

# 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.**

O God of mercy and grace, You know how often discouragement rolls over me like crashing waves. Please remind me that my service unto You depends on Your mercy and grace, not on my capabilities or performance. Thank You, Lord!

This prayer from one of our daily devotionals came at a most appropriate time for us as we settled back in our home in Tasmania after a six week period of time in the USA. The time there we can only describe as being glorious in a spiritual sense; we were encouraged, uplifted, exhorted and welcomed into the family of God, our brothers and sisters in the Mennonite Church at Montezuma, Georgia. To us coming from a setting where fellowship is confined for most of the year to just my wife and I this was a foretaste of heaven where the saints will have eternal fellowship, not just with each other but, with the Risen Lord and King of Kings.

We were able to share in the joy of a 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary reunion of another church fellowship. We shared time with likeminded brethren at the annual Ministers Fellowship and were blessed by the messages from the speakers and personal encouragement from those we spent time with. We were blessed in catching up with those we had met on a previous visit there. We were blessed and privileged to be able to share in the sorrow experienced by our Montezuma brethren when one of their church family was called home to be with the Lord. We also saw that as a time of people coming together from many parts of the USA to share that loss and comfort the family. We would desire these things for each of you too.

And then we arrived home! And we wondered how can we have that sort of fellowship here or for that matter any of you in Australia that are on your own? How can we or any of us build that? Then when we read the opening prayer we realised that God knows our needs and desires and all He asks of us is to be faithful to the task wherein He has called us and to make use of that talent (gift) that He has given to each of us and He will do the rest. May it be a prayer of encouragement to you when the waves of despondency start to roll in and threaten to overwhelm you. *JVL.*

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**MINISTER'S CORNER.****Voluntary Church Membership**

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We are looking at a subject that has to do with a voluntary aspect which touches our hearts, our choices, our will, and it touches us in a very personal way. It is interesting and we do not think anything amiss, and rightly so, but everyone gathered together and there was an interest to come in. There is an interest to come into the building and get seats. No one used force. There were no handcuffs. There is no dragging anyone in here and there are no guards standing here to make sure we stay in the seats. Our gathering is a voluntary coming in and sitting down with anticipation.

In a sense that is like church membership. No one is forced to be a part of the Church. That is very clear in the Scriptures. It is voluntary. We are talking about voluntary church membership. Briefly looking at the thought of voluntary it has the thought of one's own free will, or of one's own choice. We choose. We decide what we will do and which course we will take. It is voluntary. We are not assigned. We are not appointed. We are not driven to something. It is something that we choose to do ourselves.

I thought of the things that we do, our work and so on. Sometimes we do not have a whole lot of choices in our work and so forth, but when it comes to things that we do, shall I say in our spare time. Maybe some of us have so many things to do in our spare time that we do not have too many choices in that either. If you have free time with nothing really pressing, then what do you do? What you do is done voluntarily of your own free will.

It depicts also a voluntary willingness, a choice from within with purpose, or a free will choosing. As it relates to church membership, I like the thought of a mind to belong. The voluntary aspect is that our mind is turned in that direction to belong to the body of Christ, the body of believers, the assembly of the saints, and the called out ones.

We are called out of this world and called unto Christ. Together we are blended and built in union as the body of Christ. Those who become Christians will seek to gather together with others of like precious faith. There is a bond established when one becomes a Christian, when one seeks after Christ and finds salvation and finds rest in their hearts. They find an inter-

est also to gather together with those also of like precious faith.

That is a real blessing, and I will probably touch on that a few times. However, the blessing of the Church is often underestimated and not seen as clearly as it ought to be in the time in which we live. When there are so many people who call themselves Christians, and various people who identify themselves as a church, or refer to themselves as a church, it is confusing to some people. Who is right and what is right? Finally, we come back to the Word of God and in there we find the truth. In there we find the pattern for the true Church of God that is built on truth and on righteousness.

Thinking of the Church, there is a mutual faith where we together have a belief in God. We believe in what He has told us, what He has left for us, and the direction He has given to us. There is a holy bond in the Church that binds us together. It rises above the individual interests that we may have and binds us together on the basis of holiness and purity of the church.

There is a kindred spirit. Our interests are toward God. The mind is to belong. The effort and interest are to contribute. Then, there is a kindred spirit because we are following the one eternal God and His Son Jesus Christ our Saviour.

Further, in the Church there is a common goal. There is the same end that we are pursuing. We are not simply trying to maintain an establishment. There is a purpose in which we are gathered and bonded together in unity and love. There is a goal and something we see ahead. There is something that we are working and labouring for. Together we desire to meet the Lord and be with Him in eternity. We desire to receive and experience that final salvation and deliverance from this world and all sin and temptation and difficulty.

In the Church there is one Head — Christ Jesus. That is very important as we see (shall I say) the smorgasbord of churches. We must keep Christ Jesus as Head. We must have that foremost in our mind and clear, and not be tripped by various other issues that Christ is the Head. He is the one who is giving us direction — directing the feet, directing the hands, guiding our lives, and guiding our body.

Finally, in the Church, there is a prevailing love. It is a love that is not simply a human love. It is not merely a love that only goes to human limits. Rather it is a love that transcends far beyond that. It is love that loves the people whom we meet, even though we do not love the wrong that they

do, and the troubles that they are in. It is a love that sees their soul and goes beyond. We see each other in that there is a love for the things of God.

