

Be ye doers  
of the Word  
and not hearers  
only...  
*James 1:22*

# Anabaptist Voice

Championing a Faith that Works

## *In This Issue:*

- "PROUD BELSHAZZAR" - *THE STORYTELLER*
- "REACHING FOR UNITY" - *JOE WURZ*
- "OBEY YOUR LEADERS" - *MENNO KNIGHT*
- "HE LIFTED ME UP II" - *FLOYD YODER*
- "PEOPLE OF THE BOOK" - *DAVID L. BURKHOLDER*



# Letter from the Editor



Each year, the Masters Golf Tournament takes place in Augusta, Georgia, the first full week in April. The big event takes place on perfectly manicured lawns with azaleas in full bloom.

While I have never been to the Masters, we and our friends can enjoy the beautiful, God-created azalea blooms in our front and back yards. At Mystic Gardens, in 2026, we have already enjoyed the blooming beauty of azaleas, a huge yellow Lady Banks rose, arching spirea, purple creeping phlox, viburnum snowballs, loropetalum, camellias, dogwoods, Chinese fringe trees, and colorful Japanese red maple leaves.

- xxx -

My heart doctor wanted me to get an electrocardiogram. He gave me a phone number to call at the hospital where he works. I called the number and informed the lady we had no insurance and were self-pay. She looked up the price and told me it would be a bit over \$1,200. I asked if there would be any discount. She quickly replied, "That is already discounted. Without the discount it is over \$4,000."

My regular doctor came to my aid. He found two places that perform the needed electrocardiogram for \$220—both about the same distance from home but in another direction. I called and set up the appointment. When I arrived, I was barely inside the door when the desk lady said, "I would like to ask you a question, 'Why do you not have insurance?'"

I answered something like this: "We think it better to keep the government out of health care."

She responded, "That makes a lot of sense. I pay \$600 a month for my health insurance. I still have to pay the first \$2,000 on my bills."

- xxx -

Severe pain developed in my right hip which I thought was caused by a malfunctioning hip surgery four years ago. The surgeon said the X-rays showed everything was fine with the metal insert and the bones. He sent me to physical therapy for treatment. I sort of hooted at PT for years. But after four one-hour sessions, I am persuaded it works. The sessions require no undress, salves, ointments, or pain pills whatsoever. PT entirely depends on exercises you do, and not on what someone else does to you. How faithfully one does the simple exercises at home, speeds the healing process.

We pray this spring issue of *Anabaptist Voice* will help you put your faith into practice every day.

Blessings,

*James G. Landis*


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# About *Anabaptist Voice*

## Our Mission Statement:

We want *Anabaptist Voice* to be a servant to the churches of Jesus Christ. We choose the name “Anabaptist” as a fitting term to describe an obedient “people of God” in our generation. We follow the *example* of the historic Anabaptists who sought to obey the teachings of Christ and the apostles, but we do not idolize Anabaptists nor historic Anabaptism. We follow Christ.

## Our Purpose:

To interpret Scripture in a simple childlike way, and to apply Bible teaching to the lives of living saints.

## Our Tone:

The tone of the magazine shall be positive in that:  
it presents the right way when it decries the wrong way.

it presents the truth when it warns of the untruth.

Our motto shall be words from Isaiah 30:21.

Whenever you turn to the right hand  
Or whenever you turn to the left,  
You shall hear a voice behind you, saying,  
“This is the way, walk in it.”

## Our Bible Translation Policy:

All Scriptures quoted will be from the New American Standard Bible (1995) unless specified otherwise.

We respect the specific preference of a writer who wishes to use other translations for his article.

## Our Finances:

There is no set subscription price for *Anabaptist Voice*. We appreciate donations from those who wish to support the work.

To assure an informed supporter base, each issue contains a statement giving the number of copies printed and distributed, the total costs for the previous issue, and the amount of donations received.

## Our Organization:

The AV Editor is responsible for assuring that *Anabaptist Voice* adheres to the stated purpose, securing writers, and proper copy editing. The AV Production Team is responsible for design, layout, printing, subscriptions, and all financial matters.

At present, *Anabaptist Voice* is choosing to be free of government regulations and control as much as possible. We are not registered with any federal or state government body. We are not a 501(c)3 organization.

However, those who give to *Anabaptist Voice* through Kooskia Mennonite Church in Idaho will receive a tax deductible receipt for the donation. See page 43 for details.

## Our Audience:

Our primary target audience is anyone associated with an Anabaptist church. We define an Anabaptist church as one that practices a follower-of-Jesus baptism, maintains actual applications of Bible truths, and one where a close-knit, disciplined brotherhood exists among the believers.

Our secondary target audience is those not familiar with Anabaptist churches but are searching the Scriptures for truth.

## Some Historic Tenets of Anabaptism:

In order to provide clarity about who we are, *Anabaptist Voice* lists some historic Anabaptist beliefs and practices we believe are still valid today.

1. God accepted Jesus’ death on the cross as an atonement for the sins of the whole world. Thus the blood of Jesus enables each person to be acceptable to God when he repents of his sin and surrenders himself to King Jesus. This initial commitment is followed by obedience to the commands of Christ which gives the disciple assurance of his right standing before God. “Salvation” is not just a one-time event but a life-long experience.
2. Adult believer’s baptism signifies a commitment to follow Christ as His disciple in His Kingdom.
3. The teachings of Christ and the apostles in the New Testament are to be put into practice. The Sermon on the Mount and the Sermon on the Plain are the heart of Christ’s Kingdom teaching for His disciples.
4. Anabaptists recognize the church as Christ’s Kingdom on the earth.
5. Faithful obedience to the commands of Christ often brings persecution upon us.
6. The world (*all who do not obey God*) is evil and under the sway of Satan.
7. Our earthly conduct determines our eternal destiny. True faith must result in obedience that will be rewarded in heaven. Evil works prove a lack of faith in God and will result in eternal punishment.
8. Kingdom disciples do not participate in the civil government or “serve” in the military.



# Our Readers Write

**Policy Note:** Email letters to *Anabaptist Voice* are encouraged. All letters must be accompanied by the writer's full name and physical address (not a PO Box). If the letter is printed in the magazine, only the writer's initials and state will be attached to the comments. If you send AV a letter, we assume the right to use any part of the letter we deem of interest to our readers. Not all comments by readers express the thoughts of *Anabaptist Voice*, but we think they may have some merit in showing counter points of view.

AV Editor

## Keep Candles Burning

by Faith D. Livered

The article on the Lord's Day (AV38, page 7) warms my heart because it is so well-founded, both in Scripture and in church history. Comments by Anabaptists in the *Martyrs Mirror* confirm Brother Oberholtzer's position as well. I very much like how the article draws the child of God into observing the Lord's Day as a celebration of what Jesus has done. I share the valid concern about turning the Lord's Day into a pleasure-seeking day.

I believe *Anabaptist Voice* has an important role in our age to preserve the faith once delivered to the saints. I pray that it can be used to keep the candlesticks burning brightly until our Bridegroom comes.

J. L. B. | Idaho



## Different Gifts

by Fam Lee Checker (a reviewer)

Greek humanism endeavored to make every man equal without distinguishing that some people have different roles. This is, of course, the basis of democracy.

Some churches have thought that since it appears like American democracy is the pinnacle of human governance, it should be brought into the church. The problem is that the scriptures do not indicate that. The scriptures quoted in the article, "Obey Your Leaders" (AV39, page 18), show God's plan for church leadership.

It is also important to note that the church is a family, or a body, and everybody has different functions. A good church will try to bring out the gift of every person so that they can all be meaningfully involved. That, to me, is one of the big jobs in leadership. Some people are called to lead, some are called to give, some are called to go, and we all are called to love and follow Christ with our whole hearts.

J. L. B. | Idaho



## Bible Models

by Ree Viewed

I have reviewed the article, "Obey Your Leaders"

(AV39, pages 18-21). This article deals with a very important topic in today's world. The invisible spirits moving in the larger society subtly affect the thinking of churches, both congregations and leaders. We must continue to uphold biblical standards of government for the church, not the practices of the society around us.

One observation I would make concerns the three forms of government at the end, which is based upon the traditional Anabaptist model of 2-3 leaders (a bishop, deacon, minister). Under the New Testament model of multiple "bishops and deacons," every one of the weak points mentioned in the article would be greatly diminished. A sizable group of leaders (bishops, ministers, teachers, elders) would make submission much more compelling.

The biblical practice of multiple church leaders also fits good with your article ("The Real Team," AV38, page 13) about younger and older men serving together without retirement! The older men who no longer feel capable or willing to stand in front and preach would still be part of the leadership team."

T. B. | Chile



## Pulling Together

by Team Worker

Thank you for the refreshing article, "The Real Team" (AV 38, Pg. 13), by Jeff Byler.

The author points out clearly the blessing of the plural ministry both from Scripture and from historical evidence. While the practice of having more than one minister per congregation is probably still used in most Anabaptist churches, the need for real teams as described in this article, is all too evident.

This article also emphasizes the biblical basis for the view of the call to the ministry being the call of God for life, and of having a team of various ages working together. The shift from seeing the ministry as a sacred call of God for life, to being an assignment given by the church, is now also giving the church the 'right' to dismiss ministers for trivial reasons. The mentality of "the church has put them in, the church can take them out" is rapidly moving some churches toward the evangelical practice of affirming preachers who please

the people and dismissing ones who do not. Older ones may be asked to step aside to let the younger ones lead who are ‘more in touch’ with the people.

While there may be legitimate reasons for older ministers to request release from some leadership responsibilities, older and younger men respectfully and harmoniously serving together as a team is beautiful evidence of the Spirit of Christ at work in the church! May we not lose the vision of biblical church leadership.

T. Y. | *Tennessee*



## Three Dimensions

by *All Inone*

I couldn't tell whether *Wan Dering* (AV38, page 6) believes in the Trinity or not. The term simply means three-fold. While the word Trinity is not found in the Scriptures; “Father,” “Son,” and “Holy Ghost,” assuredly are. Matthew 28:19 says, “Baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.”

While it would be clear enough to simply take the trinity by faith, we also find a concept in the world around us that should help our understanding. God has introduced three dimensions into the created world in a manner that life would not exist without them.

Spaces require three dimensions—length, width, and height. Time itself requires three elements—the past, the present, and the future. We may not have thought about it, but the next person you meet is also a trinity. The person is indeed ONE, yet of necessity exists in a three-fold way—body, soul, and spirit.

I find it reassuring that our three-in-one God has eternally been in a relationship of perfect love, perfect unity, and perfect accord in holiness.

L.T. | *Wisconsin*



## Best Yet

by *Part Ner*

To all who had a part in AV38, I believe it is the best yet! I am really enjoying it!

It is such a blessing to be a part of God's family and those who remain faithful.

God bless you.

A. L. B. | *Virginia*



## His Finished Work

by *Lives Show*

The calendar says we are close to Easter when Jesus said, “It is finished”!

Do we have any idea of the scope of what was finished? The death and atonement of Jesus accomplished eternal plans that will take ages to show and explain.

However, it is erroneous to think, “It is finished” means our response to Jesus doesn't matter. Some may think that if we emphasize obedience we are not resting in Christ's finished work. But obedience is part of Christ's finished work; we need to obey and live for Him.

No, we cannot save ourselves by any stretch of the imagination, but obeying Jesus is far from saving ourselves. Jesus' finished work is the basis and merit of our salvation. His Lordship in our lives shows that we are His children.

When Saul, the persecutor, was arrested by Jesus on the road to Damascus, he responded, “Lord, what will thou have me to do?” Jesus did not say, “Look, Saul, it is finished. There is nothing you have to do to be saved. Simply believe.”

No, Saul found that he had many things to suffer in this new walk of grace and obedience to his Lord. He didn't try to save himself when he had this matchless grace and a Savior to follow.

Jesus' sinless earthly life and atoning sacrifice was finished. He had finished all that He had come to accomplish in sacrificing His life for us. However, our need for obedience and service to Him was only beginning.

W. B. | *North Dakota*



## Consider Others

by *Ben E. Fishal*

I enjoy AV very much and want to encourage you in the good work. I look forward to each issue.

I have followed with interest the question of whether chemical use and GM (genetically modified) seeds in agriculture is ethical or good stewardship. I know the discussion has been on-going. I would like to add another view.

*Anabaptist Voice*, Issue 38 (“Round Table Discussion,” page 32) mentions that some of those concerns are valid. Yes, I think there are valid concerns. Are the GMO's inferior? I do not think they are superior. They are not more productive than traditional hybrids. They do not result in less chemicals used per acre, just

less of different kinds of chemicals.

Maybe we should look at this from a Philippians 2:4 point of view. “Do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others.”

I would like to consider two things. First—Glyphosate (Round-up) is now found in much of America’s ground water. Glyphosate is linked to illnesses including cancer. **Philippians 2:4** surely includes the health of others, would it not?

Here is the second thing I would like to consider—genetically modified organisms (GMO’s) kill indiscriminately. When plants are genetically altered to kill insect pests, they kill all insects.

I believe there is a better way. A natural, biological caterpillar and larva control is called BT.<sup>1</sup> BT is a gut disorder that the larva gets and is effective when applied to crops.

When plants are genetically altered to include BT in their genes (not possible in nature), then all parts of the plant at all stages of growth are toxic to all insects. This is why it is [believed to be] dangerous to beneficials such as honeybees.

For example, look at the huge soybean fields of the Mennonites in southern Mexico. In spite of a GM seed ban, GMO’s are still planted. Since then, the natives of the area who have for generations been bee-keepers cannot keep their bees alive. If we care for the things of others, should not this be a point of concern?

I repeat **Romans 14:16-19** at the end of the article in AV38, page 32. “Therefore do not let what is for you a good thing be spoken of as evil; for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. For he who in this way serves Christ is acceptable to God and approved by men. So then we pursue the things which make for peace and the building up of one another.”

M. M. | Ohio



## Leaning Plumblines

by Cure Ageous

An issue of *Anabaptist Voice* arrived recently which I enjoyed. I am blessed to read the thoughts of burdened, and courageous people. By identifying leaning plumblines, the writers help balance and offset potential drift in the churches. It is no doubt a challenge

<sup>1</sup> *Bacillus thuringiensis* is a naturally occurring, soil-borne bacterium that produces toxins—specifically proteins—that are used to kill specific insect pests. It is a widely used biopesticide because it is highly selective, generally not harming humans, pets, or beneficial insects.

to keep Bible truth with sanctification balanced against religionized culture.

I. W. | Ontario, Canada



## Wit and Wisdom

by Cap Sules

Health pills for you to think and laugh about:

“The greatest gifts are not wrapped in paper, but in love.”

“If you do not take care of your customers, someone else will.”

“You do not know just how much you must know in order to know how little you know.”

“The excellence of a gift lies in its appropriateness rather than in its value.”

“Your mind is a garden; your thoughts are the seeds. You can grow flowers, or you can grow weeds.”

“Most trouble, if left alone, will die a natural death.”

“Plan your future carefully because that is where you will spend the rest of your life.”

“Days are long but the years are short.”

“Good judgment comes from experience and a lot of that comes from bad judgment.”

“Never confuse a single failure with a final defeat.”

“We tend to judge others by their actions and ourselves by our intentions.”

“God chooses what I go through. I choose how I go through it.”

“We make a living with what we get, but we make a life by what we give.”

“If you think knowledge is expensive, try ignorance.”

“When you are going through something hard and wonder where God is, remember the teacher is always quiet during the test.”

R. S. | Kinzer, PA

# Obey Your Leaders

By Menno Knight

*Obey, rule, and submit* are three hard words for Anabaptists of the twenty-first century. From our childhood, many of us have been taught that we are to think for ourselves. We are not to meekly follow the crowd and do what everyone else is doing.

