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The Secret of the Strength

— by Peter Hoover

CHAPTER 15 On to Visible Order

Where the Werra flows between the Thuringer Forest and the highlands of the Rhön, the castle of the knights of Bibra-Schwebenheim overshadowed the little house of Johannes Hut, his wife, and his four children. Johannes (they called him Hans) bound books and sold them. He worked on a commission for the knights and travelled far and wide selling the books he bound.

In 1524, while passing through the city of Weißenfels in Sachsen-Anhalt, Hans Hut got into a discussion with a miller, a tailor, and a wool weaver. They talked about infant baptism. The longer they talked and compared what the Scriptures said, the better Hans could see that Christ wanted believers, not babies, to be baptized. When his wife gave birth to a baby shortly afterward, they decided to keep him at home.

The priest and the townspeople learned about this and called for a public dispute. The judges declared Hans the “loser” in the dispute and gave him eight days to leave Thüring-

en. With his wife and five children, and with their belongings tied up in bags on their backs, the Hut family set out for Nürnberg. There they met Hans Denck. They rented a house and Hans Hut continued to travel around selling books. On May 15, 1525, he found himself in the city of Frankenhäusen when the peasants, led by Thomas Müntzer, revolted and fell in bloody chaos before the armies of the German princes. Hans saw that armed revolt was not Jesus’ way, and that Thomas Müntzer’s followers had failed to build on earth a picture of the Kingdom of Heaven. So on May 26, 1526, in a little house by the gate of the Holy Cross in Augsburg, he asked Hans Denck to baptize him-and Jesus’ cause in southern Germany gained one of its most enthusiastic promoters.

A Visible Church

Hans Hut began to baptize others wherever he went. Many of those he baptized, he ordained at once and sent out as messengers to keep on baptizing. But he did not promote a vague, “spiritualistic” Christianity. Soon after he became part of the Anabaptist movement he wrote:

When there are a number of Christians who have gone the way of the cross, suffering, and sorrow, and who have gotten tied together in a covenant, they become one congregation and one body in Christ—a visible church community.

In the Lord’s church, all goodness, mercy, praise, glory, and honor appear in the Holy Spirit. All things are held in common: nothing is private property.... We prove our covenant by giving ourselves to Christ. We give ourselves to Christ by giving ourselves to the brothers and sisters. We give ourselves to them in body, life, property, and honor, regardless of how the world misunderstands us.¹

Hans Schlaffer, also baptized and ordained by Hans Hut, wrote:

Because God, through his Son Jesus Christ, is again raising up a visible, holy, church community in these last and dangerous times, He wants it to become apparent in the world through the outward sign of water baptism.²

Menno Simons wrote:

¹ From *Quellen und Forschungen zur Reformationsgeschichte*, Leipzig, 1938
² *Ein ein fältig Gebet* . . . 1528

The visible community of the saints must be sound in teaching and sacraments. It must be irreproachable in life before the world, as far as man who is able to see only the outward, can tell...The true community of Christ is made manifest among this wicked generation in words and work. She can no more be hidden than a city on a hill or a candle on a candlestick.³

Dirk Philips wrote:

God's church is not like Franck says, just an invisible fellowship of believers. The very term *ecclesia* (those who are called out) proves that. God's church is not invisible. The apostles, according to the command of Jesus and by the power of Christian baptism, gathered a community of believers out of all nations. Theirs was not an invisible community. The apostles did not address their letters in a general or indiscriminate way to all people. They specifically named the congregations and the people to whom they wrote.⁴

Paul Glock, Anabaptist messenger of southern Germany, fell into the hands of the authorities in Württemberg, where they imprisoned him for nineteen years in the Hohenwittlingen castle. They tortured him on the rack. They sent two priests to dispute with him. When Paul spoke of the community of the holy ones, the priests made fun of him. They said no man, only God, can know who belongs to that community and who does not. They said the true church is an invisible body of those who are right with God in their hearts, and that no one can point with their hands and say, "Here is the true church," or "There is the true church." But to this Paul Glock replied:

Now it becomes clear that you are false prophets! When Christ was on the earth he pointed out the true church with His hands. He spread his hands out over His disciples and said, "These are my brothers, my mother, and my sisters." Everyone who does the will of Christ belongs to His family. Christ also said we would be the light of the world, and a city on a hill which cannot be hidden. He said we should love one another as He loved us so that the world could see this and know that we are His disciples. Peter said we should live an honest life among the gentiles so that they may be won without words. He also pointed to the Christian church when he spoke of the believers as a chosen people, as a kingly priesthood, a holy nation and a special possession of God. Paul did the same when he spoke of the believers as the temple of God and the seal of his apostolic office. So you see, you deceptive serpents, how that God does indeed point out His true and visible church community. Since you are unable to do that, you are still children of the night and of darkness, and not members of the body of Christ. If you would be members of His body, you would certainly be able to point it out!⁵

True Reality

The first Anabaptists spoke of inner Gemeinschaft with Jesus. They rejected the teaching that outer, visible rites and substances alone can save. Menno Simons wrote:

Those who point you only to bread or water as something by which you are saved point you away from true reality. They point you to signs, from Christ

back to Moses, and give you a vain hope and a false security so that you remain impenitent and without Christ all your life. You console yourselves so much with the signs that you remain without the signified truth, as may, unfortunately be seen in the case of the whole world. No matter how drunken, covetous, showy, vain, and untruthful the world's people are, they still boast of being Christians. They console themselves with this godless sealing by the idolatrous water...and with the bread and wine of the preachers, to the extent that they walk without fear upon the broad way and remain without the Word of God.⁶

But the Anabaptists, with their emphasis on Gemeinschaft with Jesus, did not go the way of the spiritualists or the Pietists. They never rejected the outward sacraments. Instead, they taught that *true reality* is inner faith made complete by outer form.

The Struggle with the Spiritualists

The Anabaptists were not the left wing of the Reformation that some historians make them to be. They were not radical opponents to Roman Catholicism—doing things differently only to be different—but followers of Jesus. They followed His example in water baptism and in communion with bread and wine, no matter where that put them in the light of sixteenth century controversies.

