



Radical

Discipleship

LEADER'S GUIDE

Radical Discipleship

Author: Jack Heppner

Series editor: Don Thiessen

LEADER GUIDE



Steinbach Bible College
Steinbach, Manitoba

Cover design - "Dirck Willems turns around to save his persecutor's life; was then captured, imprisoned, and burned outside Asperen, A.D. 1569."

For more details see page 741 of **Martyrs Mirror**.
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INTRODUCTION



This course is basically a thematic study of biblical themes relevant to the church of any generation. While we provide a short historical glimpse into the beginnings of the Anabaptist Movement in the introductory section to the Student Manual, this course is not designed to be a course in the history of Anabaptism. Rather it seeks to illustrate some of the unique ways in which Anabaptists understand biblical teaching.

The lesson plans begin with **BIBLE STUDY**. This is appropriate because Anabaptists consider themselves people of the Word. And it is often counter-productive to begin with Mennonite history when seeking to demonstrate the validity of Anabaptist perspectives on faith and life. Few will consider a truth to be valid because Menno Simons spoke it; more will take seriously a study of the Scriptures.

A short **COMMENTARY** follows the Bible study in each lesson. This section is intended to help students draw together the concepts studied in the Scripture lesson and to illustrate how various Christian traditions have interpreted the themes of the passages studied, including, of course, the Anabaptist faith tradition.

In most cases the diverse traditions are not specifically identified. It is not the purpose of this course to represent fully or critique the many strands of contemporary Christian theology. Rather it seeks to demonstrate how Anabaptist perspectives on major biblical themes offer unique insights to modern Christian faith and practice. For this reason it will be helpful to paint a backdrop of commonly held views on specific topics without going into detail and identifying specifically which traditions are being referred to. More specific mention of alternate faith traditions are made in this Teachers Guide. Teachers should use these "labels" to the extent that they are comfortable with them and to the degree they consider them useful in the class.

In most cases, Anabaptist faith positions do not contradict commonly held Evangelical viewpoints. Most frequently there is a common core of understanding. However, the Anabaptist chal-

lenge often is to take these concepts to their logical conclusions. In other cases, Anabaptists seek to enhance evangelical theology by adding some overlooked or under-emphasized dimensions of biblical teaching. Occasionally there is an invitation to go back to square one to re-examine foundational understandings.

The purpose of the commentary section in the student manual is to help participants in the class appreciate the viability and integrity of an Anabaptist understanding of the themes being studied. In some cases the Anabaptist "position" identified in these commentaries is overly simplified. Not all Anabaptists subscribe to every position identified as Anabaptist in these commentaries. However, most Evangelical Anabaptists would align themselves closely with the views expressed here.

The **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS** at the end of each lesson are designed to draw students into dialogue around the topics under discussion. Frequently the questions relate specifically to the biblical passages studied or statements made in the Commentary section. Sometimes they ask students to identify implications of truths discovered for their lives. Teachers may wish to use these questions to initiate dialogue during the class or in a closing exercise. If time permits, the class could be divided into small groups to discuss these questions in that context.

The uniqueness of Anabaptist perspectives on the biblical themes in these lessons are seen most clearly when considered together. This can be illustrated by reference to the world of astronomy. Individual stars carry their own lustre, but when seen as part of a constellation of stars, new dimensions are added. Each star now serves to enhance the creative image drawn in the heavens, and the image confers new significance to individual stars. Biblical truths always seek integration with each other.

Another way to illustrate this truth is to think of a circle with the various topics situated along its circumference. All are related to each other and are needed to complete the circle. To understand the significance of this sphere, one must break into it and begin to examine individual themes. As one moves from one point to another one soon realizes that truths learned along the way help to illuminate earlier insights. Diligent students will want to move

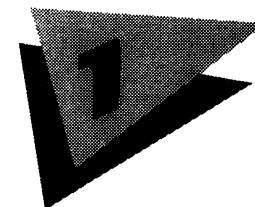
around that circle a number of times as they grow in their understanding and appreciation of Anabaptist perspectives on biblical faith and practice.

There is no particular significance to the fact that there are twelve topics in the lesson series. The main reason for choosing twelve lessons was to make this study adaptable for use as a Sunday School quarterly. There are other ways of identifying the components of Anabaptist theology. This is one way among many. Some prefer to focus ideas around a few central themes. In *Search for Renewal: The Story of the Rudnerweider/EMMC*, (p. 35) the Anabaptist vision is described as centering around four topics: 1) A Free Church 2) Discipleship 3) Love in All Relationships 4) The Rule of Christ. The Mennonite Brethren Faith and Life Pamphlet, *Anabaptism: The Basic Beliefs*, identifies twelve topics similar to those in this series, but with some differences. In some cases, a main point in that series becomes a sub-point in this series, and vice-versa.

In the end, students of Anabaptist Theology will find that all the topics are interwoven and can create many-coloured tapestries of truth, depending on how the various strands are positioned in relation to one another. To the seasoned student such variety stimulates an ever-deepening appreciation and study of the Scriptures. But every person must begin somewhere—must break into the ring and move from one truth to another. That is what we are inviting students of the Word to do in this lesson series.

We will be making reference on occasion to study helps listed in the bibliography at the back of the Student's Manual. Most frequently we will refer to various sections in *A Third Way*, by Paul Lederach. Whereas most of the books listed in the bibliography expand on a specific topic within Anabaptist Theology, Lederach's book is intended to be an overview, similar to this lesson series. It is recommended that teachers purchase this book and use it as a companion study-guide to this Leader's Guide.

It is hoped that the study of *Radical Discipleship* will help to keep us all on the cutting edge where faith meets life.



The Centrality of Christ

STUDY HELPS

Lederach, Paul. *A Third Way*. Ch. 1

OPENING REFLECTIONS

In many respects a study of the centrality of Christ is the best place to enter the circle of biblical themes of discipleship. Few Christians would argue with the statement that Christ is central to biblical faith. But there is not a consensus on how he is central and how that centrality affects Christian practice. This lesson illustrates how one's view of Christ affects the way one reads the Bible. Furthermore, it demonstrates how Jesus Christ is the foundation for all aspects of the Christian life.

BIBLE STUDY

1. A good starting point for the topic of the centrality of Christ is 1 Corinthians 3:11, "For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ." This verse states clearly what lies at the heart of faith. Christ's work on the cross is foundational for salvation, and his life, work and teaching provide the vision and example of how believers are to live.
2. The book of Hebrews states explicitly why and how Christ is foundational for the Christian. Christ is superior to all who have come before him and his presence and teaching is the pinnacle of God's revelation. That is not to say that there was

no divine revelation before Christ. Indeed, "...God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways..." (v.1). But the writer concludes that there is something "superior" about the revelation that has come directly through Christ.

This is the case because of the characteristics of the messenger through whom the message came, namely Jesus Christ. Hebrews 1:4 develops a sense of the greatness of Christ. He is the heir of all things, the creator of the universe, the radiance of God's glory, the exact representation of his being, the sustainer of all things by his word, seated at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven, and superior to the angels illustrated by the superiority of his name.

3. In Hebrews 8 the writer compares the Old Covenant to the New Covenant initiated by Jesus. The Old Covenant, based on the mosaic law and the function of the tabernacle, is said to be a reflection of the one inaugurated by Jesus. Notice that the Old Covenant is not criticised as being inherently bad. The real problem was the fact that it did not keep God's people faithful to him. Why not? On the one hand, God blames the people for turning away from a covenant which had a lot of potential (v.9). On the other hand, God admits that a new and better covenant would make it easier to understand and follow the way of God because it would be written "...in their minds," and "...on their hearts" (v.10). The New Covenant is mediated by Jesus, founded on better promises (v.6), and replaces the Old Covenant which is disappearing (v.13).

It is helpful to keep in mind the perspectives of the writer to the Hebrews on the centrality of Christ in relation to the New Covenant. It forms a good backdrop against which to understand other New Testament teachings on the nature and role of Christ.

4. The fact that Christ supersedes the Old Covenant does not mean that it did not have a legitimate place in the pattern of God's revelation. This is made clear in Matthew 5:17 where Christ states that he is not interested in destroying the Old

Covenant, but to build upon the Law and the Prophets in order to fulfil them. Thus there is not a total negation of their validity, but a recognition that Christ brings a more complete perspective on God's way and will for this world. If one accepts this kind of "progressive revelation" it will affect the way one reads the Old Testament, because it's content will be examined in the light of Jesus Christ.

5. When Peter preached his pentecostal sermon in Acts 2, it was quite clear to the listeners that Jesus was the central focus of his message. In order to get the full impact of that focus it is helpful to read the entire sermon and a description of its effect on those who heard it (2:14-47). Peter declared that Jesus was accredited by God by miracles and signs, handed over to wicked men, put to death on a cross and raised to life. There was no question but that the early disciples had a clear focus in their lives, namely Jesus Christ.
6. It is clear from both the example of the disciples and the teachings of Christ that to focus on Christ means more than believing a set of truths about him and his work. It is essential that his teaching be obeyed. The parable of the Wise and Foolish Builders illustrates this truth quite clearly (Matthew 7:24-27). Not putting the words of Christ into practice is equivalent to not believing in him.
7. The Apostle Paul understood that God's vision for the followers of Christ was that they "...be conformed to the likeness of his Son" (Romans 8:29). That is to say that Christians are to use the life of Christ as the model upon which to base the patterns and practices of life. There is "no other foundation" than Christ himself. Paul declares further that the purpose for "becoming like Christ" is so "...that he might be the firstborn among many brethren." So then Christ becomes a "brother" to those who seek to become like him. After all, brothers usually do resemble each other!

This passage is couched in a context of a discussion of predestination. It will be best not to get sidetracked at this point in an in-depth study of this topic. However, what you can affirm is that God's people are called, justified, glorified, and "predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son."

8. Throughout his writings, Paul bases his instructions about how Christians are to live on the example of Jesus Christ. Philippians 2:5-11 is frequently referred to as "The Hymn of Christ" and may have been part of a hymn sung by early Christians. In a few short verses Paul depicts what it meant for Christ to do what he did. He had to let go of a position of power and privilege, take the form of a servant, humble himself, and be completely obedient even to the point of taking up his cross. In all these respects Paul calls on believers to display the same attitude demonstrated by Christ in his life.

COMMENTARY



The commentary in the Student Manual points to two specific implications of the teaching about the centrality of Christ.

CHRIST AND BIBLE STUDY

Of course the Christian learns about Christ from the Bible, but as Paul Lederach says "...it seems that the various theological streams result from starting at different places in interpreting the Bible" (p.19).

Some traditions begin the search for biblical truth in the Old Testament but do not give full attention to the radical teachings of Christ in the New Testament. So, for example, infant baptism in the church is based on the practice of circumcision in the Old Covenant. But there is a problem with moving from Old Testament teaching directly to Christian faith and practice. If there is no further revelation in the New Testament, then it would appear reasonable to accept Old Testament teaching and practice on a whole range of issues including war, polygamy, slavery, etc.

Some traditions do begin their search for biblical truth in the New Testament but bypass Jesus and the Gospels to begin with the writings of Paul. It is supposed that the teachings of Christ as found in the Gospels are not relevant for the church, whereas

Paul's teachings, directed specifically to the early church, are. Thus it is considered appropriate to bypass the ethical teachings of Jesus, for example, the Sermon on the Mount. In effect, such an approach states that Paul was teaching a different gospel than Jesus, or at least that Paul had to revise the teachings of Christ significantly to make them suitable for the early church situation.

However, we hold that we should generally begin the search for truth with Christ and the Gospels. That means that the teaching and life of Jesus form the foundation for faith and practice. The Old Testament must be read through the eyes of Christ. It is assumed that where Christ and the Old Testament appear to be in conflict, Christ is to be followed. He is the later and ultimate revelation. At the same time, the perspectives of Paul and the other apostles are based squarely on the teachings and life of Christ. The writings of the apostles give expression to Christ's teaching in the context of the early church.

AFFIRMING THE APOSTLES' CREED—AND MORE

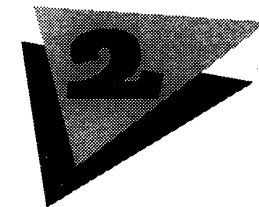
The Apostle's Creed portrays a particular way in which Christ is taken seriously.

I believe in God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth: and in Jesus Christ His only Son our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried. He descended into Hell; the third day he arose again from the dead. He ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit; the holy catholic church; the communion of saints; the forgiveness of sins; the resurrection of the body; and the body everlasting. Amen.

Note, however, that nothing appears between Christ's birth and his death under Pontius Pilate. The fact is that he lived, worked and taught among the people of his day. He was Immanuel—God with us! Surely this fact should not be overlooked. Although we

generally hold to the historic elements of the faith as outlined in the Apostles' Creed, we must insist that his life, work and teachings also be taken seriously. Of course, that means that we have no option but to be followers of The Way—following Christ in the way of discipleship.

Jesus Christ determines both the way we read the Scriptures and the way we live our lives. He is central to all that we are and do.



Salvation/Discipleship

STUDY HELPS

Lederach, Paul. *A Third Way*. Ch. 6

OPENING REFLECTIONS

The challenge of this lesson is to explore the greatness of the biblical concept of salvation and to take note of how it is related to the concept of discipleship or the Christian walk. A major temptation Christians face is to define salvation too narrowly and to isolate it from the notion of being “in the Way of Jesus,” i.e. to separate faith from life.

BIBLE STUDY

1. According to the angel's message to Joseph, the purpose for Jesus' coming was “...to save his people from their sins.” It is clear from all of scripture that “Salvation belongs to our God” (Revelation 7:10). “Salvation is found in no one else (Jesus), for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12). This thought forms a good bridge from the focus of Lesson #1 on The Centrality of Christ to the understanding of salvation. Salvation is not simply a matter of human origin or effort—God has taken the initiative with respect to our salvation. Notice how the words of the angel already tie salvation to life—people will be saved “from their sins,” presumably so that they will be free to walk in the way God has chosen for them.