## From Little Up

At the table Johnie and Susie are asked, “Would you like some peas? How about some broccoli? Which kind of meat do you want?” From the the abundance before them, children are offered many choices. When they turn up their noses or throw a fit, parents meekly give in to the child’s desires. Maybe parents offer some mild remonstrance such as, “It is good for your health,” or “Many children in the world would be glad if they could have your food,” or “You cannot have any dessert until you finish eating what is on your plate.”

Now picture a different scene. The mother or father dishes out the food with no questions asked of the child. If he complains or refuses to eat what is set before him, he is ushered off to another room for a sound spanking. Or, the child may even be made to go hungry without snacks until the next meal.

The practice of allowing the child to do what pleases him carries through in many aspects of life where children do not learn what it means to *obey* and *submit* to them that *rule* over them. The problem may be that parents themselves have never learned to *submit* to authority and pass that attitude on to their children. They challenge the policeman, the minister, and the boss—they do not even like the term, “boss.” At the table or in between meals they fill themselves with the choice foods they love.

Some cultures carry *rule* and *obey* to the extreme. When out walking, the woman follows the man; he does not need to look behind him to see if she is coming. In the army, one always *obeys* his commander without thinking on his own.

The Russians are much more willing to obey them that have the rule over them than Americans, or so we have been made to believe. Years ago, I remember reading a joke that illustrated the point that people who instantly obey quit thinking for themselves. A submarine was taking on water and was going down. All the mariners went down with it because no one told them to open the hatch.

## The Bible Speaks

So what does the Scripture teach about the meaning of those three words – *obey, rule, submit*?

The Scripture is straight forward and not hard to understand, but very difficult for American Christians to put into practice. Two words stand out in **Hebrews 13:17**: *obey* and *submit*. Let us look at those two words in several different translations.

**Hebrews 13:17.** “*Obey them that have the rule over you and submit yourselves*” (KJV).

**Hebrews 13:17.** “*Obey those who rule over you and be submissive*” (NKJV).

**Hebrews 13:17.** “*Obey your leaders and do what they say*” (CEV).

**Hebrews 13:17.** “*Obey your leaders and submit to them*” (NASB).

A straight forward understanding of these two words, “obey” and “submit” does not leave much wiggle room in the interpretation and the application of the meaning. Or does it?

Jesus gave a simple illustration of what “obey” and “submit” mean. It is found in **Matthew 21:28-32**.

“But what do you think? A man had two sons, and he came to the first and said, ‘Son, go work today in the vineyard.’ And he answered, ‘I will not’; but afterward he regretted it and went.

“The man came to the second and said the same thing; and he answered, ‘I will, sir’; but he did not go.

“Which of the two did the will of his father?”

They said, “The first.”

So to obey church leaders means that we humbly submit our will to theirs and do what they desire of us. Furthermore, according to the rest of **Hebrews 13:17** we ought not do it grudgingly, but cheerfully. It says, “For they [shepherds] keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account [to God]. Let them [the shepherds] do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you.”

Let us say the leaders make a wrong decision—at least in our minds—and we cannot submit our will to theirs. Does it not seem self-evident that if the leaders are wrong, yet you submit, God will judge them for their wrong decision. But if the leaders are right, and you are

in the wrong for not submitting, God will punish the disobedient one.

## A Better Way

There is still a better way. The doubtful ones can cheerfully submit to the leaders because the leaders carry a responsibility to watch for their souls as those that must give account to God. It is not a light burden to be responsible for the souls of others. As one bishop brother expressed it, “I wish that I could be accountable to God only for myself.”

Those who obey and submit themselves to church leaders means they can give account to God with joy and not with grief. That is the best way. But to those who disregard godly church leaders, it will not be profitable for them when the leaders give account to God.

Another verse also speaks of yielding our will to church leaders. “*You younger men, likewise, be subject to your elders; and all of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, for GOD IS OPPOSED TO THE PROUD, BUT GIVES GRACE TO THE HUMBLE*” (Proverbs 3:34; I Peter 5:5). Some will agree with the leaders and will gladly follow their directions. But the stark truth is that if love and unity are going to prevail in our brotherhoods, some are going to have to humbly submit to the will and direction of the church leaders.

## Excuses for Not Submitting

Even though the Scripture is plain, it is not easy to humbly submit to another. Therefore, Anabaptists often go in search of excuses that exempt one from simple obedience.

**Excuse #1. We do not have to obey the rulers because our forefathers disregarded the church leaders.** Calvin, Luther, Zwingli—all the reformers claimed the authority to contradict the plain teaching of the Word of God—murder in war, infant baptism, corrupt priesthood, salvation without works. This teaching against corrupted authority has been ingrained in our heritage.

Anabaptists hold a rightful bias against authority exercised beyond the boundaries set by the Word of God. Drunken, adulterous, atheistic husbands do not have authority over their godly wives to command them to remove their veils. The government never has authority from God to force the individual to swear allegiance to rulers or join the military. Leadership in the congregation never has authority to impose restrictions on believers contrary to the Word of God.

There are limits to the authority God has given to each power, and sometimes the individual must refuse

to obey and submit. But that is no excuse for disobeying church leadership when it falls within God-ordained boundaries.

**Excuse #2. We do not have to obey the rulers because God speaks to us also.** This is the old sin of Aaron and Miriam. They challenged the God-given authority of humble Moses. “*Has the Lord spoken only through Moses? Has He not spoken through us as well?*” With this saying Aaron and Miriam slandered Moses, and God was angry. He said, “*Why then were you not afraid to speak against My servant, against Moses?*” (Numbers 12:8).

Numbers 16 tells the tragic story of the rebellion of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram along with 250 leaders of the congregation, *men of renown*. This was their complaint:

“*They assembled together against Moses and Aaron, and said to them, “You have gone far enough, for all the congregation are holy, every one of them, and the Lord is in their midst; so why do you exalt yourselves above the assembly of the Lord?”* (Numbers 16:3).

There it is again as it was with Aaron and Miriam, “God speaks to us also,” and “You exalt yourself.” The uprising against Moses and Aaron garnered the support of 250 Levite leaders. God was not impressed with their position or their numbers. He dealt very harshly with them when fire came down and burned them up.

To use the excuse that we do not have to listen to the rulers because “God speaks to us also” finds common ground in many a rebellion.

**Excuse #3. We do not have to obey because the leaders are flawed.** God uses ordinary men to lead the church. They do not always make the best decisions, at least in the eyes of the beholders, maybe even a majority. Sometimes they make wrong decisions and it calls for much grace and forbearance and forgiveness. But those in the congregation must remember that the objective is to please God and not the majority.

This does not mean it is wrong to voice a different opinion to church leaders. But God’s way is to express your thoughts in private and avoid public confrontation and argument. Then if your thoughts are not heeded, humbly submit to the leaders.

**Excuse #4. We do not have to obey the rulers because they have hidden sin in their lives.** Unsubstantiated rumors and accusations are not a valid basis for disobedience. There is a God-ordained way to deal with sin in the leadership. Two or three witnesses must bring the charge before the rulers at the same time. If the charge is valid, the ruler must confess and repent;

but if the charge is flimsy and unsubstantiated, it must be dropped.

**Excuse #5. We do not have to obey the leaders because they only give us the “rules for to keep.”** The charge is that rulers act like dictators. They just tell people what they must do and teach that if the people do not obey them, they will not be saved. The leaders act like “lords over God’s heritage,” the very thing **I Peter 5:3** warns them not to be. The rulers think the people are only slaves and must be obedient in everything.

All leaders cannot please everybody. Leaders with some backbone may be accused of being a dictator when in reality they are accepting the responsibility God has laid on their shoulders. Jesus asked the people why they went out in the wilderness to listen to John the Baptist. “Did you go out to listen to a flexible reed shaken about by the wind—a man who just told you what you wanted to hear? Or did you go out to hear a prophet who brought God’s message to you?” True prophets may come pretty rough at times, dressed in camel’s hair and using tough speech. They are still God’s chosen rulers and we are commanded to obey them.

**Excuse #6. We do not have to obey the rulers because they do not properly hear the voice of the people.** The charge is that the people have no input in the decisions that are made and they themselves should have some say in the church. After all, the Spirit speaks to everyone, not just the leaders.

**Excuse #7. We do not have to obey the leaders because we have a conflict of conscience.** Some are sincere in technicalities of conscience. This should be okay as long as it does not interfere with common understandings in the congregation. Neither should the individual try to foist his beliefs on the rest of the congregation. But in many cases the conscience thing is only an attempt to have one’s own way rather than submit to church leaders.

## Rulers have Authority

Twenty-first-century Anabaptists may be uncomfortable with the word “rulers.” In our time it has the connotation of using physical force to back up the decrees of the king. We can use other biblical terms that mean close to the same thing as “rulers”—apostles, prophets, leaders, elders, bishops, ministers, shepherds. In all cases these terms confer God-given authority upon the one so named.

The authority God has given to church leaders does not rely upon physical force to demand obedience, but upon the power of God. Remember Ananias

and Sapphira (**Acts 5:1-10**). God struck them dead when they lied, not to men, but to God. While God’s punishment and judgment is not always so swift, it is always certain. **Hebrews 10:31** verifies how dangerous defying God’s authority can be. “It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God.”

Regardless of how much we may dislike the authority vested in church leaders, the rest of **Hebrews 13:17** cannot be misunderstood – *obey* and *submit*. None of the above seven excuses can justify disobedience, dishonor, disrespect, evil speaking, challenge, and rebellion against the authority God has granted to church leaders.

Like all authority given to men by God, it is limited to the bounds of His Word. That authority can be abused. No church leader has the power to make evil good. As Jesus told Peter when He revealed to him the bounds of his authority as an apostle. “Whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven” (**Matthew 16:19**).

Yes, leaders can go beyond the authority God has granted them. One of the best safeguards against the abuse of authority by a single ruler is a plural ministry. In several instances the Bible always speaks of church leaders in the plural—**Acts 20:28** (overseers); **Philippians 1:1** (overseers and deacons); **I Timothy 3:12** (deacons); **Titus 1:5** (elders); **Hebrews 13:17** (*They watch*). The New Testament never speaks of one pastor over one church. The believers should always speak of “our ministry” rather than “my pastor.” The leaders should always speak of “our people” rather than as “my church.”

## Exercising Authority

Having established then, that church leaders do have authority from God and the congregation has a divine calling to obey and submit to them, how does this work in real church life?

I propose there are three general types of church government where God’s plan can operate by scriptural standards. When people have Christlike attitudes and love for one another, any of the three patterns can be scriptural and satisfying. But where selfishness and bitterness prevail, none of the three patterns will work to the glory of God and peace in the brotherhood. However, no form of government will assure love and harmony within the congregation where there is not a willingness to obey and submit to the leaders or where sin is sheltered and not dealt with.

**Form #1.** The ministry brings a proposal to the male

members and asks for their support. If some brethren do not support the proposal, they are given an opportunity to specify why they do not support it. Rarely will such a proposal lack strong support. Thus the members are informed of the issue at hand before the action is taken.<sup>1</sup>

*Strong Point* – The congregants understand the reasons for the decision and have pledged to support it. This form of government acts as a strong check on the power of the ministry. They cannot just go ahead without the support of the people.

*Weak Point* – It is easy for people to think that salvation lies in unquestioning obedience to the church leaders.

**Form #2.** The ministry decides on a course of action and announces it to the congregation. Few details are revealed either before or after the action has been taken.

*Strong Point* – The congregants are not easily blown off course by strong individuals, rumors, or current “winds of doctrine.”

Most decisions and actions are carefully discussed by the ministry, and sometimes the ministry of linked churches, before action is taken.

*Weak Point* – Secrecy never builds trust in the leadership. Because the people have not been informed and had practically no part in the decision, it is easy for them to not support the action. In this type of setup, it becomes easy for the ministry to treat all the members as immature children that should just accept whatever they decide.

I would like to quote Harvey Miller<sup>2</sup> on the subject:

“In the kind of administration where the ministers do the proposing and the lay members do the head-nodding it is good for shepherds to pay attention to the sheep. The church suffers when leaders give little heed

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<sup>1</sup> *This is the traditional Amish way of making church decisions. See, “Solomon’s Court” The Vanguard; Volume 7, Issue 3, May-June 2025; Smyrna, Maine..*

<sup>2</sup> *“Solomon’s Court,” The Vanguard, Volume 7, Issue 3, May-June 2025.*

*“Whatever we ask we receive from God, because we keep God's commandments and do the things that are pleasing in God's sight. This is God's commandment, that we believe in the name of God's Son, Jesus Christ, and love one another, just as Jesus commanded us.”*

*1 John 3:22-23*

to the laity.

“It is, of course, very convenient for the leaders when they do not have to deal with conflicting input from the members. But the laity may well provide a healthy check and balance and serve as a measure of accountability for the ministry.”

**Form #3.** The ministry meets with the men members of the congregation and attempts to come to a consensus before coming to a decision. Everything is open and most information is forthcoming.

*Strong Point* – The members feel they have an important voice in the affairs of the congregation. Most members are more willing to support the decisions they had an opportunity to help make.

*Weak Point* – The responsibility of the ministry to lead and direct is minimized and the stability of the congregation is often threatened. The ministry may have a hard time bringing the group together in oneness of spirit. In these meetings, emotions can run out of control and decisions can be swayed by personal preferences rather than on a correct interpretation of the Scripture.

One must recognize differing levels of spiritual maturity in the brotherhood. Giving an equal voice in coming together to decide an issue does not necessarily result in a biblical or spiritual decision. What can easily come out is a decision that has the most support or the least opposition.

## Joy in Submission

When believers joyfully submit to their leaders, the leaders are not hindered by strife and disunity. This frees them to lead out in nourishing the believers, preaching and teaching the Word, and in calling men to repentance. This they can do with joy and not with grief.

If after a time, believers cannot fully support and joyfully submit to the standard of agreement in the congregation where they worship, they should seek fellowship elsewhere.



# Rubies & Diamonds

*Memorable quotes that speak to the heart.*



**“God is fair and just and will rightly reward everyone’s actions someday.”**

*– Simon Yoder at Sparta Mennonite Church, WI*



**“We, the church, hold the reputation of God’s wisdom in our hands.”**

*– Joseph Miller at Farmington Mennonite Church, MO*



**“A heart that abides in Christ stays near the things that Jesus desires.”**

*– Marcus Byler at Living Hope Mennonite Church, ID*



**“Obedience is the greenhouse where convictions grow.”**

*– David Oberholtzer at Delano Christian Community, TN*



**“After dinner rest a while. After supper walk a mile.”**

*– Marvin Rhodes at Scottsville Christian Community, KY*



**“We must use our time as currency to invest in God’s kingdom.”**

*– Kurtis Martin at Shirksville Mennonite Church, PA*



**“Only by drawing strength from God can we glorify God.”**

*– Martin Friesen at Horndean Mennonite Church, MB*



**“If you ignore God’s Word long enough you become ignorant.”**

*– Mike Tenny at Barnwell Mennonite Church, SC*



**“When we become discouraged and feel alone, we are forgetting God.”**

*– Eugene Miller at Shekinah Mennonite Church, MO*



**“You cannot catch fish unless you first cast your net.”**

*– Brian Eby at Horizon Mennonite School, PA*

*We welcome additional quotes to add to our file. If you do not see a ruby or diamond listed from your state and your congregation, please send us at least one. Please send in your quote followed by the name of the speaker and the name of the congregation where it was given. For our records, we would also like to have the name and address of the person sending in the quote.*

# Proud Belshazzar

## The Storyteller

Belshazzar strode out onto the roof top of his palace. From here he could see all the majesty of Babylon. It was hard to believe that less than 150 years earlier this city had been completely razed and left uninhabited by Sennacherib, the Assyrian. Now the evening sun glinted off the magnificent palaces and buildings that surrounded him. The lush, towering hanging gardens made the city look like a veritable oasis. The Assyrians had finally been conquered and Babylon, the great city, had now been restored to its former glory.

