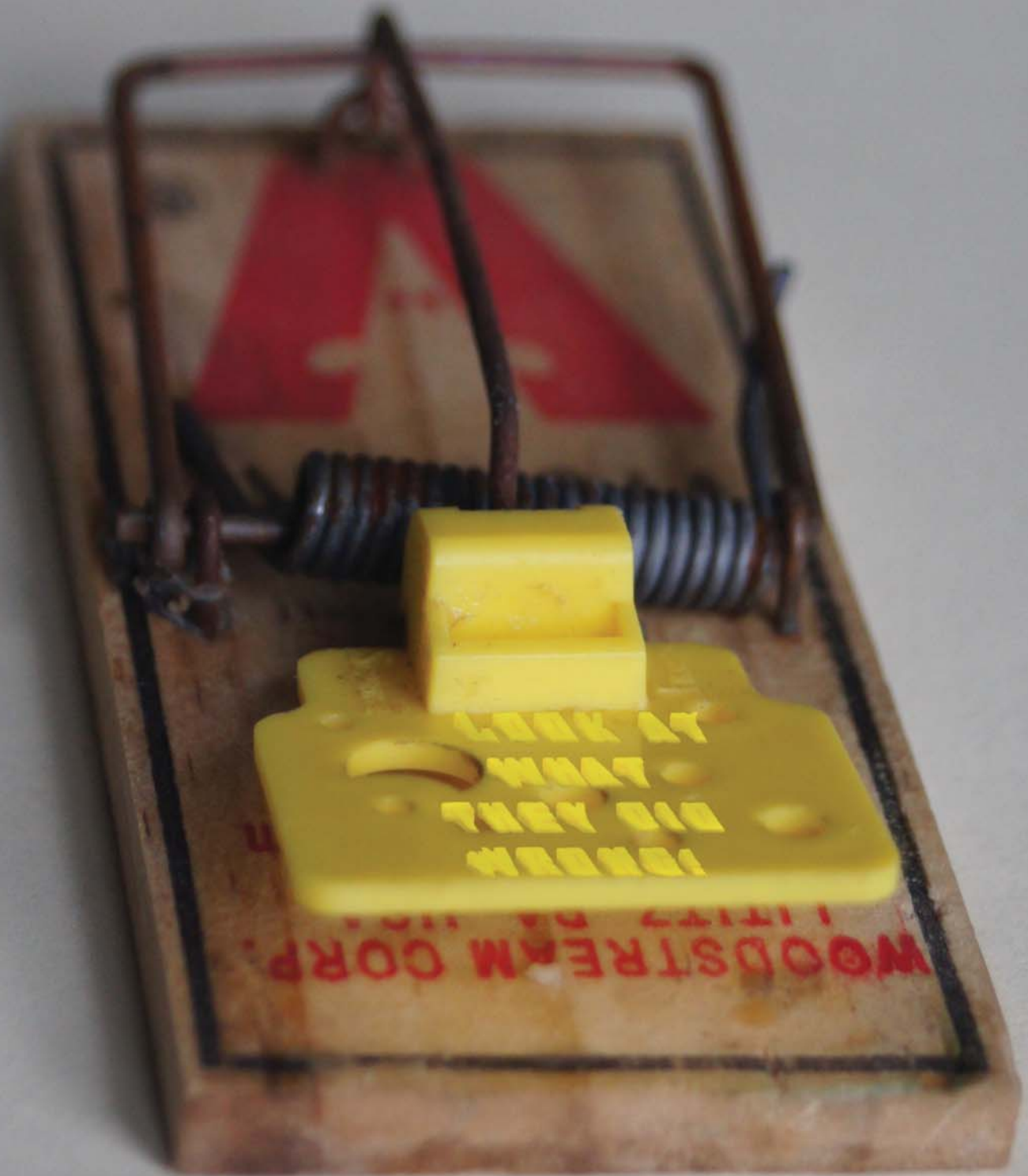




The Remnant



Don't get caught in reactionism!

See page 27

The Heartbeat of

The Remnant

Publisher

Ephrata Christian Fellowship
400 W. Main St. Ste. 1
Ephrata, PA 17522

Advisory Board

Nathan Zeiset
Mose Stoltzfus
Myron Weaver

General Editor

Dean Taylor

Assistant Editor

Mike Atnip

Art

Some images ©2001-2013

www.clipart.com

www.sxc.hu

Drawing on p. 3 - Crystal Hildebrand

Reprint Policy

All material in this magazine may be copied or reprinted in its entirety, unless we used it by permission or a copyright is indicated. Please include our full name and address.

Subscription Policy

The Heartbeat of the Remnant is published bimonthly by Ephrata Christian Fellowship. Subscription is available upon request, at no cost. *The Remnant* is financially supported by the gifts of God's people as they respond to the promptings of His Holy Spirit. We request your prayerful consideration of this need.

Send subscriptions or contributions to the above address, or call 1-855-557-7902 or 717-721-7775.

Thank you!

©2013 by Ephrata Christian Fellowship

C O N T E N T S

3 FROM THE EDITOR

4 THE ORDINATION OF WOMEN AND INTEGRITY WITH HISTORY

9 THERE ONCE WAS AN OYSTER

10 ANABAPTISTS: THE CHURCH LIVING IN ANTITHESIS TO THE WORLD

18 A GODLY WOMAN (POEM)

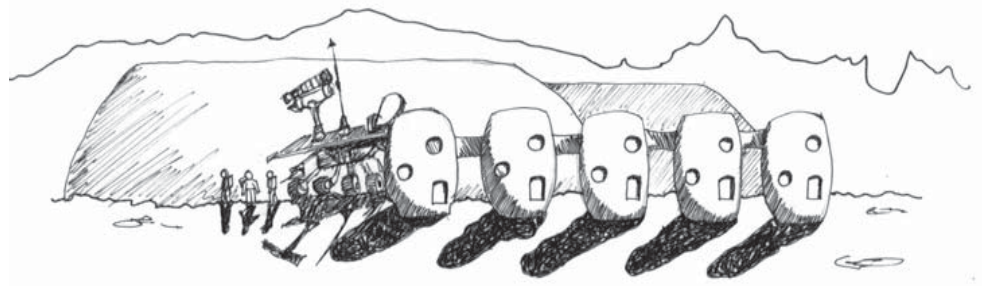
20 THE SISTERS' CORNER

24 THE MATTHEW ROAD TO THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN

27 THE SNARE OF REACTIONISM

30 GOD AND THE SWEARING OF OATHS

35 COCA-COLA AND THE KING



The Mars Colony, Or the Kingdom of God?

A few weeks ago I came across an interesting news article. A group of scientists and engineers in Holland are starting to take applications for people who are interested in a very dangerous project that, once they start, will never be able to go back home. This project will give these brave volunteers a one-way ticket. They must be willing to give their life for the cause. The project is to start a human colony on Mars.

The company is being really honest with the hardships of the mission. They say that the flight to Mars will take approximately eight months. During that time people will lose muscle mass and face many health challenges. But the biggest challenge about the whole trip is that the company is coming right out and saying that it will be a one-way ticket! Put in simple terms, this means that everyone who joins the project will die on Mars (if they don't die on the way).

That's pretty committed! Think about it; imagine modern Americans and Europeans giving up family, friends, entertainment, sunshine, grass, lakes, parks, vacations, etc. and etc., for the rest of their life ... all just to be a part of the first human colony on Mars. Do you think they had any takers? Well, within a few weeks the Dutch company claims that they have received over 40,000 applications!

I did some research on this project and found that the training for this project will be very challenging. When I heard what they are planning, I was amazed, so I did some further research to understand how they are planning to pull this off. The company says that they have a 20-year plan. Here is an outline of what they are planning:

- 2013: a replica of the settlement will be built for training purposes.
- 2014: The first communication satellite will be produced.
- July 2015: The astronaut selection process will be completed; six teams of four.
- 2016: A supply mission will be launched during January (arriving October) with 2,500 kilograms (5,500 lb) of food.

- 2018: An exploration vehicle will launch to pick the location of the settlement.
- 2021: Six additional Dragon capsules and another rover will launch with two living-quarters units, two life-support units, and two supply units.
- 2022: A SpaceX Falcon Heavy will launch with the first group of four colonists.
- 2023: The first colonists will arrive on Mars in a modified Dragon capsule.
- 2025: A second group of four colonists will arrive.
- 2033: The colony will reach 20 settlers.

Wow, think about it ... a 20-year plan to accomplish the goal of putting a colony of people on a cold, empty planet. I don't know about you, but this makes me ask how dedicated the church is to accomplishing goals for the kingdom of God. When I think about this Mars colony dedication, I feel challenged. Jesus said, "The children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light."

By earthly standards, this is radical. But lately I've been hearing about small groups of radical Christians that are beginning to dream about accomplishing radical things by heavenly standards. The more I hear, the more encouraged I get.

While I was actually working on this article I received an e-mail from All-Nations Bible Translation. This is a group of young radical Anabaptists who have a vision for ministering to unreached tribes and translating the Bible into their own language. They also have a vision for church planting and want to provide radical discipleship without the Evangelical baggage that often comes along with some groups. I know many of these young men; they are currently studying years of Hebrew and Greek to accomplish this vision. Like the mission to Mars, these brothers have a 20-year plan. The e-mail that I received from this ministry was advertising that they were taking applications for their "Kingdom Warriors

Continued on page 17

The Ordination of Women

and

Integrity with History

One of the signs of modern, fallen Christianity is the practice of women teaching men and ordaining women to leadership roles. Historically, very few churches practiced this until the last century and a half. The Bible is quite plain in these points, so I usually do not spend a lot of time reading materials that try their best to make the Scriptures say the opposite of their plain meaning. So when someone recently showed me an issue of a magazine that was dedicated to proving that it was scriptural for women to be ordained as ministers (in the official sense of the word) and to teach men, I didn't pay a lot of attention. I grew up around churches that took that stance and know the arguments.¹

But one section caught my eye. It was the claim that the early Anabaptists had ordained women preachers. Although the article is careful to not actually call them "ordained ministers," the inference is clearly there.

During the last several years I have spent a good bit of time reading Anabaptist thought and history ... and knew that even some of the foremost "liberal" Mennonite historians (who seem to have gone looking for some proof of it to support their own current practice) had concluded after long research that there were simply no ordained women ministers in early Anabaptism.

Were there zealous women, women who boldly stood their ground when asked in court trials (sometimes accompanied by torture) about their faith? Absolutely! About 1/3 of all Anabaptist martyrs were women. But the bottom line was simple: no recorded case has been found of an early Anabaptist woman being ordained to the ministry in the official sense of the word. The word "minister" means serve (verb), or servant (noun). In that sense, every Anabaptist was considered a "minister."

So what do we do with the following, taken from page 1120 of the Herald Press edition of the *Martyrs Mirror*?

¹ I am referring to *The Gospel Trumpet*, published by the Church of God, Restoration. I grew up in churches very similar to this group and have had close contact in the past with it. I wrote a historical overview of the movement, which can be found at www.primitivechristianity.org or by writing to the address in the front of this magazine.

Now when some brethren and sisters in the Swiss dominions had died in prison, of misery, want, hunger, and grief, but five still lived in confinement, the remaining ones who were yet out of bonds, when they were threatened, especially by those of Berne, that they should expel them all from the country, and seize their goods, and sell them, had recourse, next to God, with an humble and friendly letter, to their fellow believers in Holland and elsewhere in the Netherlands, requesting that they should everywhere fervently call upon God the Lord in their behalf, for comfort and grace, to the end that they might patiently endure that which might come upon them according to the flesh, for His holy name's sake.

This letter was written the 22d of July, old style, in the year of our Lord 1645, and was signed by

Hans Duster, at Baltzen, an elder in the word of the Lord.	}	From the Berne jurisdiction.
Ruth Kunstel, at Muchem, a minister in the word of the Lord.		
Ruth Hagen, an elder.	}	From the Zurich jurisdiction.
Hans Mully, a minister.		
Hans Stuss, a minister.		

What followed therefrom, and how it subsequently went with those who were imprisoned, can

The Gospel Trumpet had the following to say about the above section:

Here is an image from *Martyrs Mirror* (Page 1122, Herald Press, 1950 edition), in which two women are clearly listed with men in the ministry. Ruth Kunstel was "a minister in the word of the Lord" at Muchem, in the Berne jurisdiction, while Ruth Hagen was listed as "an elder" from the Zurich area.

These women followed their New Testament forebears Phebe, the four daughters of Philip, Junia, etc., in ministering the Word of God along with men. This cannot be gainsaid, as it is in plain black-and-white recorded for posterity. Let all who claim the Anabaptist heritage know their history.

At first glance, it does seem to indicate that there were indeed women ordained as a minister and an elder in early Anabaptism. But right away I suspected something: Ruth was probably also a man's name in that time period. A quick check to the German version would clear up the question, since the German language has a different article (meaning a different form of "the" and "a") depending on whether the noun is a male noun or a female noun.

The German text of the two Ruths

Hans Duster, zu Balzen, einem Aeltesten an den Worte des Herrn.	}	Aus dem Berner Gebiete.
Ruth Kunstel, zu Muchem, einem Diener am Wort des Herrn.		
Ruth Hage, einem Aeltesten.	}	Aus dem Züricher Gebiete.
Hans Mully, einem Diener.		
Hans Stuß, einem Diener.		

For those who do not read German (probably the majority of our readers), you will notice the article “einem.” Now take a look at whether that is a male or female article:

Indefinite Article				
	Singular			Plural
	masc.	fem.	neut.	m.f.n.
Nom.	ein	eine	ein	keine
Gen.	eines	einer	eines	keiner
Dat.	einem	einer	einem	keinen
Acc.	einen	eine	ein	keine

So, “einem diener” translates to English as “a male servant or minister.” In the same way, “einem aeltesten” translates to “a male elder.”²

Now let’s take another closer look at the English again. Does the English say “Ruth Hagen, an elder,” or does it say “Ruth Hagen, an eldress”?

Obviously, the situation here is that Ruth was a man. Ruth is certainly not a common male name, in fact it is the first time I have ran across it myself. Another possibility in this case is a misspelling, since during that time period spelling consistency was basically an every-man-for-himself sort of thing.

To be sure, at first glance it can easily look like the early Anabaptists may have had “women in the ministry.” A closer look proves that the “proof” was bad proof.

For the other “proof” of “women in the ministry,” a little clip of page 481 of Martyrs Mirror was presented:

ELIZABETH, A. D. 1549

Elizabeth was apprehended on the 15th of January, 1549. When those who had come to apprehend her entered the house in which she lived, they found a Latin Testament. Having secured Elizabeth, they said: “We have got the right man; we have now the teacheress;” adding: “Where is your husband, Menno Simons, the teacher?”

They then brought her to the town-house. The following day two beadles took her between them to prison.

She was then arraigned before the council, and asked upon oath, whether she had a husband.

Elizabeth answered: “We ought not to swear, but our words should be Yea, yea, and Nay, nay; I have no husband.”

Lords: “We say that you are a teacher, and that you seduce many. We have been told this, and we want to know who your friends are.”

Elizabeth: “My God has commanded me to love my Lord and my God, and to honor my parents; hence I will not tell you who my parents are; for what I suffer for the name of Christ is a reproach to my friends.”

