

Biblical Non-Conformity and Nonresistance

Wednesday evening, March 25, 2009

Ministers meeting pre-sermon talk at Sarasota, Florida

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When Brother Lester called me it was a complete surprise. To cover two such important subjects in such a brief time seemed impossible. Lester emphasized two things. My assignment was not to bring a major message, but rather a pre-sermon talk. And it was important that I was as time-conscious as he was. He assured me of his prayer support as I seek the Lord's face in preparation. I kindly ask for your prayerful attention as well.

My preparation had many false starts. Things did not want to come together in a cohesive way until I humbled myself and asked the church for their prayers.

If my manner of speaking seems a bit curt or blunt (katz opp or grad raus) I am not trying to be unkind. Maybe I am trying to say too many things in the allotted time. I plead guilty to wanting to include maximum content within the time allowed.

I would prefer to speak without being tied too closely to notes. I hope you can bear with me that this message is pretty well written out. I find that body and mind seem to be closely related in the aging process.

It is sobering for us leaders to remember that according to James 3:1 teachers (leaders) will be judged with stricter judgment than other people.

My brethren, be not many masters, knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation.

This awareness should help us to participate in these meetings with humble hearts and teachable spirits.

Having crossed the four-score threshold has caused me to take new interest in the farewell messages of both Paul and Peter. I am well aware that my privilege of attending these meetings cannot continue indefinitely.

In Acts 20 where Paul meets with the Ephesian elders the meeting becomes very emotional. Paul tells them that his hands are clean. He has not knowingly tip-toed around any part of God's counsel. He instructs the elders to take heed unto themselves and to the flock, God's purchased possession. They are to take their role as divinely appointed overseers very seriously, because after his departure grievous wolves will enter in, not sparing the flock. Even more menacing is the fact that of their own number will men arise speaking perverse things to draw away away disciples after themselves. "Therefore watch and remember".

Peter in his second letter also faces the fact that he is well past third base in life's journey. Let's identify with him in looking ahead to the prospect of crossing home plate to appear before the righteous Judge of all the earth who alone can declare us "safe at home".

Peter assures his readers in the first part of chapter one of God's rich provision in the knowledge of Christ for their spiritual well being: "all things that pertain unto life and godliness" and "exceeding great and precious promises".

The latter part of chapter one and chapters two and three take on a different tone. Peter says that he is going to tell them some things that they already know because he wants to be sure that they remember after he's gone.

His burden quite simply is this: that they will always remember that nothing, including his own "mountain-top experience" (the transfiguration) should ever usurp God's Word of authority that was spoken by holy men of God as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.

Chapter two and three are vivid and descriptive of how the church will be attacked by people with a different agenda. These people are self-centered and don't want to know how God has dealt with rebellion in times past. Scoffers who are willingly ignorant will not have the last word. God is not forgetful, but patient, "not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." But the day of the Lord will come suddenly with great noise and fervent heat. Those who twist God's Word of truth do so to their own destruction.

It is impressive to notice how well these early church writings apply to the present age about 2,000 years later.

Our Lord still loves His bride for whom He shed His precious blood. He has provided two foundation stones, to assure stability and soundness: the authority of the inspired Word and the supremacy and lordship of Christ.

Churches who have become unsound in doctrine or practice have failed to keep these two foundation stones in place.

What can I say about the topics mentioned in the title of this meditation? We know that we are not to love the world neither the things that are in the world.

I John 2:15-17.

15 Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.

16 For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world.

17 And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.

James 4:4 could hardly say it more plainly:

4 Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God.

To be unequally yoked together with unbelievers is to forget that Christ (the seed of the woman) and Belial (the seed of the serpent) are at enmity, totally incompatible.

II Corinthians 6:14-18

14 Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness?

15 And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel?

16 And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.

17 Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you.

18 And I will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty.

To come out from among them and be separate is necessary, for God to receive us into His family as sons and daughters.