Belshazzar was a direct descendant of those who had founded Babylon. He had been educated by the Chaldeans, who were skilled in all the dark arts and secret knowledge; there was no enigma too difficult for them to solve. He was a Babylonian, and the Babylonians were smarter, stronger and better than all the inferior peoples around them. A smug smile spread over his face.

From the height of this terrace, he could look down on the city walls where troops were patrolling. Camped outside the walls, the Medes and Persians were thinking they could assault the city. Belshazzar thought to himself, *Darius is foolish to think he can ever conquer Babylon. It is impossible for his fledgling army to climb over Babylon's 80-foot-high walls or to get through the 70-foot thickness of stone and brick.* Nonetheless, the soldiers are keeping a constant vigil in the 250-foot-tall watchtowers. There will be no surprises.

Belshazzar knew Babylon could comfortably withstand a siege for many years because the Euphrates River that flowed through it, gave Babylon an endless water supply. Belshazzar smiled to himself. *They would continue the feast as planned; they would praise the gods and live it up. There was nothing to worry about.* He walked back into his room and prepared himself to enter the banquet hall.

.....

Belshazzar pushed away from the table. The food had been delicious and the wine was of the finest that he had ever tasted. But best of all was the praise that his patrons showered on him. It felt good to be loved and admired. He stood up and commanded, "Bring in the gold and silver vessels my father brought to Babylon from the temple in Jerusalem. All hail to the gods of the Babylonians! They are stronger than any god including the one in Jerusalem."



Serving the wine in the goblets from the Jewish temple had been the final touch of symbolic mastery. His family was unstoppable. Not even the god of the Jews could stop them. Babylon, with all of its

glory and power, was their creation. From its beautiful hanging gardens and palaces to its towering walls and military might, Babylon excelled.

It felt good to be at the top; it was a right he had earned. Belshazzar thought, *I will stop at nothing less than complete domination. I will crush my enemies. I will show no mercy. There is no god that can deliver me into the hands of my enemies. The gods are there to aid me. In fact, I am sure that I myself am one of them.*

Suddenly his jaw dropped; his eyes riveted on something in the room that was strangely out of place. His heart stopped and he questioned the reality of what he was seeing. The noisy laughter and banter of his fellow revelers died instantly into a solemn hush that seemed out of place in the opulent banquet hall. There was a presence in the room that was awesome with power. One of his wives slumped to the ground in front of him, as did another. Some men fell involuntarily to their knees.

With great difficulty Belshazzar remained standing. He wanted to kneel but he had purposed long ago that he would kneel to no one. The blood drained from his face and he felt nauseous. His knees knocked together, expressing the uncontrollable fear that numbed his senses. The golden goblet fell from his hand and the wine stained his exquisite royal robe. He was oblivious to everything, but ... the hand, the disconnected hand that was writing words on the wall right across from him.

The hand had the attention of all. It was undeniable. Every man was speechless. Belshazzar's heart began to beat so loudly he feared it would burst; he could not catch his breath.

And then it was gone, leaving only a few short words in a language that in all of his studies, he did not know. Belshazzar caught himself. He must take



control. “Does anyone know the meaning of this writing?” he demanded, still breathless. All shook their heads, with eyes still fixed to the words written on the wall.

“Bring in the Chaldeans and wise men, immediately!”

Belshazzar commanded. Then he sat down. He was relieved to take his seat with some dignity.

The wise men and most educated from his kingdom came in, having been hastily summoned with little time to dress because of the urgency of his orders. Belshazzar was confident the Chaldeans could read this strange writing. One by one they studied the script. They shook their heads and sometimes murmured to one another. But they all answered the same: the meaning was unknown to them.

Belshazzar was astonished; he shook his head stubbornly. He would find the answer. The sand in the hour glass trickled on, but still, no one could interpret the writing. A messenger from the watchtower overlooking the encampment of the Medes and Persians outside the city walls came with a special report, but Belshazzar refused to hear it. After all, Babylon was too great and too well organized to fall. He had to know what the writing meant.

Belshazzar closed his eyes, trying to think. It was the soft words of his mother, Nitocris, that broke into his thoughts. She said, “Call for Daniel. He was a servant of the Holy God, and there was no one wiser in all of your father’s kingdom.”

Daniel was summoned immediately and he came quicker than expected. It was as if he had already been prepared. Belshazzar sized him up immediately. Daniel was probably in his early eighties but his eyes maintained the quiet energy of a man who lived with purpose. Here was a man who was respectful to Belshazzar but showed no fear. Even in Belshazzar’s presence, Daniel spoke calmly and confidently.

There were no hard lines around Daniel's eyes like Belshazzar usually saw with people of his age. His eyes seemed to take in the huge banquet hall in an instant—the 1,000 nobles, the gods of gold and silver, bronze, wood, and stone; the servings of food and wine, and the golden vessels from Judea. Belshazzar noted a quality in Daniel rare in Babylon; an absence of the

haughtiness he found so irritating in many of his nobles. Daniel appeared completely disinterested in the reward that Belshazzar offered, “Give your gifts to another or keep them for yourself,” he said.

The first words that Daniel spoke surprised Belshazzar. He spoke of the pride of his father and of Belshazzar's pride. Daniel spoke of his God being very upset with pride and of his father Nebuchadnezzar’s bout with insanity as judgment from the God of heaven. Belshazzar was somewhat confused about the accusation of pride. After all, had not he and his family, with their great knowledge and strength, earned what they had?

Daniel did not mince his words but spoke with great directness to Belshazzar, You have risen up against the Lord of heaven; and they have brought the vessels of His house before you. You and your nobles, your wives, and your concubines have been drinking wine out of them; and you have praised the gods of silver and gold, of bronze, iron, wood, and stone, which do not see, nor hear, nor understand.” His eyes seemed to pierce the soul of Belshazzar. “The God in whose hand are your life-breath and all your ways, you have not glorified.” Belshazzar was taken aback by the accusations, but he found himself unable to react in anger. After all, it was hard for him to deny that Daniel spoke the truth.

Finally, the interpretation of the writing came. “This is the interpretation of the message,” Daniel said with little deliberation. “MENE—God has numbered your kingdom and put an end to it. TEKEL—you have been weighed on the scales and found deficient. PERES—your kingdom has been divided and given over to the Medes and Persians.”

It was a relief to finally know what the words meant. Despite the shocking words, Belshazzar determined to show no fear. He gave orders to honor Daniel with a purple robe, put a necklace of gold around his neck, and declared him to be the third ruler of the great kingdom of Babylon.

In his mind, Belshazzar determined to immediately double the guard, entreat the gods, and talk to his counselors and sorcerers. But it was too late.

Suddenly he was startled at the sound of loud cries, running feet and swords clanging in the hallway. Men were charging into the banquet hall and everyone was cut to the ground in front of him. He looked for his bodyguards but they too were slain before him. Finally, he stood alone as they came towards him. A clammy sweat broke out on his forehead. He resigned himself to the fact; his time was up.

## Belshazzar on the Scales

Daniel leveled five charges against Belshazzar.

- You knew that the Most High God granted sovereignty, grandeur, glory and majesty to Nebuchadnezzar your father. Babylon was great not because of superior wisdom, not because of a superior army, but because God granted Nebuchadnezzar the power to rule.

- You knew that your father became proud and behaved arrogantly and that he was deposed from his royal throne. His throne and his glory were taken away from him.

- You knew Nebuchadnezzar was driven away from mankind and ate grass like cattle and slept in the open fields with the wild donkeys. When he lifted his eyes toward heaven and blessed the Most High and praised and honored Him who lives forever, his reason returned to him.

- You knew what your humbled father said, **“For His dominion is an everlasting dominion, And His kingdom endures from generation to generation.**

**“All the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, But He does according to His will in the host of heaven And among the inhabitants of earth; And no one can ward off His hand or say to Him, ‘What have you done?’”**

- You knew what your father said after his majesty and glory were restored to him. **“Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise, exalt and honor the King of heaven, for all His works are true and His ways just, and He is able to humble those who walk in pride.”**

King Belshazzar, you knew all these things. Yet tonight you have not humbled your heart before the Lord of heaven, but have exalted yourself against Him. You have desecrated the vessels of God’s temple in Jerusalem

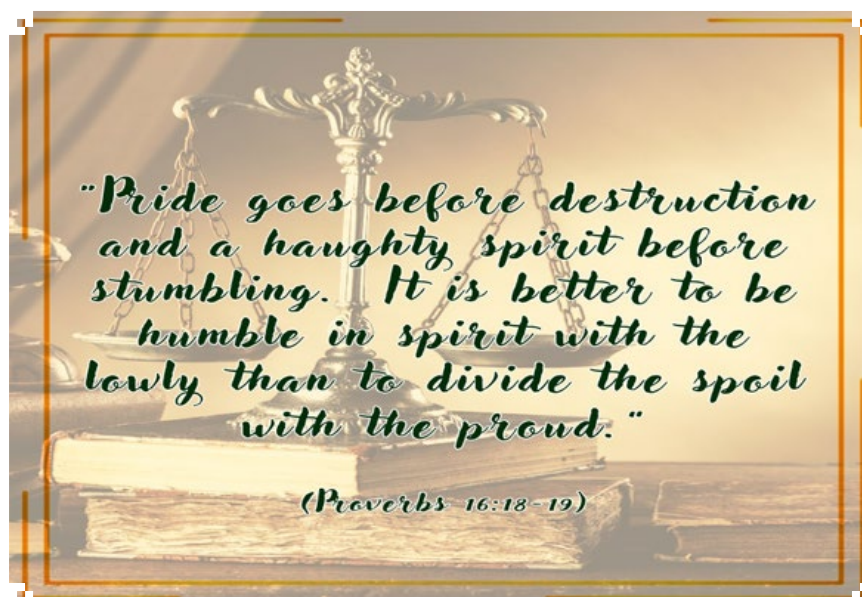
by drinking from them in this hall. Then you praised these lifeless gods instead of glorifying the God of heaven who holds your life and breath in His hand. Because you have lifted yourself up in pride and not honored the God of heaven, God has weighed you on His scales and you are coming up short. This night your life will be required of you.



## Pride

Pride is closely connected to many sins because those who commit them forget that “we are not our own.” People vaunt themselves up to walk according to their own fleshly lusts and do not submit themselves to the Spirit of God in their lives. Belshazzar’s sin, and the sin of every individual is always connected to their pride. God gives grace to the humble and this makes them teachable, but pride blinds the heart and stiffens the neck of those who practice sin. It is not possible to walk in righteousness and pride at the same time. **“Everyone who is proud in heart is an abomination to the LORD; assuredly, he will not be unpunished (Proverbs 16:5).**

The Storyteller



# Precious Stones

## Twelve Precious Stones from Georgia Church Meetings

The foundation stones of the city wall were adorned with every kind of precious stone. The first foundation stone was jasper; the second, sapphire; the third, chalcedony; the fourth, emerald; the fifth, sardonyx; the sixth, sardius; the seventh, chrysolite; the eighth, beryl; the ninth, topaz; the tenth, chrysoprase; the eleventh, jacinth; the twelfth, amethyst  
– Revelation 21:19-20 (NIV)



JASPER

“The heart of man can find no rest until it comes to Christ.”

- Austin Hege at Burkeland Mennonite Church



SAPPHIRE

“You do not have to do something if you want to do it.”

- Conrad Stover at Burkeland Mennonite Church



AGATE

“Your true purpose in life is to be a kingdom of priests and thus bless the whole world.”

- Tim Thomas at Bethel Mennonite Church



EMERALD

“We should never allow the good to keep us from the great.”

- Tim Myers at South Atlantic Mennonite Conference



ONYX

“You cannot stop rowing forward or you will be drifting back.”

- Nathan Bange at South Atlantic Mennonite Conference



RUBY

“We can ignore the Holy Spirit and do whatever we want to do.”

- Gordon Amstutz at Burkeland Mennonite Church



CHRYSOLITE

“If you have no faith, you will have no testimony.”

- Duane Strite at Hephzibah Mennonite Church



BERYL

“The Ten Commandments are given for our good.”

- Titus Barnhart at Burkeland Mennonite Church



TOPAZ

“We must choose to surrender our identity to Christ.”

- Jared Hege at Burkeland Mennonite Church



TURQUOISE

“The bigger we become the smaller God is.”

- Ryan Keller at Burkeland Mennonite Church



JACINTH

“Forgiving is not forgetting, but releasing.”

- Dave Keller at Burkeland Mennonite Church



AMETHYST

“With the Good Shepherd, darkness is not so terrifying.”

- Austin Hege at Burkeland Mennonite Church

# Reaching for Unity

By Joe Wurz

Both the biblical standard and the Holy Spirit desire that there be unity in the church. Every church member should desire and strive to be a part of a unified church. Unity is the goal, but it does not come automatically or easily. It is often a journey through treacherous shoals and wild winds that blow as we strive for perfect unity in the body of Christ.

Let us begin the journey by talking about discipline. The word “discipline” is found only once in the King James Bible, but is used about 40 times in the New American Standard Bible. The word “discipline” is translated from the Hebrew word “*musar*.” Other meanings for this word include chastisement, reproof, warning, instruction, or restraint. The most common translation in the King James Version of this Hebrew word is “instruction” and is practically synonymous with the word “discipline” used in modern English today.

Webster, in his dictionary, also includes chastisement as a synonym for discipline. Discipline is training that corrects, molds, and perfects orderly conduct. It can also be a system of rules to govern conduct and practice.

The German word *Zucht* is a term that includes various forms of discipline. The words nurture, sound mind, sober, or sobriety are all biblical terms for discipline.

## Types of Discipline

We would like to consider three types of discipline, especially as they relate to the church:

- *Preventive discipline.* We have all heard the old saying, “An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.” Preventive discipline includes giving direction through rules, laws, and regulations. We may think of this as a negative approach, but it also teaches the positive side of how to live rightly. There should be just as much emphasis on “thou shalt” as on “thou shalt not.”

- *Corrective discipline.* This becomes necessary when preventive measures are ignored or rebelled against. The intent of corrective discipline is to get the erring one’s attention and to correct unacceptable behavior. Punishment should never be given in a spirit of vengeance or anger or to flaunt one’s authority. Rather, it should draw a person to respond in a positive way to produce righteousness. **“All discipline for the**

**moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness” (Hebrews 12:11).**

- *Inner discipline.* This is the true object or goal of the two previous forms of discipline. In child training, the intent of early preventive and corrective measures is to teach the child inner control, or what we sometimes call self-discipline. We have utterly failed our 12 to 16-year-olds if they still need to be told everything they may or may not do. By then, they should know what behavior is acceptable, and what is not. If our discipline was given with love and understanding, a willingness to follow and submit to discipline usually follows.

If our discipline is designed to control the child for selfish reasons, or if we use fear tactics or expressions of anger, we should not be surprised if some form of rebellion appears. This is also true of discipline in the church, for the patterns are very similar.

No matter how well-worded or how biblical our standards are, they have no life in themselves.

## The Role of Church Standards

Today in our churches, we see various degrees of reaction against discipline. Our preventive discipline (written standards or *Ordnung*) is being challenged as unscriptural, and corrective discipline is often being ignored or considered a form of oppression. The lack of inner discipline is being mislabeled as true liberty and freedom in Christ. How should our churches be responding to these reactions?

