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Editor: anabaptistmennonites.org.

"Give me children, or else I die" Genesis 30:1. This chiding declaration from Rachel was directed to her husband who responded in anger, "Am I in God's stead?" Genesis 30:2. Actually Jacob loved Rachel more than Leah; therefore, God opened Leah's womb, but Rachel was barren, Genesis 29:31. Considering a woman's desire for motherhood, we can understand Rachel's outburst. This desire is in focus in Proverbs 30:15-16, where the writer refers to four things which say not that "it is enough." One of these is the barren womb.

Rachel may have felt cheated that she had no children while her sister had four sons. She envied Leah. She reacted, and the situation opened into rivalry between the two. While Rachel may have been carnal in her desire, her request likely included a spiritual side. God's known will was that His people would be fruitful and multiply upon the earth (Genesis 9:7). God also had promised that the seed of the woman would come and bruise the serpent's head (Genesis 3:15). Rachel likely took these things seriously and considered motherhood a godly trust.

Was it true that Rachel would die if she did not have children? Not necessarily. However, the day came when God remembered Rachel and she bare her firstborn, Joseph, and said, "God hath taken away my reproach." Interestingly, if Rachel had not died an untimely death (Genesis 35:18-19), she would have been with Jacob when he went down to Egypt to be provided for by Joseph. As such, Joseph would have been both Rachel's son and her savior. Joseph, the God-given answer to Rachel's cry, saved her family from the famine in Canaan.

What are some present-day applications to Rachel's memorable statement? "Give me children" applies to family life. We do not selfishly avoid having children. In contrast, we have a real desire for children, and we willingly sacrifice for the sake of having a family. We may be ridiculed about the size of our families, but we should not be intimidated, for "happy is the man that hath his quiver full of [children]" (Psalm 127:5). We appreciate the help and care that we receive from doctors or professional people when necessary, but some of these people may also have negative ideas about

godly family concepts. Decisions about family size should be in harmony with God's Word and will. If we are faithful in bringing up our children to honor their parents and fear the Lord, they will be "like olive plants round about thy table" (Psalm 128:3). And they will be there to help sustain us in the closing years of our lives. What a blessing!

"Give me children, or else I die" also applies to church experience. One of the blessings in church life is to see the many children, "for of such is the kingdom of heaven." Another blessing is to see maturing young men and women with spiritual vision taking their place beside their elders (Acts 2:17). Behind the scenes, Christian day schools and Bible schools contribute to the growth of the spiritual body. Another good thing is to see each generation in their time keeping the trust and passing it on to the succeeding generation (Psalm 78:1-6).

Still another blessing is the presence of those who did not grow up in a Christian setting but have found a place among God's people. Faithful churches stand in contrast to nominal churches that are failing in their mission and purpose. Many churches in society are losing their young people. From these, the Lord withdraws His blessing, even bringing "death" to their children (Revelation 2:23). The future of the church looks very bleak when the cribs in the nursery are empty.

"Give me children" also applies to society and to the political scenes of our day. One of the present-day evidences that all is not well is the fact that fewer children are seen boarding school buses. Also, the consolidation of schools and churches indicates that enrollment numbers are down. If the value of family life and raising children is not appreciated, there is sure to be a compromising effect upon the fabric of society. May we ever be thankful for a political setting that grants us freedom of life and conscience where we may live with our children.

Rachel's cry also echoed in Bethlehem after Jesus was born. "Rachel weeping for her children, . . . because they are not" (Matthew 2:18). But the Child, whom Herod sought to slay, was "born ... a Saviour" and is indeed "Christ the Lord" (Luke 2:11). While the world is caught up with their holiday festivities, may we continually pay homage to the One who was born King. Let us unashamedly declare Him and embrace His view of our little ones.

—JAS

The Congregation Benefiting From Our Broader Church

With benefits comes responsibility, and only as we fulfill our responsibilities do we experience the full impact of the blessings. The people in Nehemiah's day were no exception. Many of the people worked long and hard amidst numerous obstacles. Those who combined their efforts and worked in teamwork realized the benefits.