Paul reminds us in Romans 12:1,2 that a renewed mind is God's alternative to allowing the world to dictate our

thinking and our lifestyle. Without a renewed mind we are not in a position to understand God's will.

1 I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.

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

We also know that Christ and the apostles taught that Christ's followers should be non-resistant and non-retaliatory. We let God do the getting-even. This teaching is not primarily negative, but we are to love our enemies and do good to them that hate us. We are to overcome evil with good. When we are mistreated, we need to commit it to Him that judges righteously. This way of life is to characterize the way we live in our families, churches, and communities. Non-participation in the military is a very important part of the total picture.

Recent history reminds us that it is not safe to assume that these teachings will survive with the rising generation without intentional nurturing and practice. It is with this awareness and concern that Conservative Anabaptist Service Program (CASP) was formed.

As we consider the early Anabaptists of the 1500's we should be profoundly grateful for their example of faithfulness. Many of them chose martyrdom rather than denying their Lord and His word of authority. But let's remember that they did not invent these teachings.

The early church was non-resistant for 300 years before the illicit marriage of church and state in 313 A.D. We don't know how many remnant groups chose the path of persecution rather than cooperating with this unholy alliance. But praise God we still have access to this same Word and are privileged to submit to its teaching, which puts us at odds with the sword-and-Bible, God-and-country mentality of the larger church community.

Since the Scriptures are abundantly clear on these issues and we are people of the Word, shall we assume that the leaders gathered here believe this and are committed to faithful obedience in spite of conflicting pressures?

Is it fair to ask how well we seem to be doing?

It would be nice to be able to report that everything is fine, that we are in no danger of following the path of several other groups with Amish roots, who have gradually lost these principles to cultural conformity. I am sorry but facts do not permit us to make that assumption.

I am concerned that what follows is spoken with grace and seasoned with salt. I am reminded of the words of Paul in

I Corinthians 10:15

I speak as to wise men; judge ye what I say.

He was in effect appealing to their integrity and their intelligence.

At this point let us take a fresh look at truth. To receive truth is to be blessed by it. Failure to do so is to be judged by it.

Jesus said, in

John 8:32

32 And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.

It can make us free from the guilt and power of sin. It can make us free from ill will and wrong attitudes. To be free indeed is to have received the perfect Master. We have been freed from bondage to self.

True freedom is not liberty to do what we want, but the power and will to do as we ought.

Jesus is the way, the truth and the life.

Truth is not only factually accurate, but it is also symbolic of integrity, strength, security, virtue, and character. Truth is not subject to our bias, our preference, our convenience or even our interpretation. Neither is it subject to popular opinion or majority rule. Why? Because truth is truth. May this realization foster in us a spirit of reverence and godly fear.

There is widespread concern in our circles that there is momentum in a wrong direction. Our bishop committee is concerned about this, as well as our mission boards and other elected boards and committees. Some young people who attended CBS this winter are also very concerned. I am assuming that this concern is widespread throughout this gathered body.

Several questions:

1. What is the root cause?
2. What are the long term effects?
3. Is there a remedy?
4. Do we believe that God is willing to help us?
5. Are we willing to let Him help us?

I believe the root cause is the virus of individualism, a false freedom that permeates our modern culture and is not hesitant to invade local church bodies or larger constituencies.

Earmarks of this virus include:

--The individualist has a personal agenda

--He does not prioritize the authority of the Word or the centrality and lordship of Christ.

--He will ask simplistic questions without regard for net effect and long-term implications, for example: "What's wrong with the use of a radio?"

A better question would be, "Would its acceptance be helpful to our spiritual well being? What would we gain by having easy access to the idolatrous sports world, to the unstable youth culture with its ungodly music, to partisan politics that is not concerned about citizenship in Christ's kingdom, or to the radio preacher who can easily become a distraction to local loyalties and sound doctrine"?

If we want right answers we need to ask the right questions.

