

Anabaptist Identity 01-25-09

By David Keeling

www.earlychurchtruth.com

keelingdavid@hotmail.com

I want to extend greetings to you in the precious name of our Lord and Savior - the King of kings and Lord of lords. I want to encourage you this morning to press on and be faithful. We heard of those who have fallen by the wayside. It seems so difficult sometimes - as you look around and see people falling - but instead of being discouraged with that, it should encourage us to press on even more. It's not impossible, though it does make it look really difficult for some. But like we talked about before I left on the last trip, until we have stepped in the water and crossed on to the other side, our faith hasn't even begun. We are in a war; we are truly on the enemy territory and he's watching and waiting for us to come running home to him.

Once a man told me that it seems some who are brought up in very strict churches will come out and begin to walk by faith for a while, but then when trouble comes they turn back to the church and hide under that wing instead of continuing to walk in faith. And on the same end, people in the world - whenever trouble comes and they get discouraged - they run right back to the world. We have a tendency to go back to where it's easy; to go back to our comfort zone. That's what I want to talk a little about this morning.

When I first got home from the trip I had a letter waiting for me. I was supposed to speak at the "Identity Conference" in March. I want to read some of the letter they sent to me:

Greetings to you in Christ, our blessed Savior's name. I trust you and yours are prospering and are in good health. ... I had been reluctant and embarrassed to contact you sooner. [here's the bad news] It is not expedient for you to speak at this year's conference. My sister's wedding has caused a deep rift in some conservative circles. Therefore, because of your direct involvement we feel it necessary to let the embers die down some.

There's a little bit more there but you get the idea about what has happened. It's pretty discouraging. I was really looking forward to being able to speak there. It's disappointing ... I don't know. It was such a blessing to have a message to speak, but no place to speak it. It's just pretty disappointing. They call it the "Identity Conference" - in other words, 'who are we?' They are trying to find out who they are as Anabaptists, or how to improve on being an Anabaptist. It is really ironic that, in seeking to be Anabaptist, they are so afraid of someone taking a stand on anything that they can't get over a little controversy about whether or not they can allow that person to speak or not. If we are going to follow Christ we need to follow Him, but if we are going to be afraid of men, it's no wonder there is an identity crisis. There is no wonder they can not figure out who they are. Like I said, it was a real disappointment to me. I don't let myself get excited too much about anything on this earth, but this was one thing I was excited about to be able to go and speak to these people because I do believe we have a message that would be good for them to hear. Not just because it's mine, but I believe we have a message that would be good to hear ... and it was a real let-down. [Brother Jeff said, "It sounds like they are letting the wrong embers die down."] Yes, amen. That's exactly right. If you look at the Anabaptist movement, this is exactly like "The Fire in Zurich Hills" - the very beginning of the Anabaptist movement. There was a spark and some embers burning - the people that began the Anabaptist movement [the ancestors of the people holding this conference] were told "just let things die down a little bit and then we'll move away from infant baptism and some of these things going on." They were counseled to 'just let the embers die down,' and they would not do that. That is the very heart what they [modern ancestors of the early Anabaptists] are trying to get to, and they are proving themselves to be on the very opposite end. The "Anti-Anabaptists". [Brother Brian said, "They've just eliminated any possibility of anybody that is really sincerely seeking to get anything out of that event. Everybody that is going there is thinking they are going to get a whole bunch out of it and will probably come away thinking they were really got blessed.] Yes. Just being encouraged and remaining to be a part of the anti-Anabaptist movement, and think that they are finding their identity. It's just really discouraging.

Colossians 2:8 Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of

the world, and not after Christ. 9 For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. 10 And ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power: 11 In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ: 12 Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead. 13 And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses; 14 Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross; 15 And having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it. 16 Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days: 17 Which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ. 18 Let no man beguile you of your reward in a voluntary humility and worshipping of angels, intruding into those things which he hath not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind, 19 And not holding the Head, from which all the body by joints and bands having nourishment ministered, and knit together, increaseth with the increase of God. 20 Wherefore if ye be dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world, why, as though living in the world, are ye subject to ordinances, 21 (Touch not; taste not; handle not; 22 Which all are to perish with the using;) after the commandments and doctrines of men? 23 Which things have indeed a shew of wisdom in will worship, and humility, and neglecting of the body; not in any honour to the satisfying of the flesh.