A reaction is a negative response to something. It becomes obvious that reacting to someone else’s reaction is a vicious cycle that accomplishes nothing. So the first point for our churches to keep in mind is to not react toward these reactions against discipline in the church. Groups that decry legalism in Anabaptist churches for having regulations, become empowered by the so-called “persecution” that they receive. We should not give them any wind for their sails and keep the rudder set purposefully on the goal: a disciplined and Spirit-filled life.

We need to look for the truth and then apply it. No matter how well-worded or how biblical our standards are, they have no life in themselves. True spiritual life comes only through Jesus Christ, who said, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life, no one comes to the Father but through Me” (John 14:6). We are mistaken when we seek spiritual life through other means such as baptism, church membership, ceremonies, rituals, or church standards.

In Revelation 3:1, Jesus tells the church at Sardis, “You have a name that you are alive, and yet you are dead.” This same thing can still happen today if we place more emphasis on outward conformity than on inward change. Even though we believe an inner spiritual renewal brings a very notable outward change, we must

beware of judging one’s right standing with God only by their conformity to the church’s regulations. No set of standards can change a person’s heart; only God can do that as man responds to Him.

Without a changed heart, rules become a burden to be endured or an instrument to greater self-righteousness.

Carnality cannot be controlled with regulations but will eventually find ways to express itself. Rather, “those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires” (Galatians 5:24). Only then will church discipline and church standards be effective.

## The Misuse of Standards

No matter how good and right something may be in its proper setting, there is always a danger of misusing it, getting out of balance, or going to some extreme. We would like to list four dangers of the misuse of church standards.

– One subtle danger of church standards is the *tendency to measure our spiritual status* by them. Though a truly spiritual person would not rebel against biblical standards and is submissive to the brotherhood, this is not the only indication of spirituality. Considering ourselves to be spiritual simply because we fit within the church guidelines is an incomplete assessment of our right standing with God. This mindset may lead to the reasoning that being more “conservative” than the rest of the church is being more spiritual.

– Another risk is if church leadership uses *church discipline as a means of controlling behavior* rather

than promoting the heartfelt obedience of “faith working through love” (Galatians 5:6). When a carnal nature hides behind outward piety, we may resort to making more rules as a means of constraining the worldliness that seeps through the shell of piety. Too often, the ministry ends up filling the role of a policeman instead of a shepherd, thus getting so bogged down with fine details that the church’s witness as a light to the world is obscured.

– A related threat is a *wrong mentality about church standards* that confuses the difference between principle and application. When the central focus is on church standards, we tend to forget that the applications are not the principles. Biblical convictions are based on biblical principles, and applying these principles to our lives may vary from congregation to congregation. For example, there are a variety of ways that Anabaptists from Amish to Hutterites may apply the principle of nonconformity.

When our spirituality is measured by our obedience to the application, confusion may set in when someone else’s application differs from ours. We may quickly label that person as not spiritual—a conclusion that is harmful and breaks down relationships. This kind of thinking also keeps churches from making positive changes in their standards because their particular application is seen as the only application.

– Still another danger of over-regulation is that *uniformity can replace unity*. Spiritual unity is an important biblical principle that is often neglected. True unity derives from a body of believers who have a common bond through faith in Christ. This results in a certain degree of uniformity. Spiritual unity is willing to sacrifice the independent spirit and blend together in one body in which the fruit of the Spirit is evident. It is doing everything with “humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love; being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Ephesians 4:2, 3).

Paul also exhorted the Corinthians that “you all agree, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be made complete in the same mind and in the same judgment” (1 Corinthians 1:10). In other words, biblical unity is achieved only on the common ground of truth.

Unity should be expected more than demanded.

Both the biblical standard and the Holy Spirit desire that there be unity in the church.

“But all things must be done properly and in an orderly manner.”

(1 Corinthians 14:40)

It should be the natural result of brotherly love and submission to one another in a functioning body. If love and submission does not occur, we should search our hearts for a carnal root of bitterness or envy. If unity still does not occur, corrective discipline may need to be implemented.

## A Lack of Church Standards

On the opposite side of the spectrum come the reactions to the above misuse of standards, ending with not having any regulations at all in the church. Since there are various pietistic movements today that are making inroads into some of our churches, let us also look at the dangers of not having any standards at all.

§ *Without a collective agreement* within the brotherhood on the application of Bible principles, each individual is burdened with trying the spirits and making decisions on his own. Such independence downgrades the role of the brotherhood. Love is portrayed as tolerance to allow each one to do his or her own thing. This tolerance has very few restrictions. Compared with rules and regulations, it feels like liberty and freedom. Such people find a common ground based on their reactions toward where they came from, rather than upon the response to the faith that they should be following. When decisions are made individually, diversity of the spirit (not the unity of the Spirit) becomes a lifestyle that lures people into the world.

§ Related to the above is the *confusion regarding Christian liberty* that happens to those who have no standards. There is no liberty without law. Could we safely travel the highways if there were no restrictions, laws, or directions? Lawless people are not loving people. Laws should not be looked at as restricting personal liberty but as protecting love and respect for the convictions and feelings of all those within the brotherhood.

Christian liberty comes as a result of denying our selfishness, loving others, and submitting to a scriptural brotherhood. Rules and standards become bondage only when they are abused or resisted. The “live-and-let-live” philosophy allows for individual expression and interpretation of what is sin and what is not sin. It highlights personal convictions and preferences without being accountable to one another. It ignores the deceitfulness of man’s

own heart and the need to be our brother’s keeper.

§ Another peril for those who *have no church discipline* is the tendency to emphasize personal impressions and revelations. The cry from the no-regulation camp is that the Word of God is all we need and that anything more, such as a confession of faith or written standards, becomes idolatry and is an addition to the written Word. It is ironic, though, that their own verbal expressions of faith or private interpretations are considered valid and “from the Lord.” This again promotes individualism and undermines the protection one experiences within a close-knit, structured brotherhood.

**Spirit-filled forms and traditions are useful tools to maintain spirituality, stability, and preservation.**

As mentioned before, when written standards or confessions of faith are overemphasized, they distract from the most important revelation to mankind: the Bible. But this is equally true of unwritten, independent confessions and private interpretations that are given the same validity as the *Holy Writ*. Not only are they distracting; they are also delusive and deceptive.

## Biblical Church Standards

By reacting to what we think is the abuse of overregulation, it is easy to convince ourselves that all restrictions are legalistic or formalistic. Yet one biblical example of written standards from the early church is recorded in **Acts 15**. The Apostles and the church at Jerusalem welcomed the Gentiles into their fellowship, based on their faith in Jesus Christ. The willingness of the Gentiles to submit to certain restrictions proved their sincerity. The apostolic church agreed to command the Gentiles “**that they abstain from pollutions of idols, and from fornication, and from things strangled and from blood**” (**Acts 15:20**).

We are told that they had “**assembled with one accord**” (**Acts 15:25**), which indicates a collective decision. Some of the requirements were so-called “manmade rules,” and all of them were restrictions. Had the church resorted to legalism by not allowing the Spirit to reveal His will individually? I find it interesting and encouraging in discovering God’s approval plainly stated in **Acts 15:28**: “**For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things.**”

**“It seemed good to us, having become of one mind, to select men to send to you.”**

(Acts 15:25)

The example of **Acts 15** confirms the belief that the collective decision (written or not) can be, should be, and often is an active function of the Holy Spirit. These guidelines often include restrictions as well as admonitions. Spirit-filled forms and traditions are useful tools to maintain spirituality, stability, and preservation. When we deny this truth, we lose the ability to keep the very saving faith we claim to have, and so sorely need.

## Proper Application of Standards

Having reviewed the dangers on either side, let us now look for a balance between the two extremes. If Christ is not the life of the church, then to have rules or not to have rules will avail nothing in eternity. The Word of God is clear that man must die to himself and become alive as a new creature in Christ before he can enter into the Kingdom of God. This is more than an experience—it is a commitment. Keeping all the moral rules in the world cannot take the place of this life-saving commitment to follow Jesus Christ in a spirit of brokenness, humility, obedience, and surrender.

Even with this commitment, our subtle old nature, the world, and Satan still tempt us to depart from God. When the carnal nature comes to the surface, we do well to repent and revive the spiritual man rather than generate more rules. The carnal man can never become spiritual by creating and keeping rules. The carnal must be replaced by the spiritual. Continually abiding in Christ is a necessity.

When church disciplines or regulations are made, they need to be done collectively. The book of Ephesians portrays the church as a building, a body, a marriage, and as an armored warrior. To properly function as any of the above, there must be order. Godly order for the church can only be attained when there is a willing submission to collective decisions. These decisions are designed to provide preventive discipline and to give direction to the believers. Even though there is a suitable application of a principle, this alone is not enough unless it is also an expression of our faith.

## Standards Promote Church Unity

As seen in the story of the first apostolic church standard, in Acts 15, the Holy Spirit brought unity to the churches through a church regulation. Although there is beauty in uniformity, we still need to leave room in the church for some diversity. There are “**varieties of gifts**” (1 Corinthians 12:4). These gifts may emphasize specific needs that some members may not see as needed.

We believe the Holy Spirit dwells within the church

as a collective body of many members, yet unless He dwells within each member personally, He will not be able to work through the church collectively. The body of Christ is made up of members with various gifts, talents, and abilities. By working together in spiritual unity, the church has a unique beauty as a bright light shining in a dark world.

In **Ephesians 4:3**, we are reminded of the need “**to keep the unity of the Spirit, in the bond of peace.**” Here, the emphasis is on the unity of the Spirit, not on the “diversity” of the Spirit. The Spirit of God always promotes unity in a biblical church. If the Spirit speaks to us, He will not speak something different to the rest of the brotherhood. Even the various Spirit-given gifts for the church will enhance peace, unity, and edification. It is when we fail to faithfully prove the spirits and give heed to “another” spirit that confusion and discord abound.

Jesus prayed for oneness among His disciples, and this is especially needful for each local body of believers. The unity of belief will translate into a unity of practice. The most powerful living witness to the fallen world is a brotherhood in which love and truth are consistently practiced in submission to one another. This is done through the supernatural strength of the Holy Spirit in the common bond of Jesus. A brotherhood must seek biblical standards through the direction of the Holy Spirit to face our modern world. Then we can unitedly stand strong for Christ.

“Can two  
walk together,  
except they be  
agreed?”

(Amos 3:3)

## Standards Protect Loving Relationships

In **Romans 14:21**, Paul instructs each believer that “**It is good not to eat meat or to drink wine, or to do anything by which your brother stumbles.**” In other words, we need to be considerate of each other’s consciences. One’s conscience is trained by the influence we are under, and that is how we develop a sense of right and wrong. Not everyone’s conscience, however, is properly trained. Sometimes a conscience needs to be retrained, but never should it be violated or defiled.

Church decisions on certain cultural issues may not be so much a matter of right or wrong as a concern about which direction these issues are leading us. Eating meats offered to idols did not make a person better or worse, but to someone raised in a setting where this was forbidden, eating that meat would defile his

conscience. When we do something deliberate that offends a brother's conscience, we do not walk in love.

Collective decisions provide a means to live in peace with one another. Where this love reigns, the weaker conscience can be retrained through faith without violating it. What is not of faith is sin.

### Standards Guard a Consistent Witness

Another important element for a church to successfully function is consistency. Once an agreement is reached, it will need to be put into practice. Any willful violation of the agreement is most likely a sign of spiritual decay. It is not that changes cannot be made, if done so collectively. But when individuals ignore or rebel against the church standards, they should become subject to corrective discipline. To know and to teach has very little value when it is not lived. Faith without works is dead.

Lastly, our accepted standard dare not hinder the vision and purpose of the church in reaching out to bring

souls into the Kingdom. Too often troubled churches spend so much of their time in corrective maintenance that they lose sight of this goal. Where preventive discipline is applied in a spiritual setting, it creates an atmosphere that draws seekers to truth. Where love flows without offense, a sense of security is provided and peace is preserved in spite of differences of opinion.

### A Summary

God's kind of love, peace, and unity cannot be found in the world; it is found in the church. May God grant us the grace to allow His love to flow through us and walk in humility; esteeming others better than ourselves. Where love prevails in a church, then surely the preventive and corrective discipline will create an effective inner discipline in each member — a discipline that is approved of God and that enables the members to work together in the church in true unity of the Spirit.

J.W. | *Saskatchewan*



# Expressing Christ

So let our lives and lips express  
The holy Gospel we profess;  
So let our walks and virtues shine,  
To prove the doctrine all divine.

Thus shall we best proclaim abroad  
The honor of our Savior God;  
When the salvation reigns within,  
And grace subdues the power of sin.

Our flesh and sense must be denied;  
Passion and envy, lust, and pride;  
While justice, temperance, truth and love  
Our inward piety approve.

Religion bears our spirits up,  
While we expect that blessed hope,  
The bright appearance of the Lord,  
And faith stands leaning on His Word.

That sacred stream, Thy holy Word,  
That all our raging fear controls:  
Sweet peace Thy promises afford,  
And give new strength to fainting souls.

-Isaac Watts

*"Little children, let us not love [only]  
with word or tongue, but in deed and truth."*

-1 John 3:18



# He Lifted Me Up (part II)

By Floyd Yoder

## Recall from AV37

*Ted Summers began life near Charleston, West Virginia in 1983. At the age of three, his parents divorced. After that, both parents engaged in growing and selling marijuana. For eight years, Ted and his brother were juggled back and forth between dad and mom as they fled from the law to Kentucky, Indiana, and back to West Virginia with all their earthly belongings in one small car. Ted's schooling in the different places took place in a hit-or-miss fashion.*

*Gradually, Ted's mom completely ceased to care for the boys until they were on their own in their early teens. They existed. Staying in a small car and then in an abandoned building, Ted was picked up and thrown in jail.*

*From years of time in and out of jail and broken probation<sup>1</sup> sentences, Ted had never learned to hold good work habits or ethics. When he was finally released from an Indiana prison in 2018, he came "home" to begin a six-year-probation in Kentucky. At the age of 35, Ted was determined not to break the terms of his probation, not this time.*

## Ted Summers

Ted knew he needed a job. Mom and Joel knew Ted needed a job if they were going to survive. "Ted," Mom suggested, "Why don't you go down the road to the shed factory and apply for a job? It's less than a mile there and you could walk back and forth to work. Those people have helped us get this house when we had nowhere to go. They are good people and maybe they will give you a chance."

Ted had no other options he could try. So he slouched off down the road to the shed shop, slovenly dressed and puffing on a cigarette as he walked along. As he approached the cluster of shops where workers busily engaged in building sheds, he outened the cigarette before entering the shed marked "office."

<sup>1</sup> Probation is a court-ordered, community-based sentence that allows a convicted offender to avoid jail or prison, provided they adhere to strict conditions set by a judge. It acts as a rehabilitative alternative to incarceration, involving supervision by a probation officer, mandatory check-ins, fines, community service, and drug testing.



The door squeaked as Ted entered the office. A young man in his early 30's looked up from his work at the desk and greeted him with a cheery, "Good morning." Then he rose from his chair and extended his hand, "I'm Chad."

Ted tried not to shake as he clasped the proffered hand. But it was useless; he could not hide the fear and the tenseness within. His hand shook. "Uh, I'm Ted Summers. Uh, we live in the house up the road. Uh, Mom said you helped us get the house."

"Yes, I know the house you are talking about," Chad responded. "We were glad we could help. Now, what brings you here this morning? Are you looking for someone?"

Ted studied Chad before answering. He saw a clean young man, despite the dust clinging to his pants. As he looked directly into Chad's eyes, he saw a light and a peace foreign to his entire life experience. Ted liked this friendly young man and relaxed a bit. "I, uh, would like to see if you might have some work around here for me."