I was impressed with how people today say that they want to be a Christian but they cannot be part of this or that church. They finally decide that it will be simply between them and the Lord. We think of the Church and its importance. It was established by God through Jesus Christ our Lord. Christ is the Head. The church has a place in the life of the believer. It seems almost a stretch of our imagination when we understand that someone can so quickly set aside the Church and say it is only between me and my God.

We need to understand the Church as it is likened to a body. Christ is the Head and we have the various other parts of the body that each of us find our places in. Then, to say, "I do not need the rest. It is only between me and God," is like cutting the head off. It is like murder. It really is to the good plan of God for the Church and our place in the Church.

The voluntary church membership issue is a very real issue and one that we do well to consider Colossians 1:18 says that Christ, "is the head of the body, the church." He is, as I said, the Director. He is the one to whom we look for guidance and direction. His care is on us and is great. In 1 Timothy 3:15, we find these words, "which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth." It shows to us the very important place of the Church — "the pillar and ground of the truth." There is much connected there.

Membership is likened to a body. We are, thinking of our own bodies. There are fingers, hands, arms, and elbows. We could simply name a number of different parts of our body, as well as internal organs and our feet and all that. We are fearfully and wonderfully made. We study that. Then, think of the Church and how God has "set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him" (I Corinthians 12:18); The Church is unfolded to us. The Church must work in a very harmonious way, and when there is pain all suffer together.

We are thinking of being a part of the Church — membership in the Church. 1 Corinthians 12:12-31 gives us a good picture of the value of everyone, and the value of every part of our spiritual body, and the Lord placing each one in the body as He sees best. This calls for us to wait on the Lord in where we should be, how we look at our brethren and where we

think they should be. We remember that it is God who sets the members in the body. Sometimes we think that we could do a better job when we are not thinking right. Yet, we need to remember that God is setting the members in the body as it has pleased Him.

Yes, we realize we are working with people. That is what God is working with. We realize that there are failures sometimes and those need to be reckoned with. Nevertheless, many times when we really lay ourselves down we can see values in our brethren and in our sisters that on the surface we have not seen. Maybe when our attitudes are not right, or are not like what they should be, we question what value there is. It gives us a glimpse of the membership and how important that is to us.

If you are a hand, you are not effective unless you submit yourself to the next brother, or the next member in the congregation. In other words, what use would the hand be all by itself. It is most useful when it is part of the body. Therefore, as we submit ourselves to the body, we are most useful and we find a blessing there.

Several examples of willingness and a voluntary aspect of giving oneself to the Lord.

1) A willingness to obey and serve.

In Isaiah 6, the message came. "Then said I, Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts. (6) Then flew one of the seraphims unto me, having a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with the tongs from off the altar: (7) And he laid it upon my mouth, and said, Lo, this hath touched thy lips; and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged. (8) Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then said I, Here am I; send me" (Isaiah 6:5-8). I see that as an example of a voluntary response to the call of God. It is very important that we have that framework. First of all, when the Lord speaks we say, "Here am I; send me." We will notice several things about the Lord's call. When the Lord calls, we have that interest of obeying Him and serving Him.

2) Submission and delight to do the will of God.

This is an attitude which the Lord can use. I thought of this as I thought of our Lord and how He gave Himself willingly to bring salvation to us. Psalm 40:6-8 says, "Sacrifice and offering Thou didst not desire; mine ears hast Thou opened: burnt offering and sin offering hast Thou not required.

Then said I, Lo, I come: in the volume of the book it is written of me, I delight to do Thy will, O my God: yea, Thy law is within my heart." Do you sense that element of submission, and delight to do the will of God? Built into a voluntary response to God's call is a delight to do the will of God. That is very important as we think of church membership.

We can too quickly divorce the call to discipleship and the call to church membership. There is a direct connection, and it makes a difference. Why would we balk at church membership? There is a call. If we hear the call of God and want to obey and follow His will, and we have a delight in following Him then we will respond. I like that as it refers to our Lord and His willingness to suffer, and do the Father's will. There, in the Garden when He struggled so hard He said, "nevertheless not My will, but Thine, be done" (Luke 22:42). He delighted in doing the Father's will. That is a very basic key to be a volunteer in the Kingdom of God.

In the Church there is a place for everyone. There is a work for everyone, and there is a dependence on the contributions of every individual. We need each one. The basis of voluntary church membership lies in the fact that God has given to every man the freedom of choice. We say sometimes that we are a free moral agent. We have the freedom of choice. We can decide to do right or wrong. That sounds good to many people. What some do not like to hear is the fact that we do not have the choice of choosing the results of our choice. Those things are fixed. God has established that.

We can and will choose and we must choose. We will choose one way or another, either directly or by default. We will make choices in life and the basis of voluntary church membership lies in the fact that God has given to us the freedom of choice and He has called us. God has beckoned us with a kind and loving voice —His hand outstretched.

His provisions are abundant and the choice is ours. What are we doing about it? Will we respond to His great love and His care? God does not force anyone to be bad or good. He forces no one to come to Him. Yes, He calls. He waits. He pleads. He tarries long, but He forces no one to come to Him. There is the picture of the cottage door and outside is the Master knocking. There is no latch pictured on the outside. That is rightly pictured because control of that door is on the inside. Therefore, for you and for me, the call is there. The knock is there. The call of discipleship and the call for church membership is there. Will we respond? Will we answer that? Do we look at that correctly? God will not force us. There is no army that God has

to send out and round up people to overpower them and force them to become His subjects. That is not the way His kingdom works. It is not at all compatible with God Himself. He has no guards making sure that none in the Church escape. That is not the way He works. There are no prisons, high fences, or razor fences to keep members in. No, not at all. It is totally voluntary.