2. This question focuses on the idea that salvation is a “process.” There is a sense in which believers can say they “have been” saved, “are” saved, “are being” saved and “will be” saved. Biblical writers seem to move with ease from one expression to the other, sometimes within the same sentence. Such a full-orbed description indicates the greatness of salvation. It takes into account who believers were, who they are, what they are becoming and where they are headed. Salvation is more than a faith experience—it is a “...walking in the resurrection”.
3. The question in focus here is what Jesus meant by describing the life he offers as “full” or “abundant.” To have a “full” life would seem to mean that one is living according to the purposes for which one was created; that one is aligned with the intentions of God for humankind. If heaven gives full expression to such an alignment, then our life on earth should surely reflect that vision. After all, the prayer on the lips of believers is “...your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven” (Matthew 6:10). God desires to use his followers to answer that prayer as they purpose to accept and reflect the fullness of life he offers them in Christ.
4. The challenge to deny self, take up one’s cross and follow in the way of Jesus is clearly articulated in Mark 8:34-38, and is paralleled in Matthew and Luke. Whatever else can be said about salvation, Jesus’ own teaching on the subject should not be ignored. What is at stake here is not the loss of rewards but the saving of one’s life (v. 35) or one’s soul (v. 36). And, as Jesus states, that is tied to one’s willingness to follow Jesus. Such passages simply do not allow for a separation of the concept of salvation from that of discipleship, or to say that “being a Christian” is not associated with “walking in the way of God.”
5. Romans 10:9 speaks to the much debated question of the relationship between the “Lordship” and “Saviourhood” of Christ. One way of perceiving the connection between these two concepts is to say that a person desiring to be a Christian first accepts Jesus as Saviour and subsequently submits to him as growth takes place. However, this leads to the awkward conclusion that one can be a “Christian” without ever having

recognized or submitted to the lordship of Jesus Christ. This passage holds the concepts of the lordship and saviourhood of Christ, and consequently discipleship and salvation, in proximity. The NIV rendering, “That if you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord’...” reflects this emphasis more precisely than the KJV wording, “That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus...”

An argument could be made on the basis of this verse that submitting to the Lordship of Christ is a condition for coming to faith in him—that saving faith comes only in the context of recognising that Jesus is in fact Lord of all! Even if we do not prioritize these statements in this way, it remains clear that the question of the Lordship of Christ should normally be settled at the time of coming to faith. And this is consistent with the biblical understanding of faith being more than mental assent, but “believing to the point of action.”

6. This relationship between the concepts of “believing” and “obeying” is clearly illustrated in scripture with respect to the life of Abraham. In the Galatians passage, Paul declares unequivocally that Abraham was “credited with righteousness” because he believed God. Just as decisively, James states that Abraham was “...considered righteous for what he did...” This apparent contradiction has troubled many people. Indeed attempts have been made to discredit the statement made by James. Because of it, Martin Luther even suggested that the book of James should be dropped from the New Testament. It is much better, however, when faced by an apparent contradiction, to seek for a deeper level of meaning that transcends or encompasses both statements. This can be done in this case by simply continuing to read in the James passage (vv. 22-24). Abraham’s faith and action is said to have worked together—that he was justified by what he did and what he believed. Paul and James are not preaching different gospels. When it is understood that the biblical idea of faith encompasses both belief and obedience the contradiction is resolved.
7. Sometimes word-pictures clarify truth better than do theological and philosophical discussions. As a matter of fact Jesus preferred to use picture language to illustrate eternal truth.

Nor are word-pictures foreign to Paul and the other New Testament writers. With this approach one is not concerned if a particular image does not tell the whole truth—there is always another illustration to fill the gap. This way of communicating truth could be referred to as the “diamond” approach. Each word-picture is like one face of a diamond, giving off its own lustre.

The Scriptures are full of images used to illustrate the grandeur of salvation. Those experiencing salvation are said to be born again, to walk through a doorway, to be reconciled, to have their eyes opened, or to be converted. The list is almost endless. But it is interesting to note that in every case there are either direct or indirect references in the word-pictures to the idea that salvation includes embarking on a new way of life—to follow Christ in the way of discipleship.

8. It is clear in Scripture that God initiates the salvation process. Paul states that “Jesus died for us while we were still sinners” (Romans 5:8). At the same time Scripture calls persons to respond to the salvation offered by God—to look to Jesus, to reach out, to come to him, to commit one’s way to the Lord and to follow in his way. The writer of the book of Hebrews is very concerned about those who are tempted to forsake the way of Christ—to commit apostasy. According to the writer, there is the possibility of “turning away from the living God.” There is a stream of theology which would deny this possibility, but if Hebrews 3-6 is taken seriously, believers must heed the warning to take discipleship seriously—to remain faithful to the end as they walk in the grace of God.

COMMENTARY



As the Bible Study has shown, the concept of salvation lies very much at the centre of what Jesus came to do. There are at least two areas in which there appears to be much confusion about salvation.

DEFINING SALVATION TOO NARROWLY.

A temptation Christians have faced throughout the history of Christianity is to view salvation only as a ticket to heaven. The historic Christian faith does affirm that Christ saves us for eternal life. However, if our understanding of salvation does not encompass the life we live on earth, we have yet much to discover about its grandeur.

Jesus desires that salvation be a reality experienced fully in life. If, however, the concept of the lordship of Christ is removed from salvation, making it a secondary and optional appendage to “being saved,” it is easy to fall into the trap of thinking we are “on our way to heaven” even if we have not committed our lives to Christ.

A common way to defend salvation apart from discipleship is to say that no one can be perfect. If salvation depends on following Christ flawlessly, it is said, then there is no hope to experience it at all. That is, of course, a true statement. Recognising the lordship of Christ does not imply perfection. It does, however, speak of an orientation, an attitude, a foundational commitment. There will always be room for growth and maturation in the way of Christ, but to suggest that being saved has no relationship to a way of life is to bypass biblical teaching.

There is a growing consensus among modern Christians that to be a Christian includes being a follower of Christ.

THE RESPECTIVE ROLES OF GOD AND HUMANKIND IN THE PROCESS OF SALVATION.

Throughout Christian history there has been a tension related to the question of what the respective roles of God and humankind are in relation to the salvation process. The temptation has always been to move toward one of two extreme positions.

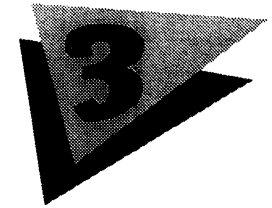
On the one hand, there are those who insist that God is the only actor with respect to salvation. The Reformed/Calvinist orientation falls into this camp as does the Neo-Orthodoxy of Karl Barth. In following this line of thinking, all persons are so totally

depraved that they are even incapable of responding to the gospel invitation. Therefore, God elects some to be saved and then works that salvation into those persons without the necessity of human response. This work is irresistible and can not be undone by any human choice. God is sovereign and he will save those whom he chooses to save. Beyond that there is no hope for those he has not chosen.

On the other hand there are those who hold that salvation is purely a matter of human choice and action. Much of medieval catholicism was rooted in this idea leading to the concept of building up "merits" in the process of earning one's salvation. The liberalism of the early 20th-century also reflected this more "humanistic" orientation toward salvation. Persons choose to do right, God is pleased and so are considered to be Christian.

When certain passages in Scripture are read in isolation, it is in fact possible to develop such extreme positions in relation to salvation. The challenge is to read all of Scripture and find a balanced view point. The work of Christ is necessary in securing salvation. It is the grace of God that makes salvation possible. At the same time persons are called upon to respond to the invitation to salvation. As they place their hands in God's hands he does a work of grace in their lives. They are reconciled, saved, born anew, and much, much more. They are accepted in Christ as they yield themselves to him, submitting to his lordship.

A very sensitive issue related to this discussion is whether apostasy is in fact a possibility. Those who say that all depends on God and his election tend to say that apostasy is impossible because if God determines to save someone he can not be stopped since he is sovereign. Those who admit human choice into the process of salvation tend to take the warnings regarding apostasy seriously. If it is possible to turn toward God, it would seem likely that there is the possibility of turning away from God as well.



The Kingdom of God

STUDY HELPS

Lederach, Paul. *A Third Way*. Ch. 2.

Kraybill, Donald B. *The Upside-Down Kingdom*.

OPENING REFLECTIONS

The concept of the Kingdom of God and the believers' role in it forms a major core of biblical understanding. Not only does it provide a perspective of the future, but also a holistic guide for ethical conduct in the world. To the extent that believers experience the full impact of the words in the Lord's prayer "...Your Kingdom come, Your will be done," they will be living out their roles as "Kingdom Citizens."

BIBLE STUDY

1. A good place to enter into the study of the Kingdom of God is Matthew 6:33 where Jesus calls upon his followers to seek his Kingdom before all else. The question in the Student Manual is basically an observation question to focus clearly on the topic of the Kingdom of God. If the Kingdom is the first thing believers are to seek, it must have great value. All other normal considerations of life must be considered secondary to grasping the significance of Kingdom understandings. That is the quest of this study.
2. The point of this question is to lay to rest a controversy that has frequently detracted from the full impact of Kingdom

teaching in the Scriptures. It has been noted that Matthew prefers to use the term "Kingdom of Heaven" whereas other Gospel writers prefer to use "Kingdom of God." Some hold that this difference signifies two separate realities and then conclude that at least the teachings surrounding the "Kingdom of Heaven" are not meant to be taken seriously by Christians living on this earth. That would then nullify the impact of most of Matthew's teaching for the modern Christian.

The passage in Matthew 19:23-24 uses the two terms interchangeably and thus does not allow for the interpretation that would separate the Kingdom of God from the Kingdom of Heaven. All kingdom teaching is applicable to modern Christians. Being aware of the controversy around these terms may be helpful to clear up confusions before they become major obstacles.

3. According to biblical teaching the Kingdom of God is both a **present** and a **future** reality. Revelation and Mark passages clearly indicate that the Kingdom belongs to the future—the other passages that it has already arrived. This apparent contradiction holds a key to understanding the heart of Kingdom teaching. Christ brought the Kingdom of God with him in his incarnation, breaking through the enemy lines, as it were, to establish a Kingdom beachhead in this world. That is why it is possible for believers to be members of God's Kingdom even while they are in conflict with the Kingdom of Darkness all around them. Only in the consummation, when Christ returns, will God's Kingdom be established in its fullness in the new heaven and the new earth. The Kingdom is "already" but "not yet!" Believers in Christ are called upon to demonstrate that the Kingdom of God has already arrived in this world. This will be seen most clearly by the fact that they live their lives according to Kingdom values.
4. One way to read the parables about the Kingdom is to try to find a unique meaning for each of the parables given. Certainly each parable or "word-picture" has its own way of painting an impression regarding the Kingdom. But it may be best to see all the parables pointing basically to the same truth,

namely that in Jesus the Kingdom of God has broken into history and seeks response in this world. The Kingdom is like seed being sown, some taking root and some not. It is like good seed sown that others try to imitate. It is like a mustard seed growing until it fills a large space. It is like the yeast that permeates the dough. It is like a treasure hidden in the earth worth more than all of life's earnings. It is like the net that drags through time. In one way or another, all the parables point to the revelation of the great "secret" which is now coming out in the open—the Kingdom of God has invaded time in a new way in Jesus Christ. Such an understanding brings with it an exalted view of Jesus and his mission. Not only did he come to die for our sins, but also to establish the Kingdom in which his followers are to live.

5. The Apostle Paul uses a variety of terms for all that seeks to separate believers from God or to exert a negative influence on believers. In Romans 8:38 he mentions "...death, life, angels, demons, the present, the future, powers, height and depth..." In Ephesians 6:12 he mentions "...rulers, authorities, powers of this dark world, and spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms..." (See also Ephesians 1:21.) Because the terms "powers and authorities" appear most frequently in these lists they are sometimes used to represent all that strives against the Kingdom of God. Some understand these "powers and authorities" to be spirit beings in the service of Satan. Others suggest that they might also represent the fallen systems and structures of society and the perverted appetites of fallen creatures. In any case, according to Colossians 2:15, these powers and authorities have been disarmed and can not hold ultimate power over members of God's Kingdom. This is because of the work of Christ on behalf of his followers. The body of Christ can stand against the powers of darkness because Christ has equipped them to do so (Ephesians 6:12-18).
6. With Kingdom talk comes the language of "Lordship." In God's Kingdom, Christ is Lord. It is inconceivable that persons who do not recognize his Lordship would consider themselves to be participants in God's Kingdom. To be in the Kingdom of God is to submit to the Lord of Lords and do the works of the Kingdom.

7. The Sermon on the Mount is frequently considered to be the centre piece of Kingdom ethics. In many respects this sermon does not leave believers very comfortable; it calls them to go beyond that which comes to them naturally. The sermon makes them aware that they can not live out the Kingdom way in their own strength. This becomes abundantly clear the more specific one becomes. Perhaps that is why some are tempted to bypass the teachings of the Sermon on the Mount and claim that they do not apply to Christians today. Seeking specific modern applications for the teachings of the Sermon on the Mount will inevitably push Christ's followers toward a radical lifestyle that doesn't blend easily with the lifestyle of those who do not seek His Kingdom above all else.
8. The final question focuses on the Lord's Prayer and the significance of the words "Your Kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven" (Matthew 6:10). Matthew 6:33 challenges believers to seek God's Kingdom. Here they are reminded that without the help and blessing of God they can not experience it. It is a kingdom of grace and forgiveness and is entered through repentance. This prayer is one of hope and confidence. No matter how dark the situation around the followers of Christ, they can be assured that with God's help they can bring the reality of God's Kingdom to bear on it. And they look forward to the day when God's Kingdom will be known in all its fullness.

COMMENTARY



iblical scholars generally agree that the Kingdom of God is a central teaching of Jesus. The Apostle Paul also speaks of the Kingdom of God—how it conflicts with the Kingdom of Darkness and how Christ has exposed it and disarmed its lethal potential for believers. Further reflection regarding the aspects of Kingdom teaching may be helpful.

THE NATURE OF THE KINGDOM

In his book, *The Upside-Down Kingdom*, Donald Kraybill speaks of the Kingdom of God being "upside-down" to the normal pattern of thinking and living. Mary's song, the Magnificat (Luke 1:46-55), prophesies that Christ would turn things upside-down—the proud would be scattered, rulers brought down from their thrones, the humble lifted up, the hungry filled, and the rich sent away empty. Kraybill draws the following analogy.