² Also to be noted is that the German word for minister itself has both a male and a female form. For a lady, it would have to be “einer aeltesterin” and for an eldress, “einer dienerin” (the *-in* suffix making it feminine).

Let me ask you: Just how much proof does the above clipping give to prove that the early Anabaptists had women ordained as teachers to men?

To be honest, it provides exactly 0% proof. Elizabeth was *accused* of being a teacher. But she was also (falsely) accused of being Menno Simons’ wife. Or perhaps the authorities were mocking her. But there is no admission on Elizabeth’s part of being a “teacher.” Or, if she did teach, whom did she teach? Children? Other women? Men?

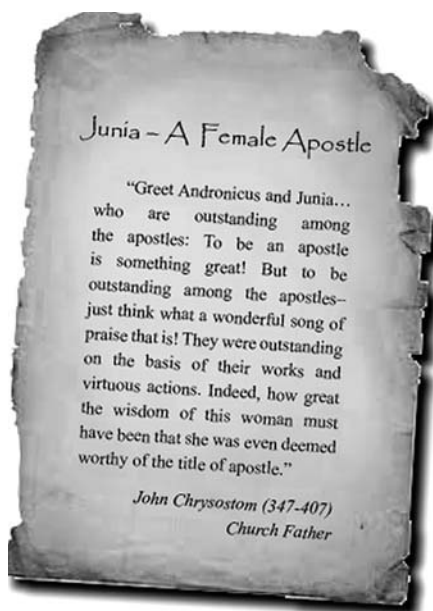
No proof of being a “teacher” is found. Much less whom she taught if she was indeed an ordained “teacher.”

This thing called integrity

All this moved my mind to think of integrity. Integrity has to do with “wholeness.” When speaking of a person’s or a group’s integrity, it carries the idea of being totally honest. For myself, when dealing with Anabaptist history it means admitting—for as much that I admire the Anabaptist movement—that there were some things I cannot agree with. Some of them held wrong ideas about divorce/remarriage. Some of them had really—I mean *really*—funny ideas about eschatology.

Back to history

But before we talk more about integrity, let’s look at the same magazine and one of the “proofs” (shown below) that it gives of the early church having “women in the ministry.”³



Proof of the early church ordaining women as preachers?

³ While the phrase “women in the ministry” is perfectly valid in the sense of women who served and blessed others, the underlying thought is of ordained women as elders, pastors, or teachers of men.

The question here is not so much the interpretation that Chrysostom gave of the passage of Scripture, but the question is about the integrity of using one quote of his to support the idea of women preaching in the church. There are several points that could be argued on his interpretation of Romans 16:7. 1. Whether listing both of them together is meant as a husband/wife team, and only Andronicus was officially the apostle. 2. Whether being called an apostle was an indication that Junia taught men. Many women have been sent as apostles (we call them missionaries in our day ... “one sent out”) and yet never taught men. If we read the rest of the writings of John Chrysostom, it is quite clear that he felt women should not teach men, nor speak in the church. There are a number of things we could quote from him, but this one suffices:

To such a degree should women be silent, that they are not allowed to speak not only about worldly matters, but not even about spiritual things, in the church. This is order, this is modesty, this will adorn her more than any garments. Thus clothed, she will be able to offer her prayers in the manner most becoming. ... [Paul] says, let them not teach, but occupy the station of learners. For thus they will show submission by their silence. (*Early Church Fathers, Vol. XXII*)

Back to integrity

But let’s look at the integrity of pulling one ambiguous quote out of early church history to prove a point, when there are plenty of other quotes that clearly refute the idea that is trying to be proven. For example:

Their [the married Apostles’] spouses went with them [on their mission trips], not as wives, but as sisters, in order to minister to housewives. It was through them

that the Lord’s teaching penetrated also the women’s quarters without any scandal being aroused. *Clement of Alexandria (ANF 2.391-Translated from the Latin)*

If the daughters of Philip prophesied, at least they did not speak in the assemblies; for we do not find this fact in evidence in the Acts of the Apostles. Much less in the Old Testament. It is said that Deborah was a prophetess ... There is no evidence that Deborah delivered speeches to the people, as did Jeremiah and Isaiah. Huldah, who was a prophetess, did

not speak to the people, but only to a man, who consulted her at home. The gospel itself mentions a prophetess Anna ... but she did not speak publicly. Even if it is granted to a woman to show the sign of prophecy, she is nevertheless not permitted to speak in an assembly. When Miriam the prophetess spoke, she was leading a choir of women ... For [as Paul declares] “I do not permit a woman to teach,” and even less “to tell a man what to do.” *Origen*⁴

And these verses (Romans 16:1-2) teach with apostolic authority that females were appointed to aid the church. Phoebe of Cenchrea was placed in this service, and Paul with great praise and recommendation follows by enumerating her beautiful deeds, saying, “She helped everyone so much, by being close at hand when needed, that she even helped me in my needs and apostolic labors, with a total dedication of her mind.” I would compare her work to that of Lot, who while he always



Antoinette Louisa [Brown] Blackwell is generally recognized as the first woman to be ordained in the USA, in 1853. She was a fervent feminist, as well as an evolutionist, writing, “[Women] will become indispensable to the religious evolution of the human race.”

enumerating her beautiful deeds, saying, “She helped everyone so much, by being close at hand when needed, that she even helped me in my needs and apostolic labors, with a total dedication of her mind.” I would compare her work to that of Lot, who while he always

4 Origen, *Fragmenta ex commentariis in epistolam i ad Corinthios* (in catenis), Greek text published in Claude Jenkins, “Documents: Origen on I Corinthians. IV,” *Journal of Theological Studies* 10 (1909), p. 41. English translation from Roger Gryson, *The Ministry of Women in the Early Church* (Collegetown, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1976), p. 28.

took in strangers, one time even merited practicing hospitality on angels. In the same way Abraham also, who was always practicing hospitality, once merited having the Lord with his angels to be entertained in his tent. So this devout Phoebe, continually assist-

This verse (Romans 16:6) teaches that women should labor for the churches of God. For they labor when they teach the young ladies to be modest, to love their husbands, to raise children, to be pure and chaste, to guide their homes, to be hospitable, to wash the saints' feet, and everything else that is written concerning the service of women.
~Origen

ing and obeying everyone, was once merited with assisting and obeying the Apostle as well. This verse teaches us two things at the same time: There are, as was said, female aides in the church, and such should be considered as part of the service of the church. Those who have assisted many, and by good service have attained to apostolic praise, should be counted as part of that ministry. He also exhorts that those who seek to do good works in the churches, whether in spiritual or fleshly aid, should receive in return the

reward and honor from the brethren.

This verse (Romans 16:6) teaches that women should labor for the churches of God. For they labor when they teach the young ladies to be modest, to love their husbands, to raise children, to be pure and chaste, to guide their homes, to be hospitable, to wash the saints' feet, and everything else that is written concerning the service of women, all of which should be done with chaste conduct. *Origen, Commentary on the Book of Romans (translated from the Latin)*

For how credible would it seem, that he [the Apostle Paul] who has not permitted a woman even to learn with overboldness, should give a female the power of teaching and of baptizing! "Let them be silent," he says, "and at home consult their own husbands." *Tertullian (ANF 3.677)*

It is not permitted to a woman to speak in the church; but neither (is it permitted her) to teach, nor to bap-

tize, nor to offer, nor to claim to herself a lot in any manly function, nor to stay (in any) sacerdotal office. *Tertullian (ANF 4.33)*

That a woman ought to be silent in the church: In the first Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians: "Let women be silent in the church. But if any wish to learn anything, let them ask their husbands at home." Also to Timothy: "Let a woman learn with silence, in all subjection. But I permit not a woman to teach, nor to be set over the man, but to be in silence. For Adam was first formed, then Eve; and Adam was not seduced, but the woman was seduced." *Cyprian (ANF 5:546)*

We do not permit our women to teach in the Church, but only to pray and hear those that teach; for our Master and Lord, Jesus Himself, when He sent us the twelve to make disciples of the people and of the nations, did nowhere send out women to preach, although He did not lack [women candidates to do this]. For there were with us the mother of our Lord and His sisters; also Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Martha and Mary the sisters of Lazarus; Salome, and certain others. For, had it been necessary for women to teach, He Himself [would have] first commanded these also to instruct the people with us. For "if the head of the wife be the man," it is not reasonable that the rest of the body should govern the head. *Apostolic Constitutions (ANF 7.427, 428)*

But if in the foregoing constitutions we have not permitted [women] to teach, how will any one allow them, contrary to nature, to perform the office of a priest? For this is one of the ignorant practices of the Gentile atheism, to ordain women priests to the female deities, not one of the constitutions of Christ. *Apostolic Constitutions (ANF 7.429)*

Ok, you probably get the point. The mass of early church quotes are clearly against the idea of women teaching men and against ordaining women to leadership roles in the church (unless, like the early Moravian Brethren, the Eldresses only taught or counseled other women or children).

The mass of early church quotes are clearly against the idea of women teaching men and against ordaining women to leadership roles (over men) in the church.

These quotes from the early church neither prove nor disprove if the Bible itself teaches for or against women teaching men or speaking in public assemblies. They do, however, give us a clear indication of how the Ante-Nicene church interpreted Paul's teachings. The bottom line is, as far as I know, there is no straightforward evidence in early church writings that women (excepting heretical groups like the Montanists) ever taught in a public assembly. I say that with integrity. I say it after having read thousands of pages of church history.

I could be wrong, of course; I don't know everything there is to know about church history. But my integrity will not let me say otherwise. Do I say that because I happen to believe that Paul's writings clearly forbid women to be ordained as elders? And that women are not to teach men, or speak in the public assembly?

No, I am being honest with history. I cannot say the same about the Quakers. As much as I like what the Quakers stood for in some areas, my integrity will not permit me to make the Quakers appear as if they forbade women speaking publically in the assemblies. It simply was not so. But the early church and the Anabaptists forbade women to speak in the public assemblies and to teach men. Integrity demands that I say that.

And if we lack integrity in history ...

So what do you do with a person or a group who does not seem to have integrity with history? Personally, I find it hard to swallow the same person's (or group's) handling of the Holy Scriptures. If they pull an ambiguous quote from *Martyrs Mirror* and make it appear that the early Anabaptists had ordained women elders, or if they use one ambiguous early church quote, but ignore a dozen plain ones ... how will they handle the Bible?

Perhaps some of you readers are wondering why I do not take up here an exposition of the Scriptures that touch women preachers. Well, my main point in this short article is not about women preachers, but about integrity. But let us look at one biblical point, again mainly considering integrity.

In the same issue of *The Gospel Trumpet*, there is a small box concerning Phoebe, the *διάκονον* [transliterated, "deaconess"] of the church at Cenchrea mentioned in Romans 16:1. The article states:

Many have thought the word servant (*diakonos*) here means deacon or deaconess, but when the same word is used elsewhere by Paul, it denotes ministers of the gospel:

"Jesus Christ was a minister" (*diakonos*). Rom. 15:8.

"Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers" (*diakonos*). 1 Cor. 3:5.

"Epaphras our dear fellowservant...a faithful minister" (*diakonos*). Col. 1:7.

"Thou [Timothy] shalt be a good minister (*diakonos*) of Jesus Christ." 1 Tim. 4:6.

"Tychicus, a beloved brother and faithful minister" (*diakonos*). Eph. 6:21; Col. 4:7.

"Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers (*diakonos*) by whom ye believed." 1 Cor. 3:5; Eph. 3:7; Col. 1:23, 25.

From the Scriptures selected by *The Gospel Trumpet*, it could easily be deduced that the Greek word *διάκονον* always refers to what we think of when we think of an ordained preacher. However ... the word "minister" simply means "to aid" (verb) or "one who aids" (noun). Are the quoted texts saying that all those mentioned were ordained preachers? Or is it simply calling them aides, or more specifically "one who executes the commands of another" (Thayer's Lexicon)? But let's get down to the integrity of the matter ... why was not Romans 13:4 added in the list selected by *The Gospel Trumpet*?

For he is the minister of God to thee for good ...

Who is this "minister"? None other than the civil authority that is over the believer. Yes, the civil authorities are "deacons" of God! In John 2:5, "His mother saith unto the *διακόνοις*, Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it." Were those wedding helpers "ordained ministers"?

Obviously my point is that the Greek word *διάκονον* can refer specifically to an ordained servant of the church (1 Ti. 3:8), or it can simply be the men responsible for filling the waterpots at a marriage, or your town mayor, or the girl who wipes the tables after a meal.

In what sense was Phoebe a *διάκονον*: an aide of the church, or a "minister of the gospel"?⁵ From the isolated text of Romans 16:1, nothing can be concluded. We have to take into account the whole NT use of the word, as well as the teachings concerning women and public ministry.

My conclusion—based on the whole of the NT teaching—is that she was simply a woman of the church at Cenchrea who aided the church by carrying Paul's letter and perhaps taking care of some other unspecified "business" while there. It appears that she had been busy succouring many people in the past, so maybe she was simply on a mission to Rome to bless some needy person or family there. Maybe some expectant mother needed an extra hand for a few months. Maybe a sick sister needed

5 Technically the phrase "minister of the gospel" does not specifically refer to preaching. An "aide of the gospel" is simply someone who helps in the cause of the kingdom of God, be it in preaching/teaching, or in helping in physical needs. For that reason I use quotes, since the phrase has come to mean a "preacher of the gospel."

some help. Maybe she taught the younger sisters how to love their husbands. There are myriads of opportunities to aid the church without being an “ordained minister of the gospel.”

But the bottom line is that we really don’t know, from the text of that one verse, in what sense Paul intended the word. But to quote only the verses that tend to use διακονο-ν in a sense of a “minister of the gospel,” and act as if that is the only way to interpret the word διακονο-ν ... is that integrity?

I quote the article again:

... but when the same word is used elsewhere by Paul, it denotes ministers of the gospel.

Does integrity ignore obvious evidence to the contrary? That said, simple, honest ignorance can also be involved. Innocent ignorance does not mean a lack of integrity. The difference is when truth is revealed, innocent ignorance will acknowledge its former error. A lack of integrity will just make excuses or ignore the truth.

Agendas and integrity

One of integrity’s mightiest foes is having an agenda. For example, concerning church history, it is common (and I have found myself doing it as well) to go looking in history to find support for a position, instead of to go looking for what position the historical evidence provides. And the same, of course, applies to looking in the Bible to find evidence to support an agenda. We see it all the time in today’s apostate churches with the “gay” agenda. It “blows me away” that people read the Bible and come away saying that sodomite “marriages” are not sin. My integrity simply will not let me say such a thing (and I am not claiming my integrity is perfect). If I felt sodomy was righteous, then I would have to abandon the Bible. Gay “marriage” is the epitome of self-righteousness. I simply do not have any desire to twist Scripture and history that hard. I have very little respect for the integrity of anyone who claims the Bible supports homosexual “marriages.” Scripture is too plain on that subject.