"Ted, take that chair there and let's get better acquainted. Tell me a little about yourself."

Ted spoke softly as he recounted some of his life story. "My life has been a wreck. Most of the time my brother and I have had to fend for ourselves. Mom and Dad were both into drugs and Mom spent years in and out of prison. Now Mom and Joel are both practically helpless and are depending on me to help them survive.

"My job skills are not good," Ted spoke still more softly as he looked off to the side. "At 35 years of age, I have never held down a job for more than a year before going off to prison for some offense or another. Then when I would get out of prison, I would break parole and go back to prison. In one of those prisons a group of men came to the prison preaching and singing. I prayed the sinner's prayer.

"Now I have just gotten out of prison and this time, I am determined to not break my parole. I want to better myself and also provide for my mom and brother."

Chad listened closely to Ted's story and then spoke slowly. "I have been in contact with your Mom some in the past year and I'm aware that she does need your help to care for her. If you would be willing to work

several days a week, you could keep the shops cleaned up, inside and outside.”

Ted straightened up in his chair and leaned forward, “When can I start?” he asked, as new hope sprang into his eyes.

“There is one thing more I must mention,” Chad explained. “With all the sawdust and paint fumes, we are very concerned about fire. One tiny spark could set off a great blaze and we could lose everything. Are you willing to quit smoking?”

Ted hung his head for a moment and then looked Chad directly in the eye. “I will not smoke another cigarette,” he promised.

Chad smiled. “I accept your pledge and you can start tomorrow morning at 8:00 am.”

Ted smiled as he rose from his chair, “Thank you, Chad,” he said. “It’s a deal.”



Ted was slow by nature, but dependable. He enjoyed the interaction with the other men at the shop. Sometimes he didn’t know how well he could keep up with the work because he did not have any experience in construction. But Chad was patient, even working with him at times.

It wasn’t long, however, until the job that had just started to throw a glimmer of hope onto Ted’s future suddenly looked uncertain. The business was changing hands. Would the new owner allow him to continue working at the shop? It had seemed so right when Chad, the young man close to Ted’s age, had kindly guided him through the first steps, acquainting him with his responsibilities.

Chad was soon gone, but not before he had introduced Ted to Marvin, the new owner. Marvin understood that here was a young man who had made wrong choices and now was trying to rise above them. Marvin’s heart went out to Ted.

What a relief to Ted, to see and feel that the new manager seemed to carry a kindred spirit with Chad, and picked up where Chad had left off. Again, Ted felt the weight lifted from his shoulders, and with renewed effort committed himself to be faithful and worthy of the trust that was placed in him.

It wasn’t long till Marvin, the new owner, saw potential in Ted. Ted saw things that needed to be done around the shop, and applied himself. Marvin told Ted

he could work as much as he wanted to, as long as he could find things to clean up and organize.

Ted soon knew this is where he wanted to work long term. He liked the overall clean atmosphere and the camaraderie of the other young Mennonite men. Many times they sang songs of Jesus as they worked in their bays. At other times they had a healthy dose of good-natured fun.

No shady or wicked activities like he had seen all his life occurred among these young men. Never had he seen such happy and joyful young men that were open, clean, and sincere. Ted’s longing heart absorbed it all.

Occasionally Jim, Dale, and Andy would show an interest in his life, and serious talks would follow. Ted began to open up more, slowly sharing more of his past. His coworkers encouraged Ted and prayed for him. Their friendship spurred him on; Ted knew they had something he needed and wanted.

He recalled how he had prayed the sinner’s prayer. Yet deep down, he knew that if one did not follow Jesus, he did not have Jesus in his heart. If one still lived in sin, he was NOT saved. A spiritual battle was going on. Saved, but not saved. The atmosphere at the shop, and the testimony of some of his co-workers convinced Ted there was more to life than what he had.

No one at home pushed Ted to read the Bible or prodded him to go to church where he might have found the answers to his yearning soul. So he kept himself at his job as much as he could.

Life at home was still such that Ted did not enjoy going there. His mom appreciated how he provided for their bare necessities. But she would ask him to take her places where she could support her drug habit. Ted refused. He knew he wanted no part of that past sinful lifestyle. Although the words were few between them, his refusal to take part in his past sins spoke to her heart. Thus two years crept by.

Then Ted’s mom’s health failed. In the fall of 2020, she became ill, was diagnosed with cancer in October, and passed away in December. As far as Ted knew, she died an unsaved woman.

Yet he fervently hoped that by God’s grace, she turned to Jesus at the eleventh hour. Knowing how empty Mom’s life had been, fueled the desire for something nobler in his own life. But where would he find it?



## Recall from AV37

*Janet Smith began life in 1994 in Thomas, Kentucky.<sup>2</sup> At a very young age, Janet knew what it was to be punched and knocked around. As a child and young person, she never knew love and devotion, nor learned about God.*

*When Janet was five, the family moved close to Florence, Kentucky.<sup>3</sup> At the new home Janet lived in continual fear. Everyone was angry at her. Hitting and pushing was the norm.*

*At the age of eight, Janet's dad pinned her mother against the wall; Janet called the cops for help. After that, her mom lived with another man for a while. During this time, this strange man's daughter was murdered. Seeing that girl lying in the casket, discolored and bruised, caused Janet to have horrible nightmares for 20 years.*

*In her early teens, Janet's older brother Brian suffered from anger fits. Her sister became unruly and was taken to a correctional facility. Janet herself lived in fearful anxiety of even a spider's move.*

*Janet found a measure of reprieve when she lived with her Uncle Alfred and Aunt Nell on their farm. She liked the animals and the fact that no one yelled at her. Aunt Nell and Uncle Alfred took Janet to church and talked to her about her spiritual condition. It did not soak in.*

*At age 18, Janet was again living with her mother. Her Mother threatened to throw Janet out since she was a worthless liability. She became overwhelmed with anxiety. As a result, she was locked up in a mental institution and given medications she did not need.*

*When Janet was released, she stayed again with friends. Her path led deeper and deeper into sin—drugs, immorality, perverted music, thievery, witchcraft, and cutting herself. Nothing satisfied her. She decided to go back and stay with mom. On the way there, her car died on a busy highway. She coasted off to the side and called her mom. “Mom, I’m in trouble. Come get me.”*

*Her mom replied, “I’m not coming. The only way you can make me happy is to go jump off the bridge.”*

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<sup>2</sup> Thomas, Kentucky is just across the Ohio River from Cincinnati, Ohio.

<sup>3</sup> Florence, Kentucky, is about 23 miles west of Thomas, Kentucky.

## Janet Smith



Janet's mind reeled with the pain of rejection. After hearing those cutting words from her mom, she sat numbly by the side of the busy highway. How long, she didn't know. When darkness settled over her, she pulled herself out of her stupor and called Uncle Alfred. He came, picked her up, and took her back to his home.

Janet lived with Uncle Alfred and his wife for the next nine months. Janet found a degree of welcome and security in their home. During those nine months, not much of an outward change transpired. But the cry of her heart was increasingly, “Jesus, if you're real, send someone to show me how to find you.”

Then she met Ted. They began living together. They found in each other a temporary balm for their voids. At the same time, the void only deepened. Now there were two seeking souls—neither one knew the answer—both groping for meaning in life.

Like Ted, Janet thought she was right, but the devil tormented her. She was still dabbling in witchcraft and smoking. She started going to church with Ted. This time she really listened to the preaching.

At one service the preacher said, “If your heart is not right with Jesus, you can come forward and be saved.” A fierce battle raged inside Janet! God had heard her heart cry. His Spirit was knocking at her heart's door. But the devil would not give up easily. Janet pulled Ted to his feet and out the church door they went. Once outside, she realized that being right with God was what her soul longed for. Janet turned and went back inside. Ted followed her. That evening, Janet came to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ.

Now a new understanding filled her. Janet began reading the Bible. Purification began. The words of Christ spoke to her heart. The perversions in her own life became evident to her. Still, she felt hopelessly bound by her witching and smoking. Ted told her, “Janet, you can be free of these sins. I know freedom and peace are possible. I see peace and happiness in the lives of those I work with every day.”

## Ted and Janet

One day, as Ted and Janet were driving along past a house, an inner something urged them to turn in. They did not even know who lived there. A man came walking out. Ted felt a strong urge to talk to him. So they talked. Strange as it may seem, God used someone

they did not know to lead them to the cross for complete deliverance.

This man, God’s humble servant, helped those two souls in desperate need to see that mouth confession is not enough. They needed to be cleansed from the inside out. As they poured out the ugliness that was still hidden deep inside, God did His work. Now their understanding was not only of saving power, but more importantly, of regeneration through the blood of Jesus!

Ted’s heart sang! Deliverance at last! The next morning he marveled at how clean and free he felt! The whole world looked amazingly clean and fresh. “Behold, all things had become new.”

Gone were the things that held Janet in miserable bondage—smoking, witchcraft, anxiety and evil voices. The next day she went through the apartment she and Ted shared and removed all the articles of witchcraft that she considered precious. Now she saw those things as evil and thoroughly destroyed them.

Ted and Janet now realized their relationship was sinful—living together unmarried. They withdrew from each other until they got married some months later.

They have attended several local churches in search of one that teaches sound biblical truths. The two babes in Christ now grow together. Today they faithfully attend where they feel God wants them. They take in weekly Bible studies at another church to get all the teaching they can.

We praise God for His pursuit of the lost sheep until they were safely brought into the fold! Together, they testify that if God was able to redeem their lives, He can redeem yours too! Or anyone else who comes in broken repentance.

After seven years, Ted is still employed at the same mini-barn shop. He has moved from a clean-up position to a builder, then on to maintenance. He is a valuable asset to other employees who come from similar backgrounds. To God be the glory!

*So Jesus was saying to those Jews who had believed Him, “If you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.”*

– John 8:31-32

*You* gave me eternal love in hopes others would see,  
Sweet and beautiful honey from heaven as it covers me.  
I pray I will always bear fruit:

Joy, with a rejoicing spirit.  
Love, and good will, so all can feel it.  
Peace, for you are my song.  
Gentleness, to help others along.  
Longsuffering, to know you will avenge.  
Goodness, to not take revenge.  
Kindness, to show my neighbor.  
Faithfulness, so I will never waiver.  
Lastly, self-control to show how you have saved my soul.

Dear Lord Jesus, I lay down my life to you,  
Who took my thoughts so blue,  
Clothed me in white,  
And covered me in everlasting light.  
I will always drink of your living water,  
Because you saved me, and called  
me your daughter.

-Janet Smith



# People of the Book

By David L. Burkholder

Throughout the years Mennonites have been identified by various names: the quiet in the land, hard workers, generous, good neighbors, thrifty. But the moniker I like best, and which I think best describes us as Bible-believing Anabaptist Mennonites, is “People of The Book”. In fact, that is what has gotten us to where we are today. Those brave young men in Zurich five hundred years ago went to The Book and there discovered the fallacies and misrepresentations of the Catholic State Church.

It was their discoveries and subsequent courage that led to the formation of the Anabaptist movement. It was The Book that explained to them what God required to become His child. And that knowledge has driven and provided the foundation of the Anabaptist/Mennonite church to this day.

The Christian life, as those early leaders discovered in The Book, is not identified or defined by church rules or the dictates of man, nor by the rules of society, but by a personal relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. And that relationship is discovered and defined within the pages of The Book, especially the New Testament where the life and teachings of Jesus, and of those who followed Him, lived out and further explained their meaning for a consistent, God-pleasing life.

People of The Book accept those teachings as “**inspired of God**” (**II Timothy 3:16**) and God breathed— “**No prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God**” (**II Peter 1:21**). By accepting the Bible teachings as sent by God, one maintains his relationship with God and is indwelt and empowered by His Spirit to live a consistent God-pleasing life, and to live in harmony with other such believers.

It is a beautiful and complete plan for mankind who, as a result of sin, are also under God’s condemnation, to be not only restored to God’s favor, but to live with freedom of conscience and in anticipation of a glorious future with Him for eternity. It is a marvelous gift from a loving Creator who, in His love for sinful mankind, gave His Son to be man’s redeemer, model, advocate, and eternal companion. It is all found and explained in The Book.

People of The Book are not comfortable integrating into the world’s culture, thinking, and life-style. They cannot accept LGBT lifestyles, unholy marital relationships, and women in places of leadership.



Separation of church and state and nonresistance are prime elements of their beliefs. People of The Book believe there must be a total commitment to follow Jesus and therefore cannot be allied with others who do not uphold putting New Testament teachings into practice.

New Testament teachings are not hard to understand; the problem comes when people who formerly understood the plain teachings are no longer willing to practice them. Satan, the arch enemy of God, cleverly promotes this abandonment of obeying and following the plain truth as the early Anabaptists did. Satan, the arch enemy of God and truth, deceives people and blinds their eyes. Under Satan’s deception, people think they do not need to obey all the New Testament teachings, but only the parts that please them.

I believe the most obvious and crucial factor contributing to a departure from the truths of God’s Word is simply a lack of reading God’s Word and the failure or unwillingness to *heed and practice* the principles revealed therein. Approached prayerfully, with dependence upon the Holy Spirit for enlightenment and instruction, the Bible guides man and enables him to follow God’s will as He intends. That has been the Anabaptist/Mennonite heritage. We must maintain it to experience God’s blessing now and eternal joy in the hereafter.

The slope downward is slippery and ends in eternal horrors and must be avoided at all cost. The best way is to remain people of The Book. We must read it with intentions of obeying its dictates. We must *heed and practice* the teachings found therein.

I heartedly recommend to you The Book. It holds the promise of eternal life for those who hold fast to its teachings and their application to life. It also spells out the doom of those who depart from its teachings and standards of life.

The Book. Read it. Heed it. Live it out.

# Agents of God

By James G. Landis

From the beginning God wanted mankind to be His agents on the earth. He created a bountiful garden with many delicious fruits bearing seeds. He filled the waters of the sea with living creatures and the skies with birds and the earth with living creatures. God blessed them all and commissioned them to be fruitful and multiply.

Then God made man in His own likeness and commissioned him to rule over His wondrous creation teeming with living things. God gave to man this abundance of good fruits and seeds to sustain and nourish him. To man God said, “Be fruitful, multiply,

fill the earth”—all terms of abundance.

After the flood God commissioned Noah with the exact same words—be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth. God did not want man to barely exist in poverty and want. He had created many,

many wondrous living things and given them to man to use for man’s good and God’s glory.

This vision of a fruitful planet supplying the manifold needs of man flies in the face of every prediction of earth worshippers<sup>1</sup> and even many expectations of the people of God. Those who predict mankind “doing himself in” and the planet deteriorating to where only a few smart people can live in a “natural state” alongside the evolving species—species they say also possess a right to life—will be offended. And like the men of Sodom and Gomorrah, they will rise up in anger and seek to impose their ungodly practices on others by violent force.

Like Lot living in Sodom, the ungodly practices of the world frustrate the people of God. Many see God just waiting to rain down fire and brimstone on this wicked place and deliver them from the present evil world where the “whole creation groans and travails under the curse of sin” (Romans 8:22). Such expect that God will set up an earthly kingdom where God rules by force and the lion and the lamb will romp together in peaceful cohabitation. Some profess that they can hardly wait

for this deliverance, but then go to extraordinary lengths to hang around as long as possible.

So there is a basic difference between the understanding of those who see a sin-cursed planet awaiting the liberation of God at some future date, and those who see a planet designed by God with the express purpose of abundantly satisfying the needs of mankind. God created all living things, said everything was good, and then commissioned man to be in charge of the whole planet.

This basic commission to mankind is still in effect and will be in effect until the end comes, when, “the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up” (II Peter 3:10-13). Then will come the new heaven and the new earth where nothing contrary to the will of God is present.