If we are a part of the kingdom of God we are so because we have chosen to be so, and we love it. God, in His love and mercy, has made ample provision for the good of mankind. He has offered to everyone the offer of eternal life through the blood of Jesus Christ. Yet, He does not block our way if we want to leave Him. Think of the story in Luke 15:11-32 of the prodigal son. He had everything he needed, did he not? His father was providing, and yet he wanted his portion and he left his father. I do not know all that he said, and I do not believe that it is simply that he did not say anything. However he did not stop him. He did not force him to stay. He did not bind him. He allowed him to go and take his own way.

Likewise it is with God. He provides for us. He lays open the way for us. He has given us the provisions for our spiritual wellbeing — salvation through Jesus Christ. There are the manifold blessings from fellowship in the church and relating brethren to brethren, sisters to sisters. Together we relate to each other and build each other up in the most holy faith. God provides all that, yet He does not stop us if we have in mind to do something else. Even though we take a different course and we choose our own way, yet the message that "God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son" (John 3:16), is still the same, and "whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

The message that God receives those who come unto Him and "will in no wise cast [them] out" (John 6:37) still stands. Like the prodigal son, when he came to the end of himself, and he thought of his father, and the fact that his father had plenty and the provisions remained, the attitude remained. The offer remained — the whosoever. In John 3:16 we have the word "whosoever." That in itself opens up the same thought of choice, does it not? The voluntary aspect that "whosoever believeth in Him should not perish is open to all, and anyone can come.

Romans 10:9 says, "If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hash raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved," Verses like that, one after the other, are on the prem-

ise of a voluntary coming and doing willingly from our heart, not being forced. It is a willingness from the heart saying, "I am finished with sin. I am finished taking my own way" Wherever we are, whatever relationship we have in relation to God or to the Church, we come willingly and we want to be a part of God's kingdom.

The very essence of God's call is voluntary. Revelation 22:17 says, "The Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely." The aspect of being voluntary is so vital in our relationship with God. God gave man the freedom of choice and one thing that it does is provide a relationship with God and His people. God's, relationship with His people is a very close relationship because those who come to Him do so voluntarily. They choose to. It means a lot to them. They give their all. They take up their cross. They lay down self. They are willing to lay down the old life, the self-life and sin and take up the cross. It is voluntary. It is because they choose, and it establishes a very close relationship.

As we go through life we have responsibilities, duties, interests and goals. From time to time it is good for us to look at this to help us again re-establish that thinking pattern in our own minds. "Yes, I want to serve the Lord. Yes, I will go on with the Lord. I want to draw near to Him, and allow Him to guide my life. And I want to allow Him to help me to lay off the things that need to be laid off. I want Him to help me to relate to my brethren and my sisters like I ought to relate to them." We make that renewed commitment.

There is the call, the outstretched arm, as I like to think of it in Matthew 11:28-30 when Jesus said, "Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you, and learn of Me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For My yoke is easy, and My burden is light." That is such a beautiful picture of that call. It corresponds with Jesus' looking out over Jerusalem and weeping, referring to the Jews, and how He would have longed to bring them under His wing and they would not. [Matthew 23:37; Luke 13:34] Again, it is a voluntary thing, is it not? They would not. He longed to, but He will not force them to. He longs to have us come but He will not force us.

We are not physically born into the Church of Jesus Christ. Therefore, it is not an automatic thing. It takes a willingness on our part to choose to be

a part of the Church. One of the reasons we use the term "voluntary church membership," is in contrast to the State church concept. When you were born you became a citizen of that State. Everyone who was born automatically became a member of the church. It was a state church. Some pressure was put in place to keep people in the church. There were quite severe consequences if you chose to not be a part of the State church. Some of our forefathers experienced that. There were things that they could not go along with. They did not believe they were right and they separated themselves from the State Church, and many gave their lives because of it. It meant that much to them.

The State church arrangement was not a voluntary church membership idea. Rather, it was a mandatory church membership. However, nowhere in the Scriptures do we find that the arrangement is a mandatory church membership. Rather, we have ample Scripture that points and refers to, and implies strongly that it is a voluntary issue, not a mandatory issue. As I said, yes it is not mandatory but there are consequences of taking our own way, and we have that as one pendulum swing.

The other pendulum swing is, on the other hand, where it does not matter if you are a part of a church or what kind of a church you are a part of, it is simply between you and God. We need to know where we stand. One man told me recently, "I know I do not look much like a Christian but the Lord knows my heart and so it is kind of between me and the Lord and that hidden/secret thing." Nevertheless, the aspect of obedience and walking in the way of truth and righteousness produces a number of questions as to really where such a person is. We leave that with them. Finally, we need to know where we stand. We need to stand on truth and righteousness. That is what the Church is built on.

The issue at hand is very important for us to consider. The thinking that it really does not matter if you are a part of a church or not, it is simply between you and the Lord is being really quite ignorant of the truth. It ignores the Word of God and is quite ignorant of the plan of God for the Church and the function as the body and as a building which are the examples that the Scriptures give.