What I want to bring out this morning is Christ came into the world and we were dead in our sins, our trespasses; we had trespassed against God onto enemy ground. We trespassed. If you go on someone else's property that they don't want you on, you've trespassed on their property. This paints a beautiful picture: we've trespassed. You know if we were in a war and got behind enemy lines, or if we were two countries bordering each other and you trespassed onto that other country, that country would have guards looking for people trespassing because once you are on their ground, they have a legal right to you. You've left the safety of your country and have become ensnared.

Jesus came and blotted out the handwriting of ordinances that were against us, and contrary us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to His cross. He spoiled principalities and powers. Whenever we hear of the spoiling of principalities and powers, we think of the verse in Corinthians where it says, "we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities and powers and spiritual wickedness in high places." Brother John and I were talking about this - you know, a lot of times when we think of that, we think of the spirit world. There are 'spooks and devils and boogey men out there' and that's what we are wrestling against. But that's not all of what that means. Whenever we are wrestling against principalities, that's real. There is a real element we are wrestling against - principalities and powers. And one of these is religion. A principality is a government; it's an authority someone has over someone else. Christ spoiled principalities and powers and made a show of them openly, triumphing over them. He overcame those powers and principalities that we were in bondage to. Right here is one of the fundamental messages of the Christian life: being set free from those bondages that spoil us. It is a fearful thing, and one of the things people have the hardest time overcoming to truly follow the Lord is the powers and principalities that are in place posing as Christ ... posing as authorities over our lives.

Just like we were talking about at the beginning - whenever people start walking and following in the Lord, and get discouraged, they run back to their safe principalities. They run back to their safe guardian that is over them; their principal. The man that is in charge is the prince of the principality. When we get into trouble walking by faith, we want to run back to that principality and have that prince over us. And they represent it's the principality of this world (the prince of the power of the air or the world we exist in now) or the Prince of Peace, the Prince of the Kingdom of God - the King of this world, our Lord Jesus Christ. And whenever we get out of our comfort zone just a little bit, and things get to be a little difficult, we always want to run back to that 'safety'. But Jesus spoiled those things. Jesus triumphed over them so that we might "go without the camp, bearing his reproach." (Hebrews 13)

I often think about Christ's message to the world, and how much He wanted to deliver it to the world so they might understand and see. I think about the time when He looked out over Jerusalem and said, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, ... I would that I could gather you as a hen doth gather her chicks under my wing, but you would not." (Matt. 23:37) He had a message for them. He had hope for them. He had something real for them, but they would not. I feel that frustration that He must have felt over and over and over again. You just get to where you can help somebody, and they just turn and run away. It's really disappointing, but I do find comfort

in that the Lord felt the same way. It is heartbreaking to watch people reject when you know you can help them.

Colossians 2:20 Wherefore if ye be dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world, why, as though living in the world, are ye subject to ordinances, 21 (Touch not, taste not; handle not; 22 Which all are to perish with the using;) after the commandments and doctrines of men?

Revelation 21:8 gives a list:

Revelation 21:7 He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son. 8 But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death.

The abominable, the murderers, whoremongers, sorcerers, ... In sorcery, that would include the drug world; that's a big part of sorcery. The abominable would be the homosexuals and those involved in clear abominations. Murderers. Whoremongers, harlots. People we look at and see on the streets. The whoremonger is someone that would buy and sell. I've been in the Philippines, and it's a common thing, the slave trade there that goes on where young ladies will be looking for a way to escape the poverty and the things they are living in. They get in contact with someone - a man from America or some western country will go over there and make a proposal for marriage and give her a handful of money. They will get their papers all lined up to where the woman can come to a free country. They will bring them over here ... the women will be ready for their wedding day - making plans and having dreams, etc. They get them from the airport and the women are put into a van with some other ladies in it ... and then look out and see their 'husband' collecting a pile of cash and then turn around and walk away ... realizing that they have just been sold as a slave. And then they are put into some whoremonger's den. That is a whoremonger. Terrible things. Sorcerers. Idolaters.