Yet, I realize that sometimes when I read—be it the Bible or history—I sense that an agenda lurks in the shadows, trying to get *me* to ignore evidence that may contradict my current understanding of an issue. May God help us all to flee from all agendas except the “agenda” to be honest seekers of truth. If the truth of the matter is that the early church and the Anabaptists did ordain women to be preachers to men, then may we have enough integrity to say so. If not, then may we just have enough integrity to not twist and hide evidence so as to support an agenda.

Pray for me! ~Mike Atnip

There once was an oyster

Whose story I tell,
Who found that some sand
Had got into his shell.

It was only a grain,
But it gave him great pain.
For oysters have feelings
Although they’re so plain.

Now, did he berate
The harsh workings of fate
That had brought him
To such a deplorable state?

Did he curse at the government,
Cry for election,
And claim that the sea should
Have given him protection?

“No,” he said to himself
As he lay on a shell,
Since I cannot remove it,
I shall try to improve it.

Now the years have rolled around,
As the years always do,
And he came to his ultimate
Destiny—stew.

And the small grain of sand
That had bothered him so
Was a beautiful pearl
All richly aglow.

Now the tale has a moral,
For isn’t it grand
What an oyster can do
With a morsel of sand?

What couldn’t we do
If we’d only begin
With some of the things
That get under our skin.

~Author unknown



Anabaptists: The Church Living in Antithesis to the World

Timothy R. Phillips and Dennis L. Okholm

Introduction

Sometimes it seems that others understand us better than what we understand ourselves. The following article was taken from a book written by Evangelical authors who openly do not profess to be Anabaptists, and who clearly state that they think Reformed theology and practice is better than Anabaptist ideas. Yet, they define and explain “kingdom theology” and outlook better than many Anabaptists have explained themselves.

While we at *The Heartbeat of the Remnant* cannot recommend all the conclusions of the book from which this article was taken (and we would have worded a few points differently in what we quote below), we have found their description of Anabaptism to be clear and honest. The book takes a look at the relationship of the church with the surrounding culture and lays out several different models of relationship. This chapter explains how the Anabaptists envisioned that relationship, a model which we at *The Heartbeat of the Remnant* can endorse. Note that the footnotes are original, with the exceptions of those that begin with THTR (*The Heartbeat of the Remnant*) where a few explanatory notes have been inserted to clarify the text. The Scripture quotations are not from the KJV as we are not changing the article with the exception of the few explanatory footnotes. ~

For some Christians, the pervasiveness of sin in culture precludes confessing Jesus Christ as Lord in all areas of life. During the Reformation the Anabaptists argued that since all Christians are called by

Jesus to righteousness, they must resist any sinful compromise and intentionally live in opposition to culture’s sinful structures. The Anabaptists called for Christians to separate and establish a community that faithfully heralds Jesus Christ. At the center of this alternative world is the church, the community of Jesus Christ’s faithful disciples evidencing their qualitative difference from this sinful world. While actively persecuted by Christendom and dismissed as eccentrics and even as failures, the Anabaptists measured success not by their influence or impact on society but by their conformity to Jesus Christ. For in the end, that alone counts.

The Anabaptists’ Theological Vision

The Anabaptists’ distinctive theological vision of Christian mission builds on their understanding of sin, Jesus’ radical work, and the church.

Creation and Sin

God created a perfect world for humans to live in love and obedience. Humans were to place their “hope and comfort” on God alone, the source of all good, and “seek diligently to please Him”; they were not to trust the structure of politics, possessions, and family that constitute human society and culture.¹ But humans rebelled and sought “salvation, comfort and help apart from God,” through the state, a “wife, child, house, farm, money, goods or even himself.”² These structures of God’s good creation usurp the place of God. They demand absolute allegiance, claiming that salvation and hope are found only in *this* state or *this* family and not in any other. To ensure this idol’s triumph, no human action or sacrifice is prohibited, for this state, family, or individual determines what is just and right.³ There are myriad contemporary examples: the Bosnian Serbs contort “patriotic nationalism” into “ethnic cleansing”; Planned Parenthood rationalizes abortion as “free choice”; the gay lobby exonerates its “alternative lifestyle” as “the way God created us”; and the CEO justifies laying off thousands of middle-aged employees, without regard for their family or future, as “helping the bottom line.”

Simply put, at the Fall the world and its structures succumbed to Satan’s rule (1 John 2:15-17). Even human-

1 Peter Rideman, *Confession of Faith: Account of our Religion, Doctrine and Faith, Given by Peter Rideman of the Brothers Whom Men Call Hutterians* (Suffolk: Hodder and Stoughton, 1950, 50.

2 Ibid., 50-51.

3 THTR—In other words, man sets up his own moral and ethical standard of right and wrong, through civil laws created by a clan, a country, or a dictator. When a group or an individual sets up a standard of right and wrong different from what God has declared, it becomes self-righteousness (*Self* declaring what is righteous rather than submitting to the righteousness of God. Ro. 10:3).

Old Testament

Divorce permitted (Deut. 24:1-4)

Do not love your enemy (Deut. 19:21; Ps. 139:21ff)

*Heretics and false prophets should be put to death.
(Deut. 13:5)*

Believers active in government

Partake in this sinful world

Jesus' Ethic

Divorce prohibited (Luke 16:18; Matt. 19:8)

Love your enemy (Matt. 5:43ff)

*Shun heretics, but commit their judgment to God at
the end of the age (Matt. 13:25-30, 36-43)*

Christians must not be magistrates (1 Cor. 5:12)

Separate from Babylon (2 Cor. 6:14ff)

ity's noble aims—justice, righteousness, and peace—are warped and prostituted to the sinner's own endeavors. The Old Testament recognized evil's present and invincible reality and looked forward to the Messiah's advent and his defeat of evil. As a result, the Mosaic Law could only place restraints on evil and this through compromise. While the Law prohibited unjust retaliation, such as a life for an eye, it sanctioned proportionate retaliation (Deut. 19:21). Its toleration of warfare, divorce, and not loving one's enemies all reflect the incorrigibility of evil.⁴ The New Testament similarly describes creation as under the "dominion of darkness" (Col. 1:13), where the "evil one" (1 John 5:19) is its "prince" (John 12:31). These sinful structures with all their "abominations" and "adulteries," the "haunt for every evil spirit" (Rev. 18:2), constitute Babylon (Rev. 17:4-5).

Jesus Christ and His Kingdom

In the midst of this sinful world, God in Jesus Christ has supernaturally invaded Satan's realm, disarmed these principalities and powers (Col. 2:15), and established his own kingdom. This kingdom is not simply a spiritual experience of forgiveness, a foretaste of some glorious future, or a sociopolitical program for bettering humanity. Christ's kingdom offers a whole alternative to Satan's kingdom, opposing it at every level. Jesus not only defeated evil's power in his followers, but established a new ethic that is alien to the compromises of this sinful world. This kingdom exists now and fully in the church.

However, the radicalness of Jesus' advent and ethic is seldom recognized. Even Christendom mutes Jesus' radical ethic by viewing him as simply deepening and extending the intent of the Old Testament law. But the

Anabaptists counter that the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5-7) reveals the qualitative newness of Jesus' work and kingdom. For here Jesus replaces the Old Testament law with his kingdom's ethics. Matthew 5:38-39 poses a classic contrast: "You have heard that it was said, 'Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.' But I tell you, Do not resist an evil person." According to the Anabaptists, Jesus startles the audience by setting aside the Old Testament law of retaliation and establishing a totally new standard: do not avenge evil. Throughout the Sermon on the Mount and in many other passages, Jesus sharply contrasts and even sets up an opposition between the Old Testament prescriptions on divorce, warfare, religious authority, and his own ethic. Rejecting the old law, Jesus insists upon an absolute ethic of righteousness without compromise and love without retaliation.

As the table above indicates, the Anabaptists interpreted Jesus' distinctive ethic as antithetical to the Old Testament law. Why this sharp contrast between the Old and New Covenants? Anabaptists affirm that both are God's Word. However, they interpreted the Old Testament as looking forward to the advent of something radically new, the Messiah, Jesus Christ. During the Old Testament period, the Messiah had not yet arrived. Only the Law was available; and it is "a yoke of bondage, doing nothing but ... demanding."⁵ As a result, evil remained a present and invincible reality, so that compromises with evil—retaliation, divorce, oaths, not loving one's enemies—were permitted.⁶

But with the coming of Jesus Christ, the "new age" has arrived. Jesus has triumphed over Satan's reign and established his own kingdom of righteousness and holiness. Now "something better is come, that is, the covenant of

4 THTR—In other words, man was incapable of conquering evil by himself, so the Law did not demand God's full righteousness—until the Messiah came to liberate man from sin's dominion. The Messiah then gave humanity the full expectation of God's morals and ethics, and provided mankind with the power to actually live it out!

5 Walter Klassen, ed., *Anabaptism in Outline: Selected Primary Sources* (Scottsdale, Pa: Herald, 1981), 154.

6 THTR—Compromise was permitted since the Mosaic Law had no provision for power to overcome evil. Grace—power—would be given by the Messiah!

God is more clearly and perfectly revealed and come fully to the light”; and as a result, “that which is dark and imperfect must cease and come to an end.”⁷ Unlike the Old Testament period, God now prohibits evil and makes absolute demands upon his people. Jesus has revealed a new ethic for his people; “the law [is] our schoolmaster until we are in Christ.”⁸ Compromises are no longer permitted; the New Covenant has displaced the Old.⁹ Warfare, arrogance, and selfish ambition must all be abandoned. Jesus demands obedience to a new set of values: humility, righteousness, no divorce, love for one’s enemies, separation from Babylon.

Jesus’ life consistently proclaimed his kingdom’s demands. Jesus conquered evil by entering sinful structures and unmasking their idolatrous pretensions and resultant evils. He challenged idolatrous Jewish pride and its related stigma toward tax collectors, adulterers, and other outsiders in Jewish society. Despite a life of threats and suffering, Jesus did not take the path of human rebellion and retaliate. He “loved everyone without measure” (Luke 6:27-36).¹⁰ Nor did he coercively impose his kingdom through military power. Using the sword would only have elevated allegiance to temporal powers above trust in God, reintroducing idolatry. Rather Jesus conquered through the cross by “entrust[ing] himself to him who judges justly” (1 Peter 2:23).

In conquering evil Jesus instituted an alternative life of love and righteousness. Christ’s kingdom embodies those people who are empowered by his Spirit to live in obedience to his standards and not the world’s. And this kingdom exists now in the church. Presently, though, Christ’s kingdom exists in a hostile environment, the kingdom of Satan. This world is Satan’s territory and his reign will cease only at the Sec-

ond Coming.¹¹ In his original proclamation, Jesus accentuated the ineradicable opposition between Satan’s and his own kingdom: “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near” (Matt. 4:17). The Greek word for repentance, *metanoia*, entails an about-face, a repudiation of the past. Similarly, Jesus’ demand for repentance poses an “either-or” decision: Satan or Christ. There are no other options and no room for the lukewarm. For sin so pervades the cosmos that unless the world’s values and structures are consciously opposed, obedience to Christ is inevitably compromised. That is why Paul exhorts believers not to “conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind” (Rom. 12:2). This is the narrow road that alone leads to life (Matt. 7:13-14).¹²

The Church

The Church as a Covenant-ed Community

Seeking to fulfill Jesus’ command to “be my witnesses” (Acts 1:8), the Anabaptists reconstituted the idea of the church on the model of Christ’s kingdom.¹³ The church is conceived as a qualitatively new reality in history, the only place where Christ now rules. As a result, Jesus’ disciples must reflect Christ’s life and standards, not Satan’s. In addition the Anabaptists contend that Babylon’s grasp can only be resisted if the church separates from the world’s sinful structures.

The need to separate from the structures and values of the

prevailing culture resound throughout Anabaptist writings. Note the first Anabaptist confession at Schleitheim (1527):

11 Jesus acknowledged the pervasiveness of Satan’s kingdom when he did not challenge Satan’s offer of “all the kingdoms of the world” at his temptation (Luke 4:5-8).

12 For further elaboration of these two antithetical kingdoms, see Robert Friedmann, “The Doctrine of the Two Worlds,” in *The Recovery of the Anabaptist Vision*, ed. Guy F. Hershberger (Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald, 1957), 105-18.

13 THTR—In other words, they did not *reform* the current church, they *remade it from scratch*.



Sin so pervades the cosmos that unless the world’s values and structures are consciously opposed, obedience to Christ is inevitably compromised.

7 Klaassen, *Anabaptism in Outline*, 156.

8 *Ibid.*, 154.

9 *Ibid.*, 156.

10 *Ibid.*, 87.

A separation shall be made from the evil and from the wickedness which the devil planted in the world; ... we shall not have fellowship with them [the wicked] and not run with them in the multitude of their abominations. ... For truly all creatures are in but two classes, good and bad, believing and unbelieving, darkness and light, the world and those who [have come] out of the world ... and none can have part with the other.¹⁴

They viewed separation positively as the way to enhance one's piety and obedience to Jesus Christ. For this sinful world can quickly divert our allegiance to Jesus Christ, even without our recognition, unless the church vigilantly cultivates discipleship.

Anabaptists maintained that Christians were to live in opposition to society, not as individuals or hermits, but in *Gemeinde* or community—true church.

In addition, the church is differentiated from the world because her members have freely covenanted to follow Christ. The Anabaptists detached religion from political power, for Christ rules inwardly, through the Spirit's work, not through physical coercion. Nor is religion a solitary quest in their view. The church is a brotherhood, a community

that intentionally disciplines and guides the believer. The Anabaptists maintained that Christians were to live in opposition to society, not as individuals or hermits, but in *Gemeinde* or community—true church. Jesus' work established a new order, which overcame the sinner's pride and selfishness. As a result, believers have been transformed so that they can put others ahead of themselves and thereby love each other with a self-sacrificial love. Jesus set down the criterion of brotherly love: "By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." (John 13:35, NIV:ILE). Simply put, the church is the people of God, a voluntary brotherhood and a fellowship which reflects Christ's love.

According to classic Anabaptist teaching, *believer's baptism* was the rite of "entry into the holy church." In this ceremony the adult believer publicly confesses that he or she has died to this world and has surrendered the self to Christ through the church and "pledges to live and die according to His will."¹⁵ To ensure that their communities imitated Christ's righteousness, the Anabaptists

maintained a strict discipline. Those who did not display a Christian life were disciplined. At the extreme, this could mean exclusion from the community (Matt. 18:15-17). The banned could be readmitted, but only if they demonstrated their repentance through godly lives.

The result is a church that is sharply distinguished from the prevailing culture. This is what sociologists call a "sectarian church,"¹⁶ one that seeks no worldly sanction and separates itself as much as possible from the world's sinful compromises.