To sharpen the issue we can think of two ladders side by side—one representing the Kingdom of God and the other standing for the typical kingdoms of this world. An inverted or inverse relationship between the two ladders means that something at the top of one ladder is at the bottom of the other ladder. An object highly valued on the one ladder is on the bottom rung of the value system of the other (Kraybill 23).

Furthermore, Kraybill notes that the Kingdom is relational. God is king and we are his subjects. We follow the dictates of the King, not out of compulsion but because we love our King. He desires for us to relate to him and for his subjects to relate to one another. But this is only possible as we live by the values of the Kingdom in the power of the Spirit.

Those who live in the way of the Kingdom cannot assume that the way things are is the way things should be. If they truly seek first the Kingdom, they will be surprised over and over again at how Christ calls them to turn their worlds upside down.

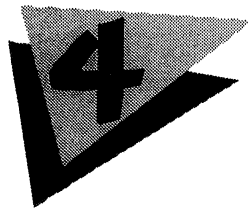
DETOURS AROUND THE KINGDOM

Throughout Christian history the call of the Kingdom has been a stumbling block for many believers. Surely, it is said, we can not be expected to take Christ seriously with respect to his kingdom teachings. Are they not too impractical? Did he really expect his followers to pattern their lives according to kingdom values? Various ways have been found to circumvent the call to kingdom living (Kraybill 29-39).

- a. Some argue that *Jesus was culturally bound*. Since the world of the New Testament was so radically different from the modern world, it is said, Jesus' expectation for another age should not be brought into the present. But while it is true that many things have changed in 2000 years, it is not true that human nature has changed. The tendency toward arrogance and evil remain alive as ever, only finding some new expressions in modern times.
- b. Others maintain that *Jesus was wrong in his timing*. If Jesus really expected the Kingdom to come in its fullness in a very short time, say a few months or even years, then perhaps it would have been possible to live according to his ethic. But since the Kingdom has not come believers must get on with their lives with the help of a more practical ethic.
- c. Or, some say that *Jesus never meant for us to take his kingdom talk seriously* because he was simply informing us how life will be lived in the future, perhaps in a millennial kingdom. But then why would Jesus spend so much time teaching his disciples about something which had no bearing on their lives?
- d. Then there are those who suggest that Jesus simply is asking his followers *to ponder the spiritual meaning of his teaching*. Perhaps, it is said, Jesus is presenting kingdom teaching to bring persons to the point of despair so that we will realize their need of grace. Once it has brought them to the point where they see their need of the grace of God, then kingdom teaching has done its work. It may still instruct them about attitudes and personal spiritual life, but kingdom teaching is not required to be lived out in real life. But does that agree with the rest of Scripture? Is the Apostle Paul not concerned in his epistles that the life of Christ be evident in our walk?
- e. Another group of Christians has insisted that the *kingdom ethic* is meant for one's personal life only. That means that in the exercise of my public responsibility I am exempt from following the ethic of Christ and his kingdom. But that

means that Christ's followers would be serving two masters. Can their allegiance change from hour to hour depending on what they are doing?

These are only a few of the ways in which well-meaning Christians have tried to by-pass Christ's kingdom teachings. All such attempts lead only to unfaithfulness. Regardless of the cost, all believers are called upon to live out the ethics of the Kingdom of God as God enables them to do so.



Separation From the World

STUDY HELPS

Yoder, John H. *The Politics of Jesus*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972

OPENING REFLECTIONS

The question of separation from the world for the believer is rooted in the teaching of the Kingdom of God (Lesson 3). Living out the ethic of God's Kingdom will invariably set Christians apart from the world of unbelievers. This lesson explores the dynamics of separation and how it becomes a foundation for a positive perspective on Christian faith and life.

BIBLE STUDY

1. If it is agreed that the values of the Kingdom of God are "upside-down" to the values of the Kingdom of this world, as discussed in lesson 3, then it is not difficult to understand why believers are called upon to live separated lives. It is important to note that separation is defined in terms of distinct behaviour, not in terms of removing oneself physically from the presence of non-believers. Jesus notes in John 18:36 that the reason the subjects of his kingdom do not fight is because "My kingdom is not of this world..." Because Christians are kingdom followers their actions in the world will be uniquely different from others around them. They will be regarded as a "separate" people.
2. This "separate" or "unique" behaviour of kingdom citizens can draw a negative response from those not in tune with kingdom values. Sometimes this negativism is rooted in the fact that kingdom behaviour by a few can be disruptive to the prevailing order of things. This was the case in the 16th-Century when Anabaptists refused to baptize infants and thus register them as members of both the church and the state. At other times kingdom behaviour pricks the consciences of those who justify their sinful behaviour. This certainly was the case in the life of Jesus. As he fearlessly lived out kingdom values, he exposed the sins of persons and evoked their hatred. So it is to be expected in the lives of Christians today. Their "separate" behaviour may also lead to certain forms of rejection and even hatred from those around them.
3. Of course some Christians have distorted the biblical concept of separation by suggesting that they should have nothing to do with unbelievers. In extremely difficult situations such as open persecution against Christians there may be little choice in the matter. However, even in such situations, it is important to remember that Christians are called upon to be "...the light of the world" (Matthew 5:14-16). Maintaining a separateness should not be rooted in the desire to be comfortable in our own closed communities of faith. Rather being "separate" in terms of behaviour should serve as a means of witness to the "light" or "the higher way." If it is not, then separation can become a negative, legalistic and debilitating umbrella under which to live the Christian life.
4. James approaches the question of separation from the point of view of the Christian's relationship with God. Friendship with the world makes Christ's followers enemies of God. To state the point positively would be to say that in order to remain friends of God, believers must sacrifice their desire to be friends of the world. It is clear in the context of this passage that friendship with the world is defined as imitating the behaviour of those who do not hold kingdom values—fighting, killing, coveting (vv. 1-3). To live in such a way makes persons enemies of God. And what are the effects of being "at odds" with God? On a primary level it is obvious that living

under the umbrella of God's displeasure damages what normally should be a healthy relationship. But to carry on indefinitely, out of relationship with God and living for self, will result in God "opposing" the believer. What that means in ultimate terms is not discussed in this context.

5. Living a separated life is also rooted in the fact that Christ has called his followers to live as a "chosen people." There are at least four aspects to this thought as outlined in 1 Peter 2:9.
 - a. If God has chosen a people he must have a special purpose for them, otherwise he would not have chosen them. And it should be expected that that purpose will be unique and will call for action that is "out of the ordinary."
 - b. This extra-ordinary purpose is expressed in priestly activity which basically means standing between God and fellow persons as mediators. Every action of a mediator is subject to public scrutiny.
 - c. His people are to be a "holy nation." Holiness implies both being set apart for a special purpose and living uprightly according to the ways of God.
 - d. God's chosen people are to "...declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light." John would say it another way, "...walk in the light as he is in the light" (John 1:7).
6. 1 John 2:15-17 again addresses the question of separation from the world from a relational point of view. His concern is that "...the love of the Father..." remain in his followers, and he states that this can only be done by not loving the world. And what is the test as to whether this love is resident in believers? It is whether or not they do the will of God. And what are the consequences of passing this test? Eternal life.
7. Paul speaks of the separated life in Romans 12 in terms of "not being conformed any longer to the patterns of this world." To be conformed is to simply imitate patterns of behaviour we observe around us. The way out of this state is

to "...be transformed by the renewing of your mind." This transformation should be an on-going thing as believers grow in Christ.

8. John 17 is the classic biblical chapter on separation and draws together a comprehensive perspective on the unique and separate way of life of believers. They come out of the world, but remain in the world. The world hates those who are being sanctified while in the world. God's people are sent into the world. And they will convince the world of the truth by their unity.
9. Romans 3 makes it clear that all persons, both Jew and Gentile, are responsible before God for their sins. All are called upon to experience the grace of God and then to live in conformity to his will. Persons do not naturally follow the ways of God, but those who have experienced the grace of God should strive to do so. And that way of life will be unique. It will give Christians the label of being a "separate people."

COMMENTARY



The idea of separation is not always popular among Christians. It is much easier to blend in with those around them; to be part of the social fabric. Yet the scriptures call them to be separate in some respects. The following section expands the discussion on some of the issues raised in the Student Manual.

SEPARATION AND POSITIVE LIVING

To walk in the way of Christ is to adopt a positive attitude toward faith and life. In accepting the way of Jesus believers declare that his way is superior to the customary patterns of life. By following in the steps of their Lord, Christians demonstrate their confidence in their King.

While it is true that kingdom citizens say "no" to many things, their lives do not become characterized by negativism. The reason

they say “no” to certain patterns of life is that they have said “yes” to other more profound patterns. Those who have accepted a positive foundation for life can more readily reject ways that are counter-productive to building the Kingdom of God than those who have not yet committed themselves to focused kingdom living.

To those looking on from the outside, it may indeed appear as though kingdom people are always against something. But those who come to understand their faith know that they have embarked on a positive path of life—a life for which all persons were created. True Christian separation should not be seen as isolation from unbelievers in an attempt to protect comfort zones. Separation happens because believers keep saying “yes” to the positive way of Christ. This results in a life which does not blend well with the way of those who still keep saying “no.”

A good exercise for believers is to list the things they have said “no” to, and then identify the corresponding “yes” which created the reason why they said “no.”

ONE WILL OR MANY?

Throughout Christian history many have argued that God has more than one will for humanity. It is said that in his sovereignty God has chosen one way of life for those who take him seriously and another for those who don't. Thus two persons living by differing values and norms may both be doing the “perfect will of God.” This way of thinking is sometimes supported by reference to the Old Testament where it appears as though God's standards change from one situation to another.

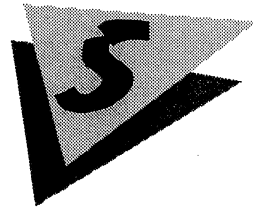
However it will be most helpful for us to consider these variations in the context of the one, all encompassing will of God. We can speak of God's “permissive” will in which he allowed certain behaviour against his better judgement without abandoning his people. Permitting them to have a king would be an example of this. Or we can speak of God's “concessive” will in which he concedes to ways clearly against his nature and involving obvious sin. God is not quick to abandon his people even though they are not following perfectly in his will.

God was at work even among those who did not recognize his lordship. This way of life can be considered to be “outside the perfection of Christ.” In the final analysis God calls all persons to accept Christ as Lord and to follow in his way. He has one will for all of humankind.

ALL OF LIFE? REALLY?

The question of whether or not Christ really expects his people to follow his way in all of life continues to be asked in many circles. Various ways have been found to keep the demands of Christian ethics from being taken seriously. In some cases certain persons are said to be exempt from following the Jesus way because of their positions in life. In other cases, it is claimed that some aspects of life need not bow to the influence of kingdom values.

This question forms a major watershed in Christendom. However, we need to insist that the ethic of Christ is applicable to all of life. This may be difficult and in the eyes of the world even impractical. Yet we must keep working at infusing all of life with the way of Jesus. And to do so will in fact set us apart as a “separated” people.



The Church as Voluntary Community

STUDY HELPS

Littel, F. H. *The Anabaptist View of the Church*

OPENING REFLECTIONS

A major question within Christianity has to do with the nature and role of the church. For some the Christian experience is seen mostly in terms of individual experience while the church is a secondary, and sometimes dispensable entity. The church, however, is of great importance. It is the context within which faith and life is discerned and expressed. This lesson focuses on the fact that the church is a voluntary community. Individuals enter it by personal choice to become part of a “people of God” that functions as a community of love and mutual support.

BIBLE STUDY

1. John 3:16-17 are well-known verses frequently used to underscore God’s role in bringing salvation to the world. God loved the world and gave his son to facilitate his desire that all the world should experience eternal life. In some theological schemes God’s will and role in bringing salvation has been emphasized to the point where it is said that people have no role to play. God chooses persons to be saved who can not resist his will in this matter. However this passage is quite clear

that while God has made the provision for salvation, those who are to experience that salvation are asked to choose to believe. This concept of voluntarism is found throughout scripture and forms the basis for the concept of the church as a voluntary community. Only those responding deliberately to the gospel of Christ are true members of the church of Christ.

2. In the context of this passage (Acts 2:41) Peter has just completed preaching his pentecostal sermon claiming that Jesus is “both Lord and Christ.” In verse 38 he calls for a response to this gospel message—repent and be baptized. Then verse 41 states that about 3000 persons “accepted” this message and were added to the church. This then underlines the voluntary nature of Christian faith and life. No one is forced to accept Christ and his community. That is a personal choice individuals must make.
3. Having identified the fact that personal choice is involved in coming to Christ and becoming a responsible member of his church, it will be helpful to take a closer look at the character of that community. In Ephesians 2:19-22 Paul paints a number of images to illustrate the nature of the church.
 - a. The idea of being a “fellow-citizen” with God’s people carries with it a relational understanding. Not only do believers belong to God, they also belong to one-another. Church members are accountable to and responsible for their fellows.
 - b. Similarly, to be “members of God’s household” implies that believers belong somewhere—they are members of a family. The Christian life was never meant to be lived alone but in the company of other “members” of God’s family.
 - c. The image of a well-constructed building also speaks to the need for believers to relate to one another. The cornerstone is, of course, Jesus Christ in whom all believers find their primary identity. But beyond that, they are “...being built together to become a dwelling place in which God lives by his Spirit.”