Sebastian Franck, the scholar and historian, was a radical. So were Casper Schwenkfeld and later on the Quakers who rejected the visible sacraments altogether. Sebastian

³ Een Klare beantwoordinge, over een Schrift Gellii Fabri ... 1554

⁴ Enchiridion

⁵ Geschichtbuech

⁶ Een Klare beantwoordinge, over een Schrift Gellii Fabri ... 1554

Franck wrote:

I do not want to be a follower of the Pope...I do not want to go with Zwingli...I will refuse to be an Anabaptist.⁷

He taught that the sacraments (water, bread, and wine) were given to the first Christians only because of their immaturity, and that it is no longer necessary to practice them.

To this, Dirk Philips replied:

Something horrible is coming up like smoke from the depths of the pit to hide the brightness of the sun. This is Sebastian Franck's teaching that the holy rites instituted by Christ are no longer important, and that they are like a baby's things and child's play. Franck says the visible sacraments are weak elements, and no longer necessary...To this coarse blasphemy I reply: Who has ever written so shamefully of the holy rites as Sebastian Franck? Shall God permit the devil to do with the sacraments whatever he wants?

It is an unendurable blasphemy for Sebastian Franck, a scorner of God and the sacraments, to look upon the first Christians as children who played with rag dolls, while he claims to have reached spiritual manhood. As if Jesus Christ, the apostles, and the first Christians did not have the Holy Spirit because they used outward elements in connection with faith! What abominable presumption and blindness! A man contradicting Christ and rejecting his rites. What foolishness of heart!⁸

Pilgram Marpeck took a firm stand against the spiritualists in southern

Germany. His book, the *Verantwortung*, is directed against the error of rejecting or minimizing the importance of the sacraments—like Thomas Müntzer and Casper Schwenkfeld did. Conrad Grebel and the Swiss Brethren, the Anabaptists of Austria, and those of the Bruderhöfe in Moravia felt likewise. "On the question of baptism," wrote one historian, "the Zurich brethren and Thomas Müntzer went opposite directions. For Grebel, baptism had increasing significance, and proper baptism was emphasized as part of the obedience required by the church. Müntzer, however, developed more and more in the direction of a mystical spirituality in which outward forms such as baptism had no place or meaning."⁹

Visible Limits

Jesus church community can be nothing other than fully visible. We cannot follow Him in secret. Either we show by our actions that we belong to Him, or we show by our actions that we do not. Either we belong to His body and function as members of it, or we are not part of the body.

The first Anabaptists recognized these clearly visible limits of the Lord's church community. They baptized with water those who belonged to Jesus. They separated from their communion those who did not. They believed that this binding in baptism and this loosing in separation was the binding and loosing of which Jesus spoke in Matt. 16:19.

Leonhard Schiemer wrote:

All who have not thrown themselves with all their possessions underneath the cross of Christ and into the community of the holy ones, all who have not been unbound from their sins (entbunden)

by the Lord's church are of the devil and of the antichrist.¹⁰

Peter Rideman wrote:

Since man's sins are left behind and forgiven in baptism, and since the Lord's church community holds the key (to remit or retain sin), baptism should take place before the brothers. The whole community should kneel together with the convert before his baptism takes place, asking God to forgive his sins. But if this cannot be, and if the brothers cannot be present, the baptizer may baptize the convert apart, or alone.¹¹

Menno Simons wrote:

Do not say, "Let the church community put me out. Their putting out will not hurt me," and other such lighthearted things. I tell you the truth, I would rather be cut into pieces than to allow myself to be separated for a valid reason from the Lord's church. Brothers this is serious!

In the Old Testament they burned evildoers with fire. That is a small thing compared to our day when evildoers are delivered unto Satan in the name of Christ and in the binding power of His Holy Word. Let everyone be careful to conduct himself wisely before God and His church community so that he may never be smitten with such a curse by Christ—so that he may never be placed outside of the holy congregation by Christ and His church community. All who are outside of Christ's congregation must be in that of Antichrist. Oh children, take care! Watch, pray, and be on guard. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.¹²

⁷ From *Von vier zwitträchtigen Kirchen, deren jede die ander verhasst und verdammet*, ca. 1530.

⁸ From *Een verantwoordinghe ende Refutation op twee Sendtbrieven Sebastiani Franck, cortelijck uyt die heylighe Schrift vervaet*, ca. 1535.

⁹ Harold S. Bender, *Conrad Grebel*, Goshen (1950), pg. 116

¹⁰ Quellen und Forschungen zur Reformationsgeschichte}, Leipzig, 1938

¹¹ *op. cit.*

¹² *Een gans grontlijcke onderwijs oft bericht, van de excommunicatie ...*1558

Who Should Be Put Out

As soon as he believed and was baptized, the Anabaptist convert began to enjoy the blessings and order of the Lord's church community. He became a disciple and friend of Jesus. He remained on intimate terms with Jesus and His body as long as he obeyed Him. But these blessings ended when he disobeyed Jesus, and if he persisted in that disobedience.

A person could be baptized, become part of the body of Jesus and be separated from it shortly afterward. But he could not be baptized, live in sin, and keep on belonging to it. If he disobeyed Jesus and returned to living in sin, Jesus and the members of His body had to separate themselves from him.

The first Anabaptists spoke of two reasons for this separation (*Absonderung*) from the body of Jesus. The first and greatest reason was to awaken the disobedient to the reality of their condition and to bring them back to repentance. The second reason was to protect the health and testimony of the body of Jesus itself.

Menno Simons explained who should be put out and why:

Christ says, if your brother sins against you, but will not hear you, nor the witnesses, nor the church, then let him be to you as a heathen man and a publican. Paul says that if a brother turns out to be a fornicator, covetous, idolatrous, an accuser, a drunkard, or a cheat, then we should not eat with him. To this class belong all who openly walk in the damnable works of the flesh which Paul names elsewhere. Lazy people who become busybodies must be put out. Divisive people, all who argue against the teachings of Christ and His apostles must be put out.

All who lead carnal lives or persist in false teachings must, as a last resort, be put out of the Lord's church community in the name of Christ. By the power of the Holy Ghost and by the binding Word of God, they must be put out, marked and avoided until they repent.¹³

A City without Walls

Menno Simons wrote:

As long as the Israelites dealt with evildoers among them, they remained upright and pious. But when they neglected internal discipline, they fell into all kinds of wickedness and idolatry....