But not all the people took advantage of those benefits or even considered it a privilege. While some were strong in building and strengthening, others were active in tearing down and discouraging the workers. The blessing, however, is always for those who desire the best and are willing to build and sacrifice for God.

Understanding the Benefits

Our set of values in life determines what we consider to be a benefit. The same is true with the congregation benefiting from the church-wide body. Do I understand the privilege I have to be connected to our broader church? We live in a society with an individualistic mentality that does not readily take responsibility or appreciate accountability. This can influence and subtly affect our thought processes. We may be tempted to think that less or little accountability to the broader church would be desirable. This may be expressed in various ways.

Sometimes we hear the sentiment that, since our group is large and is spread over a vast geographical area, it is too cumbersome to move together as one group. We do well to consider that, compared to many groups in the past, we are actually a relatively small group. We should ponder these questions: If we were to operate in smaller groups, what would we gain? Would the church be more stable and would God receive more glory? Is the idea of downsizing into smaller groups based on my desire to have Jesus increase and me decrease? Or could it be based on the idea that my personal freedom may increase and my accountability to the group decrease? We should take warning: some of the Mennonites of the past despised the accountability of the broader group, and this attitude helped to speed their apostasy. This mentality works against the Bible principles of submission and brotherhood. Let us spend our time and energies finding ways to build the church and to enhance the unity of the body. We should appreciate and willingly subject ourselves to the balancing effects of the accountability of

the congregation to the churchwide body. Congregational connections to the broader church definitely help in maintaining our conservative church life.

We recognize the benefit for an individual to live in a family setting. Hardly anyone, even in society, would disagree with this. Yet many try to avoid their God-given responsibility and accountability. The benefits for the congregation from the broader church are similar to that of the individual in the family, only on a different level. Some try to distance the individual or family from the church or school. Still others will distance the congregation from the broader church. We should welcome the balancing effect of the family for the individual, of the congregation for the family, of the district for the congregation, and finally of the churchwide for the individual, family, congregation, and district.

When a young couple begins their own home, they are better prepared for their responsibilities if they appreciate the frame of reference given them by their parents. The value they place on this frame of reference helps to provide guidance and stability in their new home. So it is in the church. No man is safe in himself; we need the safety of the multitude of counselors. Each congregation can benefit from the experience and resources in the broader group. This is especially true of new or remote congregations.

Experiencing the Benefits

To experience the benefits, each member must make his contribution in building an appreciation for the church and its efforts. We acknowledge the many benefits we have received in the past and are thankful for them.

We experience the benefits when we stay informed.

We stay informed when the Sunday morning announcements include any pertinent district or churchwide news such as revival meetings, ordinations, or Bible school terms. We can each stay informed personally by reading the Testimony. Its monthly arrival keeps us updated with mission news and church programs and functions. Holding informative meetings in outlying districts and congregations helps brethren and sisters in those areas to feel the pulse of the church's ministries, domestic and foreign. If a brother is visiting our congregation from a distant locality, we can ask him to share a report on the work of the church in his community.

We experience the benefits when we interact with other congregations, local and distant.

As we attend evening services, revival meetings, and all-day meetings in other congregations, we receive mutual encouragement from our fel-

lowship. The friendships we establish enhance unity and cohesion. This interaction goes both ways. Not only do we visit other congregations, but we also ask brethren from near and far to share prayer meeting topics and to preach in our congregation.

We experience the benefits by attending the churchwide services.

Given the geographical spread of our churches, members' opportunities to attend will vary. But we attend when possible and willingly sacrifice to do so. When we cannot attend, we can benefit by listening to the recorded messages.

The congregation also benefits indirectly from the churchwide meetings when their ministry attend the semiannual conferring meetings and other ministerial functions, such as the Ministers' Bible Study Fellowship. The congregation should do what they can to make this attendance possible.