4. In Romans 12:4-5 Paul draws on another major image of the church, namely that of a body. He focuses on the fact that each member has a unique role to play in the community of Christ. The goal within the church is not to produce uniformity but to allow individual potential to flourish. Such uniqueness is demonstrated best by allowing persons to express their gifts freely in the context of the church community (vv. 6-8).
5. The passages noted in this question point to reasons why God has gifted persons within the church community. Ephesians 4:11-13 focuses on leadership gifts, noting that they are designed to help the entire group fulfil God's purposes. They function to "prepare God's people for works of service" which leads to unity, faith and maturity. I Corinthians 12:7 clearly indicates that the "manifestation of the Spirit" or the gifts of the Spirit are given for the common good. It is significant to note that in a very real sense spiritual gifts held by individuals actually belong to the larger body.
6. 1 Corinthians 12:12-31 contains one of Paul's longest passages depicting the church as a body. Many more specific points could be drawn from this text, but those highlighted in the verses indicated serve to illustrate well the biblical vision of how the church community should function.
- Verse 13: It is the Spirit who unites believers into one body, allowing it to look beyond natural divisions to experience spiritual unity.
 - Verse 18: God has arranged the various parts in the body as he sees fit. This speaks of design, not random patterns of giftedness. That is to say that when God draws together a church community he ensures that the gifts needed to function as a body are present.
 - Verse 25: If the hand of God is recognized in the gifting patterns of a church community, all its members should be drawn together in unity as each has "...equal concern for each other."
 - Verse 26: When all the gifts are functioning together as they should there is a sense of mutual concern that develops—
- a caring about one another. When one suffers all suffer. When one rejoices all rejoice.
7. The Acts 15 account of the "Jerusalem Conference" illustrates how a body can function together well in the process of making decisions. Note that the issue under discussion, whether Gentiles had to be circumcised to become Christians, was decided in the context of the community. "The apostles and elders met to consider this question" (v.6). Various leaders like Peter, Paul and Barnabas helped to clarify the issue by reflecting on scripture in the context of the new experiences the gospel was generating (vs. 7-21). They arrived at a decision that did not ignore the sensitivities of the more conservative Jewish believers (v. 29). And looking back on the decision, those involved understood that the Holy Spirit had been working through this process (v.28).
8. The central dynamic in the community of Christ is love. Without it the body disintegrates. With it there is unlimited potential. Among the many lessons about love that can be drawn from this passage are the following. The need for love as a basis for relationships is an old principle (vs.11-12). The presence of love is the basis of assurance of salvation (v.14, 19-22). The absence of love can lead to hate which is murder (v.15). Love follows the model of Jesus Christ by laying down one's life for the other (v.16). In order to be real, love must be expressed in practical ways (vs. 17-18). To love one another is a command on the same level as to believe in the name of Christ (v.23).
9. In Acts 5 certain members of the community of Christ were defying civil authorities who had forbidden them to preach the gospel openly. Peter explained this with the famous statement that we must obey God rather than other persons. This principle points to the fact that the voluntary community of Christ can never give full allegiance to a political authority. It answers to a higher power and when this results in a conflict, God is the one who must be obeyed. That is why the true church can never be defined by political boundaries. The church and state must remain separate.

COMMENTARY



he concept of the church as a voluntary community of Jesus Christ is a major centre piece in a proper understanding of faith and life. It is in and through the church that the potential of the gospel is realized. This stands in sharp contrast to those who see the church in a more peripheral light. The commentary in the Student Manual draws attention to some of the implications of taking the church seriously. Following are some related reflections that may serve to enhance the discussion of this topic.

CHILDREN AND THE CHURCH

If it is true that membership in the church is based on the voluntary commitment of believers in Jesus Christ, a logical question is how children of believers are related to that community. This is not a problem for those who don't insist on the "voluntary" nature of the church. Some say that infants enter the church community through baptism, an act performed without their consent or personal faith commitment. After this induction the child is considered to be "in the faith" and a member of the church community which carries the responsibility to nurture the child's faith. As the child grows it is expected to affirm that faith in Christ through the act of confirmation.

Some who agree with the principal of voluntarism as a basis for church membership attempt to answer the question of how children relate to the church by pressing for early childhood conversions. Unsure about the young child's standing before God and the church, they ask them to make adult decisions about faith and life and then baptize them as children.

Anabaptists generally hold that children of believing parents should be considered participants in the community of faith without the need for infant baptism or early childhood conversion. Children prior to the age of accountability are covered by the atonement of Christ and are thus spiritually safe. The church must nurture children in the context of the community, leading them to have many positive experiences and encounters with

God. As they pass into the time of accountability personal decisions of faith and commitment should be expected. Their baptismal vows, through which they take their places as responsible members of the voluntary community of Christ, will be based on such decisions.

INDIVIDUALISM AND THE CHURCH

A major presupposition underlying much of the world view in the West is that of individualism. The right of individuals to pursue their own rights and happiness is even enshrined in national constitutions. Most Christians in the western world are affected by this philosophy of individualism more than they realize. This is one of the factors lying behind the unwillingness of many to commit themselves to a local church community. They prefer to remain unattached and thus unaccountable to a church body, and often stay in a particular community only as long as their needs are being met. After all, it is argued, salvation is a personal matter as is one's "walk with God." If the church is not needed, why get involved.

This kind of reasoning goes contrary to biblical teaching. Believers were never intended to stand alone. The armour of God (Ephesians 6) is not a personal outfit, but is to be put on by the church community. Nor is the believer expected to bear witness to Christ alone. It is the collective witness, the quality of the community life around Christ that attracts persons to faith. In order for modern Christians in the West to understand this truth they must deliberately choose to decrease the importance they give to individualism and increase their commitment to life lived with a community consciousness.



The Visible Church

STUDY HELPS

Lederach, Paul. *A Third Way*. Ch. 3.

OPENING REFLECTIONS

In many respects this lesson is a continuation of lesson five. If the church is indeed a voluntary community, separate and distinct from the state, it will be a visible entity. As individuals join the church of their own free will and become part of a vibrant church community life they become part of an identifiable people. This lesson explores the visible nature of the church and the implications that has for its way of life.

BIBLE STUDY

1. Matthew 5:14-16 compares believers in Christ to lights on a hill or a lamp in a room giving light to those present. In the same way, says Christ, "Let your light shine before men..." It is interesting to note that the word "you" in this passage is written in the plural form. The KJV uses the term "ye". A modern colloquial equivalent could be "you-all." Furthermore the term "light" is in the singular. The implications are clear. Christians present a corporate witness as a body to the world. That is not to down play the faithful witness of individuals in their worlds of work and relationships. But even such a witness should be seen as part of the unified witness that the church offers to the world. That witness will set the church community apart as an identifiable entity, visible to all.

2. In Luke 6:43-45 Jesus speaks to the question of how believers can be distinguished from unbelievers stating that "Each tree is recognized by its own fruit." That is to say that true Christians will be identified by the kind of life they live. Jesus illustrates this with the example of what believers say, noting that their speech will bear witness to their true identity. Fruit-bearing is a visible activity.

Paul picks up this visibility concept in Philippians 2:14-16 noting that it is important to "...do everything without complaining or arguing" so that a clear Christian witness can be maintained "...in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe..."

3. The underlying assumption in John 15:1-4 is that believers bear fruit. Believers are compared to branches attached to the vine, who is Christ. Only as they remain attached to Christ, drawing on spiritual resources available in such a relationship, can they give true expression to God's intended purposes for humanity. Fruit-bearing as a Christian is rooted in a relationship with Christ.

Paul also uses the image of fruit-bearing in the Christian life. Those who live by the Spirit will bear the fruit of the Spirit (Philippians 2:14-16). Stated another way, those who are controlled by the Spirit of Christ will demonstrate "visible" changes in their lives. The fruit of the Spirit is not only an inner change of the soul; it is a quality of existence noticeable in the context of real life. Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control have little meaning if they are never expressed.

4. This famous passage in 1 Peter 2:9-12 begins by establishing an identity for those who belong to Christ. They are part of a larger picture because they belong to "...a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God..." Being a Christian is much more than being an individual in relationship with God. Christians have a collective identity, belonging to an identifiable body larger than themselves. What is sometimes under emphasized in this passage is the purpose for which this body, the church, is called into existence. It exists to "...declare the praises of him who called you

out of darkness into his wonderful light.” Believers are called upon to bear open witness to the light of Christ to which they have been called.

5. Ever since the days of the early church, Christians have been tempted with the notion of being “secret” believers. The line of reasoning used is to say that what really matters is what one is inwardly, not what one expresses outwardly. Matthew 10:32-33 appears to counter that way of thinking. Faith must go beyond a private, inner experience to an open acknowledgement of Christ before others. According to these verses even one’s eternal destiny is contingent upon an open confession. Such words are not good news to those seeking a faith that meets their needs but requires little of them. This message is set in the context of a discourse Jesus gives to his disciples before sending them on a mission. Basically he is saying to them that to live and proclaim the gospel openly will bring difficulties and even persecution, but the alternative of living “invisible” Christian lives is not even to be contemplated.
6. Acts 2:42-47 provides a window into the first church in the New Testament. This early Christian community was still basking in a flush of newness and excitement and would experience many problems later in its development. Nevertheless, the picture is one to savour. It forms a vision of the potential of the church in any age. Members of that group were concerned about remaining faithful to right teaching. They experienced fellowship, with each other in the breaking of bread, and with God in prayer. There was a sense of awe among them as they witnessed God’s work among them. Sharing resources and meeting together happened naturally on a daily basis. And through it all they praised God for what he was doing. Such a faith—such an experience could not remain hidden. It was a visible church to which people were welcomed as they placed their faith in Christ.
7. It is the teaching of the church as visible that inevitably leads to the necessity of church discipline. If true Christian identity is ultimately linked to fruit-bearing, what happens when no fruit is forthcoming? What does the church do with those who claim to be believers but do not give open evidence of

this in their lives? Matthew 18:15-20 provides an answer. At least four steps should be taken in the event of such an unnatural situation. When sin has occurred, the offended person should confront the offender personally. If there is no response a second attempt should be made together with one or two witnesses. If this brings no response the matter should be taken to the church. If even the voice of the church body is not heeded the church community should disassociate itself from that person.

COMMENTARY



Over the years there have been many evangelical churches that have agreed in their view of the church as visible. Yet the teaching regarding the “invisible” church of Christ is firmly rooted in many circles. It may be helpful for us to understand more of the historical development of that teaching and how the Bible was used to undergird it. With such knowledge we will be in a better position to understand and deal with the modern temptations of “invisibility.”

THE JOURNEY TOWARD “INVISIBILITY”

As was noted in the Student Manual, the temptation of invisibility was already present in the nation of Israel in the Old Testament. But God raised up a “remnant” willing to live openly for God. This concept of the remnant, is in a sense, a forerunner of the idea of the visible church which came into existence at Pentecost. The slide back to the invisibility model in the early church was accelerated around 300 A.D. when the church and state were united under the Emperor Constantine. As the church and the state began to walk hand-in-hand, the biblical vision of the church faded into the background. The problem was this: If all of society is defined as being “Christian” yet masses of people have not forsaken an ungodly lifestyle, where is the true church of Christ?

In the 4th-century, a theologian of great influence named Augustine developed the teaching of the “invisible church,” a doctrine not tolerated in earlier centuries. Basically it stated that within the

“masses” of Christians, most of whom lived unfaithfully, there was a “little church of the faithful.” But the identity of this group was visible only to God; to the larger church it remained invisible. To strengthen this idea, Augustine taught an extreme form of predestination. He said that since God elects some for salvation and some for damnation, membership in the true church is a concern of God alone—the church should not be concerned about differentiating between the faithful and the unfaithful in the church.

Under this new teaching the need for a personal decision to follow Jesus Christ was removed. “The need for repentance was gone. The idea of renewal of life was lost. The sense of mission in winning others was gone. Instead coercion was used...The concept of grace was lost. Salvation became a matter of pardon, not of repentance and renewal...church leaders became immoral. A view emerged that the quality of life of a leader makes little difference” (Lederach 41).

This was the teaching that the radical reformers in the 16th-century rejected. “For them the church was a called-out group, a holy people, visible because of the quality of life lived as followers of Jesus Christ. The Anabaptists saw the church as the body of Christ, not as invisible, lost in the masses, but as a group of holy brethren and sisters, highly visible because of their life of love and holiness” (Lederach 41-42).

DOES ONLY GOD KNOW?

The Scriptures are abundantly clear on the teaching that Christians are to be identifiable—that it should be possible to discern who is a true follower of Christ. Nevertheless, a few passages have been used over the years to defend the doctrine of the “invisible” church. This section examines these passages to determine whether such use is legitimate.

1. 2 Timothy 2:19

The first affirmation in this verse makes it clear that “The Lord knows those who are his.” From the larger context of the Scriptures we know that this is not a new revelation—God

is aware of what goes on in his world. However, it does not necessarily follow, as some would have it, that “only” the Lord knows who are his while no one else does. The intent of this phrase is to offer assurances to believers that God knows his own—to restate the words of Jesus in John 10:14, “...I know my sheep and my sheep know me.”

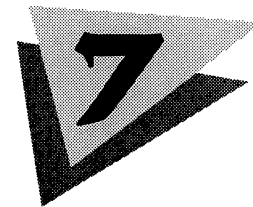
The fact that this passage should not be used to support the teaching of the invisible nature of the church is even more clear when the first affirmation is seen in the context of the second. The immediate challenge to those who are known by God is to “...turn away from wickedness.” As believers turn from wickedness it will certainly become obvious who belongs to God. In the end this passage is a call for those who are believers to stand up and be counted, not a comfort to those who are not living for God.

2. The Parable of the Weeds, Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43.

In this parable, Jesus tells how enemies of a farmer come to sow weeds among his wheat. The young plants can not be removed because they are similar in appearance to the young wheat plants. Since the true identity of the weeds can not be known until they mature servants are told to allow them to grow together with the wheat and to separate them at the time of harvest. So, says Jesus, it is with the Kingdom of God. There are counterfeits in the Kingdom not always visible to man, but God will in the end “...weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil.”

Augustine used this passage as a basis for his teaching on the invisible nature of the church. He said that it teaches that no one except God knows who in the church is a true believer and he will make appropriate judgements at the end of time—the church can not know this. However, is that really the point of this passage? The point of the parable is not to excuse a lack of fruit-bearing among Christians or for believers to stop striving for personal holiness. Rather it suggests that unbelievers try to imitate the good works of believers, and sometimes they can fool the church by being “an angel of light” even

though that is not their true identity. The parable speaks to the fate of those imposters who try to imitate a good Christian life—it does not offer an excuse for true believers to stop “letting their lights shine before men so that they might see their good works and glorify the Father in heaven.” Far from offering a foundation for the teaching of the “invisible church,” this parable confirms what is taught throughout the Scriptures—that believers are to be identified by the fruit of the Spirit in their lives.