This is also the way it went in the first Christian community. As long as the overseers required a godly life, as long as they baptized and gave the nighttime meal only to the penitent, as long as they put sinners out, according to the holy writings, they were Christ's church community. But as soon as they sought a carefree life without the cross, they laid aside the rod of discipline and preached peace. In this way they established an anti-Christian Babel, which has existed by now for many centuries.... A community without discipline and a separation from sinners is like a vineyard without trenches, like a city without walls or gates. Enemies freely come to plant their weeds within it.¹⁴

An Act of Love

The first Anabaptists believed in being firm but not harsh. Menno Simons, although he went along with unsound teachings on excommunication in his later years, did what he could to keep separated members from harsh treatment. He wrote:

¹³ *op. cit.*

¹⁴ *Een Klare beantwoordinge, over een Schrift Gellii Fabri . . . 1554*

No one is separated from the communion of the brothers except those who have already separated themselves by false doctrine or improper conduct. We do not want to put anyone out. We want to receive. We do not want to amputate but to heal. We do not want to discard but win back, not grieve but comfort, not condemn but save. Whoever turns from evil and comes back to the Gospel into which he was baptized cannot and shall not be put out.¹⁵

In another tract he wrote:

We should not deny necessary services, love, and mercy to those who have been separated from communion. Separation is a work of divine love, not of unmerciful, heathenish cruelty. True Christians love, help, and pity everyone, even their most bitter enemies. True Christians hate cruelty. They have a nature like God of whom they are born. God makes His sun to rise on the evil and on the good and sends rain on the just and unjust. If we are of a different nature, we show that we are not His children... We do not separate people from the church community to destroy them but to help them.¹⁶

Holy but Human

Even though they believed in a visible church community with visible limits, and even though they believed in keeping the Lord's church holy and separated from sin, the first Anabaptists did not boast, as some accused them of boasting, that they were a perfect brotherhood. They knew that they were still human.

Dirk Philips wrote:

¹⁵ *Een liefelijcke vermaninghe*, ca. 1558

¹⁶ *Grondelijk onderwijs oft bericht van de excommunicatie ... 1558*

Several Gospel parables describe the Lord's church community. One parable is that of the net cast into the sea which drew up all kinds of fish (Matt. 13:47). The other is the parable of a king who made a wedding for his son and invited both the good and the bad (Matt. 22:2). Christ speaks in these parables of the kingdom of heaven, that is of His church.

After hearing these parables we must admit without arguing that not only the God-fearing, but the wicked come into the church community of Christ. But the wicked are not to stay there. We are to separate them from our communion as far as we are able, already here on this earth. Then in the future, the work will reach completion when Christ separates the sheep from the goats on the youngest day.¹⁷

Menno Simons wrote:

We teach that the nighttime meal is to be observed as the Lord Jesus Himself observed it, that is, with a church community that is outwardly without spot or blemish-without open transgression and wickedness. The church can judge only that which is visible. What is inwardly evil but does not appear outwardly, God alone will judge. God alone,

not the community of brothers, can discern the hearts and minds of men.¹⁸



Kortrijk (Courtrai), in Flanders, Belgium, home to a large, active fellowship of believers during the sixteenth century-nearly all of them involved with the town's cloth weaving industry. Jacques van der Mase, a leader among them, turned from armed revolution (at Munster in Westfalen) to the simple, peaceful way of Christ. Spanish authorities caught and burned him at the stake in the 1530s. Twenty-three others met the same fate, and still more believers from Kortrijk got drowned or burned in other Flemish cities. The church at Kortrijk was crushed. The believers scattered, but the seed they carried with them survives in church communities around the world.

The Cost of Visibility

The visible sacraments of baptism and the nighttime meal brought unspeakable suffering upon the Anabaptist movement. But Dirk Philips wrote:

We are not weakened or confused by those who ask us what benefit baptism has. They ask us why we suffer persecution to be baptized when we ourselves say that salvation is not dependent upon outward signs. They

say that faith and love can override all outward institutions such as baptism and the nighttime meal.

They point to Moses who discontinued circumcision in the wilderness when it was not convenient, and say that Christians may now leave off from baptizing believers or do as they please about it. But we pay no attention to them...They have the nature of spiders turning everything good into evil, yes, even honey into poison.¹⁹

Hans Hut of Thüringen discovered the high cost of following Jesus in a visible way. After baptizing an untold number of converts into the Lord's church community, they arrested and tortured him. One night, lying unconscious in his cell after an especially severe torturing session, his foot overset his candle. The straw in the cell caught fire and burned him. Eight days later he died. They drowned his daughter at Bamberg in Franconia and his son Philip fled to Moravia where he joined an Anabaptist Bruderhof.


But walking in the light, "in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world," those whom Hans had baptized into a visible church community followed Jesus...

¹⁹ *op. cit.*

¹⁷ *op.cit.*

¹⁸ *Opera Omnia Theologica*, Amsterdam, 1681

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Did You Know?

Underneath all that white, fluffy fur, God gave the polar bears black skin to absorb UV light and keep them warm in cold arctic conditions!



Intimacy With God

—by Joe Keim

In most cases, we don't like to develop a relationship with someone who doesn't seem to care for us or constantly thinks something is wrong with us. We do, however, gravitate toward those who like and respect us.

Similarly, if we feel that God merely tolerates us, we may find ourselves distancing from Him and questioning whether He really loves us.

How can one improve their relationship and feel genuine intimacy with God?

Since our mind is where the battles occur, we must find ways to fill our mind with the right stuff.

Prayer

Instead of asking God for more, start thanking Him for everything He has already given you. Honestly, this is a

huge step that most people overlook. Thank Him for His patience, mercy, and daily provision in your life. Praise Him for saving your soul and giving you the ability to breathe, hear, walk, talk, go to work, and have family and friends who care for you.

Meditate on God's Word

Open your favorite book of the Bible and begin to read. Don't try to read the entire chapter; instead, read a few verses and meditate on them. If you can sit down with a second person and read/discuss the verses you read, do it. It's incredible how well that works in establishing your intimacy with God.

Community

We need more than social media to fill our relational needs. Facebook cannot

replace touch, eyeball to eyeball, and hearing your friend's voice.

Service

When we are down and out, discouraged and grumpy, it is because we are thinking of ourselves—me, myself, and I. Try shifting your eyes and mind away from yourself and looking around. Help someone in need.

If you follow this advice, it will improve your day and the way you feel about God and others.

Have a blessed day!