Until that “new earth” comes, two kingdoms exist together on planet earth. Satan rules the kingdoms of the world. God’s people, with God’s assistance, carry out God’s will in the Kingdom of Heaven on earth. The two kingdoms and the two rulers are in direct conflict with each other.

While God is sovereign and superior to Satan, he has allowed Satan to rule the kingdoms of the world until the end comes. This accounts for the evil present in the world. This accounts for why men still serve Satan and do things contrary to the will of God. Satan’s rule of the world explains why even those who do God’s will, will suffer persecution at the hands of evil men.

The concept of a colony of the Kingdom of God existing on planet earth at the same time as the kingdoms of the world under the dominion of Satan (evil one) illuminates our vision of how God’s will can be done “on earth as it is in heaven” (Matthew 6:10), while evil is still prevalent in the world.

Considering then, that the people of God want to carry out God’s commission to man and make the earth a place of abundance, we might ask, “How can it be done when the enemies of plenty are so obvious and strong?” First and foremost is the commitment to the heavenly kingdom. Living God’s way is not a matter of “fighting for our rights.” It is a matter of allegiance to the Kingdom of Heaven that supersedes all national loyalties.

AGENTS OF GOD

“For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.”

Ephesians 2:10



<sup>1</sup> God does not want people to worship the earth, He wants people to worship Him. Cain and Abel offered up sacrifices to God. Noah did likewise. So did all the people of God in the Old Testament.

Living according to God’s way means that God’s laws and God’s plan always take precedence over the laws of the land we dwell in. The people of God are, and should be, strangers and pilgrims in the nation we dwell in. We are foreigners in Afghanistan, Canada, China, Cuba, England, India, Iran, Kenya, Korea, Nigeria, Switzerland, United States, and Venezuela, or in any of the other 182 nations in the world.

Because our first loyalty always belongs to the Kingdom of Heaven, we cannot swear allegiance to any flag or nation or earthly leader. Our citizenship is in the Kingdom of Heaven. This loyalty directs our total outlook on life.

The people of God resident in the USA should have no more desire to sing, “God Bless America and her Armies” than the Chinese people of God have to sing, “God Bless the Armies of China.” The primary concern of the people of God is to do the will of God all over the earth and thus be fit candidates for God’s blessing.

This allegiance to the Kingdom of God should make us examine our whole life and reorder our thinking beyond the boundaries of nation-states, a one-world government, or any other entity that attempts to rule by force. If men rule by force, they are under the dominion of the wicked one. People of God have no more interest in being a part of such a government than Christ had in ruling through Nero’s throne.

This concept of the people of God living on Planet Earth at the same time as the children of the wicked one fits perfectly with the teaching of the Parable of the Tares in **Matthew 13:24-30**. Jesus interprets this parable for His disciples in **Matthew 13:36-43**. There can be no doubt as to what Jesus taught. Let us note a few items pertinent to a peaceable Kingdom of Heaven existing on the earth at the same time as the kingdoms of the world.



Jesus begins this parable by saying in **Matthew 13:24**, “The kingdom of heaven may be compared.” Therefore, we know Jesus is teaching about His kingdom.

In the interpretation (**Matthew 13:37**), Jesus says the one who sows the good seed is himself. The Son of Man (himself) sows the seed in the field, which is on Planet Earth and not in some future celestial place.

The good seed represents the sons of the Kingdom and the tares represent the sons of the wicked one. Both the righteous and the wicked exist together in the world. For now, the righteous are not to be out uprooting

the wicked by violent means. Jesus clearly said in **Matthew 13:28-30**, “**Allow both to grow together until the harvest.**” The sons of the Kingdom are to be busy doing good and producing wheat, not trying to use force to overcome evil on the earth. The sons of the kingdom on the earth are to “**overcome evil with good**” (**Romans 12:21**).

There is a day of destruction coming for the wicked, but it will not take place on the earth and the righteous will not be the agents of execution. “**The Son of Man will send forth His angels and they will gather out of His Kingdom (on the earth) all stumbling blocks and those who commit lawlessness, and will cast them into the furnace of fire; in that place there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth**” (**Matthew 13:41-42**).

The people of God are to be busy living out God’s will on Planet Earth, even though the sons of the wicked one attempt to “crowd us out.” Our thinking is different. Our allegiance is different. We play by a different rule book with nary a doubt about the final outcome. But it is clear to the people of God that they live in the Kingdom of God while on the earth and that it is God’s will and design for the earth to be a place overflowing with abundance.

So the message here is positive. The people of God should be pro-active agents sent by God—agents of creativity, agents of efficiency, agents of healing, agents of life, agents of productivity. The people of God should be builders, farmers, givers, healers, helpers, innovators, peacemakers, planters, savers, sharers, and workers; not destroyers, doomsayers, fighters, hoarders, liars, naysayers, murderers, and robbers.

The people of God become partners with God in making the earth flourish and in nourishing the earth’s people with abundance. What a different attitude! Instead of being fearful of every tremor that could threaten our lives, God’s people become confident stewards, boldly venturing into the future under God’s guidance and power. The negative attitude toward the future of Planet Earth might be illustrated by the recluse of 90 years ago who had never seen a freight train. Friends told him that powerful engines could pull a freight train of 100 cars. “I don’t believe it,” the old-timer said. “It’s impossible. The engine could never get that much weight started.” Friends carried the unbeliever to the train terminal to watch a freight train pulling 100 cars get started. The engines belched

AGENTS OF GOD

*“Remind them to be subject to rulers, to authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good deed.”*

Titus 3:1

AGENTS OF GOD

*“To purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds.”*

Titus 2:14

huge clouds of smoke skyward as they built up steam. The locomotive wheels spun. The sparks flew. Slowly the great train began to move forward. The old doubter watched in wonderment as the entire train picked up speed and the last car clacked past him. He shook his head. “Well, they’ll never get ‘er stopped,” he opined.

AGENTS OF GOD

*“God accepts men from every nation who fear Him and do what is right.”*  
(Acts 10:35) NIV

Such are the thoughts of those who believe man is destroying the earth by living on it. When confronted with the facts that the quality of life is improving as the population increases, they shake with anger and declare that the train has already run away and is destined for a huge wreck.

Yes, the enemies of doing good are out there. Evil is in the world that Satan directs. Don’t worry about it. On the contrary, work within God’s framework. Trust the all-powerful God to deal with evil and to punish the wicked. Trust in God’s power to prosper what He has blessed and to destroy what He has cursed.

Doing the will of God means that we do good on the earth and do every thing we can to live peaceably. **“If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone” (Romans 12:18).**

The people of God can, and should, and do carry out God’s design for Planet Earth and the people living on it. They live by God’s eternal laws and are set free from the arbitrary rules made by men under the dominion of Satan.



It should always be remembered by the people of God that God is not the sponsor of evil in the world. Study the story of Job. Notice how Satan used tragedy to attack Job. But God did not attack Job to prove how faithful a servant Job was. God only removed the hedge he had built around Job and thus Satan could attack him. The thing God allowed and still allows is for Satan to rule in the kingdoms of the world.

But the fact that Satan rules in the kingdoms of the world does not negate the fact that God still wants men to be obedient to the design and will that He has for Planet Earth. And when man obeys God’s will and fits into His plan, the earth and the human life on it responds favorably. People work. Food increases. Water flows. Health improves. Numbers of living people increase. Bibles and knowledge spread. Pests decline. Scourges vanish. People build. People trade. People increase. More people honor and worship God.

Such physical prosperity is not only the natural prosperity that results from hard work and moral

living. There is also the smile of God and His indulgent blessing upon the righteous.

It is true. God does favor those who obey Him, and He often blesses them with physical comforts on the earth. The earth blooms under their diligent care and they share their prosperity with those less fortunate.

In the last several hundred years, one can find examples of godly people who lived peaceably according to God’s will and created prosperous enclaves on the earth—French Huguenots, Swiss and Dutch Mennonites, Moravian Missions, Hutterite communities, Quaker settlements, Brethren, Mennonite and Amish communities.

AGENTS OF GOD

*“Our people must also learn to engage in good deeds to meet pressing needs, so that they will not be unfruitful.”*

Titus 3:8

The Elmendorf Community in Minnesota<sup>2</sup> furnishes a specific example of abundance that can result when man partners with God and lives in accord with His plan for the earth. This community of 150 persons counting women and children, farms 1500 acres in Cottonwood County. By their industry and the blessing of God, in one year’s time, they produce 200,000 turkeys, 60,000+ piglets from their 2500-sow operation, and grow the bulk of the feed to sustain these operations. Their own mechanics build planting and harvesting rigs, maintain the farm machinery and all company vehicles, and operate the company feed mill. Creative builders engineered the latest innovations in heating systems for the turkey house, as well as designed and built an electronic pig-sorter which they manufacture and sell to hog-finishing operations in several states and foreign countries.

Greenhouses and gardens grow tons of produce used to sustain their own people. Cooks turn simple food into nourishing meals. Seamstresses sew the clothes for the men, women, and children. The community provides their own school for the children and cares for its aged without fail.

Elmendorf pays real estate taxes, takes no government subsidies, and does it all without coercion. People are free to leave the community if they so desire. Certainly, the Elmendorf Community demonstrates God’s peaceable kingdom and an overflowing earth. The Elmendorf Community is not alone in the abundance that can result when man partners with God. Many other farms in Cottonwood County also produce far more than they use. And they can do it year after year. It is sustainable agriculture.

<sup>2</sup> Numbers are as of 2008.

God wants people all over the earth to serve Him by living in obedience to His will. Each man who fears God and does good deeds and lives in obedience to God's law, is accepted by Him. The suffering of the righteous is not always the punishment of God upon past sin or the chastening of the Lord on present sin, but it can be the work of Satan to destroy faith in God. Thus, no matter how bad things get on the earth, God's will for the earth and its people is still the same from the creation to this day.



No matter what happens on Planet Earth, God's way and plan is still the best. The people of God should do the will of God and be creators of abundance on the earth. Never will the people of God be found as accomplices in the evil acts of the kingdoms of this world.

Rather, even if the people of God need suffer for a time in this world, they should still overcome the devil and the temptations he sends. Yet it is a strange paradox that while the people of God may suffer, they are still the happiest people on earth,<sup>3</sup> while those who taste of the wine of sin and enjoy its pleasures for a season,

<sup>3</sup> While Jesus warned his followers to expect persecution, he still wanted their joy to be complete on the earth. "These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you and that your joy might be full" (John 15:11).

The testimony of Richard Wurmbrand after spending 14 years in Romanian prisons under horrible conditions agrees: "When I look back on my fourteen years in prison, it was occasionally a very happy time. Other prisoners and even the guards often wondered at how happy Christians could be under the most terrible circumstances." – *Tortured for Christ* by Richard Wurmbrand. Bartlesville OK: Living Sacrifice Book Company; 1998, page 57.

*"Agents of God  
are creators of  
abundance  
on the earth!"*

often drink its bitter dregs while still living on the earth.

Adhering to God's design and plan for Planet Earth brings the greatest blessing possible to mankind and gives the greatest joy to the Creator God.

The flip side is that those who deviate from God's will for the planet and mankind bring untold suffering and misery to the world. But beyond the present misery for those who deny and disobey God, there is also the frightening prospect of a coming judgment after death when accounts will be settled by the Judge of all the earth.

The conclusion of the whole matter is this:

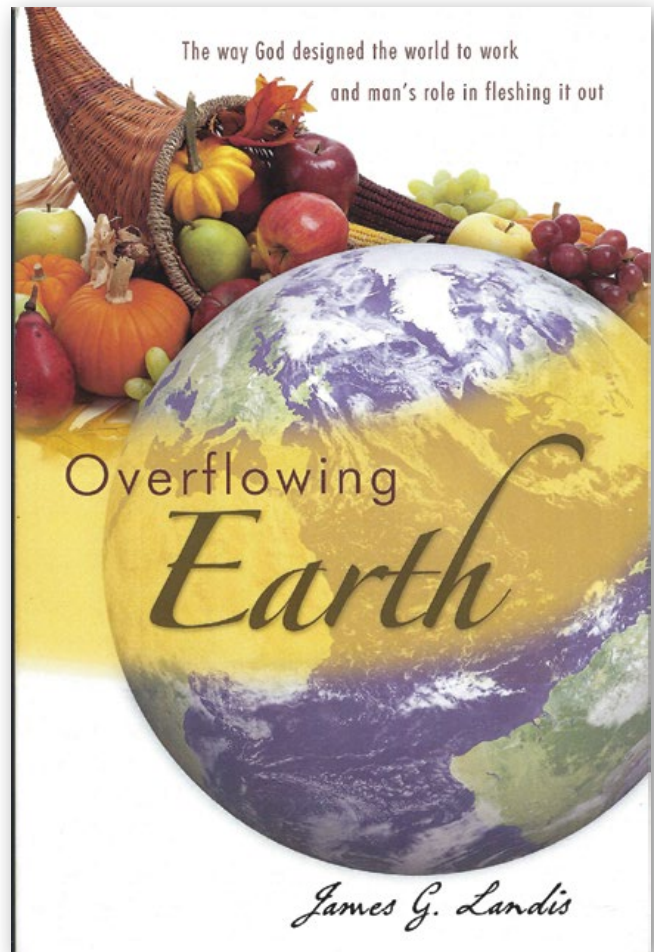
*God created all living things, said everything was good, and then commissioned man to be in charge of the whole planet. God's will for the earth and its people has not changed. God still desires that men glorify Him by doing good on the earth.*

– Adapted from the book *Overflowing Earth* by James Landis

AGENTS OF GOD

*"Those who have believed in God will be careful to engage in good deeds."*

Titus 3:8





# Round Table Discussion

by AV Readers

The following pages are meant to encourage interaction between *Anabaptist Voice* and our readers. If you have questions or thoughts and would like to hear a response from AV, this section is for you. Write to us.

– AV Editor

## Bible Set Aside

by Too Zealous

It seems the command in Genesis 1:28 did not refer to changing God’s creation and *perverting it for man’s glory and to the destruction of life and health* (GMO’s and glyphosate). [“God blessed them; and God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth’ ” (Genesis 1:28).]

## AV Editor

The command seems all inclusive to me. To cast it aside as not applying in certain situations is a besetting sin of our times. God has spelled out clearly the sins that will send people to hell. We need not fear that using GMO’s and glyphosate are such evils.

There may be better ways of farming without such GMO’s and chemicals. Use better methods. Just do not get on the bandwagon and try to force others to condemn all chemical and GMO’s on the basis of Scripture.



## Future Teachings

by Com Pelled

I read the article “Pre or Ah” in Issue #38 of the *Anabaptist Voice*, and felt compelled to write you about it.

I agree with the writer that we ought not to be having controversies over end-time events, because that does not make for brotherly love and unity in the church. I agree that the Kingdom of God is with us today in the form of Christ dwelling in His people on this earth at this time. I wholeheartedly agree that we must live in constant preparedness because Christ could come for us at any moment.

What troubled me is that the writer left me hanging. He emphasized that the return of Christ is for each individual in his own time. That is true, but that is not

the end. Does the writer actually believe that this world will go on and on indefinitely and that the return of Christ only applies to Him taking His children out of this world one by one, for maybe millions of years?

I believe the Bible is clear that there is coming a day when Christ will return to gather His children home and bring judgment on the world. There is coming a final consummation of all things when the dead will be raised, some to eternal life and some to eternal damnation.

**Matthew 25:31-32.** “When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him ... and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats.”

**John 5:28-29.** “The hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth.”

**I Corinthians 15:51-52.** “We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed ... and the dead shall be raised incorruptible.”

