

A GOD-GIVEN HERITAGE

Chapter One in its entirety

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We all have a heritage if we're alive and I assume if you're reading this, you are alive. In some Anabaptist circles where I live, having an Anabaptist heritage means that within the first five minutes of meeting someone, you will have taken time to find out who their parents are and where they grew up and whether you share any common relatives. If you are a "dyed in the wool" Anabaptist, you might even have a book which traces your family's roots back to early ancestors in Europe. For many, Anabaptist heritage gives us a place of social connection.

Anabaptists are descended from men and women who were martyred for their faith. Thousands of their forefathers endured heinous torture and imprisonment, singing joyfully as they were led to their executions. They spoke fervently of their Savior's love while being burned to death at the stake. This is the faith-filled heritage God has intentionally written into your life. He knew you would be born into your family, your country, and your generation. He chose your DNA, or genetic fiber, for His purposes.

Paul writes in Acts:

From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live. (Acts 17:26)

The Scriptures tell us ". . . *the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable*" for the Jews (Romans 11:26-29, NASB). In the same way, the gifts and the calling of the Anabaptists are meant to be received as part of God's purposeful blessings for us and for the whole body of Christ. In the rest of this book we will explore some of these gifts and the call which has been placed into our lives through heritage. We will also look at our past to discern where these blessings may have been laid aside in order to restore them for this present generation.

Looking Back Into History

It may be difficult for some to understand the connection between historical events and our present day lives. After all, what difference does it really make that ten or fifteen generations ago, those in our heritage were severely persecuted? How does it affect me? How does it affect my church fellowship or my denomination? The prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah answer these questions, at least in part. Jeremiah promises that our souls will come to the place of rest if we walk in the old (ancient) paths where the good way of faith exists. And Isaiah, in calling his people to God, urges them to look back at their own spiritual ancestors:

*Thus says the Lord: 'Stand in the ways and see, And ask for the old paths, **where the good way is**, And walk in it; Then you will find rest for your souls. . . .'*
(Jeremiah 6:16, NKJV)

*Listen to me, you who pursue righteousness and who seek the Lord: **Look to the rock from which you were cut** and to the quarry from which you were hewn; look to Abraham, your father, and to Sarah, who gave you birth. (Isaiah 51:1-2)*

We know Abraham and Sarah did not actually give birth to the people Isaiah was addressing. He was speaking figuratively about their spiritual ancestral mother and father, instructing the Israelites to reflect all the way back to the place where their faith as a nation had begun. Similarly, it would be good for us as modern day Anabaptists who are pursuing righteousness and seeking the Lord, to look back to the “quarry from which we were hewn” in order to understand and examine whether we are following the Lord with the same passionate spirit of our early ancestors.

As we look at our Anabaptist lives today and compare them with those who went before us, do we see any discrepancies? Our early forefathers shared their faith with a strong and holy zeal: are we filled with their same boldness? Are we compelled in our spirits as they were, to obey the great commission of Jesus to “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature,” or does the idea of witnessing seem frightening or uninteresting (Mark 16:15)? Many of our ancestors were filled with joy even though all their worldly goods were confiscated: are we filled with joy and free from attachment to “things,” or do we worry about having enough money, or preparing for a comfortable retirement? They were marked with great peace and a deep love for their Savior, even in light of martyrdom: do we have peace and a deep, heartfelt love for God, regardless of our circumstances? The Schleithem Confession of Faith, an early statement of Anabaptist beliefs, called the religious works of the State Churches an . . . abomination . . . to Christ Jesus, who has freed us from the servitude of the flesh Are we experiencing our ancestors’ same freedom from religious works in our own worship services?

If you are like most Anabaptists alive today (including myself), an honest response to these questions will reveal that some of the “fruit” which has grown on the tree of Anabaptism looks very different from the fruit of the young sapling which God planted in the 1500s. Things have changed, both positively and negatively, since the time of our ancestors.

Anabaptists have a good heritage. In the following chapters, we will unearth it from its resting place, brush it off, and examine it carefully. We’ll consider its blessings and we’ll look at its weaknesses. We’ll prayerfully seek God all along the way and apply the wisdom of the Scriptures, so that we may find the “good way” in the ancient paths.

Thank You, heavenly Father, that You have given me a rich heritage. Thank You that I am from Anabaptist descent. Help me to understand and to receive as my own, all the truths You revealed to my ancestors. As the Bible says, when I read the pages of this book, divide between my soul and my spirit by the Word of God: discern the thoughts and attitudes of my heart. Enlighten the eyes of my understanding, that I may know the hope of my calling and the riches of the glory of Your inheritance in the saints. Guide me into all truth.

Thank You that You have gifts and a spiritual call for me through my heritage. Show me those gifts, reveal to me the call. Help me to receive everything You have for me. And hide me under the shadow of your wings. Thank You, In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture passages referenced in this prayer:

1 Hebrews 4:12; 2 Ephesians 1:18; 3 John 16:13; 4 Psalm 17:8.