The Church as Christ's Kingdom

Christ is not only the Savior of sinners, but also their Lord and thus the norm for every aspect of life. As a result, the Anabaptists define the true church through four criteria derived from Christ's life.¹⁷ The first is *holy living*. Christ has established a church that has no "blemish, wrinkle, or any such thing, but [is] pure and holy, as He, himself, is holy."¹⁸ The Anabaptists explicitly reject the traditional move in the church's history to spiritualize Christ's kingdom by incorporating all that are sacramentally graced or have faith without regard to whether they live righteously. Faith must be evidenced by fruit: Jesus' disciples must "live unblamably in His holy commandments."¹⁹

Second, the believer's life must be one of *self-sacrificial* love or servanthood. Jesus' disciples must put themselves last and serve the other (Matt. 20:25-27; Phil. 2:3-5). As a result, the ways of the world—pride, selfishness, retaliation, and even coercion—had absolutely no place among the Anabaptists. Attempting to evade all forms of "self-seeking," they even prohibited Christians from "eating and drinking the sweat of the poor (that is, making one's own people and fellow-creatures work so that one

16 THTR—Note that this (sociological) use of the word "sectarian" is in reference to being "separated from the rest" in the sense of being cut off from general society. It is not used in the usual sense of "cut off from other true believers" as in Titus 3:10, a schismatic.

17 *The Complete Writings of Menno Simons*, trans. Leonard Verduin, ed. John Christian Wenger (Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald, 1956), 743. These criteria are an addition to the traditional Protestant signs of "pure doctrine" and a biblical use of "the sacramental signs." See also the important article by John Howard Yoder, "A People in the World," in John Howard Yoder, *The Royal Priesthood: Essays Ecclesiological and Ecumenical*, ed. Michael G. Cartwright (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 65-101. For another important exposition of these points see J. Lawrence Burkholder, "The Anabaptist Vision of Discipleship," in *The Recovery of the Anabaptist Vision*, ed. Guy F. Hershberger (Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald, 1957), 135-51.

18 Klaassen, *Anabaptism in Outline*, 111.

19 *Complete Writings of Menno Simons*, 300; Klaassen, *Anabaptism in Outline*, 112. Ironically, during the Reformation period, one could be cleared of the crime of being an Anabaptist by cursing, dancing, getting drunk, quarreling, or coveting. Claus-Peter Clasen, *Anabaptism: A Social History, 1525-1618* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1972), 143.

14 John Leith, ed., *Creeds of the Church*, 3d ed. (Atlanta: John Knox, 1982), 285-86.

15 Klaassen, *Anabaptism in Outline*, 177.

can grow fat).²⁰ Nor could possessions be used solely for oneself, for the disciple of Christ “was not the lord but only the servant of His goods.” The Anabaptists’ acts of generosity and love for fellow believers as well as the stranger were renowned, a heritage that continues to this day.²¹

Third, *the way of the cross* is not only Christ’s calling, but his disciples’ calling as well: “Those who do not carry their cross and follow me cannot be my disciples: (Luke 14:27, NIV:ILE). Bearing the cross refers to Jesus’ nonretaliatory suffering resulting from his social nonconformity.²² Through the way of the cross Jesus conquered Satan (Col. 2:15). In his servanthood (Phil. 2:3-11), Jesus denied the sinful powers their claim to absolute allegiance by trusting entirely in God (1 Peter 2:23). The disciple of Jesus shares in this same destiny (2 Tim. 3:12; 1 Peter 2:21; 4:1, 12-16). In the times of insult, persecution, or death, Anabaptists regarded the “holy cross of Christ” as their “highest shelter and shield,” as “we have surrendered with holy patience (not obliged or forced patience) to overcome all our enemies in the victory of Christ.”²³ So by bearing the cross, the disciple trusts in Christ’s victory over the powers of the age.

Finally, Christ’s Great Commission was every disciple’s charge. Anabaptists traveled throughout Europe to preach, live, and suffer for Christ’s sake. Even more crucial, the Anabaptists understood a *witness* not as one who simply believes or proclaims a message, but as one who embodies this message in the face of hostility from the world, even at the price of martyrdom. Indeed, the Greek term for witness (*martys*) is the origin for the English “martyr” and means bearing testimony at the expense of

oneself. Similarly, they embodied Jesus’ life and teaching, offering an alternative kingdom in this world.

The Church as an Alternative Culture

While insisting that the church must separate from the prevailing culture, the Anabaptist is not suggesting that Christians hide from the world. One is separated in order to be known and recognized as qualitatively different from the world. The Anabaptist community of believers is an “assembly ... gathered and led together by the Holy Spirit ... so that they want only to be like Christ, to partake of his nature, and diligently do his will.”²⁴

Offering an alternative, even a counterculture, is the church’s mission. As Peter Rideman recounts, the church is: a lantern of righteousness, in which the light of grace is borne and held before the whole world, that its darkness, unbelief and blindness be thereby seen and made light, and that men may also learn to see and know the way of life.

Therefore is the church of Christ in the first place completely filled with the light of Christ as a lantern is illuminated and made bright by the light: that his light might shine through her to others.²⁵

The church’s mission is simply to exist, to be a beacon in the world, showing the world that sin’s power no longer controls her and that Christ’s kingdom has arrived.

Rejection of Christendom as the Compromised and Apostate Church

Christendom (institutionalized Christianity that prevails in a culture) has resisted the Anabaptist’s conception of the church living in opposition to the prevailing culture as too radical and disruptive to the social order. The excuses are well-rehearsed: Jesus’ lifestyle of humility and non-resistance is unpractical; the world just does not operate like that. But Jesus challenged that response, “No one can serve two masters” (Matt. 6:24).

The Anabaptist interpretation of the church’s history supports this contention. Beginning with the Constantinian period, the church exchanged the image of itself as a community of saints for an institution integrally coupled with the broader society. The church and society formed an organic whole which in turn shaped the church’s own

Witness:

~~One who simply believes or proclaims a message.~~

One who embodies the message in the face of hostility.

20 Klaassen, *Anabaptism in Outline*, 234. Some Anabaptist groups, such as the Hutterites, even repudiated the idea of private property for the sake of brotherly love.

21 Clasen, *Anabaptism: A Social History*, 187; Klaassen, *Anabaptism in Outline*, 241.

22 THTR—The author fails to include here that “taking up the cross” also includes the daily mortification of selfish desires ... I die to my desires so that Christ may live in me. This dying to egotism will sometimes bring persecution, which means the cross must then be taken up anew to die to the desire for retaliation or bitterness towards the persecutor. But individual instances of dying to “my desires” do not always bring persecution; thus, “taking up the cross” goes beyond nonretaliation.

23 Klaassen, *Anabaptism in Outline*, 99.

24 Rideman, *Confession of Faith*, 38.

25 Ibid., 39-40.

self-understanding. Church attendance became a civic duty, supported by the state's coercive power. Of course, not everyone who attended was a believer. As a result, theologians proclaimed that the true church was invisible. And, since believers were known only to God, all "pew-warmers" had to be treated *as if* they were Christians, even if they showed no signs of faith.

The Anabaptists rejected this spiritualized or invisible church. Jesus commands that the church visibly bear his witness (John 13:34-35; Acts 1:8). Peter similarly envisions the church as "a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him" (1 Peter 2:9). If the church is identified with society, then the existing social and political order defines the adjectives "chosen," "holy," and "belonging to God." And in the end, doesn't this mean that Christ's demands are equated with the status quo?

The Constantinian church did in fact curtail Jesus' absolute demands so they were within the reach of their culture. The bonds of fellowship and nonresistant self-sacrificial love, by which the apostolic church offered a welcome alternative to pagan society, were soon eclipsed.²⁶ Instead of following Christ's commands that his disciples be servants of all, selfish ambition and its trappings pervaded the church. Hierarchy and social status replaced community. Even the emperor's political arrogance entered the church. Rather than willingly suffer martyrdom for Christ's sake, now the church sanctioned the state's own restricted notion of justice and the state's demand for the ultimate sacrifice. In only a matter of time the church began employing political power for its own ends. This scenario has been repeated throughout church history. This betrayal of Jesus' commands, the Anabaptists conclude, is inevitable when the church collaborates with the world.

The Reformation did not escape such compromise. The magisterial Protestant Reformers, the Anabaptists charged, proclaimed faith in Christ but without any moral

demands. As Menno Simons derisively observed, "They strike up a Psalm, ... 'Snapped is the cord, now we are free, praise the Lord' while beer and wine verily run from their drunken mouths and noses. Anyone who can but recite this on his thumb, no matter how carnally he lives, is a good evangelical man and a precious brother."²⁷ The Anabaptists conclude that as long as the prevailing culture shapes our values, the church will be little different from the rest of society.



As long as the prevailing culture shapes our values, the church will be little different from the rest of society.

The Christian's Mission: The Church Living in Opposition to the World

This theological vision provides the framework for exploring the Anabaptists' conception of the Christian's mission.

Jesus is Lord over All

Only if Jesus is our sole norm, judging every other aspect of reality, the Anabaptists insist, is he truly Lord over all. While Christendom typically supplements and thereby moderates Jesus' commands with cultural or practical concerns, the Anabaptists demand that Jesus' ethic must define every other obligation. As a result, the church replaces sinful institutions.

Believers Must Separate from Sinful Structures

Obedience to Jesus Christ necessitates separation from the prevailing culture and its domineering values and expectations, for the social reality in which one is most rooted shapes one's values and priorities. The church, consequently, must provide an alternative context for nurturing disciples of Christ strong enough to resist the system of the world. Similarly, believers are not responsible for coercively transforming the sinful structures of this world, but demonstrating their own freedom from Satan's enslavement and the reality of Christ's kingdom.

Certainly this understanding of the church's mission allows believers to evade the controlling confines of certain sinful structures. Take, for example, participation in the ordinary social and political hierarchies. Through the centuries, Christians have adorned their superior positions in society—as politician, administrator, magistrate/lawyer—with Christian values. But the Anabaptists re-

²⁷ *Complete Writings of Menno Simons*, 334.

²⁶ Franklin H. Littell, "The Anabaptist Concept of the Church," in *The Recovery of the Anabaptist Vision*, ed. Guy F. Hershberger (Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald, 1957), 127.

ject this option as a compromise. How can a magistrate wield power in managing society yet at the same time obey Jesus' command that his disciples must be last, even a slave to others? (Matt. 20:25-27) For in the end—no matter what rhetoric is employed, whether “law,” “justice,” or “individual rights”—the use of even legal power entails imposing one’s views upon others. Or take, for example, the administrator, bureaucrat, or the so-called “civil servant”—those who apply institutional rules to particular situations. Are those “servants” as Christ demands—“to the least of these” (Matt. 25:40, 45)—or as the institution prescribes? Who actually is their lord?

In our sinful world, if you scratch my back, I'll scratch yours. Likewise, if you stab me, watch out!

Moreover, social hierarchies are symptoms of a whole system of disobedience. As the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector portrays (Luke 18:10-14), haughty arrogance is an irresistible temptation accompanying social achievement: “I made it to this place; you could as well, if you’d only work at it!” The disciples’ fight for the seat nearest to Jesus (Mark 10:35-45) shows the powerful lure that more status and a higher position on the social ladder holds for us all. The problem is not simply prideful desire, but the distorting effect of reciprocity on morality. In our sinful world, if you scratch my back, I’ll scratch yours. Likewise, if you stab me, watch out! A tit for a tat is inescapable, and it quickly escalates to more violent forms of retaliation. By contrast, Jesus commands his disciples to return good for evil.

The way of the cross is not an Anabaptist strategy for transforming the world. They never claim that innocent suffering will shame this evil world or that the acceptance of suffering allows one to succeed in life. The way of the cross simply reflects trust in and obedience to Jesus alone. The resulting disengagement from the prevailing culture frees the Anabaptists from the world’s idolatrous temptations.

Through Servanthood, Believers Show Victory over Sin
Not even the Anabaptist can evade every aspect of our sinful world, for these structures form human life. The political order, for example, provides a peaceful civil order necessary for a stable life. While refraining from the active participation in certain structures, some passive involvement is inevitable. But how could the Anabaptist participate without being affected by that idolatrous structure?

The Anabaptist stance toward governmental powers provides an important case study and illustrates their response. The Anabaptists insist that the political order—the state and its power of the sword—was ordained by God in order to restrain evil only after the Fall. Since those in the kingdom of Christ evidence the new reality of Christ’s righteousness, believers do not need the sword for restraining evil. Like the Old Testament law, the state’s authority and coercive power is God-ordained only where evil is invincible. Simply put, the governmental authorities exist only for the wicked, not for the saved.

Christians must obey Jesus’ command, “Do not resist an evildoer” (Matt. 5:39, NRSV) and so must not actively participate in political institutions or carry out their decisions. In the words of the Schleithem Confession, the government is “outside the perfection of Christ.”²⁸ But the Anabaptists were not naïve about evil; the sword is necessary, but only nonbelievers should employ its power.

On the other hand, Anabaptists accepted Paul’s counsel, “Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities” (Rom.13:1 NIV:ILE). They supported political institutions, giving them “what we owe them before God according to divine testimony ... be it taxes, interest, the tithe, service ... whatever does not contribute to the destruction of man.”²⁹ But severe restrictions are placed upon governmental power. The state can never stand in the way of obedience to God. If the state crosses this line, the Christian must refuse its demands, but then accept the penalties imposed. Again, Jesus’ command to not resist evil must be obeyed. As in the early church, the Christian must refuse to worship Caesar, yet submit to Caesar’s persecution.

While participating indirectly in the political structures, the Anabaptists refused to conform to its sinful values. By witnessing to the lordship of Jesus Christ and embodying his self-sacrificial love, they repudiated and even subverted the prevailing ethos. Similarly, when they were condemned because of their obedience to Jesus Christ, Anabaptists saw their submission to the state’s penalties as following the way of the cross. For despite political threats and suffering, they trusted on God’s final victory, and denied these structures their claim to absolute allegiance (1 Peter 2:23). ~

©2001 Used by permission. Timothy R. Phillips & Dennis L. Okholm, *A Family of Faith: An Introduction to Evangelical Christianity*, Baker Academic (A division of Baker Publishing Group), Grand Rapids MI, 182-192.

28 Leith, *Creeds of the Church*, 287.

29 Klaassen, *Anabaptism in Outline*, 252.

Continued from page 17

Training Camp.” Amen! Imagining little colonies of radical Bible translators taking the gospel to unreached areas of the earth thrills me much more than the thought of a colony on Mars.

Then I thought about another exciting thing happening this month. Three of my good friends are starting a radical, inner-city church ministry south of Boston. A former skinhead, a Harvard graduate, and a nice “normal” guy are teaming up to live with their families in the city of Boston. They have a desire to live and experience daily discipleship with the people to whom they are called to minister. Amen!

Also, a few days ago I received an e-mail from a converted kickboxer from Thailand. He has a wonderful testimony. Instead of fighting in the flesh, now that he is converted he fights spiritual warfare. He is now a powerful street preacher and desires to take the gospel of the kingdom to his people in Thailand. He has a vision to reach the Thai people with a real kingdom message, and he even desires to live among them and experience daily fellowship and discipleship. Wow! We have been sending great e-mails back and forth, and he really blesses me.

Also this month I heard of a group of young men and women living close together in an inner-city work in downtown Winnipeg. They have an inner-city school aimed at reaching the unchurched children and young people of the city. They have been having great responses and are now asking great questions about how to take the whole thing to the next level. Living by faith for their support, these young people are experiencing New Testament living at a new level. Amen!

