

An Appeal to American Anabaptists

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Soul-winners in America today face a perplexing dilemma. “If someone comes to Christ as a result of my witnessing, where should I send them for fellowship? Is there any church where this new believer can go where he will receive Biblical discipleship?”

The sad condition of the modern church makes this question a difficult one to answer. Many groups today are naming the name of Christ, but not very many are departing from iniquity. Most churches who profess to be “going and teaching” all nations are neglecting to “teach them to obey all things” that Christ commanded. Jesus’ words in the Sermon on the Mount are ignored as Christians everywhere swear oaths, fight in war, and divorce and remarry at the same rate as the unbelievers around them. False doctrine, worldliness, and broken homes have all but snuffed out the testimony of Christ in this country.

One comparatively bright spot in this dark religious landscape is the group of people called the conservative Anabaptists. While there are many New Testament teachings that are rejected by Christians in general, conservative Anabaptists have made a valiant attempt to retain these teachings. While American Christianity has said it is OK for Christians to swear oaths and go to war, Anabaptists have maintained that Christ was serious when He said “swear not at all” and “love your enemies.” While American Christianity has chosen to become like the world to win the world (or maybe just to make life easier), Anabaptists have insisted that God calls His people to some degree of separation from the world in their daily lives. While divorce ends nearly half of the marriages in American Christianity, the divorce rate among conservative Anabaptists is close to zero.

Yet in spite of the strong points of the Anabaptist people, there are still some giant “bushel baskets” hiding the light of Christ, some major issues that are shrouding the “city set on a hill” in a cloak of murkiness. These issues are threatening to extinguish the light that does exist, and no doubt will do so if they are not addressed quickly and thoroughly.

My appeal to my Anabaptist brethren is that we would deal in a Biblical way with every weight that hinders and every sin that besets us. My appeal is that we would take the steps needed to permit God’s power to flow through us like it flowed through the Anabaptists of centuries past.

My appeal is for us to consider seven things I believe we must do thoroughly, honestly, and consistently to become the kind of vessels God can use in His kingdom.

1. We must make Jesus Christ the center of our focus

For any group to validly call itself Christian, it must have the person of Jesus as the center of its focus. Every other issue, regardless of how significant it may be, must be peripheral to Christ and our relationship with Him.

The Bible was given to point us to Jesus. God the Father points us to His Son. The Holy Spirit points us to Christ. All of our teaching and practice is worthless unless it points in some way to the Lamb of God Who takes away the sin of the world.

If Christ is truly the center of our focus, He will also become our *passion*. Someone has rightfully said, “A man can have many interests, but he can only have one passion.” Far too often believers from other backgrounds are attracted to Anabaptist circles by our radical lifestyle. After joining us with high expectations, however, they become

disillusioned when they discover that Christ is merely an interest rather than our passion. He is merely one of many Bible doctrines rather than *our life* as the apostle Paul testified.

Jesus said we are to love God with all our heart, soul, strength, and mind. He said we are to seek first God's kingdom and His righteousness. If we are not passionate about Christ and His kingdom, our young people are likely to jump ship the first time they meet someone who is passionate about his beliefs. Perhaps they will be led away by a false teacher, college professor, or cult leader who is passionate about whatever cause or philosophy he happens to be promoting. Or maybe they will sense where our true passion lies—whether it be business, sports, or even some religious activity—and then will choose to adopt that passion themselves. Or perhaps they will decide to develop their own passion as they explore the vast array of pleasures this world has to offer.

How much better, though, if we could repent of our lukewarmness and take up the passion of Paul, whose heart cry was “that I may know Him.” How much better if we could grasp the majesty of Christ's kingdom ourselves and then offer our children a real relationship with Him Who is worthy to receive our praise, devotion, obedience, and love.

2. We must learn to humble ourselves

Of all the activities that a mortal man can do, there is probably none more important than humbling himself. To truly humble ourselves is an important ingredient in becoming born again (Matt. 18:3-4). Humbling ourselves is the key to receiving the grace from God that we so desperately need (1 Peter 5:5). The spiritual success or failure of virtually every person mentioned in Scripture was determined by whether or not he consistently humbled himself.

We are all proud creatures naturally. We think our ways, opinions, abilities, and teachings are superior to those that belong to others. We resist anyone who tells us that something is wrong with us, or that we need to repent in an area of our life. Yet our spiritual victory and eternal destiny are often dependent upon whether or not we are willing to take heed to such concerns.

Humbling ourselves can take many different forms, such as confessing sin rather than hiding it, changing our opinions rather than clinging to them, and accepting personal pain rather than resisting it. It will always, however, involve some sort of denying of our own egotistical nature and submitting ourselves to the will of God.

If we do not learn to humble ourselves, our hearts will not be open when God Himself wants to speak to us. If we do not learn to humble ourselves, our graceless lives will quickly deteriorate into either dead formalism or else unchecked worldliness. If we do not learn to humble ourselves, our interpersonal conflicts will continue to mar the testimony of Christ on this earth. If we do not learn to humble ourselves, our pride will almost certainly alienate the very people we are supposed to be pointing to God.

If we do not learn to humble ourselves, we will not be able to effectively address the concerns listed in this paper, even if we know in our hearts they are true.