The Ordinances of the Church

STUDY HELPS

Lederach, Paul. *A Third Way*. Ch. 7 and 8

OPENING REFLECTIONS

If the church is a voluntary, visible community, as we have asserted in the previous two lessons, it will follow that its symbolic rituals will convey a community consciousness. Both baptism and communion are more than individual and personal experiences. They bear witness to the life and experience of Jesus Christ in the context of his people. This corporate emphasis broadens and deepens the personal significance of the ordinances of the church for individual believers.

BIBLE STUDY

1. The story of Jesus' baptism by John in the Jordan River is well known. John is hesitant to carry through on Jesus' request for baptism but finally consents. The witness of the Spirit descending like a dove and the voice from God identifying Jesus as God's son testify that John had done right to baptize Jesus. The question of why Jesus needed to be baptized has baffled not only John, but many Christians throughout Christian history. Jesus told John it should be done "...to fulfil all righteousness" (Matthew 3:15). John the Baptist testifies later in John 1:33 that the sign of the dove served to identify "...the one who will baptize with the Spirit." However one

understands the significance of Jesus' baptism, that act in some way lends credence to the concept of baptism for his followers.

If Jesus was sinless he did not need to be baptized in the same way John's followers were being baptized. For them it was a baptism of "repentance" from sin. So his baptism was in a sense pointing forward to some significance beyond John's baptism—something that could serve as a bridge of understanding to the newer Christian understanding of faith and life. William Barclay suggests that by being baptized Jesus "...identified himself with the search of God for man in the hour of their new consciousness of sin." We do know that following his baptism Jesus embarked on his public ministry. Could it be that this example of Jesus, being baptized to identify with the work of God among his people, is instructive for Christian baptism as well. Baptism is more than a personal experience; it is a commitment to the work of God among his people.

2. As noted in John 1, the descent of the Spirit upon Christ following baptism identified him as the one who would baptize with the Spirit. According to Ephesians 1:13-14, Jesus has fulfilled that vision because all who believe in him have been "marked in him" with the seal of the Spirit. So at least one dimension of the believer's understanding regarding baptism has to do with the in-dwelling of the Holy Spirit. Having been "baptized" with the Spirit, believers have within them a guarantee of eternal life within them.
3. 1 Peter 3:21 identifies baptism not so much as an act symbolizing washing or cleansing, but rather as a "...pledge of a good conscience toward God." In this we see that Christian baptism moves beyond John's baptism. It has nothing to do with the removal of original sin, as some would suggest, or a miraculous means of conveying grace. "At the heart of baptism is a pledge—a pledge to the Father, to the Son, to the Holy Spirit, and to fellow believers to live a pilgrim life of discipleship" (Lederach 83). A "pledge of allegiance" involves unreserved commitment. Those who pledge allegiance to the flag of a country are saying that they are committed to protecting its sovereignty, without question. The only unreserved pledge

Christians can and must make is toward God. Only life within the context of such a pledge allows one's conscience before God to be fully free and good.

4. The focus in 1 John 5:6-8 is on a three-fold witness regarding Christ which should be evident in the life of a believer, namely the Spirit, the water and the blood. Taken in the broader biblical context it seems logical to understand these three types of witnesses as having to do with baptism. Water baptism stands at the centre of the three. The first witness to spiritual life in a believer is the gift of the Spirit through whom comes the power to forsake sin and begin a new life in Christ. Water baptism follows with its public pledge to follow Christ in the context of the church community. The blood speaks of the extent to which one is willing to go in the struggle against sin and accepting the consequences of faithfulness—suffering and even death are not a deterrent to walking in the way of Christ. (See, Lederach 84-88, for a fuller commentary on this passage.)
5. According to Romans 6:1-14, baptism must be understood within the framework of a commitment to Christian discipleship. Baptism signifies death to sin (v.2) "...in order that...we too may live a new life" (v.4). Believers "...should no longer be slaves to sin" (v.7). "In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin and alive to God" (v.11). This passage does not allow baptism to be removed from a commitment to walk in the way of Christ. Baptism is more than an outward sign of an inward event—it anticipates a life to be lived for God.

1 Corinthians 12:13-14 underscores the idea that the commitment to discipleship made in baptism must be understood as discipleship in the context of the church—"...we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body." Baptism should never be a display of personal triumph, but of submission to the way of God as lived out in the visible community of faith.

6. Acts 2:37-41 chronicles how believers at Pentecost were added to the church. The two requirements were to believe the message that Peter preached (repentance and forgiveness), and to be baptized. It is clear that baptism in this case had

some significance with respect to the joining of the new movement begun at Pentecost.

7. It is clear that the baptism Jesus referred to in Mark 10:35-40 is the baptism of suffering. Jesus assumes that those following him will experience suffering. Is this the witness of the blood as referred to in 1 John 5:8? It would appear that the link is legitimate. Baptism involves a commitment to follow Christ even in suffering and death.
8. A second ordinance of the church is that of the Lord's Supper. It was during the celebration of the Passover that Jesus instituted this communion service (Luke 22:14-20). There has been a lot of controversy over the phrase, "This is my body..." which Jesus used with reference to the bread he offered his disciples. Evangelicals generally hold that the bread "represents" the body of Christ. Since Christ was still present in body when he made this statement, it is said that the bread symbolizes Christ's body. This is reinforced with the statement in verse 19 "This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me." The Lord's Supper is a memorial service in which believers remember what Christ has done for them.
9. Paul gives some instructions with respect to the Lord's Supper in 1 Corinthians 11:23-33. It is important to note the context in which this instruction occurs. In verses 17-22 Paul addresses the question of unity. The Corinthians were practising communion even though there were divisions in the body. More than that, they were not even waiting for each other. Individuals were concerned only for what they got out of it. Paul is attempting to correct this "individualistic" approach to communion. This communal aspect of the Lord's Supper is reinforced by his final instruction in verse 33, "...when you come together to eat, wait for each other."
10. This emphasis on being participants together in communion is also clearly emphasised in 1 Corinthians 10:14-17. The argument is most clear with relation to the bread in verse 17. "Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf." The Lord's Supper should

always symbolize more than a personal memorial of Christ's death; it should signify at the same time the unity of the community of Christ.

COMMENTARY



With respect to *BAPTISM*, there are a number of affirmations that are not always understood in the same way in varying church traditions. In some cases it is a matter of differing emphases arising out of understandings of the nature of salvation, the nature of the church and the nature of the Christian life.

1. Baptism is offered only to those who show evidence of a new life. It is not enough to make an intellectual confession regarding Christ. The concepts of faith and life should be held together closely; salvation and discipleship are not to be separated (Lesson 2). Since baptism involves a commitment to follow Christ in the context of the community, even to the point of death, persons wishing to be baptized must give evidence that they have begun that pilgrimage of discipleship. They must show evidence of rebirth.
2. Since baptism is an act of publicly declaring one's faith and identifying with God and his people, persons being baptized should at the same time become members of the body in which they are baptized. This has been a point of contention within evangelical circles as some have disassociated baptism and membership entirely. Because of communal understandings related to baptism, individuals should not be baptized in isolation. They must become part of a body to which they are accountable. To baptize persons without mutual commitments on the part of the candidate and the congregation is a contradiction in terms.
3. Those who practise what is known as adult, believer's baptism, should insist on it being "adult" because of the nature of the vows involved—a child is not capable of counting the cost of discipleship as are adults. And since they understand that

baptism follows an adult faith commitment, infants and children are normally not baptized. The push toward baptizing children at a younger and younger age is not rooted in such understandings of faith.

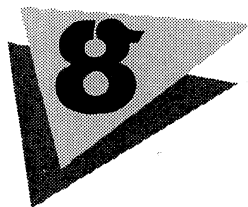
4. Originally Anabaptists used the sprinkling or pouring method, but in more recent times some immerse their candidates entirely in water using a number of different techniques. At one point the mode of baptism was a point of contention. However, in most cases today they recognize all modes, and in some cases more than one mode is used in one church, depending on the preference of the candidates. No method captures entirely all the symbolism inherent in baptism. Immersion signifies participation in the death, burial and resurrection of Christ. Pouring symbolizes the pouring out of the Spirit; the rising from the knees an image of resurrection. In both cases water symbolizes washing away of sin.
5. Baptism should be taken very seriously. This is so for a number of reasons. It is in baptism that the community of faith is formed. Without it there can be no ultimate accountability and therefore no church discipline. Also, if it is true that in baptism candidates indicate their willingness to be baptized in blood, this step is really a life and death issue. Baptism should not be something persons enter into casually. It should be a sincere, solemn, yet joyful experience.

With respect to the *LORD'S SUPPER*, there should be emphasis on the elements representing not only Christ's death but also the unity of his body, the church. In some evangelical circles unity does not come into focus at communion time. The images of the grapes and the loaf remind us that communion should represent the unity of the church community. Traditionally some churches have had times of confession before partaking of the Lord's supper so that all disunity could be repaired before partaking of the elements together.

Here is an explanation of these symbols of unity taken from *Teachings of the Apostles*, an early Christian document. Perhaps there are lessons to be learned today from such an emphasis.

With the bread the unity among us is symbolized. Where there are many small kernels of grain to be combined into one loaf there is need first to grind them and to make them into one flour...which can be achieved only through suffering. Just as Christ, our dear Lord, went before us, so too we want to follow him in like manner. And the bread symbolizes the unity of the community of Christ.

Likewise with the wine: many small grapes come together to make the one wine. That happens by means of the press, understood here as suffering....And thus also the wine indicates suffering. Hence, whoever wants to be in union with the community, has to drink from the cup of the Lord, for his cup symbolizes suffering.



Leadership as Servanthood

STUDY HELPS

Kraybill, Robert. *The Upside-Down Kingdom*. Ch. 11, 12

OPENING REFLECTIONS

If the church is a unique community, then it should be expected that leadership within that community will be defined and exercised differently than in other circles. It will be rooted in the example of Christ and characterized by the upside-down values of the Kingdom of God. Leadership within the church of Christ is best understood within the framework of servanthood.

BIBLE STUDY

1. Jesus' statement in Luke 22:24-27 is foundational for the Christian understanding of leadership. Jesus here contrasts the leadership style of the "Gentiles" or unbelievers with his own manner. Those who have not caught the vision of Kingdom values tend to think of leadership in terms of authority. Arrogance creeps in as such leaders view themselves as "benefactors." But Jesus said that he was among his disciples "...as one who serves." Normally great persons are the ones to be served. In the way of Jesus, greatness is defined by service.
2. In order to underscore servanthood as the pattern for leadership, Jesus washed his disciples' feet (John 13:1-7). This was hard for Peter to accept but Jesus insisted. Then he said, "Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also

should wash one another's feet." Serving one another is the way of the Kingdom, even when it comes to leadership. The question Jesus asked his disciples could well be asked of believers today, "Do you understand what I have done for you?"


3. The way of servanthood is not reserved for leaders in the church. All of Jesus' followers are called to accept servanthood as a way of life. In Matthew 16:24 Jesus calls all his followers to do three things which are also especially applicable to leaders.
 - a. To "deny oneself" means that believers do not think first of their own welfare. True leaders must be concerned about the well-being of the ones they lead, not about seeking advantage for themselves.
 - b. To "take up one's cross" speaks of making a willing sacrifice—to be faithful even when it is costly. True Christian leaders present themselves as a sacrificial offering to God and his people instead of attempting to cling to privilege and power.
 - c. To "follow Jesus" means to take him as the model for life. To "be like Jesus" is the Christian's goal. Christian leaders have good reason to look to Jesus and imitate him as they serve others.
4. Servanthood was not easy for Jesus' disciples to learn. In Mark 9:33-37 the text indicates that they had been arguing among themselves as to who was the greatest. This is a typical human activity; everyone trying to come out on top—to be the most important. In order to dramatize for his disciples that this is not the way of the Kingdom of God, Jesus took a child in his arms and basically told them to accept the way of children as the model of faithfulness. Children are not generally concerned with power and prestige, but simply trust. That is to be the orientation of leaders.
5. In Mark 10:35-45 Jesus' disciples display once more that they have not yet understood the way of servanthood. In this case James and John seek to manipulate Jesus into granting them special positions of power in his coming kingdom. Of course their vision of the kingdom was faulty, but their action does illustrate the temptations leaders face—that of seeking and

securing positions of power and privilege. Perhaps Jesus' reply to the self-centred search of his disciples is his clearest teaching on the topic of servant leadership. "...whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

6. The concept of servant leadership is rooted in the kingdom principle of equality of worth. To illustrate this, Jesus uses the example of John the Baptist in Luke 7:24-28. He admits that John was a great man, but then goes on to say that "...the least in the kingdom is greater than he." What Jesus is saying is that everyone is important in the kingdom of God. Greatness is not earned through publicly recognized accomplishments but by submitting to God in the way of the kingdom.
7. Paul understands servanthood thinking in relation to leadership as well. In Ephesians 4:11-13 he indicates clearly that God has given leaders to the church "...to prepare God's people for works of service..." All persons in the church are called to be servants, so it is only reasonable that the leaders among them are servants as well. In this respect, leaders in fact are servants of servants. Such a vision of leadership should help to keep leaders from "...thinking more highly of themselves than they ought..." (Romans 12:3).
8. In Acts 15:22, we catch a glimpse of how the early church selected leadership persons for the responsible task of bringing the news of the decision made at the Jerusalem conference (15:1-21) to the Gentile believers in Antioch, Syria and Cilicia (v.23). Note that it was the apostles and elders together with the whole church who made this choice. If the whole community of faith is involved in choosing its leaders, it follows that they are also accountable to that body.
9. In this passage Paul demonstrates that he is aware of the need to be a servant leader. In 1 Corinthians 10:32b he notes that "...I am not seeking my own good but the good of many..." Then in 11:1 he challenges the Corinthians to "Follow my example as I follow the example of Christ."