**I Thessalonians 4:15-17.** “For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, ... then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds ... and so shall we ever be with the Lord.”

**II Peter 3:10.** “But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; ... and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up.”

These verses do not just speak of coming for His saints one by one. They point ahead to a final coming “day of the Lord” when “the end of all things” will come.

I do not profess to understand how all these things will be, but we cannot afford to overlook these important truths as we urge all men to prepare at all times for the imminent return of our Lord.

## AV Editor

Thank you for your kind and thoughtful letter.

You say you do not profess to understand how all these things will be. Neither do I.

I do believe that God’s judgment will come upon the earth just as surely as it did in the days of Noah. Like Noah we should be “preachers of righteousness” in our time. So I do not see how it is any different if we preach that God’s judgment will come upon the individual for his sin or whether we teach that the earth will be burned up because of great wickedness. In either case the sinner must repent to escape divine punishment when God decides his time is up.

While God, in His mercy, awaits the end of the world, death on the earth continues. According to Bible teaching, the righteous are rewarded at death with a new body and ushered into eternity—Enoch, Moses, Elijah, Stephen, Paul, all the 11 disciples, heroes of faith, all the saints. Likewise, the wicked are sent to a place of great torment—rich man (Lazarus account), Judas, Ananias and Sapphira.

I do not know how to reconcile a bodily change at death with a judgment and bodily resurrection sometime in the still distant future. I cannot picture all the saints since Jesus’ time lying dead in their graves and awaiting the “second coming” of the Lord.

I do understand, *“and so shall we ever be with the Lord.”*



## Wrong Focus

*By Off Ended*

Please unsubscribe us from your magazine “Anabaptist Voice.” We have been concerned for some time by the editor’s response to various letters and after reading the Winter 2026 issue, feel that the voice being promoted does not align with all Anabaptists.

Page 35 of issue 38 made me wonder if the editor really believes that “they who say man does not kill beasts, also plants, etc” are all atheist, ungodly, earth-worshipping heathen. We are organic farmers who do so out of a love for God and our fellow man; this is part of stewardship of creation or as Paul says, “as using and not abusing.” The continued direction of this magazine and the editor’s strong tone against anyone who may disagree seem to not reflect the Christian values of humbleness of mind and considering others better than oneself but an attempt to always prove “my way is right.”

Thanks for your efforts in promoting a faith that works; this is indeed needed. Let’s just make sure we don’t turn other Christians into the enemy. The real

enemy of our souls is active and working. Please focus on this instead.

## AV Editor

Yes, you got it right. The editor is not always right. The editor does not write to please all Anabaptists. He writes to please God. The editor’s message was not written clearly enough if you thought he said that all people opposed to GMO’s and the like were ungodly sinners.

The point I want to make is that atheists and unbelievers deny the authority that God gave to man to rule over His wonderful creation. Believers recognize that authority and use it for the good of man and to the glory of God.



## Christ’s Authority

*By Con Cerned*

I am concerned that the authority of men has overpowered the authority of Christ in many Anabaptist churches. Below are three statements that help to explain my concerns.

1. An emphasis on the authority of the church leaders tends to shift the focus from the authority of our risen Lord to the authority of men. The result is that the actual authority of Christ can be sidelined, or else the authority of a certain group of humans is practically equated with the authority of Christ.

2. An emphasis on the authority of the church leaders tends to promote the big WE. Who is the church? WE are the church, and WE have the authority to prohibit what we want and to allow what we want. Church leaders may even occasionally ask what WE want. In mission work this thinking can hinder the Spirit working though other believers of a different culture.

3. An emphasis on the authority of the church leaders tends to emphasize what the flesh can do rather than what the Spirit does in our lives. In this we are touching on a matter which Paul addressed in his letter to Galatian believers. In addressing problems, it is easier to observe outward actions than to determine thoughts and motives; in fact, we are poorly qualified to judge persons’ hearts. Understanding the nature of a problem can require much humility, prayer, efforts to communicate, and even time.

In **Mark 10:42-45** we have these words of Jesus to His disciples: **“You know that those who are recognized**

as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them; ... but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be ... slave of all.”

Jesus said the authority of His servant leaders is not to be exercised in the same way as worldly rulers exercise their power.”

## AV Editor

Your opening statement: “*I am concerned that the authority of men has overpowered the authority of Christ in many Anabaptist churches,*” is a valid concern. But it is important to remember that Christ vested His authority in church leaders when he said to the apostles: “*Whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven*” (Matthew 18:18-20).

In reality, the authority of Christ resides in the God-appointed leadership. The authority of Christ is expressed through the leadership and not by a majority vote (See “Obey Your Leaders,” page 8).

A servant or slave has no authority unless it is given to him by his master. This means that church leaders can, and should, exercise the authority delegated to them by Christ.

A church has the right and even the responsibility to ensure order by creating biblical applications and enforcing them under the Holy Spirit’s direction as can be seen in “Reaching for Unity” (AV39, page 17).

It is critical to the survival of the church of Jesus Christ that believers see that the church and its leaders have authority delegated to them by Christ. Every believer answers to the true church of Christ. If individual members believe that they answer directly and solely to God, this will end in chaos. This independent mindset is not loving, humble, submissive or orderly.



## Laid to Rest

by Neo Idea

I do not think the men before the flood observed a literal Sabbath Day of rest. It sounds to me like the Sabbath was a totally *new* idea for Israel. I doubt they kept it when they were slaves in Egypt! In the beginning God rested the 7th day. But I have not found in Scripture or in history *any* reference to Adam, Enoch, Noah, Abraham or the patriarchs keeping the Sabbath.

In **Romans 14:4-6**, Paul commented about both foods and the Sabbath. “Who are you to judge another’s servant? To his own master he stands or falls. Indeed, he will be made to stand, for God is able to make him stand. One person esteems one day above another; another esteems every day alike. Let each be fully convinced in his own mind. He who observes the day, observes it to the Lord; and he who does not observe the day, to the Lord he does not observe it” (NKJV). That sounds like there should be some tolerance and respect for each other in which foods we eat and which holidays we observe.

I agree with you that keeping the Lord’s Day for rest and worship is rooted in a creation principle that we do well to honor. We lose something valuable if we forget or neglect it. We soon get caught up in wealth-seeking and pleasure-seeking. We benefit greatly from a day of rest. I promote it, but not as a Sabbath. I do not teach it as a Sabbath, not as a law, but as a way to love the Lord my God with all my heart.

## AV Editor

You are right, Christians keep the Lord’s Day, not the Sabbath. However, I find the argument that God created the world, rested, blessed the Sabbath Day, and then forgot about it for several thousand years, hard to believe. Other commandments such as marriage for life and forbidding violence and murder continued from the beginning. Where did the idea of clean and unclean animals come from?—but why would we think men were not instructed to keep the Sabbath Day holy and a day of rest until God gave the Ten Commandments to Israel?

Actually, there is some evidence that the seven-day week and the seventh day as a special day of rest and worship continued from the beginning on through the time of the flood. Some uncertainty exists about the exact time Noah’s family was in the ark due to how many days were counted as a month of the year. However, the exact time is given in terms of years and months and days of Noah’s life. So the amount of days Noah was in the ark is calculated to be either 371 or 378 days—exactly 53 or 54 weeks. And the first thing Noah did after coming out of the ark on the Sabbath Day was to build an altar to the Lord and offer up clean animals on it. This evidence of a seven-day week may not be conclusive, but it is certainly suggestive.

There is more we can observe in this account. The record is intentionally specific. Seven days after Noah entered the ark, the rains began. At the close of Noah’s stay in the ark, three periods of seven days are detailed. It would seem rather clear that the seven-day periods continued throughout Noah’s time in the ark.

Now I propose that under the Old Covenant, each of the Ten Commandments listed things that men were supposed to do or not do. Under the New Covenant the heart was changed, but the Ten Commandments were not. The commandments stand as God's eternal law.

Following Jesus still means that we practice the Ten Commandments. Jesus did not fulfill or spiritualize any of the ten—meaning that if your heart was right, one does not need to practice them.

Thus we still honor the Creator God by observing the seven-day week with one day as a special day of rest when physical work ceases.



## Out of Step

*by Sur Prized*

I am noticing that in your magazine you are using a translation other than the King James. Frankly, I am surprised.

To me, the KJV has been the official text for our conservative churches. Would you mind changing back?

## AV Editor

Thank you for your kind suggestion.

First of all, we want to say that we have not degraded the KJV in any way. You are free to continue using it in your own reading and study and to compare it with what you read in the NASB.

One reason we prefer the NASB for use in *Anabaptist Voice* might be likened to measurements that were used in the days of Tyndale and King James..

*The English system* of measurement in 1611, when the King James Version was first printed, used a system based on a foot of 12 inches. Common units of measurement were the inch, foot, yard, the mile, the rod, furlong, and the chain. Likewise, people traded in a money system not based on 10—pence, shillings, half-crowns, crowns, pounds. Today we would not even recognize these coins.

All these changes in measuring things does not mean that we must continue using inches, feet, and yards in order to be biblical. Neither do we have to trade in pounds and shillings based on the money system in the time when the KJV was written.

Words and their meanings have changed over

the centuries just like measurements. So our aim at *Anabaptist Voice* is to use the most straightforward, simple, accurate words in today's English to communicate the wonderful gospel message to our readers.



## Giving Thanks for All

*by Owen Thanks*

“I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; for kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty” (**I Timothy 2:1-2**).

*First of all*, the apostle Paul writes that we are to supplicate, intercede, pray, and *give thanks* for kings (governments) and all those in authority. I am thankful for authorities who grant us the liberty to live a quiet and peaceable life! Should the time come that we have atheistic authorities who take those liberties away, I pray that I will have the grace to respect and pray for them as well.

As American Anabaptists, we enjoy other freedoms we can be grateful for—exemption from military service, freedom of church assembly and function, land ownership, freedom to travel, freedom to evangelize. Many Christians have never experienced these freedoms but instead, face constant opposition and persecution by anti-Christian governments. So we should always be thankful for these freedoms and thank God for them.

Another privilege the government has granted us stems back to a decision by the US Supreme Court in 1972. It granted the Plain People the freedom to educate their children as they felt best, (within certain parameters). That ruling is still referred to in the Court as a guide for current decisions relating to parental freedom in educating children. We owe God gratitude for giving us this basic freedom.

The government also has another God-ordained function for which we can be thankful. “For it [*the government*] ... does not bear the sword in vain: for it is a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath on the one who practices evil” (**Romans 13:4**). It is the responsibility of the government to punish the evildoer. We thank God He has granted us a government who uses the sword to keep order and to punish evil doers.

Christians must remember that the Kingdom of God and the kingdoms of the world are two separate kingdoms. Romans 13, and other scriptures, indicate

an “us and them” relationship that portrays an expected separation between the civil government and the Christian. The current political scene has examples of people who want to be a part of both kingdoms, but demonstrate that it is impossible to live in the peaceable Kingdom of Christ and in the power kingdoms of the civil governments at the same time.

The spiritual Kingdom of Christ operates on a standard of eternal values while the civil government is primarily concerned with temporal matters.

### AV Editor

We should be thankful for the freedoms we enjoy. We are to pray that we may live a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty. When God grants that to us, we should be thankful.

The quiet and peaceable way of life has something the world longs for but is hard to find. Millions would like to enjoy it but are hopelessly caught in the jaws of war—hatred, rape, scarcity of food, water, and shelter, destruction, bombs, blood, and death.

The Old Testament record tells us that God hates violence. God destroyed the earth in Noah’s time because the earth was “filled with violence” (**Genesis 6:13**). In **Ezekiel 7:23-24** God threatens to destroy Jerusalem because of bloody crimes and violence. **Jonah 3:8** tells how the king of Nineveh, at the preaching of Jonah, urged the city to “turn from his wicked way and from the violence which is in his hands”. These are but a few of the examples given in the Old Testament that show God hates violence.

Any so-called Christian who claims war can be God-sponsored is still living in the Old Testament where God did incite evil nations to punish and destroy other

nations. In the New Testament, all war is evil—on both sides, instigated by the evil one and carried out by evil men. God will judge each man who has a part in the war machine.

War is one evident evil of governments. Many other evils in the kingdoms of the world—women ruling over men, immodesty, murder, lying, stealing, perverting justice, swearing—should warn Christians that one cannot be a part of both kingdoms. This should not surprise us. For the two kingdoms have two different masters. The kingdoms of the world are under the sway of Satan and the Kingdom of God is under the Lordship of Christ.

Yes, God can rule and overrule in all things, but He does not always do that. Instead He allows men to choose evil or good. So not everything that happens in the world is according to God’s way. But God can, and does, use evil men to protect the righteous and to punish the wicked. So when evil men carry out God’s plan to keep order in society, that does not make them righteous.

There is no exemption from righteousness for men and women in government. Instead, the Mars Hill sermon in Acts 17 still applies to our own time. “Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all people everywhere should repent, because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead” (**Acts 17:30-31**).

Either one’s total allegiance belongs to the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, or one’s allegiance is to the evil kingdoms of the world. One cannot serve two masters.



# The Practical Side:

*“Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus.” — Colossians 3:17*

Here is your chance to help others live out the Gospel of Jesus Christ “right in the corner where they are.” This section is not for some idealistic future kingdom posing theological complicated questions with no good answers—for example, the woman who had seven brothers as husbands (*Matthew 22:24-28*).

Take the time to write Anabaptist Voice and share your situations where you faced a difficulty... and failed, or won a victory. As you ponder the situations in these stories and then share your answers and experiences with others, remember the words of Jesus when He told the packed-out house, “My mother and brothers are those who hear God’s Word and put it into practice” (Luke 8:21).



The Practical Side: Work Shoes Required



## The Practical Side: Rest of the Story

*Real world situations met by today's Anabaptists.*

### Scared

by A. Fraid

*On a pitch dark night in the Dominican Republic, the Mennonite resident suddenly awakened to a state of full alertness. A clicking sound at the front door caused him to move silently to the front door. Now what should he as a nonresistant Mennonite do? (AV38, page 40).*

Without much reasoning about the theological implications of my actions, I reacted out of the urgency I felt. I did the only thing that I could think of doing in that moment. After all, we were taught as boys to be men of action.

With all of the force I could muster I struck the door with both hands and yelled at the top of my lungs. There was a long moment of silence. In this moment I realized that the impact of my hands had broken out the raised panel of the door and that my would-be intruder had uninhibited access to the house. “Great,” I thought to myself. “Now he can just march in and hold us up.”

The intruder, however, spent this moment to digest this new prospect and fled with no attempt at conversation or dignity. Watching through the hole in the door I saw rubber boots on muddied grass scampering off into the

night. All that was left was the pipe wrench that he had intended to pry open the door. I chuckled to think that he probably ended up getting a bigger scare than me.

After years of reflection, I have wondered whether my actions were appropriate or not.

### Upon Reflection

1. Does non-resistance apply strictly to physical violence and harm?

The doctrine of non-resistance is first mentioned in **Matthew 5:38-42**. “You have heard that it was said, ‘EYE FOR EYE, and TOOTH FOR TOOTH.’ But I say to you, ‘Do not show opposition against an evil person.’” The principle given here in these verses is that we should not physically oppose evil, mete out vengeance or demand justice. Note that our Lord includes “suing” and “giving” in His examples as well.

However, parents are commanded to discipline their children physically. We are also commanded to reprove and rebuke those who stray from the truth. We pray

and wrestle against spiritual darkness. This could be considered opposing evil. So we need to balance the principle of non-resistance in dealing with evil, with other principles.