In a few months I will be going on a mini mission trip to minister to several first-generation Anabaptist Christians peppered throughout Eastern Europe. As I prepare to go, I have been reading their stories and testimonies ... and again I am blessed. Who are they? A group of Russian Mennonites living in Germany who desire a more radical everyday life together; believers in Switzerland, Serbia, and Croatia; a little community in Romania struggling to keep the faith in a pagan world. There is also a little settlement of Anabaptists living in the Czech Republic in a historical Anabaptist city. They want to preach the light of the gospel in their town, which has been dormant for almost 300 years. I’m looking forward to meeting these new believers.

Beauty from ashes

Many of us have been through tough times lately. I have caught a lot of tears the last few years and I’ve shed a lot myself. But I praise God because every day it seems I hear of more exciting things happening. I rejoice to hear of more examples like these mentioned, of precious fruit rising from the ashes of the last few years.

I firmly believe that Christ has us go through tough times to take us to a greater level of vision and dedication. There is no doubt about it: through the years I have witnessed incredible things that God has done among the “Remnant” people. But I believe that now He wants to take us even further. Jesus said, “And every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit.”¹ Pruning hurts; but the new fruit that blossoms from the wounds is a testimony to the faithfulness of the Lord.

The Dutch space company can boast of their plans for a colony on Mars. However, the saints that I have spoken of here are planting a kingdom that will never go away. Both ways require years of vision and dedication. However, only one will bear fruit into eternity. These saints and many more like them are doing it for Christ and His kingdom. That encourages me.

Readers, have you been discouraged? Take courage. The pain has not been in vain. God’s pruning work will bear its precious fruit. Let’s keep going! “And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not.”²

In this issue we take a look at the rudiments of the Anabaptist movement, how the goal was to establish Christ’s rule on earth by forming a brotherhood of men and women who live in antithesis to the natural course of humanity. We also take a look at how the historical and biblical record can so easily get distorted by agendas. If you have heard or read about “The Romans Road to Salvation,” be sure to check out “The Matthew Road.” “The Law of Kindness” was written for the sisters, but we men could use a dose of kindness as well. And finally, we take a look at the swearing of oaths.

May this issue of *The Heartbeat of the Remnant* find you encouraged to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem, despite the scoffing of Sanballet. ~Dean Taylor

Christ has us
go through tough
times to take us
to a greater level
of vision and
dedication.

1 John 15:2

2 Gal 6:9

A Godly

—Written by an anon

Based on the following scriptures: Proverbs 31, Deuteronomy 6:5-7 &



The Bible speaks to everyone who follows in the Way,
But some parts are specific in the things they have to say.
The fathers are encouraged, and those alone in life,
And there are admonitions for the mother and the wife.

I always linger over these; they speak to my estate.
They offer me direction in the small things and the great.
To be a godly woman is the goal I want to reach,
And so I need to study what the Scriptures have to teach.

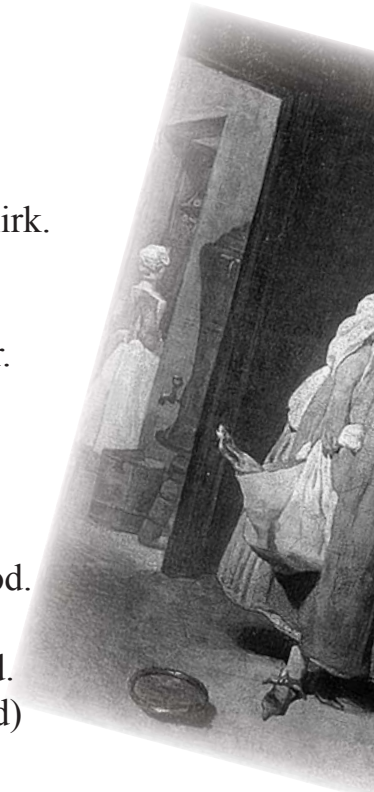
A woman who is called to be a mother and a wife,
Who takes the cross and purposes to live a godly life,
Is ever growing in the faith she's chosen to profess,
And there are certain qualities she covets to possess.

The godly woman stays at home; her duties keep her there.
She rises while it yet is night and gives herself to prayer.
Her days are full of service and her heart is full of love;
Her mind is full of gratitude and praise for God above.

Though not employed outside the home, she has no mind to shirk.
She eats not bread of idleness, but fruit of honest work.
Her brother and her sister, her parents and her neighbor,
Her husband and her children share the blessing of her labor.

The love her husband feels for her is easy to reflect,
And she not only loves him, but she gives him her respect.
In her his heart may safely trust; she does him only good;
When he confides his inner thoughts, he finds them understood.

She's mindful, too, of Eden, where the woman was deceived.
She knows it's not her place to teach (as others have believed)
Nor to usurp authority, but listens with subjection,
In meekness and humility, accepting his direction.



Woman

Anonymous godly woman

11:19, Titus 2, I Timothy 2, I Peter 3:1-7, I Corinthians 11 & 14:29-40



When all the church assembles in a solemn, formal way,
The godly woman listens what the brethren have to say;
And if she hears a statement made that makes her sit up straighter,
The question forming in her mind is asked her husband later.

There is a congregation where her voice is often heard,
And her children are attentive as she teaches them the Word,
When she sits within her house, and when she walks along the way;
When she lays them down at night, and when she rises with the day.

The godly woman is discreet, not seeking others' praise;
She's modest in appearance, and she's modest in her ways.
She isn't prone to gossip, but her neighbors know she cares,
And any help her hands can give is certain to be theirs.

The godly woman doesn't follow fashion's idle whim,
Nor deck herself in gold or gems to draw the eyes of men.
And yet, compared to those who do, she is exceeding fair;
Her meek and quiet spirit is an ornament more rare.

The godly woman isn't gay; she's left that all behind.
She's pleasant and she's cheerful, but she has a sober mind.
Her covered head, her simple dress, her modest mein are one;
Her singular adornment is the good that she has done.

When years of faithful laboring have bent her body low,
She'll teach the younger women in the way that they should go.
Her works are their example in the service of the Lord;
And verily, I say to you, she'll have a rich reward.

Oh, make of me that woman, Lord! And guide me in that way.
Behold, Thou art the potter, and I the softened clay.
Encourage me where I am right; rebuke me where I'm wrong.
I read these Scriptures often and I ponder on them long. ~





That they may teach the young women ...

The Law of Kindness

She openeth her mouth with wisdom; and in her tongue is the law of kindness. Pr. 31:26

Hasn't it all been said, and written, and read about that evil little monster, the tongue? It is a fire, a world of iniquity, and defiles the whole body; it sets on fire the course of nature, is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison, and no man can tame it. These are some of the things James says about the tongue. Ja. 3:5-8 A Proverbs study of the capacities that our tongues have for good and evil teaches us that our concern with its use is twofold: using it wrongly and using it rightly. The godly woman of Proverbs is our model for the right use of the tongue, for her tongue is ruled by kindness.

Sins of the tongue

One of the greatest temptations to the misuse of the tongue among women is what we call gossip, and we need not try to call it anything else. To gossip is to pass on unverified stories about others (often concentrating on their faults and weaknesses and their consequences). It is an unwritten rule of the gossip game that we do not discuss any faults of others that we ourselves also have. "Death and life are in the power of the tongue," says Proverbs 18:21, and in 11:9 we read that "An hypocrite with his mouth destroyeth his neighbor." Gossip has destroyed reputations, as well as the emotional, mental, and even the physical health of its victims. Many have committed suicide in a state of mental and physical deterioration indirectly caused by unkind tongues.

Gossip is a habit. We should beware of "Christian" gossip, or sharing information about another under the

guise of asking for prayer. This is despicable, but it does happen. Very rarely need we reveal personal and private information about another, and never so if it has been told us in confidence. Sometimes we may not be specifically told that certain information is confidential, but we should be discerning enough to understand that it should not be repeated. If, when we share information with another, we have to ask that it not be repeated, in many cases we'd best not tell it at all, but redouble our praying about it.

Often we hear someone say (perhaps we say it ourselves), "Now I just love Sally to pieces, but ..." Then we know Sally is about to be cut to pieces. If we are going to say something unkind about someone, at least let's not be a hypocrite. Sometimes we don't really love Sally at all, and we are hiding hatred with lying lips. Pr. 10:18 To be a little more kind to ourselves, usually what we are really saying is, "Sally is a dear person, but she has many faults. However, I'm so charitable that I love her anyway." The next time we have an impulse to say, "I just love her, but ..." about someone, why not change "but" to "because" and tell why we love her, and let it go at that? Wouldn't it be wonderful if we spoke about the living persons the way we do about the ones who have just died—nothing but praise and kindness?

Picture a law at the gate of your mouth which says, "No unkind word shall pass these portals!" That is what is meant by, "In her tongue is the law of kindness." A law is something that must be obeyed. If it is broken, there are consequences—broken spirits (Proverbs 18:14), bro-

ken hearts (Proverbs 18:8), broken relationships (Proverbs 16:28; 17:9), and miserable feelings of guilt in the offender. If we truly fear God, we need have no shame as we talk with one another, knowing that He hears, for our speech will be gracious and kind and loving. Mal. 3:16

“I am purposed that my mouth shall not transgress,” says the Psalmist. Ps. 17:3 We have discussed ways that our mouth can transgress by speaking unkindly. Is it a transgression to fail to speak a cheerful word to a discouraged person? Our failure to do so is usually a result of lack of thoughtfulness, or laziness, or no real interest in the welfare of others. And this lack is a result of what? It is painful to admit, but this lack is a pre-occupation with *our own* needs and desires, which keep us from noticing the needs of *others*.

Recently I had occasion to commend someone for a beautifully executed task, and I shall never forget the response. “My dear,” she said with tears in her voice, “I needed that encouragement!” With a convicted heart I thought of many Scripture passages that instruct us to lift up one another with kind words, and of how seldom I think to do it. “Pleasant words are as an honeycomb, sweet to the soul, and health to the bones.” Pr, 16:24

“Heaviness in the heart of man maketh it stoop: but a good word maketh it glad.” Pr. 12:25 “The Lord God hath given me the tongue of the learned, that I should know how to speak a word in season to him that is weary ... He wakeneth mine ear to hear as the learned.” Is. 50:4 If we would have the tongue of the learned, we must learn something about those to whom we would minister. We must have our ears wakened. In other words, we need to talk less and listen more.

Kind ears

The natural companion of a kind tongue is a kind ear, and a person of true charm is first of all an expert listener. There is a vast difference between listening and simply keeping silent. A listener records, analyzes, and devises intelligent and interesting ways to respond to what he hears. To be a good listener one must have a genuine interest in others. A godly woman knows how to listen lovingly, patiently, and attentively, and her response will be thoughtful and concerned, demonstrating genuine interest. “The heart of the righteous studieth to answer.” Pr. 15:28 Many of us only “study” to say whatever we can about what interests

us most, and we listen by maintaining a polite silence until we can get the floor again to continue our me-myself-and-I monologue. Usually we are sadly unaware of the one-way nature of our communications.

It is important to distinguish between sincere praise and flattery, the determining difference being in the motive behind each. Flattery has a self-seeking goal, which is to ultimately work for the good of the one employing it, sometimes to the detriment of its object. Flattering praise is usually insincere and frequently exaggerated to the point of inaccuracy. The purpose of a true compliment

is to strengthen and encourage the one complimented. There is such a clean feeling in knowing that our praise of another flows from a sincere heart’s desire for that person’s good, and that our compliments are true and honest without a tinge of flattery.

We should remember when we are tempted to flatter someone that there is usually an ulterior motive lurking somewhere. It may be that we only want the other person’s approval of ourselves, but this is seeking to meet our own needs, not the other person’s. We should guard against trapping others or ourselves with flattery. Pr. 29:5 And we should be warned about those who entice and flatter us, and who tell us tales about others. They will probably amuse others with tales about us. Pr. 20:19

Remedies for the tongue

If we desire to have our tongues obey the law of kindness, God’s word has several suggestions as to how we might accomplish this. We should begin by asking God daily to prepare our hearts so that the answers or responses of our tongue would honor His name and do good to those we encounter throughout the day. Pr. 16:1 We should pray for a spirit of acceptance of others and their ways in order to avoid the temptation to be critical.

Enthusiasm is such good medicine for the soul! Nothing is more heartening than a hearty endorsement of one’s ideas. A friend of my mother-in-law said on the day of her funeral, “One thing I shall always remember about Dorothy is the enthusiastic way she responded to ideas. Her characteristic response was, ‘Yes, let’s!’” A congenial companion to enthusiasm is unqualified praise. A compliment with no “ifs,” “ands,” or “buts” is a rare jewel, and we should practice bestowing them more often.

*The purpose of a true
compliment is to strengthen
and encourage the one
complimented.*

A word in time ...

A spirit sensitive to the needs or particular circumstances of others is so important. In other words, don't sing merry songs to a person with a breaking heart. Pr. 25:20 And although it is very commendable to count one's blessings, we should never do it in the company of a person who is obviously undergoing great trial or testing.

It is not easy to accept criticism or advice, but a true friend is willing to hurt us, if in the end we will be helped by that advice. It is only his faithfulness as a friend that causes him to inflict these necessary wounds. Pr. 28:23 Each of us has the possibility of two applications here. If we sense a necessity to administer such wounds, we must be sure that God has directed it and that our motives are pure. We must pray for a meek spirit, using Galatians 6:1 as our guide and authority. Or if a friend sees needs in our lives and attempts to help us by first having to hurt us, we shall have to ask for special grace and humility from God, for a teachable spirit, and for objectivity sufficient to see our faults. These situations are often victory grounds for Satan.

The royal law

Up to here we have only dealt with the superficial meaning of our text. Have you ever heard of The Royal Law of LOVE? Read James 2:8. The basic truth of this lesson is that the law of kindness cannot be present in the tongue unless the law of love exists in the heart. "A good man out of the good treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is good ... for of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaketh." (Lu. 6:45) Whatever is in our heart will determine what will come out of our mouth.

Love is the watershed of life—everything falls on one side of it or the other. Either a person possesses love—the capacity to love—or he doesn't. And he either has the world's flimsy facsimile, or he has the shining pure gold of God's love, working for, and in, and through him. We are speaking here of divine love, as it has redeemed the souls of those who will receive it, and as it flows freely through them, warming and blessing the lives of those around the redeemed ones.

God's love

Love is too deep and broad and complex a subject to try to confine to a few pages or brief minutes of study. But we

should recognize that love is the essence of God, and that it is His will that it should be manifested in the lives of His children. The common denominator of all expressions of love is sacrifice. The prototype of this is God's gracious expression of love for us in the sacrificial incarnation and death of Christ. Every manifestation of real love involves giving, or the giving up of something. Loving others doesn't merely mean to put up with them, to refrain from criticizing them, or doing them any harm. "She will do him good, and not evil" teaches us that we must attempt to do those things that would be good for and helpful and pleasing to those we love. Often this means giving up something, or some of ourselves—of our energy, our time, or material resources.

Love's loved ones

Sometimes we think that in the area of love our greatest difficulty is in loving the unlovely, or those people we don't particularly even like. This is a problem. But many of us don't love those nearest and dearest to us as we should. This lack shows itself in two ways. First, we don't truly love them deeply and unselfishly and with hearts full of gratitude to God for them. Second, we tend to take for granted the quality and quantity of the love we do have, and assume that they do also, so we rarely express it. What should we do about this? If we recognize that this is true in our lives, we should confess it to God. Next, we can begin to ask Him daily to strengthen and increase our love for our husbands, children, parents, and others close to us, thanking Him for them. And then we can ask Him to help us discover fresh, creative ways to show our love.