10. The writer to the Hebrews also emphasizes the fact that leaders are models within church (13:7). To be a designated leader requires a kind of living that is worthy of being imitated. True leaders lead by their example of faith and life.
11. In Galatians 2:8-9 Paul indicates that there were at least three recognized leaders in the church at Jerusalem when he and Barnabas visited there, namely James, Peter and John. In the church at Antioch there were at least five "prophets and teachers," namely Barnabas, Simeon, Lucius, Manaen, and Saul (Acts 13:1). The New Testament vision is for multiple leadership. Leaders share responsibilities with each other since none carries all the leadership gifts required in the church. One might well ask whether modern pastors are often expected to function too much in isolation, with the assumption that they are gifted in all leadership areas.
12. Jesus was not very complimentary with respect to the way many Pharisees of his day exercised their leadership (Matthew 23:1-12). Instead of helping people they laid burdens upon them. And everything they did was designed to gain recognition. That is not the way to which Jesus called his followers. "...do not be like them, for they do not practice what they preach." "The greatest among you will be your servant. For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted."

COMMENTARY

ervant leadership is more easily spoken about than practised. Yet for those who learn to see their leadership as a form of service there are many rewards. Not only are such persons freed from the tyranny of having to control all that happens around them, but they discover as well that when people are empowered rather than dominated the goals and mission of the group they are leading are more easily attained. It is of interest to note that virtually all secular literature about leadership

today speaks about leadership as service. Should Christians be less prepared to accept the way of servant leadership in their faith communities?

LEADERSHIP AS ONE GIFT AMONG MANY

Servant leadership functions best in the church community if it is understood that leadership is one gift among many. Leadership is not a "right" but a responsibility given to those gifted by God for the task at hand. But it must be remembered that those who serve in non-leadership roles have received their gifts from God as well. That means that leaders are not permitted to "lord it over" those who serve in non-leadership capacities. All have received their gifts from God and must work together to accomplish the work of God in the world.

Furthermore, leaders must view themselves as part of a team of leaders God has raised up to provide direction for his people. As noted in the Bible study, there are a diversity of ministries within any given faith community. That means there will also be more than one form of leadership present. Christians should avoid the temptation to have only pastoral leaders in view when thinking about leadership. That leaves the impression that only a few select persons lead while all the rest follow. The fact is that every area of church life requires leadership. The challenge of servant leadership is not reserved for a few key leaders, but is required of all who lead in any and every form of ministry.

Churches aspiring to this concept of leadership are generally most comfortable with a pattern of shared leadership as demonstrated in the early church. Traditionally, overall church leadership was relegated to "the bench" or a team of leaders who worked in close consultation with each other and the congregation. This team approach to leadership is threatened today by the concept of the pastor as the leader in a congregation. However, there are many examples of the pitfalls of singular leadership. If leadership is not shared, a church faces a major crisis when a particular pastor leaves or terminates service. If shared, however, there is a much greater possibility of long-term stability in the congregation.

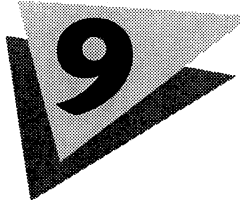
SERVANT LEADERSHIP AND AUTHORITY

The question of authority frequently arises when discussing the concept of servant leadership. If leaders are servants, do they have any authority, or are they simply puppets in the hands of those they are trying to lead? Is it legitimate for them to critique present practices and advocate change? If leadership is understood in a hierarchical way, it is clear that leaders have the authority to rule, to dictate, and to regulate so that established goals are reached. But what about servant leaders? How can they lead if they are servants? Can servants have authority? How can authority be exercised by servants? These are important questions and deserve some answers.

1. It must be remembered that the authority of the church is received from Jesus Christ, not from traditions, laws or personalities. If authority is rooted in a groups' desire to maintain a strong tradition it will invariably become coercive so it can force persons into the established mould. If authority is based on the mandate to enforce a pre-determined set of laws, then leadership will take on a "policing" character as persons are compelled to "obey." And if authority is centred in powerful personalities the church will be tempted with undiscerning acceptance of persons and ideas because of the demand for personal loyalty. True authority is given by Jesus Christ and sustained by the Holy Spirit working in and through the Christian community. The church's authority is only authentic when it is seeking to be conformed to the mind of Christ.
2. Authority in the church is primarily corporate, not individualistic. While specific leaders may be entrusted to exercise authority in some respects, the ownership of that authority resides in the community committed to the authority of Christ. That is why servant leaders can not simply tell the church what to do. Their leadership is displayed most clearly when they give direction to the believing community as it gathers around the Scriptures under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

True authority in leadership is manifested most clearly when leaders lead by example. When they take the initiative to demon-

strate their vision for the church by the patterns of their lives, their leadership is authenticated. This can be done in many ways. They demonstrate a willingness to grow in faithfulness to Christ. They show that they are genuinely interested in the welfare of others. They encourage and help others to exercise their gifts. They grant those they are leading the right to accept, reject or modify the direction they are seeking to give the church. And, even while maintaining a singleness of purpose and a clarity of vision, they refuse to dominate and manipulate others for their own good. When leaders exhibit such qualities the question of authority will begin to fade into the background. When these qualities are absent, not only is servant leadership gone, but the question of authority will become increasingly important because now authority has become something to protect.



Love in all Relationships— The Teachings of Christ

STUDY HELPS

Bonk, Jon. *The World at War, The Church at Peace.*
Ch. 4 and 5.

Drescher, John. *Why I am a Conscientious Objector.* Ch. 2.

Steiner, Susan C. *Joining the Army that Sheds no Blood.*
Ch. 2 and 3.

OPENING REFLECTIONS

Commitment to the way of peace lies near the heart of the understanding of discipleship. Believers are called to practice “love in all relationships.” This way of life is clearly taught and demonstrated by Jesus, reinforced by the teachings of the Apostles, and is not discredited by the violence of the Old Testament. The next three lessons probe the biblical teachings about the way of peace. This lesson focuses on the life and teachings of Jesus as a foundation for the ethic of “love in all relationships.”

BIBLE STUDY

1. In his predictions of the coming Messiah, the prophet Isaiah compared him to a sheep (Isaiah 53:7). A sheep is generally known as a quiet animal that does not put up resistance when imposed upon. Whether being led to slaughter or being sheared, the sheep doesn't fight back. Isaiah predicts that the

coming Messiah will not be a warrior, but a lamb. This verse is set in the context of the whole chapter which is frequently referred to as a "Suffering Servant Song." In it the Messiah is pictured as one who conquers, not through a show of strength but through suffering. He is "...familiar with suffering," and "...smitten...afflicted...pierced...and crushed." If in fact the Jesus of the New Testament is the one Isaiah spoke about, it should be expected that his way would be characterized more by the way of the sheep than the way of the warrior; the way of peace instead of violence.

2. If Jesus had been just an ordinary Jew, he would not have been concerned about the Roman centurion or his dying servant (Matthew 8:5-13). Jews generally hated the Romans, considering them to be their enemies. But Jesus was no ordinary man. As the Messiah sent from God, Christ demonstrated by the healing of the centurion's servant, that his way of love extends even to relationships with enemies.
3. When a military conqueror rode in a victory celebration in biblical times, he would normally ride a white stallion—a grand symbol of power and speed. Donkeys were the beasts of burden for the common folk, the means of transportation for the lowly. Rulers rode them only when they were on a mission of peace. From one perspective, the triumphal entry (Matthew 21:1-11) was a high point in Jesus' life. The people in the crowds held him in high esteem and were ready to make him their ruler. But their visions of the way of Jesus were as mistaken as the visions of Jesus' disciples who kept thinking in terms of power and suppression of enemies. Jesus' choice to ride a donkey was rooted in the prophetic vision of the Messiah who would come "...gentle and riding on a donkey..." It was an obvious object lesson, but largely lost on the crowd that abandoned Jesus quickly when their expectations were not met.
4. When one of Jesus' disciples used the sword in an attempt to protect him from the crowd which had come to arrest him, Jesus' response was quick and decisive. "Put your sword back in its place." He made it clear to the offending disciple that

violence was not his way. If it were, he could have called on twelve legions of angels to protect him. He was committed to fulfil the Scriptures in their vision of the suffering servant.

5. Earlier on in his ministry, shortly after Peter had recognized him as being the "Christ," Jesus made the startling prediction of his impending suffering and death (Mark 8:31-33). When Peter protested, Jesus rebuked him because he saw in his objection the temptation of Satan to go the route of force. Some suggest that Jesus was rejecting the way of violence because in this special case it would be the means of bringing Christ to the cross—that it had nothing to do with the way Jesus' followers were expected to live. But that notion is quickly dispelled if it is noticed in the following verses (vv. 34-35) that Jesus called the crowds and the disciples to him and said, "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me." The way of Christ has more to do with losing one's life than saving it. That was the way for Christ and that is what he expects of his followers.
6. Jesus demonstrated love for his enemies while hanging on the cross. In the midst of his pain and anguish he prayed, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23:32-34). If anyone had a right to curse his enemies, Jesus did. But instead he desired for them a right standing before God.
7. It is commonly held that when Jesus appeared to his disciples in John 20:19-21 he showed them his wounds in his hands and side so that they would recognize him as their master (John 20:19-21). It may well be that the wounds served to convince the disciples that the man who had passed through locked doors was in fact Jesus. But is there a greater significance to this demonstration of his wounds? Could it be that it is related to the statement that follows, "As the Father has sent me, I am sending you"? This statement could be read as a simple declaration of sequence, namely that the Father sent me and now I am sending you. But when read in context, it seems there is more involved. Could it be that what Jesus is saying, in effect, is that he is now sending out his disciples "in

the same manner” in which he was sent out—as a lamb among wolves? In that case the demonstration of his wounds would bolster his earlier teachings that his followers would be required to take up their own crosses in order to come after him.

8. The saying about an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth (Matthew 5:38-42) reflects the natural inclination of sinful persons. It is the universal call for vengeance. However, Jesus asks his followers to replace the call for retribution with radical actions rooted in the way of love. Turn the other cheek. If someone takes away your tunic, give him your cloak as well. Go two miles with the one who asks you to go one. All of these actions are designed to take one’s enemy by surprise. It is the unexpected—the up-side-down thing to do. But it is the way that leads to life because it is rooted in love.
9. In a similar vein, the passage in Matthew 5:43-48 indicates that the saying “Love your neighbour and hate your enemy” needs to be replaced if it is to fit in with the Jesus way. Jesus notes that anyone can love those who love them. There is nothing wrong with such reciprocal love, but the disciples of Christ are called to a more radical notion, that of loving their enemies, going even so far as to pray for them.
10. Jesus summarized the mission he was on in Luke 19:10 by saying, “For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost.” If that is the mission of Christ, should it not be obvious that his followers should seek to participate in that mission? But what if those they seek to save are their enemies? Does that annul the commission? While the natural response to enemies is to harm them, the followers of Christ are called to “seek to save” them. If believers are preoccupied with seeking to save their enemies, it will be counterproductive to harm them in any way.
11. Peacemakers are called blessed by the Lord (Matthew 5:9). Those who make peace instead of war have caught on to the way of God in the world. It is his ultimate purpose that all persons be reconciled to God and to one another. The way of peace is the way of love, and this is the way of God.

COMMENTARY



here Christians come out on the peace question depends largely on what they do with the life and teachings of Jesus. As has been illustrated in earlier lessons, many ways have been devised either to by-pass Jesus or to not take him seriously when it comes to his teachings and example about the practice of “love in all relationships.” Jesus Christ ought to be central to our deliberations about how we are called upon to live in a world of violence. If one traces back the line of arguments on this question to their respective starting points, it becomes understandable why some Christians conclude that the way of love applies to all relationships, while others are hesitant to bring all relationships under the umbrella of love.

BEGIN WITH THE QUESTION OF SURVIVAL— END WITH COMPROMISE

Robert Culver offers a line of argument about war in an article entitled, “Justice is Something Worth Fighting For,” (Christianity Today, Nov., 1980).

1. **Sin Makes Force Necessary**

Referring to the difficult times of the 1930s and 40s, Culver states that “Survival was the issue...” That is to say when times are tough Christian ideals may be compromised.

2. **The Old Testament**

If war is wrong, why did God allow wars in the Old Testament? He concludes, “The Old Testament taught a personal ethic of non-retaliation and of non-violence to neighbours... It did not see this as contrary to its social ethic which allowed personal self-defense, vigorous action against insurrection and just wars of defense... If these two strains of thought were consistent with one another in the Old Testament dispensation, might they not be consistent in the New Testament dispensation? The answer seems to be yes.”

3. **Jesus’ Teachings Don’t Apply**

Culver states that Jesus’ teachings on the subject of peace cannot be taken literally. Jesus exaggerated to make a point.

Common sense must counter the radical statements of Jesus. The precepts Jesus taught relate "to the heart and the feelings." "If Moses' disciples did not think they were required to embrace pacifism, probably Jesus' disciples need not embrace it either."

4. **War is a Moral Necessity Because of Sin**

Because there is evil in the world, rulers have been given the right by God to use force to restrain it. "If it is right for rulers to use coercive force, then most men of good will and good conscience will say that it is right for the Christian to be part of the force."

5. **Some Wars are Just Wars**

Following the teaching of Augustine, the Christian philosopher who died in 430 A.D., Culver declares that if a war has just cause, it is right for Christians to participate in it.

BEGIN WITH CHRIST—END WITH OBEDIENCE

In his book, *Why I Am a Conscientious Objector*, John Drescher offers an alternative viewpoint that begins with Christ and calls for obedience.

1. **Discipleship** "My refusal to fight is based upon my calling as Christ's disciple. Jesus is my Lord! ... My way of life and ethics must be in harmony with his... Christ tells us to love our enemies, pray for our enemies, forgive our enemies, do good to our enemies, and overcome evil with good" (p.23).
2. **The Identity, Teaching and Life of Christ** "He (Christ) is the Word become flesh... the full and final message to us of God's will. Jesus personified in his person and relationships—in his love for even his enemies—by dying on the cross, the way of love and nonviolence... He died for all and cares equally for each person... He has called disciples from every tribe, tongue and nation: He is the Christ of all cultures... He is the authority for belief and behaviour—even though the temptation remains to live a life and to use methods he never allowed and even spoke against" (p. 27-31).