The author invites you to
text or call if you have
questions or comments!
(419) 651-6813

I Must Tell Jesus

—by Gerald Hochstetler

About as far back as I can remember, I'd say my early teens, I wanted to be free. Every fiber in my body longed to be free.

Rules. I hated rules.

My Dad would go to town and stop at the flea market. Once in a blue moon my turn would come around and I'd get to go along and get a little taste of the world. Two accounts seared into my brain that I will never forget.

The first was the day I bought my first pack of cigarettes. I nervously fumbled around in my pocket and handed the clerk my own hard earned cash. I felt liberated. My life of freedom was about to begin. I would soon be blowing smoke like a real man. No one was going to tell me what to do, or so I thought.

The other account made an even greater impact. I was walking along and heard a familiar hymn being sung. It was ab-

solutely beautiful. The harmony and the music were heavenly beautiful. I made my way over and just stood there. If I allow myself, I can still feel it.

*I must tell Jesus! I must tell Jesus!
I cannot bear my burdens alone;
I must tell Jesus! I must tell Jesus!
Jesus can help me, Jesus alone.*



What did that even mean? Jesus can help me, Jesus alone! The beautiful music rang out into an ugly, ugly environment. I felt bad...and good. I would do this, I thought.

*I must tell Jesus all of my troubles;
He is a kind, compassionate Friend;*

*If I but ask Him, He will deliver,
Make of my troubles quickly an end.*

I must tell Jesus, I must tell Jesus....

And so it went. Even though it felt like heaven was near, I had to move on. For even this music was forbidden. I could not afford to be caught here listening to music.

Oh, what a troubled world of false religions and ugliness we often create. I would go on to a long life of "looking for freedom" in all of the wrong places. But in this confused journey, faith also began to grow.

This Jesus was available, This Jesus does hear. This Jesus does understand. And so the last line of the song became, and is still becoming, a reality. Jesus can help me, Jesus alone.

That, my friend, is the good news of the gospel. Jesus can help us, Jesus alone! This Jesus is the gateway to freedom!

“Then Job answered and said, I know it is so of a truth: but how should man be just with God? If he will contend with him, he cannot answer him one of a thousand” (Job 9:1-3).

What Job is asking is, “How can I be saved? How can I be justified with God?” In verse three, Job says, “Though God asks me a thousand questions, I cannot answer Him one.” The remaining chapter involves Job showing how much greater God is than tiny, sinful man, leaving the question, “How can I be justified with God?”

Job’s friend Bildad answered Job’s question in Job 8:8-11

“For enquire, I pray thee, of the former age, and prepare thyself to the search of their fathers” (Job 8:8).

Bildad is saying, “Inquire, study out the former age (meaning our forefathers), then study out their fathers!

“(For we are but of yesterday, and know nothing, because our days upon earth are a shadow:) Shall not they teach thee, and tell thee, and utter words out of their heart? Can the rush grow up without mire? can the flag grow without water?” (Job 8:9-11).

Bildad is saying, “Study out our forefathers because we don’t know anything. What our forefathers believed is what is true. We haven’t been here very long, so return to our forefathers and let THEM teach you. You, Job, are a rush. You are A weed! How can a rush grow without a swamp? You need the swamp (your forefathers) for you (the rush) to be justified before God.”

In short, Bildad’s appeal to Job is humanism and sophisticated reason.

Job’s friend Zophar answered Job’s question in Job 11:13-14

“If thou prepare thine heart, and stretch out thine hands toward him; If

iniquity be in thine hand, put it far away, and let not wickedness dwell in thy tabernacles. For then shalt thou lift up thy face without spot; yea, thou shalt be steadfast, and shalt not fear” (Job 11:13-14).

What Zophar is saying is, “Job, what you need is religion. What you need is to do good. What you need is legalism and sterile ritualism. You need form and self-effort. What you need to do is prepare your heart. That is meditation.

What you need to do is stretch out your hands. That is ceremony. What you need to do is put away sin. That is reformation.

Meditation, ceremony, and reformation. Millions today “go to church”. They meditate, they perform ceremonies, they try to reform themselves, and then they leave with empty hearts. They have a form of godliness, but they do not have the power thereof!

The answers these two men gave as solutions to Job’s heart’s cry, “How can I be justified with God,” are the same methods that the Mennonite church gives its people today. We are Mennonites! We are of Menno Simons! We are of Jakob Hutter! We are of Jakob Ammann! We are of John Holdeman! We come from the Anabaptists! We meditate! We perform ceremony! We reform ourselves. (Amendment of life).

But, here is what Job knew.....

“If I wash myself with snow water, and make my hands never so clean; Yet shalt thou plunge me in the ditch, and mine own clothes shall abhor me. For he is not a man, as I am, that I should answer him, and we should come together in judgment” (Job 9:30-32).

Job is saying, “There is nothing that I can do to justify myself before God. It doesn’t matter how much I abstain

from sin; I’m still lost. It doesn’t matter how clean I cleanse myself, I’m done for. What do I do before God? Who am I before God?

God is not a man, and I am not God. I need a mediator!”

He was calling for Jesus! Jesus, the God man!

Illustration.

Suppose a beggar is called before a king. The beggar says, “The king is so far above me, I can’t answer one question of his one thousand questions. Who am I before a king?”

The beggar decides, “I’ll call another beggar to be my mediator before the king.”

The king says, “Who do you think I am to listen to another beggar? I’ll call on another king to mediate.

The beggar replies, “But who am I to still have a king that doesn’t understand me, a beggar, to mediate before you?”

What the beggar and the king both needed was someone who could lay their hands upon them both.

Jesus wept, he cried, he wearied, he bled, he died! Jesus, the God man. Born of a woman! Jesus was not God, dressed up as a man. He was the God-man!

Jesus was enough man to lay his hand upon Job. And Jesus was enough God to lay his hand upon God. Fully man!

Fully God!

As much God, as though he were not man at all. As much man, as though he were not God at all. With the timbers of a cross, he bridged the gap between sinful man and holy God!

A mediator must be totally just. A mediator must have both parties in mind. A mediator must be given absolute authority.

In the Bible, we can find examples of people who thought they worshipped God until their blindness (hardness of heart and eyes) was taken away.

“And on the sabbath we went out of the city by a river side, where prayer was won’t to be made; and we sat down, and spake unto the women which resorted thither. And a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, which worshipped God, heard us: whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul” (Acts 16:13-14).