Love must also be learned. It is easy to love some people—they are so winsome and gracious that we can't help loving them. But in the case of others, it is a strain. We recognize the need for an exercise of grace, and exercise is a good word, for it is something like work. If you believe there is a lack of real love for others in your life, why not try this:

1. Recognize that love is not an emotion; it is an act of will.
2. Recognize that love is not optional for the Christian. Christ commanded it. Read John 15:12, Mat-

Every
manifestation
of real love
involves
giving, or the
giving up of
something.

thew 22:39 and Matthew 5:44 and list three categories of people we are required to love. Now list any categories this leaves out. (Clue: there are none.)

3. Pray, specifically and generally, for love, God's love, to pour through you to others. Name those whom you do not love, confess this as sin, and ask God to

enable you to love them, to see and appreciate their good qualities; to be gracious to their faults. Name those whom you do love. Ask God to enable you to love them more; to find new and creative ways to express this love. (Note: there are very few wives who love and appreciate their husbands as they should.) Expect God to answer this prayer because He commanded it; therefore you know

No man can tame the tongue. But the Holy Spirit of God can ...

it is His will. He has promised to supply those things that we ask in His will. 1 Jn. 5:14-15

4. Act. Do loving, thoughtful things for others. Express appreciation and admiration for them. Tell them you love them. You will be surprised to discover within yourself a little floweret of love where you thought none could grow.

No man can tame the tongue. But the Holy Spirit of God can, and only He can. Every believer has the Holy Spirit dwelling within him,¹ and the fruit of the Spirit is love. But this love must be nurtured and cultivated and allowed to grow into something strong and useful and beautiful, as we surrender ourselves day by day, moment by moment, to the control of the Holy Spirit.

Practical applications

Read Proverbs 10:11-21, 31-32. What do these passages have to say about the mouth, lips, and tongue of the righteous or wise man? What do they say about the mouth or lips of the foolish man? ~*Unknown author*

This article was submitted to *The Heartbeat of the Remnant*, and due to a lack of proper filing, the name of the author is not known nor even who submitted it. If proper attribution is desired, please let us know and we will give proper acknowledgement in a future issue.

¹ Note that the Spirit dwells in every believer, but that does not mean that the Spirit dwells in every person who *thinks* he is a believer. Some people profess faith and then deduce that they are now filled with the Spirit because the Bible says that all believers have the Spirit ... when in fact their "faith" is void and they are in reality devoid of the Holy Ghost.

2nd Quarter 2013 Financial Report

Thank you for your support!



01/01/13 Beginning Balance	\$11,054.66
Receipts	
Tape/CD Ministry Donations	\$10,936.56
Remnant Subscription Donations	\$16,175.00
Total Receipts	\$27,111.56
Disbursements	
UPS & Postage	\$1,202.58
Tapes, Albums, CDs & Labels	\$4,504.29
Equipment & Software Purchases	\$1,013.26
Equipment Maintenance & Repairs	\$0.00
Mailing & Office Supplies	\$119.61
Rent	\$2,250.00
Telephone	\$817.08
Website Development & Maintenance	\$479.82
Building Improvements	\$0.00
Miscellaneous	\$142.58
Payroll Expense	\$7,515.00
Books & Catalogs	\$1,137.00
Remnant Publishing & Mailing	\$12,018.20
Total Disbursements	\$31,199.42
03/31/13 Ending Balance	\$6,966.80
Difference	-\$4,087.86



The Matthew Road to the Kingdom of Heaven

or

What Is Wrong with the "Romans Road to Salvation"

Joel Mahorter—British Columbia

You may have heard of the “Romans Road to Salvation,” a collection of verses from the letter of Paul to the Romans. It usually consists of at least some of the following verses, in roughly this order:

- “For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.” (Romans 3:23)
- “As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one.” (Romans 3:10)
- “For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.” (Romans 6:23)
- “But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.” (Romans 5:8)
- “That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.” (Romans 10:9)
- “For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.” (Romans 10:13)
- “Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” (Romans 5:1)

- “There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus.” (Romans 8:1) Note the last half of the verse is not quoted!
- “For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Romans 8:38-39)

People use these verses to present everything they think someone needs to know in order to “get saved” and have an assurance of getting to heaven. A person is usually told that all they must do is have faith (or believe) in who Jesus is, what He did by His death on the cross, and to accept His free gift of salvation. Often a person using “Romans Road” will mention the need to feel sorry for your sins and ask God for forgiveness, although the verses used do not mention this. Some will suggest that you must turn from your sins, although it is not common to hear a definition of what that really means. The person who is being shown the “Romans Road” is then commonly advised to pray a prayer asking Jesus to come into his heart and become his personal Savior. People who do that are usually assured that all of their sins, including the ones they have not yet committed, are already forgiven and that a place in heaven is assured for them. The people who use this and similar presentations would not say that a short presentation could have everything a person should know about being a Christian, but that it contains everything necessary to “get saved” and have assurance of going to heaven.

It does not seem to occur to many people who use the “Romans Road” that it is strange to try to present how to become a Christian ... but without ever referring to what Christ had to say on that topic. Likewise, few people seem to question the idea of asking someone to pray a prayer that Jesus never asked anyone to pray, or of offering an assurance that Jesus never offered anyone. Nor does it seem odd to many people to present a message supposedly about how to become a disciple of Jesus, using nothing but quotes from a letter written to people who were already disciples of Jesus. Sadly, even though Jesus had much to say on the topic, what He said is often not mentioned.

It is worth noting that a letter like Romans can be used to construct several different “roads,” all leading in different directions. That is not to say that Romans contains false information; it is just the reality of what can be done when taking a few small snippets out of context from a larger work. Even in the early days after Jesus, what Paul

said about salvation in his letters was being twisted, and this was leading people to destruction. 2 Peter 3:14-18 warns about this.

With those dangers in mind, here is a different “road,” one based on the words of Jesus from the Gospel of Matthew:

- “From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” (Matthew 4:17) Jesus began His preaching ministry with this call to repentance. God had always called people to turn away from sin. For those who do so,

the coming of Jesus brought a new opportunity. Now the kingdom of heaven was about to be established on earth.

- “For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.” (Matthew 5:20)

Jesus never told anyone that it was impossible to be righteous. Rather, He called people to live a righteousness that exceeded the righteousness of the Jewish religious leaders. As Jesus taught in the Sermon on the Mount, even the righteousness required by the Law of Moses

was not sufficient in God’s kingdom (see especially Matthew 5:21-48). Therefore, while announcing a new kingdom, Jesus also taught a new law.

- “Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.” (Matthew 7:13-14) The way that Jesus called people to is a difficult one. The easy way that only requires acceptance of some truths or good intentions without any real work or suffering is the way to destruction.

- “Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven.” (Matthew 7:21) Good words without obedience will not get a person into the kingdom of heaven. Jesus did not leave room for any doubt about who does the will of His father when He said the following: “But what think ye? A certain man had two sons; and he

came to the first, and said, Son, go work to day in my vineyard. He answered and said, I will not: but afterward he repented, and went. And he came to the second, and said likewise. And he answered and said, I go, sir: and went not. Whether of them twain did the will of his father?” (Matthew 21:28-31) To agree to do the will of the Father, and to actually do the will of the Father are two very different things.

- “And said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.” (Matthew 18:3)

Entry into the kingdom of heaven requires the simplicity and humility to accept what Jesus taught, like a young child would accept what his earthly father taught.

- “Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.” (Matthew 5:48) Being perfect or complete is not an option, but a demand. So many people think they cannot be perfect, but Jesus taught how it was possible: “And, behold, one came and said unto him, Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life? And he said

unto him, Why callest thou me good? there is none good but one, that is, God: but if thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments. He saith unto him, Which? Jesus said, Thou shalt do no murder, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Honour thy father and thy mother: and, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. The young man saith unto him, All these things have I kept from my youth up: what lack I yet? Jesus said unto him, If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me.” (Matthew 19:16-21) Again Jesus makes it clear that obtaining eternal life requires us to obey God. Jesus left us the example of simple obedience to His father and He calls us to follow Him in that. Good intentions alone will not get us where Jesus went. Jesus taught plainly what would be required of those who wanted to be His disciples and find the way to life.

Isn't it strange to try to present how to become a Christian ... but without ever referring to what Christ had to say on that topic?

- “Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it. For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul? For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then he shall reward every man according to his works.” (Matthew 16:24-27) Nothing less than true self-denial and self-inflicted death of our fleshly desires and following Jesus will lead to life. If we seek to keep our lives or the things we love in this world, then in the end we will lose our lives. We must really forsake everything, and not just the extremely wicked things. Jesus had to give up heaven and submit Himself to death before He could be resurrected. We must walk in His footsteps if we want to follow Him into His kingdom; there are no shortcuts.

If we live in the fear of God that comes from the knowledge that Jesus is going to come back to judge the living and the dead and repay us for what we have done, we will

be ready to face the trouble that Jesus faced: “Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you: and ye shall be hated of all nations for my name’s sake. And then shall many be offended, and shall betray one another, and shall hate one another. And many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many. And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold. But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved.” (Matthew 24:9-13)

The one who endures all these troubles and yet remains righteous will be saved in the end, but the one who turns back will face certain destruction. With that in mind we will heed the strong warning that Jesus gave: “Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come. But know this, that if the goodman of the house had known in what watch the thief would come, he would have watched, and would not have suffered his house to be broken up. Therefore be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh.” (Matthew 24:42-44)

If you are not able to present the gospel that you believe using the words of Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew, then you can be sure you have been deceived ...

Unlike “Romans Road” and similar presentations, this one will not end by giving you any assurances that Jesus did not give. The information presented above is possibly not enough for you to truly count the costs of following Jesus. Just from reading the verses above it may not be clear to you some of the specific ways that Jesus calls *you* to deny yourself and take up your cross. Perhaps you have anger against your brother and need to hear that Jesus taught that even angry words would put you in peril of hell (Matthew 5:21-22). Perhaps you lust after women and need to hear that Jesus said that even private lust was adultery and could cause you to be thrown into hell

(Matthew 5:27-30). Perhaps you are divorced and have been remarried while your first spouse is still living, and need to hear that Jesus said that you are committing adultery (Matthew 5:31-32). Perhaps you desire to defend your possessions, loved ones, or yourself from evil people, and you need to hear that Jesus said to love even your enemies and not to resist evildoers (Matthew 5:38-48). Perhaps you have chosen not to forgive someone and need to hear that Jesus taught that God will not forgive you if you do not forgive others (Matthew 6:14-15). Perhaps you want more things than you need and

need to hear that Jesus commanded you not to store up treasure on earth (Matthew 6:19-21). No prayer or belief or intention will do you any good if you do not follow the road of self-denial, suffering, and death that Jesus walked.

If the way presented here seems different than what you understood the way into the kingdom of heaven was like, then you would do well to read all of the Gospel of Matthew, and then the rest of the Gospels. Keeping in mind the danger mentioned previously, consider everything that Jesus had to say about entering into the kingdom of God and being ready for His return and judgment. If you are not able to present the gospel that you believe using the words of Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew, then you can be sure you have been deceived and that you believe a different gospel than Jesus taught. The same is true for the gospels of Mark, Luke, and John.

When you have understood Jesus’ message, then you will be ready to read Romans and all the other books of the New Testament. If you start with the Master first, you will find that Peter, John, Paul, James, and Jude all preached and walked the same “road” that Jesus did. ~



The Snare of Reactionism

Based on a sermon by R. M.

Submitted by Steve Yoder

Our Lord and Savior clothed Himself with humility. When wronged or challenged, He responded with a meek spirit. Can we, as God's children, refrain from reacting wrongly when we feel that the church or some individual has deceived us? If there is anything that "destabilizes" church life, I believe it is *reactions* to the things that come into our lives. I have personally seen the damage and negative effect—the snare—of reaction. And let me just say that I am as vulnerable to reaction as anyone.

Ephesians 5:15-18 gives us the following admonition: See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, Redeeming the time, because the days are evil. Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is. And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit.

My concern and desire is that we be controlled by the Holy Spirit and that nothing contaminates or takes away from that control. Reactionism is one of those things that can and will come into our lives and control our actions, thoughts, and direction. Let's compare the above verse with a person living in reaction.

We are told to "walk circumspectly." A reactionary person does not do this, but rather walks as a fool who is only focused on one thing. Others see his folly, but he cannot see it.

Next, the verses tell us "understanding what the will of the Lord is." Reactionism is like a remote control hooked to our mind, controlling our every action, rather than the Holy Spirit leading us into the will of the Lord.

Then we are told, "be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess." Although the verse specifically mentions wine, I think we could replace the word "wine" with anything that causes us to not think soberly or soundly. Reactionism is an intoxication; we become obsessed with something and it controls our thinking and our actions.

Action in reverse

The dictionary defines "reaction" as "a reverse or opposing action." Let's look at four points about this reversing or opposing action:

1. What reaction is.
2. Why we react.
3. The result of reaction.
4. Avoiding reaction.

As we look at reactionism, we are going to use the Pharisees as an example. The Pharisees formed as a group about a century and a half before the coming of Christ. They came together as a result of problems, real problems. After the captivity, the Jewish people experienced many ups and downs between the time of Ezra and Christ. At the return to Jerusalem with Ezra, it appears that the scribes and the priests worked in unison. But as time went on, the scribes developed into their own denomination within Judaism and became known as the Pharisees. They developed as a response to a tendency within Judaism to leave out details of the ceremonial law. As this tendency developed, some concerned people got together and said, "We're going to fix this problem. We're going to keep the Law!"

They probably had good intentions, but they ended up as a reactionary movement because of what they became 150 years later. When Messiah came, they didn't (as a whole) recognize Him because of their reactionary tendencies. This is very sad because that is the last place they would have originally wanted to go.

How did that happen?

When the Pharisees formed as a group, they were from the scribes, and the Sadducees were from the priests. It appears that during the time of the Greek occupation of Israel, the observance of the ceremonial law was at a low ebb among the chief priests and rulers of the people. The Pharisee movement was formed as a response to this neg-

ligence. Their focus was to keep the law that the priests and rulers were holding in low esteem.

What is reaction?

One form of reaction is when two incompatible things try to mix. Certain chemicals react when they come in contact. In fact, some chemical reactions cause certain substances to change into some other substance.

The same thing can happen to people; when we react, we actually become something we didn't start out being. Something or someone makes a tremendous impression on us and we decide—consciously or subconsciously—that we will NEVER do THAT!

The result is a reaction that changes our lives. The problem is not in the “action,” but in the “re-” part of reaction. When problems occur, we should act, not react.

Why we react

We react because we see the effect of someone's error and we want to avoid those effects. We tend to react harder against those who are closer to us, and even more so if their wrongdoing is against us. When we look at the results of someone else's wrongdoing, and add a little bit of self-righteousness ... that is where I believe the “re-” in reaction comes from. A little bit of self, mixed with someone doing us wrong, and BANG, we get that “reaction.”