3. We must call sin what it is

Jesus came to save us from our sin, not from our weaknesses, slip-ups, or character flaws. When we try to use some less offensive word to describe sin, it is usually an indication of incomplete repentance, and it limits the cleansing work that God wants to do in our hearts.

Depending on our style of church structure and administration, our temptation is to focus on those things that violate the particular practice of our congregation, but then neglect to deal with the things that violate the Word of God. Unforgiveness, lust, pride, covetousness, gluttony, rebellion, anger, and a love of this world are all real sins that separate us from God, and we must confess them as sin if we hope to receive the cleansing power of Christ's blood. If we try to deal with the symptoms of these sins without addressing the sin itself, then we will fail to find true freedom either for ourselves or for those to whom we minister.

4. We must weed out witchcraft

The church in Thyatira had works, charity, service, faith, and patience. But they also made room for the wicked Jezebel to teach and seduce God's people. Many conservative Anabaptists have battled for generations against the threats of immodesty, war, and divorce, but then have blindly given way to the horrible, hellish sin of witchcraft.

Throughout the Old Testament God declares His fierce hatred against all forms of witchcraft. In the New Testament God says that sorcerers shall have their part in the lake of fire. Yet so often when someone expresses concern about water-witching or other forms of divination, or about the vast array of occultic health care practices, the response goes something like this: "Well, we just have different opinions about these things," or "Just because we don't understand how something works does not necessarily mean that it's witchcraft."

These responses simply reveal the biggest problem in our attitude toward witchcraft. In answering the question about what is and what isn't witchcraft, the biggest problem is not that we don't *know*. The biggest problem is that we don't *care*. When we make statements like these, without taking the time to investigate the truth of the matter, we simply reveal that we don't have the same hatred for witchcraft that God has for it.

When we truly grasp the loathing our God has for the sin of witchcraft, we will leave no stone unturned in our search for truth if there is any possibility at all that something we practice could be witchcraft. Then, if we should discover that indeed we have been guilty of this heinous sin, we will repent of it thoroughly and seek the freedom that can only come by the blood of Jesus.

5. We must deal with materialism

As rich Americans, we ought to pay close attention to the realities Jesus told us about ourselves. He told us that He came to preach good news to the poor, but that the rich shall hardly enter the kingdom of God. He said "blessed are you who are poor" but "woe to you who are rich."

Jesus also told us how to respond to these realities by giving us two clear commands: "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth" (Matt. 6:19) and "Sell that ye have, and give alms" (Luke 12:33). Perhaps we will disagree about how we ought to obey these commands, or exactly what Jesus meant when He gave them. But can we all agree, at a minimum, that He must have meant *something* by them?

Can any of us imagine the potential if God's people everywhere would give all their excess (laid-up) resources for the care of the needy and the spread of the gospel around the world? Can any of us imagine the consequences if we don't?

6. We must repent of our apathy about the lost

Christ's great commission in Matthew 28 consists of two components. The first is the command to "go." The second is the command to "teach obedience." If Satan cannot keep Christians from ignoring the entire great commission, he wants them at least to neglect one of these two fundamental parts of it.

Many Protestant groups have been diligent about obeying the command to "go." They have been sadly negligent, however, on the command to "teach obedience." Conservative Anabaptists, on the other hand, have typically put a lot more emphasis on the call to "teach obedience." But we have been greatly lacking in our response to "go" and to "preach the gospel to every creature."

We have been called to win those we can, for God is not willing that any should perish, but that all would come to repentance. We have also been called to warn those who refuse to come to repentance, lest their blood be required at our hand.

Let us wake up to the entire call of Christ's great commission, both to the call to go and also to the call to teach obedience to Jesus. There waits for us a world to be won, a kingdom to be built, and a God to be glorified.

7. We must give ourselves to prayer

This little paper, at its core, is about revival. If each of these issues would be addressed effectively, it would constitute the very essence of revival. And it is certainly my desire that such a revival will take place.

Yet throughout history, true revival has always been connected in a fundamental way to consistent, passionate prayer by God's people. Prayer, and especially prayer with fasting, is the key that God has given us to touch His heart and change the world. Abundant power in spiritual work is always the result of much time spent alone with God. Corporate revival goes hand in hand with groups of believers meeting often for prayer. When believing prayer from pure hearts ascends constantly toward God, righteousness grows and flourishes. But when prayer becomes stagnant and less frequent, sin begins to abound and revival fires abate.

Jesus promised us that if we pray in secret, our Father Who sees in secret will reward us openly. Let us pull out this key that God has given us and bravely go to war against Satan, allowing God to make us channels of His love and power.

Oh that God in these last days would raise up an army of true soldiers who will manifest His kingdom in all its beauty. Soldiers whose eyes are on their Savior and whose hearts burn with a passionate love for Him. Soldiers who have learned that the truest sign of greatness is an ability to humble oneself in every circumstance. Soldiers who hate all forms of sin, including the devilish practice of witchcraft. Soldiers who have been set free from the love of money and are obsessed instead with laying up treasures in Heaven. Soldiers who are ready and willing to take the gospel of Jesus to every creature within their power. Soldiers whose source of strength comes from spending much time on their knees before God.

My belief is that God will do this with anyone who is willing. My prayer is that He will do it with us Anabaptist people.