The teaching about non-resistance is not a “stand-alone” doctrine. It fits hand-in-hand with, **love your neighbor as yourself (Mark 12:31)** and treat people the same way you want them to treat you (Matthew 7:12). It also fits in with the principle of to **not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good (Romans 12:21)**.

The sum of these teachings is how to deal with sinful man under the New Covenant where conversion through the Holy Spirit is now possible. Christ is teaching us to not oppose evil people with physical force or to demand justice.

Christ teaches his followers that they should use meekness, love and goodness to draw people into the kingdom. Physical force, coercion, threatenings and violence are not for the sheep of the Good Shepherd.

## 2. Is restricting a drunk something Christ's followers should do?

The principle of non-resistance should be carried out in conjunction with the other principles stated before. Wisdom is in comparing scripture with scripture.

One important thing to consider is the Golden Rule: treat people the same way you want them to treat you. Do we want to be executed, or offered mercy if we sin against someone? We want to be shown mercy of course. If you were about to do something very bad because you were not in your right mind, would you want someone to restrain you? Yes, of course.

Never should a person be physically hurt or beaten in any way. But it would be wrong to stand idly by when people are doing something harmful to themselves or others and do not know what they are doing. Just like it would be wrong to not stop an animal that is harming someone.

## 3. What would be the correct action in this situation?

This response may not be technically wrong because no harm was intended, but it would have been better if I would not have been so hasty. A more biblical solution would have been to start a conversation with the person on the other side of the door and ask him if he needed something, Or maybe I should have invited him in for a cup of coffee. Or what would have happened if the man had heard me praying inside the door? No one knows what God might have done.

# The Practical Side: Readers Respond

*Real world situations met by today's Anabaptists.*

## Kindness Not Forgotten

*by Gen Erous*

I am writing a response to the deacon (“The Deacon Work,” *AV38*, page 40).

The deacon had a golden opportunity! He handled it quite well, in my opinion. He was able to offer material aid, while at the same time, provide spiritual challenge.

Many of God's people have been "scammed" by pretenders. Actually, we are not responsible for what people do with what we share with them. God pours out many blessings on many people who use them for evil purposes. We are Christians. As such we are called to carry on the work of Christ. We strive to do as He would do. He kindly, generously fed two very large groups of people. No mention is made about their eligibility or worthiness to receive this blessing. He healed hundreds

to thousands of infirm people. Again, no mention is made as to whether they were deserving of this blessing.

Christ died for us, even while we were yet sinners. Yes, we are and were undeserving. We have been given much. Many of us had little choice to be anything but what we are. The world around us is swarming with people who had little chance in life.

We are given much, so that we can bless much. God has shown us grace, kindness, and mercy to an overwhelming degree. This is not so we can be stingy, selfish, and stuffy. We are so blessed so we can be a blessing! This simple interaction can have eternal implication. Penny and her boys will not soon forget this kindness from a man of God.

# The Practical Side: New Story

*Real world situations met by today's Anabaptists.*

## Bread for a Nickel

*by Eco Nomics*

Back around 1975 I taught a Sunday School class of boys between the ages of 8-12 for a year or so. Some of them were from broken homes and did not have much of a father figure in their lives. I occasionally tried to spend some time with these boys on Saturdays so they would know I cared about them.

One day when one of those boys was with me, we ran into another man from the church at a grocery store. In our conversation this brother happened to lament that the price of bread had recently gone up; I think it had gone from 27 cents a loaf to 30 cents.

Well, afterwards my Sunday School lad declared with all the righteous indignation of a 10-year-old, “When I grow up, I’m going to have a store and sell my bread to the people for a nickel a loaf!”

I saw the incident as an opportunity for a teachable moment, so I said, “Now Donald, you shouldn’t be too hard on the store owner. Think about all that goes into making a loaf of bread.

“First of all, farmers have to grow whatever grain it is that the bread is made of.

“They have to buy seed and fertilizer and fuel for their machinery. They work a lot of hours to make a crop.

“Then the grain has to go to a mill where it is ground into flour. That machinery costs a lot of money, plus all the people who work there have to be paid.

“Then it has to go to a bakery where they actually make the loaves of bread and wrap them for sale. All of that costs money and their workers have to be paid.

“Finally it gets to the store. But remember every time it had to be moved from the field to the store, it was hauled by trucks which cost lots of money to run, and their drivers have to be paid.

“So, the store owner had to pay a lot more than a nickel a loaf. It costs money for him to keep his store building and pay all the folks who work there. If he does not sell the bread for more than what he paid for it, he

can’t keep on running his store. Then not even the store keeper and his family would have any bread to eat and none of his customers could get any bread from him.

“So you see, the money we pay for anything we buy—big, like a car; or little, like a loaf of bread, that money has to be passed all the way down the line so that everyone who had a part in producing it, making it, or hauling it to you can have a share in it.”

I don’t know how effective that lesson was with my young friend, but I hope it helped him. Many people today are as ignorant and clueless in economics as my 10-year-old friend was fifty years ago.

Here is what the current news reported: Wal-Mart announced that they are closing 10 stores in the Chicago area because people are stealing so much of their merchandise it is impossible to stay in business.

A number of Wal-Mart stores in Milwaukee are closing because of unrestrained thieving.

Two years ago a lot of big box stores closed in California because the law would not prosecute shoplifters if they stole less than a thousand dollars worth of stuff.

More recently, in the city of Boston, Massachusetts, all the Walgreen drug stores announced they were closing because theft of merchandise made it impossible to operate.

As usual, the answer can be found in the Bible.

**II Thessalonians 3:10:** “For even when we were with you, we used to give you this order: if anyone is not willing to work, then he is not to eat, either.”

## Practical Questions?

1. How do we teach the plain Bible teaching in this last verse?
2. How do we teach that something does not come from nothing?
3. How can we teach not to steal?

## The Lord Watches

by Dee Livered

A few months ago Borislav was apprehended by the military recruiting officers and taken to a detention centre. Borislav explained that he was at the detention centre for a week, and then God miraculously released him.

When Borislav first arrived at the centre, he was praised for his high education and told of all the honors and badges he would wear on his shoulders when he became an officer. But the moment Borislav explained that he is a believer and now his first loyalty is to Jesus Christ, the officer's attitude drastically changed.

Instead of praising him, Borislav was belittled for his faith.

After this first session, when Borislav was alone, he cried out to God and promised God that if he ever gets out of this place, he will serve God even more.

A week later—it had been a trying week—Borislav approached an officer (not the one who first interrogated him) in the yard. As he was fingering the little New Testament in his coat pocket, he said, “I have something to offer you!” Victor had plans to witness to him of the Lord.

The officer was startled, and looking around, answered, “We cannot do anything here. There are video cameras everywhere.”

Borislav understood the officer expected a gift of money. So he replied, “You did not understand me. I am offering you the Words of Truth that show the way of salvation!”

The officer was greatly surprised, and asked, “Who are you?”

“I am a believer from the mountains,” Borislav answered. “I know the mountains well and I could have escaped across the border in the first days of the war. But I chose to stay in Ukraine to help needy people. Since I am a believer, I cannot take weapons in my hands.”

The officer responded with, “Wait a minute!” He immediately left Borislav standing there and disappeared. In ten minutes the officer returned with a release paper for Borislav. In brisk words, he said, “You may leave!”

Borislav greatly rejoiced and praised the Lord for his deliverance.

Some time passed. One day his wife told him, “The military officers were at the door seeking you, but you were not here.”

Borislav's heart sank. Now he knew he was being sought again.

His wife told him, “Flee to our relatives in Europe or go into hiding.”

Borislav sought the Lord for direction. He told the Lord, “I do not want to decide this question according to my flesh. I want You, O Lord, to give me direct direction.”

Two days later, Borislav received a call from Brother Mykola, the director of a registered Christian School in Yaremche. Mykola told Borislav, “Bring your diploma, and come over immediately. We have a position in our school which just now became vacant.”

Borislav understood this was the direction from God he had prayed for. In short order, Borislav was officially employed as a Physical Education teacher at the Christian school. This position gives him protection from army service.

But Borislav is not content to just teach school and evade army service. He is again active in evangelization, ministering to his mountain people who are steeped in a mixed religion that often includes the powers of darkness. Many refugees from the war also live in the mountainous areas surrounding his home. They too need to hear the gospel of peace and love preached to them.

*“But Moses said to the people, ‘Do not fear! Stand by and see the salvation of the Lord which He will accomplish for you today!... The Lord will fight for you while you keep silent.’”*

*Exodus 14:13-14*

## The story of *Anabaptist Voice*

In 2015 the *Heartbeat of the Remnant* had ceased publication. Some of my friends and I thought the magazine had been a worthy effort and ought to be continued.

Several interested brethren worked together to consider whether we should try to revive the *Heartbeat of the Remnant* or start over. Due to circumstances, we decided to start over as *Anabaptist Voice*. We made a few approaches for someone to serve as editor of the new publication, but none could be found. So, at the age of 73 years, I decided to try to fill the role.

At the onset, the Lord and I agreed that if He would give me the needed health and strength to edit 40 issues, I would stick with it. As the years rolled by, more questions came in about what I was going to do about continuing *Anabaptist Voice* when I was no longer able. My reply was always, “If the Lord does

not send someone around, we will shut it down. But if God sends the right man to me, I will do my best not to miss him.”

I approached two or three brethren about assisting me in the work. All the replies went somewhat like this: “I have growing children.” “My work is very demanding.” “I have responsibilities in the church and have been advised to not add another responsibility to my duties.” That is the way it went until God sent Jeff Byler to me. Jeff had all the required skills needed—a ready spirit, a willingness to learn, time to write and edit, experience as a church leader, and a vision for the work of *Anabaptist Voice*. Jeff has been assisting me for the last several issues. Lord willing, when AV40 is completed, Brother Jeff L. Byler will become the new editor of *Anabaptist Voice*.



Jeff and LoRita Byler are currently living in Idaho, USA. They are the parents of five grown children. Previously, they lived in Coyhaique, Chile (17 years), where he still serves on the ministry team of a church plant that his siblings (Ted, Marcus, Ed, and parents William and Sara) helped to start.

Jeff values the heritage that was passed on to him by his grandfather, Dan J. Byler, and father, William Byler, and wishes to contend for the biblical “faith which was once for all

handed down to the saints.” Jeff’s hope is to meekly and diligently serve the church by the promotion of Holy Spirit-inspired writings from modern-day Anabaptists who love the Scripture and put their faith into practice.

Jeff believes *Anabaptist Voice* is a needed print magazine amid the babble of electronic media in today’s confused and needy world. By God’s grace and Holy Spirit power, Jeff wants to serve you, the church, and the Lord through *Anabaptist Voice*.



Jeff and LoRita Byler



March 2026

Left to right:  
Jeff and LoRita,  
Marcus and Darlene,  
William and Sara,  
Ted and Kendra,  
Ed and Corina.

A Byler family group  
near Coyhaique, Chile.



March 2026



## Meeting Report

The 37th annual Latin American Pastors Conference (Conferencia de Pastores Latinoamericanos) was held in Sumpango, Guatemala this year. The date fixed for these meetings is usually Tuesday through Thursday of the last week of February. This allows pastors to not miss a Sunday in their home congregations. The first conference was started through the vision of the churches in northern Costa Rica and has grown greatly from the first half-dozen initial pastors. Last year it was hosted by the churches of Belize.

The Anabaptist churches of Central America take turns hosting this conference. The churches in Guatemala did an excellent job of hosting the 70 some pastors and their families who arrived from about a dozen countries from Mexico to Chile. Though the Guatemalan tortillas and food were deliciously prepared, the fellowship was even more fulfilling. Sharing the struggles and blessings of ministerial life and praying with fellow laborers is one of the most important benefits of these meetings. We went away with our hearts burning to work even more diligently and obediently in the Kingdom of Heaven.

This year, in true Anabaptist tradition, a confession of faith was agreed upon and accepted by most of the pastors present.

Each day of the conference, four to five sermons were geared to help face the common struggles in modern-day Anabaptist churches. Often a lively discussion followed each sermon. Translation from Spanish to English on headsets was available for those who did not speak Spanish.

Here are a few translated highlights of the messages heard:

*Volcán de Fuego, Fire Volcano, near Antigua, Guatemala could be seen from the ministry conference letting off steam.*

Felipe Ebersole (Honduras) sermon: **“The Blessing of Serving in Ministry”**

• *“Criticism is an opportunity to learn more about ourselves.”*

Felipe Glick (El Salvador) sermon: **“Do not Move the Ancient Landmark”**

• *“The oldest landmark is the Word of God.”*

Marcos Paniagua (Costa Rica) sermon: **“Balancing the Family and Ministry”**

• *“The family is our first ministry.”*

Marcos Yoder (Costa Rica) sermon: **“Being Examples in Family Life”**

• *“God’s glory is manifested when His plan for the family is fulfilled.”*

Chente Mejia (Costa Rica) sermon: **“The Work of a Deacon”**

• *“God has always been concerned for the widow, orphan and poor.”*

Brian Yoder (Guatemala) sermon: **“Ruling Well in your own Home”**

• *“A frustrated man is not effective.”*

Jose Miller (El Salvador) sermon: **“Healthy use of Technology”**

• *“Our hearts follow our eyes.”*

Jimmy Ramirez (Costa Rica) sermon: **“Equipping Brethren for Ministry”**

• *“A minister’s job is to make people hungry.”*

Andres Crider (Guatemala) sermon: **“Correct use of the Old Testament”**

• *“Stories are vehicles to understand principles.”*



# Circulation & Financial Statement

## Income & Expense Report

March 31, 2026

January 1, 2026 Beginning Balance	\$1,457.21
<b>Income</b>	
Donations	\$3,595.00
Local Support*	\$10,000.00
<b>Total Income</b>	<b>\$13,595.00</b>
<b>Beginning Balance + Income</b>	<b>\$15,052.21</b>
<b>Expenses (AV38)</b>	
Postage	\$5,057.09
Printing & Mailing	\$6,872.00
Staff Expenses	\$1,499.97
<b>Total Expense</b>	<b>\$13,429.06</b>
<b>March 31, 2026 Ending Balance</b>	<b>\$1,623.15</b>

## Circulation Report

### ISSUE #35 - ACTUAL NUMBERS

Print Qty: 5,020 | Operating Cost: \$12,518.33  
Cost Per Copy: \$2.50/ea.

### ISSUE #36 - ACTUAL NUMBERS

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Cost Per Copy: \$2.57/ea.

### ISSUE #37 - ACTUAL NUMBERS

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Cost Per Copy: \$2.55/ea.

### ISSUE #38 - ACTUAL NUMBERS

Print Qty: 5,080 | Operating Cost: \$13,429.06  
Cost Per Copy: \$2.65/ea.

\*see section "Our Finances" on Page 4 for more info.

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## End Matters

### FUNERALS MATTER



We recently traveled to Woodbury, Tennessee to attend the funeral of Suzanne Heisey, the wife of Dale Heisey. Doris and I have been long-time co-workers in Kingdom building with the Heiseys for over forty years. Our purpose in making this journey was to give comfort and solace to dear family members.

We sorrow with them, tis true, but we do not sorrow as those who have no hope. Our hope is that the departed soul has been delivered from the physical and mental ailments suffered in this life—into eternal glory.

Because our life on earth is so short, a funeral should cause everyone to pause in the busyness of life, and think not only upon the life of the deceased, but upon our own standing before God. Am I ready to meet my Maker? Have I walked in newness of life? Have I truly forgiven those who have wronged me? Have I aided the widows, orphans, and the helpless ones?

Yes, so soon our souls, in a new body, will bow before our Creator God and He will judge us. Are we wearing white robes of righteousness or will we be naked before Him?

Funerals Matter!

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*"He has made everything beautiful  
in its time"*

*- Ecclesiastes 3:11*