3. **The Gospel** "The entire New Testament teaches that the gospel is global... The reconciling work of Christ cannot be restricted to one community, church, country or continent... Engaging in warfare strikes at the heart of evangelism. Each person I face in combat is either a Christian or a non-Christian. If I destroy a Christian, I kill the brother for whom Scripture says I should lay down my life. If my enemy is a non-Christian, I destroy one for whom Christ died..." (pp. 37-40).

4. **The Church** "The nation to which the Christian belongs is... the church of Jesus Christ... Members belong first to each other regardless of race, country or political system... When one group including Christians takes up arms against another group including Christians, both are saying that Caesar, not Jesus, is Lord... that the body of the nation may not be rent, but the body of Christ may be" (pp. 43-48).

5. **Government** "God is not morally responsible for every ruler in power... He ordained all in the same way he ordained marriage; it cannot mean he puts his stamp of approval on each... I am told to be in submission to authorities. Notice, however, that obedience is reserved for God. And if obedience to God conflicts with human authority then I must submit to the consequences of that obedience" (pp. 51-56).



Love in all Relationships— The Teachings of the Apostles

STUDY HELPS

Bonk, Jon. *The World at War, The Church at Peace.*
Ch. 4 and 5.

Drescher, John. *Why I am a Conscientious Objector.*
Ch. 4 and 5.

Steiner, Susan. *Joining the Army that Sheds No Blood.* Ch. 4.

OPENING REFLECTIONS

The biblical teaching about “love in all relationships” did not die with Christ. It was picked up by the Apostles and integrated into their teaching in the context of the early church. Some have suggested that Paul discarded Christ’s teaching about peace because it was too impractical in the context of the first generation church. The teachings of Paul, far from contradicting those of Christ, actually support Christ’s teaching about the way of “love in all relationships” as found in the gospels.

BIBLE STUDY

1. After speaking about the supremacy of Christ and his work of reconciliation (Colossians 1:15-20), Paul goes on to explain what effect that truth has on believer’s lives. The example and power of Christ is meant to be evident in the lives of believers as they live a life “...holy in his sight, without blemish and free

from accusation” (v. 22). For Paul, the gospel was not only a means of gaining eternal life, but as well an entry into a life characterized by the way of Jesus Christ.

2. Paul has much to say about how the work of Christ affects the lives of believers. For example, see 2 Corinthians 5:17-21. The key word in this passage is **reconciliation**. There are, in the mind of Paul, at least two major implications for those who have been reconciled to Christ.
 - a. First, the person reconciled has become a **new creation**—the old has gone, the new has come! Life now takes on an entirely new perspective as it is seen through the purposes of Christ. Attitudes and actions, especially in relation to other persons have also been renewed. To be reconciled to God affects all of one’s life.
 - b. But, more than that, those who have been reconciled have been given a ministry of reconciliation. As believers demonstrate by their lives that they have been reconciled to God, and that they now seek reconciliation with all persons, they become ambassadors for God as he makes his appeal through them to others. Reconciliation or peace-making lies at the heart of evangelism, and should also lie near the centre of the life-style of believers.
3. Paul expands on the concept of reconciliation in Romans 5:8-10. He paints a stark picture of alienation. God and humankind are enemies with no relationship possible because of human sin. But God is moved by love to do something about that estrangement and sends Christ to die for the world. Again and again in his writings Paul encourages believers to “be imitators of Christ.” They are to be moved by love to work at the business of reconciliation initiated by Christ.
4. In Ephesians 2:11-22 Paul gives a practical example of how the gospel of Christ can bring about reconciliation within the realm of human relationships, in this case between the Jews and Gentiles.
 - a. Paul is careful to note that it is Christ who has broken down the barrier between these former enemies. “He himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has

destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility...” (V:14). Believers, of whatever description, can find a unity in Jesus Christ.

b. Verse 15 focuses on how the work of Christ has created “one new man out of the two.” In verse 16 this one new man is referred to as “the body” which has been reconciled through the work of Christ. To be a believer is much more than to be reconciled to God—it also means to be reconciled to others within the body of Christ.

All of this is possible because of the work of Christ. Certain levels of peace within society can be achieved without giving recognition to the work of Christ, but true biblical peace is found only in Christ.

5. Another favourite topic for Paul is the “Fruit of the Spirit” (Galatians 5:22-23). For some Christians, spiritual growth is measured in terms of a heightened mystical experience. Paul agrees that growing believers should experience the energizing power of the Holy Spirit and that this will result in an increased intimacy with Christ. But the evidence or the fruit of the Spirit’s presence is seen most clearly in how it affects relationships with others. Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control are largely those qualities of life that have to do with relationships.

Peace is one of the fruits of the Spirit mentioned in this list. While it may not be possible in all contexts, Christians nevertheless seek to live at peace with others, that is to practice “love in all relationships.”

6. Paul is not so naive as to think that everyone is ready to respond to and participate in the peace that is rooted in Jesus Christ. There are “strongholds” of evil within society and individuals which resist the kind of peace offered in Christ (2 Corinthians 10:3-5). That means that believers are drawn into a spiritual battle, but the weapons they use are not the weapons of the world. Worldly weapons are not effective in spiritual warfare because they do not have “...divine power to demolish strongholds.”

7. It should be noted that when Paul instructs the Ephesian Christians to “Put on the whole armour of God so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes” (Ephesians 6:10), he is addressing the church community as a whole. The English pronoun “you” can be either singular or plural, but in this case it is properly read as a plural pronoun. It never was God’s plan that Christians were to stand alone. As the body of Christ stands together in a relationship of love and appropriates the weapons of spiritual warfare described in Ephesians 6:14-18 believers are more likely to have victory over the “devil’s schemes.”

The weapons are compared, by way of illustration, to the armour used by a Roman soldier. The argument has sometimes been made that since Paul uses a soldier’s armour to depict spiritual weapons he could not have been opposed to Christian participation in the military. However, one could come to the opposite conclusion if it is understood that Paul is contrasting spiritual weapons with worldly weapons. He has just reminded the Ephesian Christians that their struggle is not “against flesh and blood” as is the struggle of the soldier. The spiritual weapons are truth, righteousness, the gospel of peace, faith, salvation, the Word of God and prayer. Note that these weapons are not instruments of violence as are the weapons of the soldier.

8. It could possibly be argued that in his instruction to the Roman Christians on how to live in the grace of God in Romans 12, Paul had only the Christian community in view. Certainly many of the admonitions refer to how believers relate to one another. But there are indications that the life style he is advocating also has the unbelieving world in view. Believers are to bless those who persecute them (v.14), and are to overcome evil with good (v.21). So while “not returning evil for evil” would certainly be the standard within the Christian community, it is also to be the norm for relationships outside the church.

9. A similar argument can be made about the statement in Romans 13:10, “Love does no harm to its neighbour.” The story of The Good Samaritan clearly indicates that neighbours

are any persons within reach. Believers have no right to choose the objects of their love. They are called upon to practice "love in all relationships."

COMMENTARY



It seems clear from the study of the life and ministry of Jesus, and the teachings of the apostles that believers are called upon to live a life of "love in all relationships" or the way of "peace." If that is the case, what happened to the way of peace in the rough and tumble of church history? Answering that question can help bring a balanced perspective to the teachings of the New Testament on this subject.

THE WAY OF PEACE IN THE EARLY CHURCH

Did the early church of post-biblical times understand the message of peace and live by it? According to the witness of early church leaders and historians of that era, the answer is "yes." When taken together there is little room for doubt that for about three centuries after Christ, the church by its stated position and its practice held to a peace position. Justin Martyr, an early church leader who died for his faith in A.D. 165, said regarding peace:

"We who were killed with war and mutual slaughter, and every wickedness, have changed our war-like weapons; our swords into ploughshares and our spears into implements of tillage."

Tertullian, the African church leader, (A.D. 160-225) asked, "How shall a Christian man wage war, nay, how shall he even be a soldier in peace time, without the sword, which the Lord hath taken away?"

Origen of Egypt (A.D. 185-254) wrote the following in defense of a biblical peace position:

"We (Christians) no longer take up sword against nations, nor do we learn war any more, but are become children of peace."

As Christianity spread throughout the Roman Empire, affecting more and more of its citizens, the pressure on the Christians to

conform was intensified. By the end of the second century some Christians began to find justification for participation in the army. However, as a whole, the Christian community condemned the use of force and participation in the military until the beginning of the fourth century.

THE PEACE POSITION LOST

In his struggle to claim the throne of Rome, Constantine faced a number of competitors. According to legend, after having called upon the Christian God to help him, he saw a flaming cross in the sky bearing the words, "In this sign conquer." When he did win the battles against his opponents, Constantine proceeded to make peace with the Christians, whom his predecessors had persecuted. In 313 A.D. he gave full freedom to Christians and shortly thereafter Christianity was made the official religion of the Roman Empire.

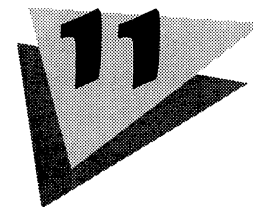
This dramatic turn of events had a significant impact on the ensuing development of the church. From being persecuted, Christians moved almost overnight to positions of privilege in society. Unlimited freedom and wealth was bestowed on the church. However there was a price to pay. In return for these favours, the state came to expect unconditional loyalty from Christians. As Christianity became more popular and the masses were baptized into the church, the pressure to conform to worldly standards on every front intensified. Almost immediately church leaders made an about face in their pronouncements regarding the way of peace. A church council in A.D. 314 in France declared: "They who throw away their weapons in time of peace shall be excommunicated."

Athanasius of Alexandria came to the conclusion that, "...to kill one's adversary in war is both lawful and praiseworthy." Augustine developed what since then has been known as the Just War Theory to justify Christian participation in warfare. Basically he said that it depends on the circumstances; if a war had a just cause then Christians could participate.

However, these dark ages were not totally without the peace light. Individuals and small groups gave witness to the way of peace.

Among these groups were the Waldensians of the 12th century and the Lollards of the 14th century. Menno Simons, one of the early leaders among Anabaptists in the 16th century proclaimed that, "Christ did not want to be defended with Peter's sword. How can a Christian then defend himself?"

Today there are groups of Christians who continue to hold up the principle of "love in all relationships." Among them are the Mennonites, and the Church of the Brethren. In recent years many individuals and groups have begun to listen more intently to their witness so that many people in most denominations now believe in peace and advocate non-violence.



Love in all Relationships— What about the Old Testament?

STUDY HELPS

Bonk, Jon. *The World at War, The Church at Peace*. Ch. 6.

Steiner, Susan. *Joining the Army that Sheds No Blood*. Ch. 6

OPENING REFLECTIONS

Even if it can be argued from the New Testament that Christians are called to practice love in all relationships, inevitable questions arise with respect to the Old Testament. Did God's people not fight many wars, even at the God's command? If war was practised in the name of God should that not be permitted today as well? This lesson speaks to the problem of violence in the Old Testament.

BIBLE STUDY

1. It must be remembered that much of what is recorded in the Old Testament does not reflect God's perfect plan for humanity. Rather it is an account of how God attempted to relate to a fallen, sin-cursed world. The creation account, however, does provide a glimpse of God's perfect will for humanity and a description of how sin shattered the peace that permeated God's created world. At least three sets of relationships in the creation account illustrate God's will for his world.

- a. Genesis 1:29-31 describes the peace that existed between mankind and the rest of creation. Here is a picture of humankind being sustained by the environment. It was truly a garden of tranquility.
 - b. Genesis 2:24-25 depicts peace in the world of human relationships. Husband and wife are committed to each other in a trustful relationship, symbolized by the fact that there is no shame in their nakedness.
 - c. Genesis 3:8a alludes to peace between God and mankind. In this context Adam and Eve hide from God when he comes to meet them in the cool of the day. It seems that the standard practice had been to meet and relate freely on a daily basis until sin entered the picture.
2. Genesis 3:5 depicts the great temptation that trapped humankind as being the desire to be "like God." Mankind was created to reflect God's image (1:26)—God being in control and humankind moving in concert with him. As long as humankind is willing to take its cues from God peace prevails. However at the point at which humankind tries to be "like God"—to be in control—that peace disintegrates into brokenness and fallenness.
 3. This disintegration affected all three sets of relationships in which peace had prevailed before the Fall.
 - a. Genesis 3:16-19 depicts how humankind and creation moved into an adversarial relationship. Pain, domination, curse and sweat would now become part of the human experience.
 - b. Genesis 3:7 illustrates the new brokenness in the human community. Instead of openness and trust, Adam and Eve now hid from each other behind fig leaves as mistrust took over.
 - c. And Genesis 3:8-13 pictures the loss of relationship between God and humankind. Instead of seeking God in the cool of the day, Adam and Eve hid from God among the trees of the garden.

4. As the effects of Adam and Eve's choice propelled themselves forward into history, relationships in the human community continued to deteriorate. Cain and Abel found themselves at odds. In the heat of jealousy Cain clubbed Abel to death and then refused to take responsibility for his murderous act (Genesis 4:8-9). Somewhat secretively, yet quite belligerently, Cain drew humankind into an intensified struggle against itself.
5. A few generations later Lamech appears on the scene (Genesis 4:19-24). It seems that a young man had hit him. So he murdered the lad. That in itself was not so different from Cain's act. What was new was that Lamech celebrated his murder instead of trying to hide it as Cain had done. It seems that he put his story of bloodshed to music (at least poetry) and shared it with his wives. With the war ballad now established, violence became a standard pattern for dealing with conflict within the human community. And so the effects of the fall were propelled forward into human history destroying the peace, harmony and freedom from bloodshed that God had intended for his people.
6. Especially since the fourth century, many Christians have pointed to the wars in the Old Testament, apparently sanctioned by God, as a justification for Christian participation in war. However, a closer look at the scriptures reveals that in many cases the battles recorded in the text were very unique. In the first place they have to do with the fulfilment of specific covenant promises God had made to his people, a condition that no modern nation could claim for itself. Secondly, it becomes clear that it was God's plan that he would deliver his people; he would fight for them while they stood in silent faith and watched. His people were to understand that their God was much superior to pagan gods and was able to deliver them from their enemies. Three examples of such unusual warfare can be found in the following passages.
 - a. The salvation of the Israelites from Egypt by means of a miraculous crossing of the Red Sea and the subsequent drowning of the Egyptian army is a good example of how the Lord fought for his people (Exodus 14:13-14).