With every privilege there comes a responsibility as we think of voluntary church membership. Today, when you talk about church membership being voluntary, immediately their thoughts go to "take it or leave it." Yes, it is a take it or leave it. That is the way it is with the Christian life. We can

choose to follow the Lord or to reject Him. It is a take it or leave it situation. I think too many think that they can be okay whether they take it or leave it. That is trying to choose the result of our choice, and we cannot do that. God's laws are fixed. Therefore, it becomes rather a grave issue when we think of rejecting or leaving it.

Many agree also with the voluntary concept but they want to tailor the conditions. They want to tailor the responsibilities, and the accountabilities. We cannot do that. Some say, "If I give myself to the church to become part of the church I am not sure that I can give myself to what they ask of me. There are some situations where it may be legitimate to consider that and some situations where the spiritual life of the church is in question. However, in a spiritual brotherhood we are called to submit one to another. Our relationship with the Lord also calls for full submission to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. He is the Head and we see things from that perspective. It helps us to give ourselves to our brethren. People who want to tailor those things are usually those that want benefits without the responsibilities, but we must meet God's terms.

Some of the aspects of being voluntary. I touched on some of these already. There are a number of things that go along with that.

1) The choice is voluntary. To be a part of the true Church of Jesus Christ we need to have that voluntary conversion experience where we come to the foot of the cross and lay down self. We confess our sins to God and we do that voluntarily. We do not need to be asking, "What else did you do? What else needs to be made right? Where else? What else are you hanging on to yet?" Of course, there is encouragement sometimes but finally it is that volunteer choosing to follow the Lord.

2) There is a voluntary commitment. When we become a part of the Church it requires commitment. This commitment is to the Lord and to the body of Christ. It is not only a submission to Christ our Head but also to the body. That is an aspect of this voluntary church membership. We are committed follow the Lord. We are committed to work through things that are difficult. We are committed to help our brethren, our sisters. We are committed to sacrifice for the welfare of the brotherhood. We have a commitment that does not quickly question our brethren. Of course, we are concerned when there is a pattern established in our brethren, but we are committed to help in time of need.

3) Our contributions to church life are 3) voluntary and need to be voluntary

if there will be a church that is alive. I thought of the Old Testament with the children of Israel, when it came to the tabernacle and the building of the Temple they gave willingly. That is a part of this voluntary church membership. We are interested in the cause of the kingdom and we are willing to give. We do not say "Well, it is now his turn. I did my share." Do we have shares or are we willing to give as the Lord has given to us. We are a contributor and a supporter. We hold up each other and we uphold the truths of the Word of God. We are supporting the cause of the Kingdom.

4) We are voluntary in submission. It is a choice not to submit. For the Christian it is voluntary. It is not forced. There is surrender, service, and conviction. I thought of the aspect of conviction. Sometimes that runs a little low and we wonder, do some have conviction? Do they really believe some of the things are important like separation from the world? The Lord sees the willing hearts. The Lord sees those that volunteer themselves to Him and to His Kingdom. Why do we do things? What is the reason that we do the things that we are doing?

5) Voluntary church membership affects relationships. It affects our view of ourselves, and others. It affects our view of giving. Think of Ananias and Sapphira and how they kept back part of the price of the land. The apostle Peter said, "Whiles it remained, was it not thine own?" (Acts 5:4) They were acting a lie, and were wanting to have the glory without the sacrifice. There was a problem and it is a challenge for us.

6) It effects some suffering sometimes. Are we willing to suffer for the cause of Christ? Are we willing to suffer for the sake of others?

7) It affects our witnessing. There are those who are not willing to be a part of the church. Yet they want some benefits. They are in the church and yet they have a very selfish outlook in life and you cannot get them off their seats to go and help with anything in relation to witnessing to those about us. It all comes back to that voluntary issue, does it not? Are they really willing to live for God, willing to make a contribution, and have that mind set to do God's will and to be a part of the Church of Jesus Christ?

Are we promoting voluntary church membership? How is it coming through to our children? We need to keep that clear. It is very clear and evident that we would all like our children in the Church. We must remember that to train and teach as we would every child, whether in our home or not, must come to that place of choice and voluntarily choose to

follow the Lord Jesus Christ. If we deviate from that and somehow we corral them into the Church, we are not faithfully building the Church of Jesus Christ. We are bringing into the church trouble, strife and a very downhill slide. If we have that keenly in our minds (and I am not saying that we should not encourage people to give their hearts to the Lord, that is very well in order). We must remember not to crossover that threshold of making choices for them. We go as far as we can but it finally must be their personal choice.

It was sad, I am sure, and grief for the father of the prodigal son to see his son go. Many parents are sad to see their children go. We must keep that clear that it is a voluntary choice. We must promote in our children and to those whom we relate a genuine new birth experience and voluntary church membership.

Membership in the family of God is very important. It is a great blessing and a greater blessing than we often realize. It is, in fact, the greatest blessing man can realize this side of eternity — that relationship. What are we doing to make it that way? Is it a voluntary church membership issue with you? It finally rests with us whether we will take that course. Jesus does not have draftees in His cause. He has voluntary workmen. May we be faithful to the Lord in giving our time and our talent in the cause of the Kingdom. The time is short. The work is great.