A year or so ago I came across a copy of a letter that was written in 1957 signed by five older bishops. It was an appeal to the executive committee of their conference. The burden of the letter was that they would honor the conference position against the radio. They warned that failure to do so would lead to the acceptance of television. The appeal seemed fervent and humble.

The bishops who wrote are no longer here. The younger committee apparently did not effectively heed the appeal. The prophecy has now gone into fulfillment.

The end result of unbridled individualism is to make obedience to Bible teaching optional. The final authority is now the individual's preference. This has priority over Bible authority.

In my brief life time I have observed several groups move from the sisters wearing a respectful, adequate covering to cut hair and no covering. That is a good reason why we should be concerned if coverings are gradually getting smaller and hair correspondingly more prominent. Increasingly the wedding ring has become an important identity symbol in those circles.

Is it mere coincidence that in those circles, Bible teaching on divorce and remarriage is being reconsidered?

The individualist has been known to rationalize that church regulated clothing is legalistic, believing that the interpretation of what is modest should be up to the individual.

It becomes clear that the problem is essentially a conflict between self-centeredness and love of truth.

Failure to acknowledge the authority of the Word is to become part of the problem. This deadly virus of individualism will visit members including leaders when allowed to do so.

One reason this virus is so serious is that it leads to losing the ability to discern between truth and falsehood. It leads to misguided sincerity. God allows such people to actually believe a lie.

II Thessalonians 2:10-12

10 And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved.

11 And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie:

12 That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness.

God is eager to provide helpful solutions when we want His help more than we want our own way.

Let us hear a paraphrase of the Lord's word to Solomon in II Chronicles 7:14:

If Beachy leaders shall humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their short-sightedness and self-centeredness then will I hear from heaven and give grace to resist the pressures of illicit fellowship and unscriptural compromise and give courage and wisdom to lead with grace and truth not only for their own salvation but for those of the flock for whom I have made them overseers.

As we pray this final prayer I confess that to pray to God out loud is intentional. Not only do I want God to hear, I want us to pray together. It is my fervent desire that this prayer would reflect our love for the Lord who is the ultimate Expression of truth.

Before we pray let us remember the words of our our Lord.,

John 15:7

If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you.

Our kind Father in heaven, we thank you that we have not been sentenced to failure but that we can be “more than conquerors though he that loved us.”

Forgive us if we have been indifferent toward intentional non-compliance. Deliver us from the dead-fish syndrome that can only float downstream. Deliver us from the paralysis of indifference or discouragement. Give us your grace and wisdom to take needful corrective measures.

Deliver us from a spirit that is only negative. Make us aware of the many things that are thank worthy and right.

Help us to eagerly support and promote such things.

Guard us against a Laodicean spirit of self-sufficiency and independence that gives us a false sense of our spiritual well-being.

Give us spiritual discernment in the body of believers. Guard us against arrogance or apology in our defense and practice of truth.

When it becomes necessary to consider making changes, give us wisdom to look at the big picture, considering the long-term implications.

Help us to lead with the energy and grace of Christ's victory. Help us to be stable without becoming stagnant, steadfast but not legalistic. Help us to foster a climate that encourages open communication.

Impress upon us that the spirit and virus of individualism is no respecter of persons. As leaders, we desire your protection and immunity that only you can provide through love of truth and whole-hearted love toward you, and loving our neighbors as ourselves.

Give us hearts of pastoral concern and sincere love of truth; help us to achieve that delicate balance of responsible oversight without resorting to carnal methods of leadership.

Remind us that not only can You answer prayers, but You can do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think. Cleanse us from every hindrance that would keep You from doing what You want to do for your beloved church.

Thank you that You are eager to become the Solution to our problems when we seek You with unselfish hearts.

You know how much we want to finish well and be found faithful. Help us to lead with clean hands and pure hearts.

We pray in the name of Jesus Christ, the Head of the church, Amen.

--DLM