We experience the benefits by participating in the church's institutions and functions. This participation certainly includes the activities at Ashland and Numidia. When our youth return from Bible school and when our schoolteachers return from the Christian Schoolteachers' Instruction Course or the Christian Day School Institute, the benefits of the broader church are brought home to the local congregation. This participation might also include accepting a writing assignment or assisting with relief work. For some, this participation will mean a term of service on one of the mission fields, at West Willow Rest Home, or at Liberty Ridge Farm.

We experience the benefits as we adhere to the same values, standards, and practices.

The practices and functions of any district or congregation should not be significantly different from that which is practiced across the church.

We experience the benefits as we present the needs of the church at the throne of grace.

When we gather for prayer meeting, we should bring our burdens for the needs of the broader church: the mission fields, the publishing work, and the church institutions. Those who are aware of particular needs should mention those needs. When this is done, each one can pray more specifically—both at the prayer meeting and at home in his personal prayer closet. We should faithfully pray for the leaders of the church, local and churchwide.

Our children will pick up our attitudes toward these churchwide involvements and blessings. Do we promote them in word and action? The things we value greatly receive more of our attention. But if we have lost appreciation, it is easy to find fault. We should each ponder: how much do

I appreciate and value these blessings and what am I willing to do to maintain them? With benefits comes accountability.

We are a richly blessed group of people. Many in the past would have only dreamed of the benefits that we experience in relating to broader church life. Let us be thankful and take advantage of this unique gift. Let us willingly give our energies to Christ and His body for His Name's honor and glory!

Brother Glenn



Avoiding Deceptive Religious Voices

The delusive voice that beguiled Eve in the Garden of Eden has never been silenced. Throughout history Satan has enlisted many helpers in his tireless anti-God, anti-truth campaign.

The jealousy of Cain has likewise traveled with us since the day God showed respect to Abel's offering. Men like Cain and Balaam want to enjoy blessing and reward with the righteous, but they are loath to part with their love of sin. They mask error with truth to salve their consciences, outwardly professing devotion to God, yet "turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness" (Jude 4). They promise liberty, but "they themselves are the servants of corruption" (2 Peter 2:19). The power of this deception is multiplied when men arise from among us, "to draw away disciples after [themselves]" (Acts 20:38), "and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple" (Romans 16:18).

These voices come to us readily in the form of books and recordings. Their message is appealing and is often presented in a dynamic fashion. While we do not stand in judgment of their motives, we must reckon with the fact that their teaching often undermines sound thinking. Some common errors include a casual view of God; denying the deity of Jesus Christ; the teaching of unconditional eternal security; the pietistic emphasis on inward experience at the expense of practical obedience; the individualistic, rather than interdependent, approach to church life; and the antitraditional undercurrents. How can we avoid these deceptive influences?

The first line of defense against the counterfeit is to be familiar with the true. Knowing the truth will help us to be discerning. We believe that the Bible is the "only infallible rule of faith and practice." As we read or as we

listen, we need to be alert for content that is not sound doctrinally or does not complement sound doctrine. We need to maintain sound, Biblical, practical preaching that is backed by solid administration in our homes.

We avoid deceiving ourselves and others by a commitment to live the truth. God has given us many resources to help us to know and to live the truth. Conservative Mennonite authors have written many valuable books. We send our children to our own Christian day schools and welcome the influence that comes home. Our Sunday schools and Bible schools are an aid in the indoctrination of our youth. But if our homes more nearly reflect the image of sources other than what the church teaches, we indicate that we have perceived those teachings as truth.

We avoid deceptive voices when we choose our resources carefully. Careful selection of Bible study helps is of utmost importance. One question we should consider is, "What is the author's view of the atonement?" Does he say that Christ died to pay the penalty for sin—eternal death—or that He suffered and gave His life to satisfy God's justice? Resources used to study Bible doctrine must be chosen with special care. Do they communicate a full Gospel message? Some resources we have are valued more for their historical and informational value than for the establishment of a doctrinal platform. We must ever regard them as such, being aware that their underlying philosophies can grow on us. Our conservative Mennonite publishing houses are a good place to look when we are selecting Bible study helps.