Paul preached the Gospel (Christ crucified in 1 Cor 15:1-4) and Lydia believed. Then, God opened her heart. Then, she could see spiritually (was born again).

“There was a certain man in Caesarea called Cornelius, a centurion of the band called the Italian band. A devout man, and one that feared God with all his house, which gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God always” (Acts 10:1-2).

“And he commanded us to preach unto the people, and to testify that it is he which was ordained of God to be the Judge of quick and dead. To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins. While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word. And they of the circumcision which believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost” (Acts 10:42-45). They became born again.

Paul himself thought he was worshipping God before God opened his eyes and changed his heart, which we can see when we read Acts 9.

“Though I might also have confidence in the flesh. If any other man thinketh that he hath whereof he might trust in the flesh, I more: Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee; Concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless. But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith” (Phil 3:4-9).

The people mentioned in the Scriptures above were changed from natural to spiritual (born again). They all thought they were worshipping God until they were born again, and then they saw things differently. They went from darkness to light. Jesus opened many people's hearts and eyes in the Bible, and it has been happening ever since.

What a glorious Savior that we have! Have your heart and eyes been opened (spiritually/born again)? They must be in order to go into the Kingdom of God. According to the Bible, there are no exceptions.

We see another example in John 9 when a man who was born blind had his eyes opened.

“He answered and said, Whether he be a sinner or no, I know not: one thing I know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see. Then said they to him again, What did he to thee? how opened he thine eyes? He answered

them, I have told you already, and ye did not hear: wherefore would ye hear it again? will ye also be his disciples?” (Jn 9:25-27).

Let me stop here and ask a couple of questions. Are you one of His disciples? Have you had your eyes/heart opened (been born again)?

“And Jesus said, For judgment I am come into this world, that they which see not might see; and that they which see might be made blind” (Jn 9:39).

Here, Jesus is saying that He came to make those who were spiritually blinded able to see. It is also saying some people think they know God, but they don't know Him (because of blindness). Read John chapter 9, and you will see how the Pharisees responded because of their blindness.

“But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned” (1 Cor 2:14).

“But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: In whom the god of this world (Satan) hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them?” (2 Cor 4:3-4).

Pretty plain language, is it not? Jesus tells us the ONLY way INTO the kingdom of God is to be born again. There are no exceptions according to Jesus Himself. Paul also says it.

“Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born? Jesus answered, Verily, ver-

ily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit” (Jn 3:3-6).

Here, Jesus is saying that the first birth is when we are born from a natural/water/fleshly birth. The second birth is when we are spiritually born from above. This is a free gift from God.

“In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ (only God could do this): Buried with him in baptism (into Christ, by God), wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead (resurrection). And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh (first birth, natural) hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses (second birth, spiritual)” (Col 2:11-13).

“For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body (Christ’s church), whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit” (1 Cor 12:13).

“Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular” (1 Cor 12:27).

There is only one church, and that is Christ’s church, or the body of Christ (Kingdom of God). 1 Cor 12:12-27.

“One Lord, one faith (Jesus), one baptism (from God). One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all” (Eph 4:5-6).

“Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new” (2 Cor 5:17).

Once a person becomes born again, they will have God’s Spirit in their hearts, and everything will look different. Everything will be brighter and more vivid. Their understanding will be different, etc. The Bible says that He will give us of His Spirit.

“That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us” (Heb 6:18).

“The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God” (Rom 8:16).

“And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father” (Gal 4:6).

“Even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you” (Jn 14:17).

“Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? (1 Cor 3:16).

Do you want to become born again and be able to see spiritually? It is a free gift for anyone of any age, any race, any religion, etc.

“For the wages of sin is death; but the gift (a gift is free) of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Rom 6:23).

“For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast” (Eph 2:8-9).

Ask God to take your sins away from you! Give Him all your sins and problems. Everything! Jesus died for the ungodly, so it doesn’t matter what your situation is. Please, just give it to Jesus and cling to Him! He wants a personal relationship with you!

“For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly” (Rom 5:6).

“But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom 5:8).

“For there is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not” (Ecc 7:20).

“As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one” (Rom 3:10).

“For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God” (Rom 3:23).

“If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 Jn 1:8-9).

“For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved” (Rom 10:13).

“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 (born again)” (Rom 10:9).

Are you at peace with God? Have all your sins been washed away by the blood of the Lamb? Are you ready to die today?

I will close with two Scriptures.

“By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all” (Heb 10:10).

“God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth” (Jn 4:24).

Praying God’s blessings on everyone!

Years ago, a non-Mennonite pastor friend shared some concerns he had about his church's youth group. He said he rarely let his children go to any of their youth events because the youth group and the youth leaders had such a "worldly mindset".

His words caught me by surprise. He and his family were not "plain," and I wondered what a non-Mennonite would consider worldly. I was even a bit surprised that he was worried about how worldliness might affect his children. By the standards that I had been raised in, his entire family was very "worldly."



However, I have since learned that no Christian—regardless of denomination—wants to be considered worldly or to have a worldly mindset. So, what is worldliness? What does it look like? What does the Bible say about worldliness?

"Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and pride of life is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth forever" (1 John 2:15-17).

"If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you" (John 15:19).

"And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God" (Romans 12:2).

"Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? Whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God" (James 4:4).

Worldliness is clearly something God wants to keep us from.

We are all born with a worldly nature. Though I was born a Mennonite child and looked different than the rest of the world, I was still worldly. I wanted my own comfort, pleasure, and needs to be met more than anything else. I wasn't willing to wait for God to meet my needs in His timing; I took things into my own hands. I made decisions according to what made me feel good or look good. How I appeared outwardly mattered more than who I was inside.

"Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world" (Gal 4:3).

"Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience" (Eph 2:2).

After salvation, God put within me a different spirit. 1 Corinthians 2:12 says,

Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God."

Salvation changes desires. I began to want to obey His commandments and to do what I knew to be His will. Jesus says in Matthew 22:37-40 that we are to love God with all our heart, soul, and mind and to love our neighbor as ourselves. The entirety of the rest of the commandments hangs on these two commands.

Does that mean we aren't tempted to be worldly after salvation?