But look what tops the list there: the fearful. The fearful. That doesn't mean someone who feels afraid. That doesn't mean someone that is scared. That means someone who doesn't have enough courage to act on the truth. Not enough courage to walk in the light God has given them. Not having enough courage to walk in the Gospel and to come out apart from this world and its principalities; coming out from the vain traditions of men. No matter how holy they look - it's being afraid of what people will say if you come out and follow the truth. The fearful and unbelieving right there with the abominable, murderers, whoremongers, sorcerers, idolaters and all liars. That is pretty plain. There isn't much to add to that [to make it clearer].

Christ called us to walk in the light. If we want to be identified with Christ, we are going to know His suffering, and we are going to know His shame, and we are going to know the separation that He felt. Someone seeking the 'identity' of being a follower of Christ needs to forget trying to follow the pattern of some group. They need to learn to follow the One that that group followed. They need to learn to follow Jesus; to walk in the light, not following in traditions. Not trying to pattern themselves after the Anabaptists or early Christians, but to pattern themselves after the One they patterned themselves after. If you want to be identified with the Anabaptists, you don't try to pattern yourself after an Anabaptist; you pattern yourself after Christ. It will be amazing how close we can be come identified with the Anabaptists or identified with the early Christians.

Follow the One who is the light ... who is the truth. When we look at walking in the light as Jesus was in the light, we see in John 3 about they that hate the light and loved darkness.

John 3:19-21 And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. 20 For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reprov'd. 21 But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God.

Whenever we walk in the light, we walk in the light and know it is going to cost us. We don't walk in the light because we have decided, "Well, it won't cost me too much." We walk in the light because we found light; we do not care what it costs. People use the illustration where the man went to build a building; he got part of it built and then ran out of money and everyone laughed and

mocked. Do you know who was doing the mocking? It wasn't God. It is the devil mocking when we aren't able to finish what we started doing, because we didn't consider what it would cost. We get the idea out of that that we better consider if it's going to cost us too much if we follow the Lord. No. We better consider if it's going to cost us too much if we DON'T follow the Lord. We look at that just backwards of the way it should be. So that, the cost is no consideration - we are going to follow the Lord. And the one that does the mocking is the one he spooks out of following the Lord. The fearful is the one who gets mocked, even though it may look wise at the time.

When we choose to follow the Lord, we may not make every decision right, but we are going to walk in the truth that we have - no matter what it costs. We are going to throw down the principalities. Jesus said in Matthew 16, "*the gates of hell shall not prevail.*" That's a promise. The gates of hell are those principalities, those things set up against the Gospel of Christ, and they won't stand against us when we stand against them. A lot of times that message is turned upside down into a defensive position that says it's our gates we are protecting. No it's not. We are in the offensive position and hell's gates won't stand against us when we take the offense and go forward. The gates of the principalities of this world won't stand against the truth of the word of God.

I want to encourage us this morning to continue to be faithful. To walk in the light and be encouraged. To find our fellowship and our identity in following Christ, whether we are accepted by anyone or not - because that doesn't matter. What is important is that the Lord will accept us. That's where the promises are. There are no promises in the bible to anyone that is not committed to the Lord; not willing to walk in the light; to stand against the powers of darkness and principalities of this world. We can't help anyone until we get clear of those things ourselves. You can't hardly save a drowning man when you're in the same pool with him. In most cases he'll drag you down. You have to get out onto solid ground and hold on to something solid to be able to help anyone. It seems that isolates you to the point you can't reach them sometimes, but you don't want to give up or quit trying.

Let's draw our fellowship and encouragement from the Lord because we know He felt the same way when He was here. We read about the prophets and men of God in the Old Testament, they preached their message and no one would listen. Over and over again God's word goes unheeded. When Samuel tried to lead the people - they wanted a king. The Lord told him, "they haven't rejected you, they have rejected me." So don't be discouraged.

May the Lord add His blessings. Keep praying for those who are seeking truth and seeking light. That they would be willing to identify themselves with the Lord, and just come out from among that - whatever is holding them.