We avoid deceptive voices when we use our resources carefully. We view all other voices as being subservient to the voice of Scripture. The Bible is the standard of truth to which all other works must be compared. It is the final authority on all matters. The Bible will stand when the works of men have crumbled! Devotionals and sermons should be based on a Bible text, rather than taking an illustration and tacking Bible references to it.

To avoid deceptive voices, we must reject most of the recorded "Christian" material available today. Many of the catalogs that appear in our mailboxes advertise products that emphasize entertainment above sincere worship and Bible study. These items often use humor to captivate audiences. Other unacceptable features may be Bible drama, anti-Semitic sentiments promoted by modern evangelical groups, and the deriding of Biblical separation. The preaching to which we listen must be characterized by sobriety and be doctrinally sound. We should receive our Bible instruction from those whom we know to be living exemplary lives (2 Timothy 3:14).

We avoid deceptive voices when we remain open to Bible truth. We should

never be satisfied that we have explored the depths of God's Word sufficiently. Rather, we desire a deeper understanding of God's Word and will for our lives. "Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled" (Matthew 5:6). When we reach a plateau in Christian experience, the appeals of the deceptive voices become louder. A true disciple of Christ is always desiring to grow in self-denial and cross bearing.

We avoid deceptive voices by preaching a full Gospel. "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works" (2 Timothy 3:16-17). To teach and preach the whole Bible must and will include the foundations of doctrine, the exhortation to holy living, and the absolutes of the future. We might fail to preach the full Gospel because we tend to gravitate to the easier milk of the Word and lack the diligence required to digest the meat of the Word. Or we may tend to avoid truths that convict us of the needs in our own lives. Receiving the fullness of Bible truth will equip us and give us inspiration as we face the joys, sorrows, and temptations of this life.

May God's eternal truth be our guide in this life and lead us safely to the city, where "without are dogs . . . and whosoever loveth and maketh a lie" (Revelation 22:15). There we anticipate being free from the very presence of deceptive voices. May God help each of us to reach that blessed end!

Brother Edward



Publication Board Report

The Publication Board was formed in 1969, shortly after the formation of the EPMC. It operates under the direction of the Mission Board and has been vested with the responsibility to give organized direction to the literature interests of the church. In light of this, the Publication Board has always focused its publishing primarily on the needs of our own church and other conservative Mennonite groups, rather than appealing to the broader religious market. This focus also includes the evangelistic interests of the church.

The Eastern Mennonite Testimony serves as the official periodical of the church. This publication is an invaluable asset to the church through the doctrinal and practical articles it contains. It also provides an exchange of information concerning congregational activities and statistics. About 6,100 of these periodicals are distributed each month. Costs are covered by contributions. The ninth five-year bound volume (July 2009–June 2014) of the Eastern Mennonite Testimony has just arrived at the bookstore.

The Home Horizons, our periodical for families, fills a unique place in the publishing work. One of the goals of this paper is to make use of the latent writing talent among us. Brethren or sisters can contribute stories. Young men can share inspirational articles for the youth section. Brethren and sisters provide human-interest articles for The Scholar's Desk. Approximately 5,600 copies are printed each month. Subscriptions cover the expenses for this paper.

Our evangelistic pamphlet is The Living Waters. About 100,000 copies are printed each month. This publication provides a regular opportunity for brethren to contribute by writing. Short, simple articles are needed for this paper.

The Board continues its involvement in the growing Spanish literature needs of the church. The bimonthly *Sendas Derechas* fills the role of the Home Horizons for a Spanish-speaking audience. A number of books are in various stages of translation and review. These include *Lovers of the Truth*, *The Great Cloud of Witnesses*, and a tract on the Christian woman's veiling. *Samantha's Gift* will soon go to the printer. Since Spanish literature is mission related, these publications are distributed without charge or at greatly reduced prices. In the past there has been some difficulty in meeting the costs of the Spanish literature. You will notice that the 2015 offering schedule includes the Spanish literature fund. Your contributions are greatly appreciated.