I was challenged anew with great need in our day to think right about church membership and church relationships that the testimony going out from us would be effective. As people say, "behold how they love one another." Our mind set to do the will of God will have a direct impact on the witness that we leave in the community. May the Lord help each of us to be a volunteer in the Church of Jesus Christ.

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## **STORMY SEAS BUT A SAFE HARBOR**

After feeding the five thousand in the evening not far from the seaside, the Gospel of Matthew records that Jesus constrained His disciples to get in a ship and cross to the other side. He Himself then went up into a mountain to pray (Matt. 14:15-23). There in peaceful solitude Christ spent time alone with His Father.

"But the ship was now in the midst of the sea, tossed with waves: for the wind was contrary" (v. 24). However, Mark says that the Lord "saw them toiling in rowing, for the wind was contrary to them" (Mark 6:48). In His time, Jesus came walking to them on the water and calmed their fearful hearts by calling to them, "Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid" (Matt. 14:27). "And He went up unto them into the ship; and the wind ceased: and they were sore amazed in themselves beyond measure, and wondered" (Mark 6:51). When this account is transferred to our setting today, it lends courage and stability in the midst of storm.

We have heard the analogy of the church being a large ocean liner plying the seas of time, headed for the heavenly shore. This ship is built to traverse the high seas. This is substantiated by Jesus' assurance that "the gates of hell shall not prevail against" the church (Matt. 16:18). This comforts us in the storms and opposition of our day.

This ship that is predestined to dock on heaven's shore refers to the "faith once delivered unto the saints" (Jude 3), not to a particular denomination. The faith, or the true doctrine of Christ and the apostles (Eph. 2:20), will never drift or be extinguished. From this perspective, the focus is not on a certain organization but on Scriptural teaching. The cause of the gospel is not furthered by striving about who is the church but by pointing out what constitutes the faith. Nevertheless, part of the faith is Christ's teaching that His church would be a discernible body of believers keeping the true doctrine. The New Testament church is organized, meaning that the gifts of the Spirit are in evidence and allowed to operate in an integral fashion. (Rom. 12: 4-8; Eph. 4:1-13). Thus the church is united and undivided in its concept and working.

As time draws to a close, it can be expected that the waters this ship of faith is sailing on will grow more and more turbulent. The tenor of the Scriptures speaks of the last days being a time of spiritual confusion and deception, and there are more and more shipwrecks of faith along the

shores. As it has been down through the centuries, these treacherous seas may arise from within the church as well as from without. Our courage and rest, though, will not fail us if we plant our feet firmly on the Word of God, the unchanging and unshakeable foundation of the faith.

The faith of Christ and the apostles has weathered tempests of every nature through the centuries. There have been grievous departures from the faith within the church because of false doctrine, and there have been times of spiritual decay due to laxity in discipline and lack of vision. From without, the faith has been blasphemed, ridiculed, and its adherents severely persecuted, even unto death. During a lengthy period of time, known as the Dark Ages, the Word of God was forbidden to be read or disseminated. But God led in such a way that the truth marched on. According to the Revelation, there was a time when the opposition became so severe that God prepared a haven of refuge for the faith and its adherents. Many believe that place was America. Here the church was sheltered and nourished (Rev. 12:6) for a long period of time. Whatever one may think about such prophetic scriptures, the truth is that God has preserved the faith, and He will preserve it until the end. Jesus says, "Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom" (Luke 22:32).

The seas through which the ship of faith is plowing are of a spiritual nature. That is, she is being challenged by, and is confronting, the spirit realm. Satan is an evil being whose spirit fosters many evil spirits. There are those angels that followed him in his uprising against God, and they are evil spirits. And every man and woman has a spirit that lends itself in one way or another to either the Holy Spirit or the evil realm. Satan knows the time is short (Rev. 12:12), and as the end draws nearer, we should expect that spirits will become more and more vehement. The spirit world, even though it may be in subtle ways, is agitated and even frenzied today. "Christian, walk carefully!" But let the faithful also say to one another, "Christian, walk cheerfully!" As Christ walks upon these waters, He surely says to the sincere and the humble today, "Be of good cheer [I am coming]."

The Holy Ghost has patiently, yet earnestly, been calling us to make our calling and election sure (2 Pet. 1:10). This sense of urgency has registered with the spirits of many brothers and sisters. Concerned children of God have long prayed for a genuine revival with an accompanying correction

regarding separation from the world. The call of the Holy Spirit is often to the amendment of life. We need to be committed to such amendment of life with fond hope and expectation that changes will be made. And thank God for corrections that are made. However, inasmuch as there can be a sense of disappointment in the follow through, one's spirit may become frustrated. The faith and confidence of some may be affected. Surely, the evil one will take every advantage of this situation, causing the waters to be more and more troubled.

The lighthouse that stands close to the harbor's entrance, warning of peril and pointing to safety, is the same one that has always stood on the coastline of time—the Word of God. That great ship of the faith is "locked in" on the lighthouse, and she will come safely into the harbor, regardless of the storms. This ship is not affected by any forces of drift. But our burden is to be sure we are in that faith. If anyone is to be on that ship of the saving faith, his or her hope must be grounded upon the Word. Just having a religion, or only a historical faith or church membership, will not give one passage on that ship of faith. Living in a time wherein one's personal beliefs are not put to the test by opposition, "the faith" is often not so rooted in the heart with conviction. When such a situation continues for a length of time, the tendency will be toward an empty claim of religion without the power and vision of true godliness (2 Tim. 3:5).