Apparently not. Paul tells Timothy in 2 Timothy 4:10, *"For Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world, and is departed..."* Jesus, in the parable of the sower, spoke of seed that started growing but the "cares of the world" choked out its life.

We need to avoid worldliness, just like any other sin.

Worldliness is a mindset of living in the flesh rather than being led by the Spirit.

1 John 2:16 defines a worldly mindset as being the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life.

Paul similarly describes walking according to the "course of the world" in Ephesians 2:2-3. He says before salvation, our conduct was that of living according to the lust of the flesh, and we fulfilled whatever desires our flesh and mind wanted.

Before I was born again, I didn't do everything I wanted in the flesh. I knew there were consequences for some things. But I did as much as I thought I could get away with. Things that were forbidden were only out of reach if there was a strong likelihood of getting caught.

After salvation, the Holy Spirit changed those desires. I quit trying to live according to what my flesh wanted, even when no one would see. But the temp-

tation remained. Those desires didn't go completely away. Peter warns us as "strangers and pilgrims" in this world to abstain from fleshly lusts because they "war against our souls" (1 Peter 2:11).

James 4 describes what the lust of the flesh within us looks like and how it plays out. He describes it as being a friend of the world and says it is "enmity with God." He also refers to it as spiritual adultery.

Just as Jesus said that a lustful look is equal to adultery, the same is true in the spiritual sense. Worldliness is spiritual adultery, but we can commit spiritual adultery by gazing lustfully after worldly things.

Instead of following after the flesh, we must be led by the Spirit. We can't be led by the Spirit unless we draw near to God and allow Him to draw near to us.

Worldliness is focusing more on the outward than the inward

This is a point that we, as conservative Anabaptists, know best. The world is so focused on their outward appearance that they rarely think about what their inward man looks like. But do we really understand what all that entails?

"Whose adorning let it not be that outward adorning of plaiting the hair, and of wearing of gold, or of putting on of apparel, but let it be the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price" (1 Peter 3:3-4).

The world judges by outward appearance. Clothing is meant to make a statement. Sometimes, clothing gives a message of how much money people have—or how much they would like people to think they have. The world likes expensive name brands and the latest fashion. The opposite is also true. Panhandlers will deliberately wear

clothing that makes them appear poor—whether they are or not.

Clothing can also draw attention to the person. The world likes clothing that is provocative and showy. People want to stand out and get attention.

Do Anabaptist people struggle in this area? Or are we just automatically exempt because we have clothing regulations?

No matter how many rules or regulations churches have about clothing, you can usually still pick out the ones that have a bit more money than others and want to display it. You can still tell which ones are trying to draw attention to themselves or their body.

Sometimes, we think dressing shabbily or attempting to look poor is equal to humility. When people focus on appearing "poor" to show how humble they are, they are still focusing on the outward—not all that differently than what a panhandler does.

Worldliness is a heart problem, unfortunately.

When we focus on dressing differently from the world, we are still focusing on the world's clothing. In our attempt to dress differently than the world, we are still focusing on our appearance. Even when we look right at our own clothing choices, only God truly knows our heart motives.

What if our focus was on the other part of those verses? When we truly care about the "hidden man of the heart"—having meekness, caring about others more than ourselves, etc.—we might



find outward clothing choices mattering less and less.

I think we, as Anabaptists, have failed in our focus of outward appearance more than many other denominations. In our determination not to become obsessed with appearance like the world does, we have become just as fixated as they are.

The world says how you appear to others is of greater importance than who you really are.

So do Anabaptists.

If you think this isn't true, ask yourself what kind of person is more likely to be confronted? Do we confront the man who follows church regulations for dress but is known to be angry, neglects his family, or hoards his earthly riches? Or are we more concerned about the ones who don't dress exactly according to church standards? Who is more likely to have communion denied to them?

We are repeatedly warned not to allow worldliness regarding dress creep into our homes and into our churches, but it seems it has crept in like a wolf in sheep's clothing and we have been deceived. We seem to be unable to recognize the worldly motivation in much of our outward appearance.

There is nothing wrong with dressing differently than the rest of the world. But that can't be our focus and motivation in the clothes we choose.

There is nothing wrong with dressing differently than the church next door. But if we feel a bit more righteous in our clothing choices and look down on those we think look too much like the rest of the world, we are the ones imitating the world in judging others by outward appearance. We become the ones that need to repent of worldly attitudes of outward appearance.

Worldliness is seeing this present age more than eternity

Probably one of the most well-known verses in Mennonite circles is Romans 12:2, “*And be not conformed to this world...*”

Many verses that have “world” in it, are from the Greek word “Kosmos.” In this verse though, it is from the Greek word “aion” which carries a different meaning. It means more like an age, or a course of time.

That means this verse carries a slightly different meaning than what I used to think. Rather than not being conformed to “kosmos” (the world, its inhabitants, and the arrangement of it), it is talking about not being conformed to this present age.

The prodigal son is a good example. His mindset was on the “here and now” rather than the future. He didn’t want to wait for what would eventually be his. He didn’t want it on someone else’s terms. He wanted what he thought should be his right now. His world view was life “in the moment.”

Today we hear the term YOLO (you only live once) as an excuse to do whatever appeals. Having this present age as our focus without keeping eternity in view can cause us to set ourselves as our own idol. If all I care about is what I have right now, what I deserve, and how to be happy, I will do whatever I have to make that happen. My relationships, food, looks, money, everything will matter a lot more about how it makes me feel now.

Think of how many sins come from this mindset. Our strife and fighting with each other comes from this. We’re not thinking of waiting to see what God wants to do in us through a hard situation. Rather, we look at the circumstances and how they affect me right now and then react to the person we think is causing our present distress.

That is being conformed to this present age.

When Satan tempted Jesus, he tempted Him with things that appealed to the “here and now”. But Jesus turned down those temptations because His mindset was not of being conformed to this “present age”. He remembered His greater purpose and kept eternity in mind.

If we always keep eternity in mind, we will be more willing to be patient with the “sufferings of this present time” because of the future glory that will eventually be revealed (Rom. 8:18).

That is the opposite of being worldly.

Worldliness is caring more about myself than others

Jesus said in Mark 12:30 that the greatest commandment was to love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength. He followed that by saying that the second greatest commandment is to love others as we love ourselves.

When our focus becomes more about ourselves and looking out for “number one,” we become like the world. The world says, “Look out for yourself because no one else will.” How willing am I to trust God to supply exactly what I need and also to be willing to give as He directs?