The work of writing and revising Bible study guides is another project under the direction of the Publication Board. These study guides are developed especially for our youth and are used at the Ashland and Numidia Bible schools. They are also frequently used in congregational settings. *The Doctrine of Eternal Destiny* and *Train Up a Child* have been recently released. *Doctrine of Christ* is moving toward printing.

This past summer a forty-foot by eighty-foot warehouse addition was added to the EMP building, along with an expanded driveway and a loading dock. These additions help to facilitate truck shipments. Another reason for additional warehouse space is to enable EMP to meet its commit-

ments in handling school curriculum.

Another interesting part of this building project is a ten-foot by twelve-foot fireproof concrete block vault located in the old warehouse. The history committee intends to use this vault for their historical archives. Direction may be given in the future, enabling the brotherhood to make use of these archives; however, parameters have not been set at this time.

The publication work is large and challenging. Were it not for the blessing of the Lord, we would have little of worth to report. We are also deeply indebted to the many individuals who are making significant sacrifices for the publication work. Much of the actual writing, editing, and review is done by individuals outside of the Publication Board. Though largely unnoticed, these labors will be amply rewarded by God. Be sure to include the work at EMP on your prayer list. We are depending on your prayer support. If you are asked to contribute in writing or editorial work, do not be hasty to decline. We proceed with the conviction that the publication interests of the church are best served by the resources within the brotherhood.

May God bless your interest in and your contribution to the work, and may He receive all the glory.

Brother Chad for the Publication Board



Anticipating Our Lord's Return (Part 6)

WATCH

Imagine the job of a night watchman in a large factory building. The other workers have all gone home and the machines are quiet, but someone needs to guard against fire and theft. I imagine his job to be usually boring and uneventful. The watchman must stay awake when most other men are sleeping, and he must watch for something that almost never happens. How can we keep from losing interest while we watch for Jesus' return?

Watch yourself. Yes, when we are watching for Jesus to return, we need to watch ourselves. Jesus will indeed return, but we need to see to it that we are ready for His return. Whenever Jesus talked to His disciples about end-time events, He first of all warned them, "Take heed that ye be not deceived" and "Take heed to yourselves" (Luke 21:8, 34). We must have our

eyes open and our minds alert. We must not follow counterfeit Christianity that emphasizes emotionalism and ignores discipleship. We must not think that appearing right is equivalent to being right. We must not allow our focus to become consumed with earthly things—the cares of earning a living, the pleasures of affluence, or the general busyness of life. In a very real sense, each of us is our own worst enemy. No one else can make us give up or lose interest. It is something we do to ourselves. Watch out!

Watch and pray. Prayer is not so much asking for things from God as it is the soul's longing after Him. We want His kingdom to come. We want His will to be done. So we pray. We pray for faithfulness. We pray for vigilance and endurance. We pray for escape—not from the difficulties and the sufferings of life, but from deception and apostasy. We want to "be accounted worthy ... to stand before the Son of man" (Luke 21:36). Watching is not something we do alone. It is done in cooperation with God. And so we pray to Him as we watch for Him. As Charlotte Elliot expressed, "Watch, as if on that alone/Hung the issue of the day;/Pray that help may be sent down;/Watch and pray."

Watch in anticipation. Jesus told about some men who were waiting and watching for their lord. It did not matter to them what hour of the day or night their lord might come, because they were ready. Their lights were on and they were watching. Let us be like those servants. We anticipate Jesus' return any time and all the time. Watchfulness becomes a way of life for the Christian and is not boring. Like the builders on the wall of Jerusalem in Nehemiah's day, we also need to be able to do more than one thing at a time. We are busy for the Master, but our glance is toward the skies. "Blessed are those servants, whom the lord when he cometh shall find watching: verily I say unto you, that he shall gird himself, and make them to sit down to meat, and will come forth and serve them" (Luke 12:37). "Even so, come, Lord Jesus."

—*Brother Robert*