On the other hand, if we take a picture of someone's life—the whole picture—and add the Holy Spirit, we will end up with “action.” The equations look like this:

Effect of someone's negative action on our life
+ self in our life
reaction

Effect of someone's negative action on our life
+ Holy Spirit
action

We react against many people, but more so if the person(s) is/are close to us: fathers, mothers, our bishop, ministers, church, or church groups. Think of your worst enemy, and then think about whether you have any reaction against them. We become more vulnerable to reaction when we experience some sort of break with people we have been associated with in the past. Not all breaks with the past, of course, are wrong. Church divisions are ripe breeding grounds for reactionism. We see it happen so often: someone leaves a church and they start making bad choices and changes, and you have to wonder, “Where will they stop?” This is often because of reactionism against their past.

The results of reactionism

We will look at the Pharisees for results, but let's remember to look at ourselves as we consider these things. The first result is *inconsistency*. Those in reaction may be really strong on one point, but the next one they totally miss. Jesus spoke of this in Matthew 23:4 where the Pharisees bound heavy burdens on people but would not help them carry the load.

The next result of reactionism is *blindness*. The Pharisees could see gnats really well, but missed the camels. This becomes a bondage, but the person in bondage will not even know it. They say, “THIS is what controls THEM, and I'M NOT going to let IT happen to me. Let all THAT go; don't mess with IT.”

Sad to say, THIS, THAT, and IT actually ends up controlling the person trying to stay away from THIS, THAT, and IT, because they are not able to unbiasedly evaluate THIS, THAT, and IT. They say, “I can't do THIS, because back there, those people did THAT.” So “those people's” THAT ends up controlling the person's decisions.

The third result of reactionism is *self-defense*. Luke 10:25-29 gives us a good example of this. Assuming that this was a Pharisee (which it may not have been), we see someone who may have had such a concern for the ceremonial law that he could not see the practical application of loving his neighbor. When Jesus asked him a simple question, he (v. 29) tried to “justify himself” and legalistically asked “who is my neighbor?”

The fourth result of reactionism is an *increasing self-righteousness* as seen in Luke 18 with the Pharisee and the publican. We can think ourselves to be righteous because we look at those we are reacting against and say, “We are NOT like THAT!” And of course, “THAT” refers to something bad in the other person, something we are reacting against.

The fifth result of reacting is *the inability to benefit from the input of others*. When we react we tend to compare ourselves to others and that makes us immune to their input. So, we do not get the help that God is trying to give us through another brother ... or from other churches that we are reacting against.

The sixth result of reaction is *hypocrisy*. Matthew 23:27-28 talks about the Pharisees “appearing to be righteous.” The reason reactionism brings hypocrisy is because our life is led by ulterior motives, not led by the Holy Spirit. We are blinded into thinking we are something that we are not, because all we can see is that we are NOT LIKE THEM, and THEY ARE WRONG.

The seventh result of reactionism is that *we end up with the same fruit of the very people we are trying not*

to be like. Have you ever seen that, and wondered how it could be? Someone trying not to be like another person or group, yet ending up with the same fruit? The reason is simple: neither one is led by the Spirit, so neither one has the fruit of the Spirit.

For example, suppose that my father was a strong disciplinarian and I said that I am never going to act like he did. He was unbalanced in relation to discipline, and I end up unbalanced in relation to love. So I don't discipline my children as I ought. The result is basically the same: a lack of relationship, a hardening of the children, and a rebelliousness of the same. That is why we cannot afford to react. We CANNOT afford it!

We may have a legalistic bishop or a legalistic church, and we come out of it and think, "We are never going to be legalistic!" Then we end up being legalistic ... it's just one of those laws of nature, so to speak. This happens because we have taken our focus off of God and put it on *not being like them*. When our focus gets off of God, we will become legalistic because we are not being led by the Spirit.

Avoiding reaction

In one sense, we can't altogether avoid reaction. But we *can* minimize the results. The only way to avoid reaction is to be rid of all self. Maybe a better way to say it is to say that once we think we are totally rid of all reaction then we probably are not. We can allow God to neutralize our past reactions by letting Him lead us from here on out by His Spirit. There are several points to help us in this.

First, we need to learn humility. Some of the Pharisees recognized Jesus when He came, and I believe these were the humble ones. What made Nicodemus, Joseph of Arimathea, and Gamaliel recognize the Messiah? I believe humility paid a large role in that!

Galatians 6:3 tells us, "For if a man think himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceiveth himself." Paul needed to say that because—even though it is an obvious truth—we don't always recognize it. Humility opens the door for us, and pride closes it.

Secondly—and may I add that these three points are a package, you can't have one without the others—we need to learn to appreciate those people who we don't appreciate ... those who have done us harm in the past. That does not mean we just ignore the things they have done, but we need to look at the good they have done to us as well. Parents, church leaders, teachers, other church fellowships ... whoever they may be that you feel "missed

it." Find out where they "hit it!" And, appreciate them for that. This point and humility go hand in hand. God can bless this kind of action and use it to help neutralize any reaction of the past.

Thirdly—and this follows on the heels of the previous point—thank God AND thank THEM for the influence they have had on your life. It may be one of the most difficult things we have ever done. If we live in these three points, we can be released from the control of reactionism. The Holy Spirit can enter our lives and control us.

Joseph's example

In closing I would like to look at the story of Joseph and his brothers in Genesis 50. Joseph's brothers had abused him; in fact, abused and rejected in unquestionable terms.

But notice what happened ... Joseph actually learned to appreciate those very abusive brethren. And he thanked God for it! Genesis 50:15-21:

And when Joseph's brethren saw that their father was dead, they said, Joseph will peradventure hate us, and will certainly requite us all the evil which we did unto him. And they sent a messenger unto Joseph, saying, Thy father did command before he died, saying, So shall ye say unto Joseph, Forgive,

I pray thee now, the trespass of thy brethren, and their sin; for they did unto thee evil: and now, we pray thee, forgive the trespass of the servants of the God of thy father.

Now let's look at Joseph's response. Notice that he does not just ignore the fact that they abused him, but it does not control his response in any way. This liberated him to say and do the following:

And Joseph wept when they spake unto him. And his brethren also went and fell down before his face; and they said, Behold, we be thy servants. And Joseph said unto them, Fear not: for am I in the place of God? But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive. Now therefore fear ye not: I will nourish you, and your little ones. And he comforted them, and spake kindly unto them.

If we can act toward our abusers the same way that Joseph acted toward his brothers, then we can be delivered from reaction and be a blessing to all around us! ~

It is easier to see reaction in others than to see it in ourselves.

God and the Swearing of Oaths

By Andrew V. Ste. Marie

“I am content.”

A twenty-four-year-old young man stood before the city council of colonial New York City and said these words. What was he content with? He was content to be put back in jail. For what cause? For refusing to disobey the words of Jesus.

Early in 1745, young David Zeisberger had set off with Christian Frederick Post to learn the language of the Mohawk Indians. The two young Moravian missionaries were arrested and charged with refusing to swear an oath of loyalty to the King of England. The colony of New York had a new law which stated that “Every Vagrant Preacher, Moravian, Disguised Papist [Roman Catholic], or any other person presuming to reside among and teach the Indians” who had no license and had not taken the oath “shall be treated as a person taking upon him to seduce the Indians from his Majesty’s interest.” The council read the new law to David, and asked him if he would take the oath. He replied, “I hope the honorable Council will not force me to do it.” They said, “We will not constrain you; you may let it alone if it is against your conscience; but you will have to go to prison again.”

“I am content,” David told them. So back into jail he went, with his companion, for a total of fifty-one days. “We count it an honor to suffer for the Saviour’s sake,” David wrote.

These two Moravians sat in a New York prison for standing against the swearing of oaths. For others, refusal to swear has led to death. How does God view the swearing of oaths? Is swearing really *that* bad – or might it be, as some suggest, an act of worship which is highly pleasing to God? What does Jesus say?

What is an oath?

Before discussing whether oaths are right, we must first understand what oaths are. Those who defend the swearing of oaths define an oath as “calling God to witness to the truth of a statement.” (We will see why they define it this way later.) However, Jesus had a different definition of oaths in Matthew 23:16-22.

In this passage, Jesus is rebuking the Pharisees for making rules concerning which oaths could be broken without guilt and which ones had to be kept inviolable. Notice what the Pharisees were swearing by: the temple,

the gold of the temple, the altar, and the gift on the altar. Obviously, these were oaths, and Jesus treated them as such. However, none of them were “calling God to witness”! We see then that this cannot be the true definition of an oath. There are two parts to an oath: 1) the oath itself (“I swear”) and 2) the confirmation: what is being sworn by. People swear by many things, for instance, “I swear to God” or “I swear by my mother’s grave.” Some even swear without a confirmation, just saying “I swear that...” There are the judicial oaths in courts, service oaths for public office or military service, and the Hippocratic oath for medical professionals. These are all oaths. The writer of the book of Hebrews affirms that oaths are sworn by something greater than the swearer and are used for confirmation of something asserted: “For men verily swear by the greater: and an oath for confirmation *is* to them an end of all strife” (Hebrews 6:16). We see in this verse that the purpose of oaths is for confirmation of a statement based on the authority or weight of something greater than the swearer.

First oath in the Bible

The first recorded oath in the Bible was given by a godly man, Abraham. In Genesis 21:22-31, we read the story including the following:

And Abraham said, I will swear ... And Abraham took sheep and oxen, and gave them unto Abimelech; and both of them made a covenant ... Wherefore he called that place Beersheba; because there they sware both of them.

The Law of Moses

Amid the flames, clouds, smoke, and trumpeting on Mount Sinai, God gave a covenant to Moses to give to the people of Israel. This law would be the standard of righteousness until the Messiah came to replace it. The Mosaic Law has plenty to say about oaths, and it is essential to understand exactly what the Law allowed and did not allow when we are discussing the subject of oaths.

Under the Law of Moses, oaths were permitted, and the children of Israel made extensive use of them in Old Testament times. In fact, under certain circumstances, the Law actually commanded the use of oaths. In Exodus 22:10-11, we read:

If a man deliver unto his neighbour an ass, or an ox, or a sheep, or any beast, to keep; and it die, or be hurt, or driven away, no man seeing *it*: *Then* shall an oath of the LORD be between them both ...

In this passage, we learn that if the animal was lost to the owner in some way, the man who was keeping it was to swear an oath that he was not guilty of stealing or destroy-

ing his neighbor's animal. This oath released him from being required to replace the animal for his neighbor. The neighbor was required to accept the oath as confirmation that his neighbor was innocent.

In the book of Deuteronomy 6:13-15 and 10:20-21, God includes swearing by His Name as part of the service which He desired from the Israelites and mentions it in the context of a rejection of idolatry.

Thou shalt fear the LORD thy God, and serve him, and shalt swear by his name. (Deuteronomy 6:13-15).

Thou shalt fear the LORD thy God; him shalt thou serve, and to him shalt thou cleave, and swear by his name. (Deuteronomy 10:20-21).

Oaths were also required in the service of the priests. Numbers 5 records what was to be done with a woman who was suspected by her husband of unfaithfulness. She was to be brought to the priest, who was to perform a ceremony to allow the Lord to reveal whether she was guilty or innocent. Part of this ceremony involved an oath:

And the priest shall charge her by an oath ... (Numbers 5:19-22).

Not only were oaths permitted and commanded in the Mosaic Law, God Himself made use of oaths on more than one occasion. For instance, in Jeremiah 22:5, God declares: "But if ye will not hear these words, I swear by myself, saith the LORD, that this house shall become a desolation." In Exodus 17, after a battle between the Israelites and the Amalekites, Moses built an altar and called it Jehovahnissi, "Because the LORD hath sworn that the LORD will have war with Amalek from generation to generation" (Exodus 17:16). (See also Deuteronomy 7:8; Psalm 110:4; Hebrews 6:13, 17; Isaiah 45:23).

So we see that not only were oaths permitted under the Law of Moses, they were actually required in some circumstances, and God Himself swore. Nevertheless, there were restrictions which were applied even under the Mosaic Law which are important to understand.

Restrictions on swearing

The Law of Moses strictly forbade false oaths—swearing to something which was not true, or swearing that a person would do something and then not doing it. If a man swore to do something and was unable to perform it, the Law considered it sin and required that he bring a trespass offering to the priest. Leviticus 5:4-6 and Numbers 30:1-2 speak of this, as well as swearing falsely in Leviticus 6:2-5 and 19:12.

The prophets, who called the people to return to the Lord and repent of their transgressions, also spoke against false oaths. Zechariah includes false oaths in a list of things which God declares that He hates.

These *are* the things that ye shall do; Speak ye every man the truth to his neighbour; execute the judgment of truth and peace in your gates: And let none of you imagine evil in your hearts against his neighbour; and love no false oath: for all these *are things* that I hate, saith the LORD (Zechariah 8:16-17).

In Malachi 3:5, those who swear falsely are put in the same list with sorcerers and adulterers. Joshua, near the end of his life, warned against swearing by the names of false gods.

That ye come not among these nations, these that remain among you; neither make mention of the name of their gods, nor cause to swear *by them*, neither serve them, nor bow yourselves unto them: But cleave unto the LORD your God, as ye have done unto this day (Joshua 23:7-8).

As can be seen, oaths were not a light thing among the ancient Israelites: they took oaths very seriously. An example of this is found in I Samuel 14. King Saul, in the middle of a battle with the Philistines, swore an oath: "Cursed *be* the man that eateth *any* food until evening, that I may be avenged on mine enemies" (1 Samuel 14:24). All the people, who "feared the oath" (verse 26), refrained from eating anything, even when passing by a piece of honeycomb dropped from the hive—except Jonathan, who had not heard of his father's oath. He nearly lost his life for eating when his father had rashly cursed anyone who ate that day.

Oaths were taken so seriously that any oath or vow which a woman made was subject to the approval of her husband or father, who could nullify her oath or vow if he so chose (Numbers 30:3-16). So we see that with some important exceptions, oaths were permitted and even required under the Old Covenant. But the day came when the reign of the Law of Moses ended.

A new kingdom

"Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand," cried John the Baptist (Matthew 3:2). People from all over Judaea flocked to hear this man, dressed in camel's hair, preach about the coming of the new kingdom. Then one day John greeted the King himself with these words: "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world" (John 1:29b). "The law and the prophets were until John," Jesus later said; "since that time the kingdom of God is preached, and every man presseth into it" (Luke 16:16). The reign of Moses' Law had ended, and the King was here to establish the laws by which His kingdom would operate. Among the laws which He set up was a radically different standard on the swearing of oaths.

Jesus' words on oaths

Jesus addressed the subject of oaths in the most influential sermon of all time, the Sermon on the Mount. In Matthew 5:33-37, we read:

Again, ye have heard that it hath been said by them of old time, Thou shalt not forswear thyself, but shalt perform unto the Lord thine oaths: But I say unto you, Swear not at all; neither by heaven; for it is God's throne: Nor by the earth; for it is his footstool: neither by Jerusalem; for it is the city of the great King. Neither shalt thou swear by thy head, because thou canst not make one hair white or black. But let your communication be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay: for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil.

