not depend on circumstances. Praising the Lord "is comely for the upright" (Psalm 33:1); it is a natural attitude for the spiritual man.

The Bible contains examples of those who gave thanks, some in prosperity and others in adversity. In what varied circumstances did these men of God give thanks? What applications should we draw?"

The returned captives "sang together by course in praising and giving thanks unto the LORD ... because the foundation of the house of the Lord was laid" (Ezra 3:11). Despite meager beginnings and surrounding enemies, the people rejoiced to see the restoration of temple worship. The captivity brought about by idolatry was past and restoration brought joyfulness.

God deserves thanksgiving for spiritual restoration in the face of continual spiritual conflict. He merits our praise for His desire and ability to continue spiritually that which He has begun in us. Although the spiritual foe is all around us and spiritual battles are yet in progress, God has been very good to bring us this far spiritually and is able to lead us on to our eternal home.

Many years later, the returned captives again "gave thanks in the house of God" after they completed the walls of Jerusalem (Nehemiah 12:36-40). After years of desolation, the defenses of Jerusalem were again erected despite intense opposition. No longer could the enemy freely overrun Jerusalem, and the Jews gave fervent thanks to God.

God is worthy of thanksgiving for providing us with spiritual defenses. In considering the church, it is a blessing that we can "mark . . . well her bulwarks" (Psalm 48:13). A Scriptural brotherhood that is seeking to make current practical applications to the Word in the face of Satan's assaults is a great blessing. Christian day schools provide a wall of defense against the encroachments of the world. We should give thanks for these bulwarks and guard them well that we may "tell it to the generation following" (Psalm 48:13).

Daniel "prayed, and gave thanks before his God, as he did aforetime" after the king passed a law forbidding any petition to God or man for thirty days (Daniel 6:10). Although the object of vicious intrigue, he gave thanks to God even at the risk of his life.

God is worthy of thanksgiving regardless of the difficulties we face. The martyrs often went to the stake rejoicing in their relationship with the Lord. Even when facing illness, financial reverses, low commodity prices, or the reproach of Christ, we too should daily thank the Lord for the manifold blessings we have received at His hand.

Our Lord "took the seven loaves and the fishes, and gave thanks" as He prepared to feed the thousands (Matthew 15:36). The Creator of all provided us with a perfect example by giving thanks to God for the loaves and

fishes before feeding the multitude.

God is worthy of thanksgiving for the bounties of the earth. We enjoy manifold bounties and have not known it to be otherwise. Our thanksgiving should be evident to all men. The giving of thanks for our daily food in public, as well as in private, brings testimony to the world of the constant need for thanksgiving. Our stewardship of these bounties should contrast with the prevalent wastefulness of society.

Our Lord also "took the cup, and gave thanks" and "took bread, and gave thanks" as He prepared to share these Communion emblems with His disciples (Luke 22:17-20). The thanks our Lord gave for these emblems remind us to be thankful for what they memorialize.

God is worthy of thanksgiving for providing redemption for humanity through our Lord Jesus Christ. Each Communion service is truly a special thanksgiving service for redemption. Each day should be a day of thankful living for so great a salvation.

Anna "gave thanks . . . unto the Lord" when she saw the newborn Christ (Luke 2:38). Her thanksgiving included the recognition of the coming fulfillment of the prophecies concerning redemption.

God is worthy of thanksgiving for all that He has promised that He will yet do for His people. Our thanksgiving to Him should include thanking Him for His coming triumph and for the home He has prepared for us in heaven. We should fill the remainder of our days with thanksgiving—in thought, in word, and in deed for His past and present blessings, and for the future blessings promised to the faithful.

From: The Editorial, Eastern Mennonite Testimony Nov.2007.

Compiled & Edited by:
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NOW THANK WE ALL OUR GOD

Now thank we all our God, with heart and hands and voices,
 Who wondrous things has done, in Whom this world rejoices;
 Who from our mothers' arms has blessed us on our way
 With countless gifts of love, and still is ours today.

O may this bounteous God through all our life be near us,
 With ever joyful hearts and blessed peace to cheer us;
 And keep us in His grace, and guide us when perplexed;
 And free us from all ills, in this world and the next!

All praise and thanks to God the Father now be given;
 The Son and Him Who reigns with Them in highest Heaven;
 The one eternal God, whom earth and Heaven adore;
 For thus it was, is now, and shall be evermore.

Martin Rinkart 1586-1649.

Martin Rinkart, a Lutheran minister, was in Eilenburg, Saxony, during the Thirty Years' War. The walled city of Eilenburg saw a steady stream of refugees pour through its gates. The Swedish army surrounded the city, and famine and plague were rampant. Eight hundred homes were destroyed, and the people began to perish. There was a tremendous strain on the pastors who had to conduct dozens of funerals daily. Finally, the pastors, too, succumbed, and Rinkart was the only one left—doing 50 funerals a day. When the Swedes demanded a huge ransom, Rinkart left the safety of the walls to plead for mercy. The Swedish commander, impressed by his faith and courage, lowered his demands. Soon afterward, the Thirty Years' War ended, and Rinkart wrote this hymn for a grand celebration service. It is a testament to his faith that, after such misery, he was able to write a hymn of abiding trust and gratitude toward God.