A personal relationship with the Lord—which is one that will be confirmed by adherence to the Word—is imperative. Then the winds may blow and the waves beat high, but the heart will be anchored in truth (Matt. 7:24-27). Many years ago a certain man agonized in repentance to find forgiveness of his sins, despite having been a religious person. During this time of wrestling with God, the Holy Ghost clarified numerous points of the true doctrine to him. The faith settled deep into his heart. He came to be recognized as a true man of God, endowed with the gift of preaching the message of repentance. Toward the close of his life, he said he was so convinced of the true doctrine that "if the whole church should fall away, I would still be convinced that this is the true ground and foundation." That's the ship of faith that will dock on heaven's shore.

*Bro. Gladwin Koehn.*

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## The Father's Love & The Cross

*The Father loveth the Son, and hath given all things into His hand. John 3:35*

**Introduction:** The Gospel of John has much to say about the Father's love. We all know God loves lost humanity so much that He gave His Son that we might have everlasting life. And we marvel at that love. **1 John 4:9-10** reads, *"In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because God sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins."* The ultimate demonstration of that love was in the death of His Son. *"But God commendeth His love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us"* (**Romans 5:8**).

But what about His Son? Did He love Him as He made the ultimate sacrifice? Some would have us to believe that the Father poured out His wrath on the Son, that He punished Him, that He made Him pay the penalty for our sins, and that He forsook Him as He carried out the Father's will to make redemption for us. What kind of a Father-love would that be?

Two times Jesus said, *"The Father loveth the Son"* (**John 3:35; 5:20**). In **John 10:17** He said, *"Therefore doth My Father love Me, because I lay down My life, that I might take it again."* In **John 15:9-10** Jesus said, *"As the Father hath loved Me, so have I loved you: continue ye in My love. If ye keep My commandments, ye shall abide in My love; even as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love."* **And regarding His love for the Father, Jesus said,** *"But that the world may know that I love the Father; and as the Father gave Me commandment, even so I do"* (**John 14:31**). The whole redemption transaction was bathed in the mutual love of the Father toward the Son, and of the Son toward the Father.

How, then, shall we understand the Father's love as Jesus suffered and died on the cross? A careful interpretation of the Scripture in the light of that love will give us an understanding that neither violates the Scripture text nor the Father's love for His Son. Let us consider several often misinterpreted Scriptures in answer to a number of questions regarding God's Love & the Cross.

### **I. Did God Take Pleasure In the Son's Suffering?**

The Scripture, “*Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise Him; He hath put Him to grief*” (Isaiah 53:10a), conveys to some readers that the Father took some sadistic pleasure in the suffering and death of His Son made flesh, and that He was responsible for causing it to happen. That is due to an unfortunate translation of a single word – the word translated “pleased.” Other translations (Amplified Bible, NIV) render that word “will”, and the meaning then is clear that “*it was the will of the LORD to bruise Him*” in order to carry out His marvellous plan for our salvation.

The Father did not find pleasure nor delight in our Lord's suffering and death. But it was His will for it to happen to provide the redemption planned before the foundation of the world.

### **II. Did God Pour Out His Wrath On the Son?**

“*He shall see of the travail of His soul, and shall be satisfied*” (Isaiah 53:11) does not speak of the satisfaction of God's wrath through our Saviour's suffering. Indeed, it does not speak of God the Father at all. Rather, it speaks of the Suffering Servant – the Saviour – who would be satisfied because of what would be accomplished by His suffering. The Amplified Bible comes close to the meaning: “*He shall see **the fruit** of the travail of His soul and be satisfied ...by His knowledge ...shall My righteous One, My Servant, justify and make many righteous ....*”

### **III. What Was the Cup of Which Jesus Spoke?**

The cup of which Jesus spoke in His prayer, “*O my Father, if this cup may not pass away from Me, except I drink it, Thy will be done*” (Matthew 26:42), is not the cup of God's wrath. Rather, it is the cup of suffering and death. That is evident in Mark 10:32-40 where Jesus told His disciples, “*Ye shall indeed drink of the cup that I drink of*” (vs. 38). Their cup, like His, was not the cup of divine wrath, but of suffering and death at the hands of sinful men. That cup is enough to explain the agony of our Lord in the Garden, for He knew all that would befall Him.

### **IV. Did Jesus Become Sinful On The Cross?**

“*For He made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin ...*” (2 Corinthians 5:21) does not teach that Jesus became sinful, and therefore a justifiable object of God's wrath.

Rather, He became a sin-offering for us, as the spotless Lamb of God. Had He become sinful, He would not have qualified as the sacrifice for sin, just as a lamb with a blemish did not qualify as a sin-offering under the Old Covenant.

The Greek word translated *sin* here is the same word translated *sin-offering* in the Septuagint – the Greek translation of the Old Testament. Jesus, being the perfect and holy sacrifice, was not the object of God’s wrath.

## V. Was Jesus Punished?

*“Surely He hath borne our griefs [infirmities], and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem Him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon Him; and with His stripes we are healed” (Isa. 53:4-5). (1 Peter 2:21-23)*

Jesus was not punished (although He suffered for us), as He was without sin, and therefore was not guilty. Only the guilty are punished, while the innocent suffer. The Father’s love for the Son did not give way to His wrath as the One in whom He was well-pleased hung dying on the cross.