- b. Another example of God's kind of warfare is found in the story of how he helped Gideon rid the land of the Midianite threat. According to God's instruction Gideon used unusual weapons such as trumpets, pitchers, torches and a shout of victory to route the enemy of God's people (Judges 7:19-21).
- c. And then there is the famous story in Joshua 6 about the victory over Jericho. Trusting in the word of the Lord, the Israelites marched around the city, sounded trumpets and shouted and the walls tumbled down before them.
7. God's plan to drive out the pagan nations before his people is clearly articulated in Exodus 23:20-33. His angel would go ahead of the people, throwing the enemy into confusion and hornets would scare them away. The Israelites were frequently tempted to run ahead of God and fight in their own way and in their own strength. On one occasion when they went into battle even though Moses told them that the Lord was not with them, they were soundly defeated (Numbers 14:36-45).
8. This unusual plan of God to fight for his people did not allow the Israelites to fit well into the political landscape around them. Without a king and a standing army they were always a curiosity among the nations. Finally they insisted on having a king like the rest of the nations. God was opposed because he knew that it would lead his people away from trusting in God as their protector and provider. But because the people insisted, God granted them their wish (1 Samuel 8:19-22). Perhaps this could be seen as His "permissive will." And even though God's people did not follow his will perfectly he did not abandon them. In some cases God even assured victory for the battles of the kings. But increasingly the kingship drew God's people away from his plan for them until their wars could scarcely be distinguished from those of other nations.
9. At a point when the Israelites had wandered far away from God's plan for them, the prophets reminded the people that it had been God's plan all along for his people to be a light to the nations of the world (Isaiah 49:3-6). He had not intended his people to be just another nation relying on the standard crutches of kings and armies, but a nation that was unique in

that they relied fully on their God. But that hope had vanished because of the disobedience of his people. Now the prophets rekindled that flame of hope as they predicted the coming of the Messiah who would demonstrate beyond doubt that the way of God is not violence, but the way of suffering love. And that hope was fulfilled in Jesus Christ, whom Christians recognize as God and follow in all of life.

COMMENTARY



Much more could be said about the problem of violence in the Old Testament. Many good books have been written on the subject. However, even if all the possible questions about the presence of war and violence in the Old Testament can not be answered satisfactorily, believers are still required to follow the example and teachings of Christ as found in the New Testament. To do so is to bear witness to the conviction that Jesus is the ultimate and highest revelation of God.

JUST WAR?

One way Christians have found to justify participation in war in spite of the teachings of Christ was the development of the Just War Theory. Afraid that the church would not be able to stand against the threat of barbarian invasions, but sensing at the same time that "Christian" armies should behave differently from barbarian armies, Augustine, Bishop of Hippo (354-430), declared that it was right for Christians to participate in a war if it met the criteria of being a "just war." Criteria which were considered to make a war "just" included the following.

1. Just Cause: Only defensive wars are legitimate.
2. Just Intention: The intention of war must be to restore peace and bring about justice.
3. Last Resort: War can only be waged when all other means have been tried.
4. Formal Declaration: A state of war must be declared by the highest authorities (ruling out civil wars).

5. Limited Objectives: Unconditional surrender is not demanded and wholesale destruction is not permitted.
6. Proportionate Means: The force used must be in keeping with the objectives.
7. Noncombatant Immunity: The lives of ordinary citizens must be protected.

For nearly 1600 years many Christians have used this Just War Theory as a justification for participation in the military. However it should be questioned whether any wars fought since the time of Augustine have in fact met the criteria of this theory. Even if this theory were biblical, it could not be used to justify wars in our modern times. Jon Bonk comments on the use of this theory by Christians: "In fighting, Christians accomplished less than nothing, sending to eternity barbarians who might otherwise have put their faith in Christ. The Body of Christ cannot be destroyed by the weapons of this world. The greatest peril lies not outside, but inside the church" (Bonk 28).

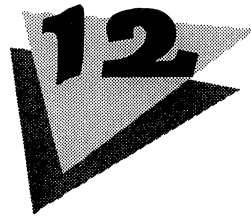
THE POSITIVE PATH OF PEACE

To walk in the way of peace is to adopt a positive attitude toward faith and life. In accepting the Jesus Way believers declare that God's way is better than the lifestyle which comes to them most naturally. While it is true that peacemakers will say "No" to many things, their lives are not characterized by negativism. The reason they say "No" to certain patterns of life is because they have already said "Yes" to more profound patterns of living. Having joyfully accepted the way of Jesus, they reject all actions which are counterproductive in the ministry of reconciliation to which Christ has called them.

To those looking on from the outside, it may appear as though peacemakers are always against something. However those who know the truth through experience understand that they have embarked on a positive path of life. Although faced by much misunderstanding and even open resistance, peacemakers know that the way of Jesus will ultimately triumph over all other ways.

The possibilities for Christian peacemaking are as unlimited as the experiences of life. In whatever situation they find themselves,

peacemakers look for a course of action to which they can say a profound "Yes!" Having adopted a positive faith approach they will find it necessary to say "No" to other types of responses. They are aware that to say "No" without first having said "Yes" will leave them without a firm foundation upon which to base their lives. They also know that in order to live out this positive path of peace they will need both the power of God and the encouragement of the community of Christ of which they are a part.



The Mission of the Church

STUDY HELPS

Ramsyer, Robert L. *Mission and the Peace Witness*.

Shenk, Wilbert R. *Anabaptism and Missions*.

OPENING REFLECTIONS

The mission of the church is to live faithfully in the world with the view toward inviting others to share in the good news of Jesus Christ. True disciples of Christ bend everything they are and have in the direction of mission in order to participate with God in what he is doing in the world. Jesus cares about the whole person and his followers must demonstrate the same as they reach out to others in his name.

BIBLE STUDY

1. The "Great Commission" given by Jesus and recorded in Matthew 28:19-20 forms a centre-piece for Christian mission. Many translations use a command form at the beginning of verse 19 ("Go therefore..." or "Therefore go..."). However a more natural reading of the participle in the original language would be "As you go..." In the former case the emphasis is on the command to go, while in the latter it is on "making disciples." In either case, it is expected that the followers of Jesus will be spreading throughout the world and that wherever they go they will be drawing persons into the community of faith as they too accept Christ as Lord and Saviour.

It is of significance to note that the command to "...make disciples..." is broader than to introduce someone to Jesus. It is not enough to have persons make decisions for Christ; new converts must be discipled to walk in his way. That is why it is important that these persons be baptized and taught to obey the teaching of Christ. In baptism they commit themselves to Christ and his body, the church. And as they are taught, new disciples begin to live out the life of Christ. That means that Christian mission is not the same as evangelism. The Christian mission is not complete until new converts have been taught to live their lives in submission to Jesus Christ.

It is also worthy to note that Jesus promises to be with those who seek to fulfil Christ's mission. Without the presence and power of Christ the work of mission is impossible.

2. Romans 10:14-15 speaks about the necessity of having messengers to share the good news of Christ. The colourful phrase, "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news," basically says that persons carrying the good news about Jesus are doing a great thing. They are bringing the message of hope and salvation to the world.
3. It is of interest to note that when the persecution arose in Jerusalem (Acts 8:1-5) "...all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria." It is not clear why the apostles stayed in Jerusalem, but it is clear that "Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went." This account serves to illustrate well the fact that mission is not reserved for church leaders. It is something that grips the hearts and imaginations of church members who live out and share the gospel wherever they go.
4. James 1:27 adds another perspective to the responsibility of believers as they reach out in Jesus name. Basically he states that true faith expresses itself in acts of kindness to unfortunate persons. To visit orphans and widows in their distress embodies one dimension of what it means to be in mission. Careful and sincere care-giving in Jesus name is characteristic of "true religion."

5. According to 1 John 3:16-20, the love of God is expressed in our lives as we share our material possessions with those who are in need. In this context the challenge is to share extra resources with "brothers" in need. God is pleased when those in his family who have resources share them with those who don't. To live with such an open attitude "sets their hearts at rest" because they have given themselves to the cause of Christ which is greater than themselves. Those whose lives are characterized by reaching out in Jesus' name are the ones who have caught the spirit of mission.
6. The story of the "Sheep and the Goats" in Matthew 25:31-46 is a serious reminder to believers that faith is more than giving mental assent to a certain set of beliefs. Although many continue to proclaim that faith without some form of tangible expression is acceptable, Jesus here says that he will take the actions of persons into account when sitting in judgement on the nations of the world at the end of time. Those who opened up their lives to the destitute and so demonstrated true faith are rewarded, while those who have ignored those in distress bring judgement upon themselves. Jesus says that "Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me" (v. 40). Who are these "brothers" of Christ? Is it only those who are believers? More likely it refers to any person, created in his image, who is in need. Jesus cares about needy persons and so should his followers.
7. The parable of "The Good Samaritan" in Luke 10:25-37 provides another picture of what it means to reach out in Jesus' name. The question posed by the expert in the law was how he could attain eternal life. It is remarkable to some that he did not answer that he should believe in God and be saved. From other passages we know that Christ calls for faith or belief. But he also calls for submission to his lordship. Again, it appears from Jesus' words that he prefers not to separate belief and submission, or faith and action.

Jesus does respond to the expert in the law with the call to "Love the Lord your God and your neighbour as yourself." Wishing to excuse himself, the expert asked who his neigh-

bour was. The parable teaches believers that they are called upon to reach out to the needy and hurting people around them. In doing so they demonstrate love for neighbour and for God. And that, says Jesus is the way of eternal life!

COMMENTARY



Radical Reformers" of the early 16th century could be considered the forerunners of the modern missionary movement. Although the concept of mission in the Protestant world did not catch on for another two hundred years, these reformers opened the door to what was to become a far-reaching movement. The modern evangelical mission movement rests to a large extent on their pioneering work.

It seems strange at first thought that the Protestant Reformation with its focus on salvation by grace through faith did not generate enthusiasm for missions. By contrast, even the Roman Catholic Church was more "mission minded" than the Protestants as they took it upon themselves to "Christianize" the indigenous peoples of the Americas which had just been discovered. Within Protestant circles, however, it was the "Radical Reformers" as the Anabaptists were called who recovered what they considered to be a New Testament understanding of being in mission.

Upon closer examination, it becomes obvious why the Protestant movement as a whole did not carry with it a missionary consciousness. Although there was a new awareness of the grace of God among Protestants generally, certain of their understandings about faith and life militated against developing a missionary spirit. Although severely persecuted because they countered these understandings Anabaptists opened the door to modern missionary thinking.

Most of the Protestant reformers like Martin Luther, Ulrich Zwingli and John Calvin denied the validity of the Great Commission for their time. It was thought that the command to preach the gospel in all the world had applied to the apostles but had no bearing on the task of the modern church. On the other hand,

Anabaptists took the Great Commission seriously and made it central to their way of life. Making missions foundational for the Christian in this way was rooted largely in the biblical themes identified in this lesson series.

Perhaps the most profound shift the radical reformers made that propelled them in the direction of missions was the move toward the idea of the church as a voluntary community. They felt the New Testament taught a believers' church model in which all members chose to be part of the church through voluntary submission to baptism. They opposed infant baptism because infants are incapable of making faith and life choices. If persons were called upon to make a faith decision it followed that they must be evangelized or persuaded to follow Christ in the context of the church. This ran counter to the general Protestant view in which all members of a state were considered to be members of the church through infant baptism. If all persons in a state are part of the church, there is no need for evangelism or mission in that context.

While Protestant countries considered all their citizens to be Christian, it sometimes was deemed appropriate to spread the faith to other states who did not hold to the same faith. However, according to Calvin, this was the responsibility of the state and would normally be done by means of military conquest. When another country was conquered all its citizens were forced to embrace the faith of the victorious nation. Anabaptists, however, did not recognize political boundaries when it came to matters of faith. They considered it their duty to call all persons to true faith no matter what their nationality.

Another missionary concept common to the radical reformers was the idea of a free will. Luther and Calvin maintained that a person's will is bound—that all that happens in the world is already predetermined by God. If such is the case, they argued, attempts to affect eternal destiny by asking persons to make choices is presumptuous. If God in his sovereignty has elected persons for salvation they will be saved without any human intervention. This was the theology lying behind the comment made to William Carey a few centuries later when in response to his vision to be a

missionary to India he was told, "Sit down young man. If God chooses to save the heathen he will do it without your help!" Anabaptists argued that all persons are called upon to choose to follow God voluntarily—and that such a choice determines eternal destiny. If that was the case, they contended, it was important to preach the gospel to all persons and persuade them to respond.

Related to the idea of the sovereignty of God and the bondage of the will was the understanding for Protestants that persons should stay in the vocation in which they were called. Faith should simply be lived out where one was located. Anabaptists understood themselves to be pilgrims on a journey through life. They were to be mobile for the cause of Christ and his Kingdom. With such an orientation they were willing to risk security and life itself in the missionary service of the church.

Anabaptists felt it was their duty to reach out to all persons with the love of Christ. They accepted the radical ethic of the Sermon on the Mount which meant that they loved even their enemies. They held that it was not right to kill anyone for whom Christ had died. Their primary responsibility was to seek by word and deed to draw even their enemies to faith in Christ. That is what Christ had done and that is what they were called to.

Anabaptists have been at the forefront in helping the modern evangelical church understand the biblical call to missions. Their emphases on practical obedience, identification with the suffering, a high view of the church, rejection of violence, and kingdom consciousness are being adopted by an increasing number of churches and mission agencies. Although some Anabaptists were side-tracked from missions in their history, many today are making major contributions to the cause of world-wide missions.

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Don Thiessen
Steinbach Bible College
PO Box 1420 • Steinbach, MB • R0A 2A0



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204-326-6451 • www.sbcollege.mb.ca



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