Many plain people are known to have plenty of money. We are taught to work hard and to be good stewards. This is important, but what do we do with that money? If God asked us to sell all we had like He did the rich young ruler, would we do it? Or would we go “away sorrowful?”

Shouldn’t we be concerned about our needs, though?

When Jesus preached the Sermon on the Mount in Matt. 6, He said we should “take no thought” about our needs. He follows that with:

“For after all these things do the Gentiles seek: for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need

of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these things shall be added unto you” (Mat. 6:32-33).

The Gentiles were the pagans—they were the “world.” If we want to do the opposite of the world, then our focus must first be on seeking the kingdom of God, and our needs will be met. Worldliness is focusing on seeking my needs and not my neighbors.

We, as Anabaptists, tend to take care of our own pretty well, but what about those outside our circles? I know a minister whose family has taken care of a widow in his neighborhood for years, though she was never part of their church. Do we turn away from people who are not part of our plain circles, or do we love them as we love ourselves?

“Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, to visit the fatherless and the widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world” (James 1:27).

In conclusion

Worldliness might not be what we have always been taught. No matter how plain I may dress or how different I make myself look outwardly, I might still be a most worldly person. And just because I’m Mennonite doesn’t mean I’m not worldly any more than it means that I’m automatically born again.



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March

When Uncertainty Terrorizes

(part 1 of 4)

How can we keep the uncertainty of today's world from impacting our faith? As Chip Ingram opens the book of Psalms, he will help us prepare for and get a handle on the most dangerous emotions we will face in life.

Made Whole by God

(part 3 of 5)

Jesus came that we would be made whole. Message by Duane Sheriff

The Dangers of Legalism

Legalism is believing that we can earn or keep favor with God by what we do. It flows from the failure to be humbled, broken, amazed, and satisfied by the grace of God. In this sermon, we learn about three dangers of legalism to avoid: a judgmental spirit, an insistence on man-made rules, and a marginalization of Christ as our supreme focus. Message by Bill Bertsche.

The Grace Awakening

When three people from different worlds collide in one space, you never know what will happen! A Pharisee, Jesus, and a sinner end up at the same dinner. Message by Phillip Miller.

April

When Depression Threatens

Have you ever woken up in the morning and immediately felt like a dark cloud is hovering over you? Learn why followers of Jesus struggle with times of depression and the strength we have to withstand these feelings. Message by Chip Ingram.

Made Whole by God

(part 4 of 5)

The power of the Christian life comes from the spirit, through the soul, and is expressed in the body. Our best life comes from refusing to conform to the ways of this world, refusing to give in to the temptations of sin, and renewing our minds to God's way of seeing things. Message by Duane Sheriff.

God's Plan Includes the Peaks and the Pits

There are no accidents with God; a providential plan is in place and will come to fruition. In this truth we can find peace. Message by Bill Bertsche.

Finding Our Place in the Story

As we wake up in this universe, we find ourselves in the midst of a story that is already unfolding. But what is the story about? And how do we find our place in the story? Message by Phillip Miller

May

When Fear Paralyzes

Author J.R.R. Tolkien once wrote, "A man that flies from his fear may find that he only has taken a shortcut to meet it." In this message, Chip Ingram will help us confront this intimidating emotion as he continues his series, Experiencing God's Presence. Learn from Psalm 46 what we, as Jesus' followers, can do to stand our ground when feelings of fear come.

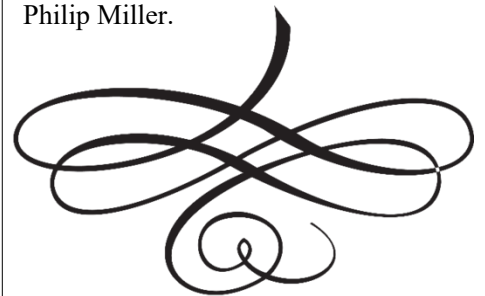
Made Whole by God

(part 5 of 5)

This is the final message in a five part series by Duane Sheriff.

The Day You Get Your Life Back

1,991 years ago, a Galilean carpenter turned Rabbi, who'd been crucified and buried for three days, arose and walked out of his tomb alive! In a moment that changed history forever, Jesus revealed His death-defying life for all the world to see! Message by Philip Miller.



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We've been married for 26 years and married on Thanksgiving day. Here are fifteen things we would tell our younger selves:

1. "You should love me for me," is selfish. Improve yourself. Do self-development, read books, go to seminars, and take vacations. It's good for you. It's good for them. It's good for the marriage. They fell in love with you for who you were. They will stay in love with you for who you become.

2. Don't sweep anything under the rug. Discuss it all. Oooo, even the hard stuff.

3. Apologize fast.

4. Never threaten to leave. Instead, say, "I'm never leaving so we have to address this problem."



5. Don't use sex as a weapon or tactic.

6. Observe how you talk about your spouse to others. If they are the "handbrake" or the "ball and chain" then that is what they will become. What you say will become true. You stood in front of all your family and friends and professed your undying love for your spouse, so be proud of your decision.

7. Encourage each other's hobbies.

8. Sleep together, every night.

9. They say don't go to sleep angry. But, sometimes it is best to wait a night and let your subconscious understand the issue better.

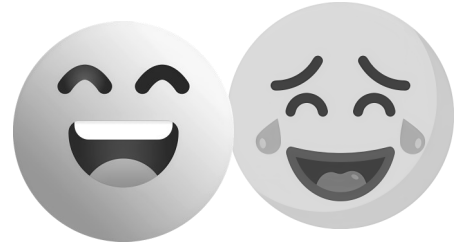


10. Arguments or disagreements should be resolved, not won. You're a team, not opponents.

11. If you see something you like or love about your partner, tell them immediately and don't expect one in return. If you both commit to this, the comments are more meaningful than compliments.

12. Don't criticize or belittle. Discuss.

13. Laugh at yourself.



14. For a marriage to work, you both need to work on it. It can't be all one-sided.

15. The most important decision you'll make in your life is your spouse. Don't hope it was the right decision. Make it the right decision.



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There are three kinds of authority.

HUMAN AUTHORITY

First, our parents were our authority. Then came the teacher, the boss, and the person in the car behind us with the blue lights flashing. They are all our human authorities. Our opinions or ideas aside, they called the shots. We obeyed. Or we better have.