## VI. Did Jesus Pay The Penalty For Our Sins?

*“Ye are bought with a price”* (1 Corinthians 6:20) does not mean Jesus by His death paid the penalty for our sins. The result of sin is death – physical and spiritual death (Genesis 2:15-17). The penalty for sin is death – eternal death. *“The soul that sinneth, it shall die”* (Ezekiel 18:4). Jesus died only a physical death. He did not pay the penalty of eternal death – the second death. But He did pay the price for our redemption. *“Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, ... but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot”* (1 Peter 1:18, 19). The Father’s justice did not exact a penalty from His Son, but His grace through the obedience of the Son whom He loves provided the price for our redemption from eternal death – the precious blood of Christ.

## VII. Did God Forsake Jesus As He Hung On The Cross?

*“My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken Me?”* (Psalm 22:1; Matthew 27:46) is often interpreted to mean the Father turned His back on Jesus because of the supposed vileness of His sinfulness caused by His sin-bearing. Isaiah 53:12 does say, *“He bare the sin of many,”* and 1 Peter 2:24 says, *“Who His own self bare our sins in His own body on the tree,”* but the bearing of the sin(s) is symbolic, not literal. Just as the sin-offering did not become sinful with the symbolic transferring of the sinner’s sins to its body (Exodus 29:10; Leviticus 16:20-22), so our Lord remained without sin. There was therefore no reason for the Father’s turning away from His Son, for His Son was without sin. Indeed, Psalm 22:24 tells us He was observed the sacrifice being offered, and He was attentive to His Son’s cry. *“For He hath not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted; neither hath He hid His face from Him; but when He cried unto Him, He heard.”* The Father’s love bound Him to the cross to witness the sacrificial death of His Son and to hear the triumphant cry, *“It is finished.”*

Indeed, the love bond of the Father and the Son cannot be severed. Miraculously, the Son could leave heaven to take up residence on the earth in bodily form, but because the Trinity is inseparable, their love remained constant, and the Father could not leave the Son. *“For in Him dwelleth the fulness of the Godhead bodily”* (Colossians 2:9). Jesus Himself said: *“But if I do [the works of My Father], though ye believe not Me, believe the works: that ye may know, and believe, that the Father is in Me, and I in Him”* (John 10:38). Far from bringing wrath or punishment on the Son, the Father was there suffering with Him. 2 Corinthians 5:19 tells us *“that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself.”*

**Conclusion:** God’s love and the Cross. Never once did Jesus experience God’s disfavour or wrath. Never once was He alienated from the Father. Never once was He separated from the Father’s love.

God’s love was not only for lost humanity that caused Him to send the Saviour. It was also for the Saviour as He hung on the cross to die for us.

Such is the love of the Father, for His Son, and for lost humanity. O, such wonderful love! *Brother James Goering. Strasburg 12/16/07;*

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**SNAPSHOTS.**

Brief excerpts from various Anabaptist publications.

**THE PEACEABLE KINGDOM OF CHRIST** By Pieter Jans Twisck  
(Translated from the German Printing of Odessa, Russia, 1875, by William McGrath, Minerva, Ohio 1989)

**Introduction:**

Pieter Jans Twisck (1565-1636), was a Dutch Mennonite elder of the Old Friesian Mennonite Church at Hoorn, North Holland. According to the *MENNONITE ENCYCLOPAEDIA*, vol. IV, pp.757ff, he was a prolific writer who wrote many tracts and books, including editions of books of martyrs, a confession of faith (1617) and a concordance (1614).

One of his tracts, the original Dutch version of which has been lost, still exists in a German translation, "Das Friedensreich Christi oder Auslegung des 20. Capitel in Offenbarung St. Johannes" ["The Peaceful Kingdom of Christ or Exposition of Chapter 20 of the Revelation of St. John"].

This book was printed in German in Odessa, Russia in 1875, then reprinted in Elkhart in 1888 and 1915. It was translated into English by J.F. Funk in 1913 and published as "The Peaceful Kingdom of Christ". It has been reprinted many times since.

However, we feel that it is time to retranslate it and reissue it. The same circumstances that caused it to be printed in Odessa in 1875 are now once again urgent. Just as back then, books were appearing which claimed that Jesus Christ was coming in a certain year. Claas Epp had predicted that the "millennium" would begin March 8, 1889. Thousands of people have recently been excited by the predictions of a book claiming Christ would come in September, 1988 and the "millennium" would begin 7 years later. This kind of date-setting is clearly unscriptural.

Furthermore, the whole teaching of a "secret rapture" in which Jesus Christ would come for the church, followed by a seven year "tribulation" period, followed by a literal "millennium" on earth, is clearly contrary to Scripture. The secret rapture theory was unheard of before 1830.

Amish Mennonite Publications is pleased to be able to present this translation of Twisck's work to the public, to help counteract the hysteria and deception so prevalent in modern dispensationalist "prophecy" writings, conferences and seminars.

We are happy to be able to also include the relevant statements by

Menno Simon's and the Early Church, on Christ's Kingdom. We believe in the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. We believe we should be ready for His Coming. We do NOT believe in any "secret rapture", "seven year tribulation" or literal earthly "millennium". Prove all things by the Word of God!