Jesus made clear the radical new standard which He was requiring of those in His Kingdom—no oaths at all, for any purpose, in any way. “Swear not at all,” has nothing unclear about it.

James' words on swearing

Jesus was not the only one to instruct the citizens of the kingdom of God to abstain from swearing. The Apostle James wrote:

But above all things, my brethren, swear not, neither by heaven, neither by the earth, neither by any other oath: but let your yea be yea; and *your* nay, nay; lest ye fall into condemnation (James 5:12).

In this verse, we again find the answer to the question “does God want His children to swear oaths?” James tells us “swear not,” and then instructs us to avoid swearing by heaven, earth, or “by any other oath.” “Any other” would include swearing by God Himself.

This verse also gives us the answer to the question “is the subject of swearing really all that important?” The letter of James discusses many topics—responding to the trials of life, partiality, the relationship of faith and works, controlling our tongues, strife, separation from the world, wealth, etc. These are undoubtedly important issues. Nevertheless, when he arrives at the topic of swearing, he begins with “But above all things, my brethren” ... in other words, this one topic is more important than anything else discussed in the entire book!

What were they forbidding?

In spite of the clear instructions given by Jesus and James, there are some today—and there have been some through the centuries—who insist that the swearing of oaths is permissible, or perhaps even highly pleasing to God. They insist that what Jesus and James were actually forbidding was only false and frivolous oaths—not any oath at all. This view has some serious problems.

First, if they meant to forbid only false and frivolous oaths, why did they not say that they were forbidding false and frivolous oaths? Secondly, why did they use such absolute language: “Swear not at all,” “swear not ... by any other oath”? Thirdly, Jesus was clearly following the pattern of the other sections in the Sermon on the Mount where He raised the standards of the Law of Moses (“Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time ... but I say unto you”). The Law of Moses forbade false oaths, as we have seen; if Jesus only forbade false oaths, He would not have raised the standard at all.

Did Paul swear?

Those who defend the swearing of oaths point to the epistles of Paul, claiming that he swore several times in his writings. The verses quoted here are used to support this claim:

- For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his son, that without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers (Ro. 1:9).
- I say the truth in Christ, I lie not, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Ghost (Ro. 9:1).
- But *as* God *is* true, our word toward you was not yea and nay (2 Corinthians 1:18).
- Moreover I call God for a record upon my soul, that to spare you I came not as yet unto Corinth (2 Corinthians 1:23).
- The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which is blessed for evermore, knoweth that I lie not (2 Corinthians 11:31).
- Now the things which I write unto you, behold, before God, I lie not (Galatians 1:20).
- For God is my record, how greatly I long after you all in the bowels of Jesus Christ (Philippians 1:8).
- For neither at any time used we flattering words, as ye know, nor a cloke of covetousness; God *is* witness (I Thessalonians 2:5).
- Whereunto I am ordained a preacher, and an apostle, (I speak the truth in Christ, *and* lie not;) a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and verity (1 Ti. 2:7).

What is it in these verses which lead some to believe that the Apostle Paul swore oaths? Do you remember that those who defend the swearing of oaths define an oath as “calling on God for confirmation”? In all of these verses, Paul calls on God to confirm what he is saying. Those who defend oaths, then, take these statements as oaths, and as confirmation that it is perfectly acceptable to God to swear oaths. But God is not the author of confusion.

As we pointed out before, their definition of the word oath is faulty, and thus their conclusion regarding these

verses is also faulty. Although Paul did call on God to confirm his words, he did not use oaths (saying “I swear”).

Whenever a teaching of Jesus seems to be contradicted by Paul, we must find a way to harmonize the two which leaves Jesus’ words supreme—not the other way around. Jesus is the King, and the servant is not greater than his master (John 13:16, 15:20)—even if that servant is the great Apostle Paul. Of course, Paul’s writings never do contradict Jesus’ words.

The early church on oaths

We have seen that whereas the Old Covenant allowed and even required some oaths, they are strictly forbidden under the New Covenant of Jesus Christ. The early Christians of the first two generations after the apostles held to this view.

Justin Martyr, about the year 160 A.D., wrote, “And with regard to our not swearing at all, and always speaking the truth, He commanded as follows: ‘Swear not at all.’” Irenaeus (student of Polycarp, who was a student of John the Apostle) wrote: “He commanded them not only not to swear falsely, but not even to swear at all.” Tertullian wrote, “Of perjury I am silent, since even swearing is not lawful.”

The early Anabaptists

The early Anabaptists (Dutch Mennonites, Swiss Brethren, and Hutterites) took firm stands against the swearing of oaths. Their writings on the subject are well worth reading, because they faced several of the same objections which we do today when we insist on obedience to Christ’s teachings on this subject.

The Schleithem Confession (written 1527), the earliest Anabaptist confession of faith, was written by the Swiss Brethren and took a strong stand against oaths:

We are agreed as follows concerning the oath: The oath is a confirmation among those who are quarreling or making promises. In the Law it is commanded to be performed in God’s Name, but only in truth, not falsely. Christ, who teaches the perfection of the Law, prohibits all swearing to His [followers], whether true or false,—neither by heaven, nor by the earth, nor by Jerusalem, nor by our head,—and that for the reason which He shortly thereafter gives, For you are not able to make one hair white or black. So you see it is for this reason that all swearing is forbidden: we cannot fulfill that which we promise when we swear, for we cannot change [even] the very least thing on us.

Now there are some who do not give credence to the simple command of God, but object with this question: Well now, did not God swear to Abraham

by Himself (since He was God) when He promised him that He would be with him and that He would be his God if he would keep His commandments,—why then should I not also swear when I promise to someone? Answer: Hear what the Scripture says: God, since He wished more abundantly to show unto the heirs the immutability of His counsel, inserted an oath, that by two immutable things (in which it is impossible for God to lie) we might have a strong consolation. Observe the meaning of this Scripture: What God forbids you to do, He has power to do, for everything is possible for Him. God swore an oath to Abraham, says the Scripture, so that He might show that His counsel is immutable. That is, no one can withstand nor thwart His will; therefore He can keep His oath. But we can do nothing, as is said above by Christ, to keep or perform [our oaths]: therefore we shall not swear at all.

Then others further say as follows: It is not forbidden of God to swear in the New Testament, when it is actually commanded in the Old, but it is forbidden only to swear by heaven, earth, Jerusalem and our head. Answer: Hear the Scripture, He who swears by heaven swears by God’s throne and by Him who sitteth thereon. Observe: it is forbidden to swear by heaven, which is only the throne of God: how much more is it forbidden [to swear] by God Himself! Ye fools and blind, which is greater, the throne or Him that sitteth thereon?

Menno Simons, in a book which he wrote against Reformed theologian Martin Micron, wrote:

That these things are so your unscriptural glosses [comments, explanations] concerning the oath make plain. Christ says, Ye have heard that it hath been said by them of old time, Thou shalt not forswear thyself, but shalt perform unto the Lord thine oaths; but I say unto you, Swear not at all; neither by heaven, for it is God’s throne: nor by the earth; for it is his footstool. Matt. 5:33-35. And you, Micron, say that nothing but light-minded, false oaths are hereby prohibited, as if Moses allowed Israel to swear light-mindedly and falsely, and that Christ under the New Testament merely forbade these, notwithstanding that all intelligent readers know that it was not merely allowed Israel to swear truly but it was also commanded them to do so. Lev. 19:12; Deut. 10:20.

If the Israelites then, as you hold, had the liberty in this matter that we have, and if it be such a glorious thing and an honor to God rightly to swear by the name of God, as you make bold to lie against

your God, then tell me (Dear Micron) why Wisdom did not say, You have heard that it hath been said to them of old, Thou shalt not forswear thyself, and I say the same thing. Instead Christ says, Moses commanded not to forswear thyself, but I say unto you, Thou shalt not swear at all.

In another book, Menno wrote:

Nearly everything which is transacted before the magistracy must be affirmed by an oath, although the Lord has so plainly forbidden the swearing of oaths to all Christians. Matt. 5:34 ... He has plainly forbidden us to swear, and pointed us to yea and nay alone. Therefore it is that through fear of God we do not swear, nor dare to swear, though we must hear and suffer much on that account from the world ... it should be observed that Christ Jesus does not in the New Testament point His disciples to the Law in regard to the matter of swearing—the dispensation of imperfectness which allowed swearing, but He points us now from the Law to yea and nay, as to the dispensation of perfectness, saying, Ye have heard that it hath been said by them of old time (that is, to the fathers under the law by Moses), Thou shalt not forswear thyself, but shalt perform unto the Lord thine oaths (that is, thou shalt swear truly and fulfill thine oath): but I (Christ) say unto you my disciples, Swear not at all (that is, neither truly nor falsely), neither by heaven, for it is God's throne, nor by the earth, for it is his footstool, neither by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. Neither shalt thou swear by thy head because thou canst not make one hair white or black. But let your communication be yea, yea; nay, nay; for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil. Here you have Christ's own doctrine and ordinance concerning swearing.

Peter Reidemann, an early Hutterite leader, wrote:

Therefore Christ, in order to drive away the shadows that the light of truth—which light He is Himself—may shine upon us, cometh and saith, 'Ye have heard that it hath been said to them of old: Thou shalt swear no false oath but shalt perform thine oath unto God. But I say unto you that ye swear not at all; neither by heaven; for it is God's throne: nor by the earth; for it is his footstool: nor by Jerusalem; for it is the city of the great King. Neither shalt thou swear by thy head, because thou canst not make one hair white or black. But let your yea be yea; and your nay, nay: for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil'—that is the devil.

Now, if one should say, as they all interpret it, false and superficial swearing is forbidden, but when one sweareth out of love, necessity, and the profit of one's neighbour, it is well done and not wrong—this happeneth when human reason goeth before the knowledge of God, and where human cleverness desireth to rule over the Spirit of God, and not allow itself to be controlled by the same. For just so did Eve look at the forbidden fruit, and chose the same at the counsel of the serpent, which she followed more than the counsel of God, therefore was she deceived by its cunning and led into death. So it is still: whosoever will please men cannot be Christ's servant. For truly here one cannot let reason rule or twist the scriptures in accordance with human presumption or opinion, for that is futile, but one must give God the honor and leave his command unaltered ... Therefore saith James, 'Above all things, dear brothers, swear not, neither by heaven, neither by the earth, neither by any other oath: but let your yea be yea; and your nay, nay; lest ye fall into hypocrisy.' Here James will have no oath at all, whether small or great, to avoid hypocrisy. Therefore, let men twist it as they will and dress it up and adorn it as they may, no good will be found in human swearing, for Christ himself saith, 'Let your speech be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay: for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil.' The evil one, however, is the devil, that teareth good from the heart of men and planteth evil.

The Dortrecht Confession (also known as the 18 Articles of Faith), written by the Dutch Mennonites in 1632, states in Article 15:

Regarding the swearing of oaths, we believe and confess, that the Lord Jesus has dissuaded his followers from and forbidden them the same; that is, that he commanded them to 'swear not at all,' but that their 'Yea' should be 'yea' and their 'Nay nay.' From which we understand that all oaths, high and low, are forbidden; and that instead of them we are to confirm all our promises and covenants, declarations and testimonies of all matters, merely with 'Yea that is yea,' and 'Nay that is nay;' and that we are to perform and fulfill at all times, and in all things, to everyone, every promise and obligation to which we thus affirm, as faithfully as if we had confirmed it with the most solemn oath. And if we thus do, we have confidence that no one—not even the government itself—will have just cause to require more of us. Matt. 5:34-37; James 5:12; II Cor. 1:17.

Application for today

To take a stand against swearing oaths is, at first glance, not nearly as costly a decision today as it was for the early Anabaptists. They decided to stand with Christ on this issue at risk of life and limb. Today, if we want to take a stand against oath-swearing, we simply ask to affirm instead of swear if necessary, and no one seems to care. Nevertheless, Jesus' teachings about oaths ought to affect our lives profoundly.

Jesus wants our yes to be yes and our no to be no. James says the same thing. Our speech ought to be so reliable that we do not need oaths to confirm what we say. We should be known as honest people because Jesus has transformed our lives. We do not need oaths anymore because everyone knows that whatever we say will be true and reliable.

We also must be careful in our everyday speech to avoid oaths. Interjecting "I swear" into a conversation is an oath, a violation of the command of Jesus Christ. Such expressions as "by George," "by Jove," or even "by golly" are abbreviated oaths—the confirmation without the swearing. If we use these expressions, perceptive people will not take us seriously when we say we do not believe in swearing oaths. Furthermore, they are, in and of themselves, violations of Jesus' commandments and therefore sin.

Lying and exaggeration must be completely eradicated from our speech. Otherwise, we open ourselves up to the criticism that we refuse to swear because we know we are not telling the truth. May such things never be heard. Rather, may all know that we refuse to swear oaths because we have accepted the kingdom of God, with its high standard of honesty, and are following the commands and teachings of Christ and the Apostles which forbid oaths—and everything we say is scrupulously honest and, as God grants power, within the standards of righteousness which He has set for His kingdom.

May we earnestly pray to God that He would tame our tongues. "But the tongue can no man tame; *it is* an unruly evil, full of deadly poison" (James 3:8). God can tame it for us, and a tamed tongue must be one of the most remarkable proofs of a regenerated life. "For in many things we offend all. If any man offend not in word, the same *is* a perfect man, *and* able also to bridle the whole body" (James 3:2). ~

This article was slightly abridged to make it fit into the available space in this issue.

Nothing of major importance was removed.

Coca-Cola and the King

Dean Taylor

A few years ago when Daniel Kenaston, a missionary in West Africa, was home on furlough, he preached a sermon that really made me think. He told of a journey that he took deep into the bush to reach a remote African tribe. The tribe was so secluded that it appeared as if no white man had ever been there. When Daniel arrived the villagers were happy to see him, and they wanted to take Daniel to meet their king. Daniel was very excited and honored by this.

As he came closer to the king's chair his mind was spinning, thinking about what the meeting would be like. After he went through all the ceremonial protocol that is typical for that culture, the king said that he wanted to give Daniel a gift. Daniel was honored.

The king sent his servant back to get the gift. As the servant came closer, Daniel noticed that he had a black bag in his hand. He wondered, "What could possibly be in that bag?" When Daniel considered how remote this tribe was, it made him really curious about what the gift could possibly be. The servant handed the bag to the king, and the king slowly pulled the gift out of the bag. Daniel couldn't believe it! To his surprise, the gift was nothing but an empty Coca-Cola bottle.

Daniel smiled and thanked the king for the gift, but when he got back home the Lord smote his heart. Pondering the gift and considering how utterly remote the tribe was, Daniel thought, "How terrible it is that Coca-Cola got to this remote, un-reached African tribe before the gospel did."

If only the church would have the dedication and persistence that commercial America has, we could circle the globe with the Gospel many times over. God give us a burden for the lost that surpasses that of American consumerism! ~


The Heartbeat of

The Remnant

Ephrata Christian Fellowship
400 W. Main Street Ste. 1, Ephrata, PA 17522

Address Service Requested

Nonprofit
US Postage
Paid
Erie, PA
Permit #227



I read in a book that a man called
Christ went about doing good.
It is very disconcerting to me that I am
so easily satisfied with just going about.

-Toyohiko Kagawa