RELIGIOUS AUTHORITY

Oh, this is the one that causes all the trouble. Jesus had a lot of problems with this one. The religious people wanted to impose all kinds of demands and restrictions on the people. Jesus was tough on them. Talking about leaders, He said:

“For they bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men’s shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers” (Matthew 23:4).

Today, we see church leaders who seem to feel that leadership comes with glory, power, and positions of honor. They will exercise authority over the church, a lot like human authority. They act more in the pattern of a king than a servant. A leader like this will scatter more than gather, or, as a brother once said, he will drive the sheep to

market. This type of authority should not even exist.

SPIRITUAL AUTHORITY

This is what Jesus was all about: serving and ministering. He was the greatest authority who walked on this earth, yet he humbly washed His disciples’ feet. He was without sin, yet He wanted to be baptized: not to show an outward sign of inner cleansing but as an example to us. His whole life was all about doing His Father’s will. In fact, He plainly stated that He came not to be ministered to but to minister.

A spiritual leader will follow the same pattern that Jesus had. He will always seek the Father’s will. He will be an example in his leadership. He will never ask others what he is not willing to do first. He will lead as a gentle shepherd, esteeming others higher than himself. A spiritual leader will understand that it is not his church. He is not called to build the church but to guide, to show forth the Lord Jesus as the builder of the church, and to point the people to Him.

His goal will be to prepare God’s people for works of service, *“For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ”* (Eph 4:12). He will always be in God’s service as he leads (never pushes) the flock.

Finally, a spiritual leader will (again, like a shepherd) always be on the lookout for wolves. He knows that they will try to slip into the flock and cause destruction. The spiritual leader, who is always gentle with the flock, will be ruthless with the wolf. He knows that a wolf, no matter how much he comes in sheep’s clothing, will try to tear the sheep apart. The wolf will be sent packing. In fact, the shepherd will give his life for the sheep. He does this because he is not a hireling.

Let me tell you what a hireling is. It is someone who does what he does because it is a job, not more. A year ago, when I was in the hospital, I received excellent care. The nurses cared for my every need - until their shift was over. Then they were gone. They served me because it was their job. On the other hand, my good and faithful wife took care of me - not because it was her job. She didn’t do it out of duty but out of love. Her shift never ended. I had to encourage her to go home sometimes and get rest. She was by my side 24/7 if she could.

The difference between a shepherd who is a spiritual authority and a hireling is as different as day from night.

Lord, make men into spiritual leaders who pattern after Jesus and not after human authority.

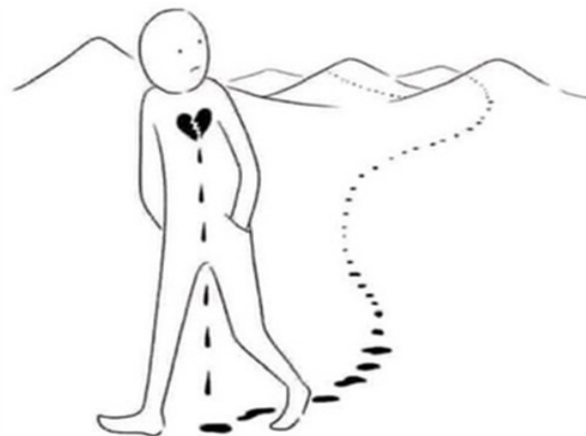
Tough Goodbyes

One of the toughest goodbyes comes when we love someone but realize a healthy relationship isn’t possible.

Staying means enduring unfulfilled promises, accepting hurtful behaviors, and losing ourselves in the effort to hold on.

We know that walking away will be painful, but it’s the path to healing. In contrast, remaining will only deepen our wounds.

Sometimes, we choose to leave, not out of a lack of love for the person, but because our love compels us to prioritize our own well-being. Leaving can be an act of love, too.



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Powerful Words

—By Andrew Schrock

One of the most powerful words I have ever heard:

“For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him” (2 Cor 5:21).

Jesus Christ was made every one of our sins. Regardless of what you think, He was made your sins. You can beat yourself to death with all the different ways to be reconciled to God, but Jesus was MADE your sins.

The day Jesus was made our sins, He became the way the truth and the life! When He took our sins upon Himself, the Levitical priesthood lost its job. The Old Covenant became obsolete. When He was made our sins, the foreshadowing was done and finished its purpose. Jesus fulfilled all; and is and will be all in all.

No more priests. No more sacrifices. No more circumcision. No more uncircumcision. No more bond or free.

No more Jew or Gentile. No more unclean food. No more memory of sins every year. No more conscience of sin. No more under the law. No more signs other than Jonah in the belly. No more man interceding for us. Jesus is our everything, both great and small. Do you put all your faith in Jesus? Is He your all in all, or are you obligated to other ways?

Worship Him. He is worthy. Trust Him. Man will always fall short.

I don't care what you run after for answers, Jesus will always be my answer. I don't care how many voices cry from all corners of the earth saying, “Yeah, but.” Jesus is my only hope. He was made my sin, and He made me the righteousness of God. No one else did that for me. Therefore, Jesus is King and has all of my gratitude and thanksgiving.

No, I will not share that worship with man-made systems.

Jesus sheds His love abroad in our hearts. He tells us to preach His Gospel to everyone and to love our neighbor as ourselves.

To all the people around the world that are disgusted and discouraged with fights and divisions in the churches: Jesus was made your sins, the church wasn't. Worship Jesus. We are to be loyal to Christ more than man.

If Jesus makes you one with the Father, what more do you want?

Nothing can separate us from that love!

“Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things” (Phil 4:8).



God is bread when you're hungry, water when you're thirsty, a harbor from the storm. God is father to the fatherless, a mother to the motherless. God is my sister, my brother, my leader, my guide, my teacher, my comforter, my friend. God is the way-maker and burden-bearer, a heart-fixer and a mind-regulator. God is my doctor who never lost a patient, my lawyer who never lost a case, my captain who never lost a battle. God is my all in all, my everything.

God is my rock, my sword, my shield, my lily of the valley, my pearl of great price. God is a god of peace and a god of war. Counselor, Emmanuel, Redeemer, Savior, Prince of Peace, Son of God, Mary's little baby, wonderful Word of God. —Thea Bowman (1937-1990)