Menno Simons comments on the "dispensationalist" theory that there will be a literal "millennium" kingdom on earth follow:

"If you want to appeal to the literal understanding and transactions of Moses and the prophets, then must you also become Jews, accept circumcision, possess the land of Canaan literally, erect the Jewish kingdom again, build the city and the temple, and offer sacrifices and perform the ritual as required in the law. And you must declare that Christ the promised Saviour has not yet come, He who has changed the literal and sensual ceremonies into new, spiritual, and abiding realities.

"Oh miserable, erring sheep, notice that in the preceding I have pointed out to the magistrates that the kingdom of Christ is not of this visible, tangible, transitory world, but that it is an eternal, spiritual and abiding kingdom which is not eating and drinking, but righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Ghost. In it no king reigns except the true King of Zion, Christ Jesus. He is the King of righteousness, the King of kings, who has all power in heaven above, and on earth beneath, before whom every knee must bow and all tongues praise.

"The true King David in the spirit who through His righteousness, merits and crimson blood has delivered the sheep from the mouth of the hellish lions and bears, has slain the great and terrible Goliath, and obtained for the spiritual Israel of God eternal welfare and peace. Neither this King nor His servants bear any sword but the sword of the Spirit, which pierces even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit. With the Word of God, which He bears, He defends the kingdom against the gates of hell, and graciously keeps and guards its supremacy in the midst of heavy cross and trial. And this He does not with iron or steel, as the untamed, cruel world does, for His kingdom and dominion is spirit and not letter, as has been shown.

"This kingdom is not a kingdom in which they parade in gold, silver, pearls, silk, velvet, and costly finery, as is done by the haughty, proud world; matters which your leaders defend and allow with this meaningless provision: 'just so you do not desire these things and live for them in your heart!' In this way Satan can defend his pride and make pure and good the desire of his eyes. But in the kingdom of all humility (I declare) not the

outward adorning of the body, but the inward adorning of the spirit is sought with zeal and diligence, with a broken and a contrite heart.

"...So it is with you, madmen that you are (pardon me, it is the truth which I write). The prophets you read according to the Jewish understanding. The doctrine of Christ and the apostles is a thing of the past, you say, and you contend that another dispensation is beginning and you do not perceive that you thereby deny the Son of God, deny the Scriptures, and comfort yourselves with mere lies, just as disobedient Israel in their time used to do".

(-Menno Simons, COMPLETE WORKS, 1956, pp.217/219.)

### **The Early Church and The Millennium**

Eusebius' History tells us that the apostle John, inspired writer of the book of Revelation, denounced as a heretic that Cerinthus who believed in a literal millennium on earth. This proves that the author of Revelation 20 did not himself believe in a literal earthly millennium. So those who misinterpret Revelation 20 as a literal earthly millennium are going against the teaching and belief of John the Apostle who wrote the book of Revelation.

Out of forty Early Church writers, only seven held to a millennium on earth. There is no trace of it in Clement of Rome, Ignatius, Polycarp, Tatian, Athenagoras, Didache, Shepherd of Hennas, or Theophilus. It is specifically condemned by Clement of Alexandria, Dionysius, Origen, Eusebius, Jerome and Augustine. Barnabas was erroneously thought to be a millennialist, but close study of his writings shows him to have been an amillennialist who believed that the so-called millennium was God's period of rest in eternity, which would follow the destruction of the present world. The seven writers of the Early Church (out of forty) who were millennialists were Papias, (whose ideas came from Jewish apocalyptic writings), Tertullian (who was going through a Montanist stage as a follower of the man who believed the millennium would be in Asia Minor), Victorinus, Irenaeus, Justin Martyr, Commodianus, and Lactantius

None of the Early Church creeds or confessions of faith held to an earthly millennium. There is also no trace of millennialism in any of the Anabaptist-Mennonite, Hutterite or Amish confessions of faith. The Protestant Reformers also condemned the idea. Typical of the Early Church position is the statement by the grand nephews of Jesus (grandsons of his brother Jude), made to the emperor Domitian around 96 A.D. It proves that the earliest and most Biblical men of the Early Church believed the peaceable kingdom of Christ to be heavenly and spiritual, not earthly and carnal:

Eusebius reports that the emperor Domitian had heard rumours that some Christians planned to set up a political kingdom on earth. He sent and arrested the leaders of the Christian Church to examine them on this:

"There were yet living of the family of our Lord the grandchildren of Judas, called the brother of our Lord according, to the flesh, -Jakob and Zoker. They were brought to Domitian (who inquired) whether they were of David's race, and they confessed that they were.

"He then asked them what property they had, and how much money they owned. And both of them answered, that they had between them only 9,000 denarii. (\$1,350), and this they had not in silver but in the value of a piece of land, containing only 39 acres; from which they raised their taxes, and supported themselves by their own labour.

"When asked also, respecting Christ and His kingdom, what was its nature, and when and where it was to appear, they replied that it was NOT a temporal nor an earthly kingdom, but celestial and angelic; that it would appear at the end of the world, when coming in glory He would judge the quick and the dead, and give to everyone according to his works.'

"Upon (hearing this) Domitian, despising them, made no reply but treating them with contempt as simpletons, commanded them to be dismissed, and by a decree ordered the persecution to cease. Thus delivered they ruled the churches, both as witnesses and relatives of the Lord. When peace was established, they continued living also to the time of Trajan -such is the statement of Hegesippus." *From - Ecclesiastical History by Eusebius.*

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