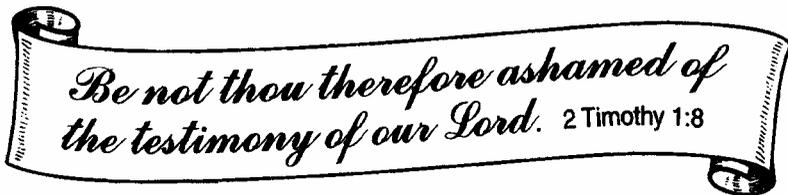


THE EASTERN MENNONITE TESTIMONY

SELECTED ARTICLES FROM THE MONTHLY PUBLICATION
OF
THE EASTERN PENNSYLVANIA MENNONITE CHURCH
JUNE 2011



The Eastern Mennonite Testimony is the official organ of the Eastern Pennsylvania Mennonite Church. That publication seeks to promote the historic Anabaptist-Mennonite faith and practice. The Testimony is published monthly by the Publication Board of the Eastern Pennsylvania Mennonite Church. Subscriptions are free. Forward subscriptions and contributions to Eastern Mennonite Publications, 40 Wood Corner Road, Ephrata, PA. 17522 U.S.A. Telephone (717) 733-7988 Fax: (717)733 2757.

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Editor: anabaptistmennonites.org.

"His Name Is John"

Zacharias wrote this emphatic declaration to clear the confusion concerning the name of his infant son. The priestly couple's acquaintances thought surely the baby boy would be named Zacharias after the name of his father. But the name of this child had been announced by the angel Gabriel before his birth since he was called to a special work. Both parents stated that the child's God-given name was John (Luke 1:57-65).

God does not give such specific direction in the naming of the child to most parents. He graciously allows earthly parents the privilege to choose a name that will identify their child for the rest of his life. But God does have an interest in the choice of names. To His people Israel, God said, "I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine" (Isaiah 43:1). Along with the solemn trust of training our children for God, we also have the responsibility to give them names that are fitting to godly people.

Certainly, parents today have a rather broad range of choices for naming their children. Along with Bible names there are long lists of names commonly used in the past. However, godly parents do well to remember some considerations when contemplating suitable names.

Names carry connotations. Parents sometimes name their child after someone whom they consider an ideal role model. If the name given is worthy of imitation, it can have a good impact on the life of the child. This is especially true when the "ideal" is a Bible character of sterling faithfulness to God.

As in the case of Zacharias and Elizabeth, parents are sometimes urged to select a name that has family connections. Using the name of the parent or of a relative of the past can be a worthy way of linking the present generation with the faithful of past generations.

The names that parents choose reveal their spiritual values. Godly parents will use discernment in the type of names they choose. That intriguing name may have been made popular by a celebrity of worldly society. On the other hand, a name that associates the child with a hero of faith also reveals the direction parents are aiming their "arrows" (Psalm 127:4). Parents do well to choose a name after spending time in prayer and serious reflection.

The sound of a name is often an important factor in the parent's choice. However, the name that sounded so nice for the baby might not be so fit-

ting for the adult. That unique name with a cute sound may prove quite difficult to spell or embarrassing to pronounce. The child's name can become a disadvantage to him if it makes him feel different from his peers. Some names confuse gender distinction.

Godly parents will search their motives when naming their child. Could pride or a feeling of independence cause parents to choose a name that stands out from names commonly used among God's people? A brother has well-stated that "we do not believe that each generation needs to develop their own set of names if they possess the spirit of humility and contentment."

The godly names of Christians stand out as a testimony in the world. Even though Bible names such as 'Adam' or 'Joshua' have become popular in worldly society, there are various other names, common in worldly society that we would consider unsuitable to use because of their connotation of worldliness. It should not be difficult to identify the people of God by their select use of names.

The first names in the family lists of our church directories should show a marked difference from lists of names found in worldly publications.

A godly name is only of value when accompanied by godly character a name is what a person makes it. A person may have been given a name that he considers inferior, but he can make his name "good" by a righteous life. "A good name is rather to be chosen than great riches" (Proverbs 22:1). Like the parents of John the Baptist, our goal should be that each child would grow up "to give knowledge of salvation unto his people" (Luke 1:77).

—ELG.



Building Convictions for Social Security Exemption (Part 1)

The Social Security program of this country (USA) is a government-operated insurance program to provide for older people. The history of this program begins with the passage of the Social Security Act, which was signed into law August 14, 1935. President Franklin D. Roosevelt included this program in his New Deal, which he hoped would lift the United States out of the Great Depression and put the country on the road to financial prosperity. This represented one step in a forward march toward socialism.

This new law mandated that employers and employees would equally contribute to a retirement program that would allow the working populace to retire with payments at sixty-five years of age. Removing the elderly from the workplace was expected to reduce the prevailing high unemployment rate. Social Security is a pay-as-you-go program without an investment fund that can yield returns to cover future obligations. Medicare and Medicaid, which make payments for old age, disability, sickness, and death, are extensions of Social Security and give evidence of an advancing socialistic government.

The position of the Mennonite Church regarding this new law was weak at best. In 1936 Daniel Kauffman wrote about it in the Gospel Herald. After discussing the involvements, he concluded with this statement: "For the present we see little to do but to pay the required taxes, as provided for in the law as it exists now, and leave the problems of tomorrow for disposition when tomorrow comes." However, as time passed, convictions developed against involvement in this program. The movement for Social Security exemption began in the 1960s with the Old Order Amish. They believed that since they met the needs of their elderly and did not accept government aid in any form, they should be exempt from paying Social Security taxes. The government granted them exemption. Later, conservative Mennonite church groups, upon request, were also granted the same exemption.

The criteria for church group exemption is as follows: "The church teaches against accepting private and public insurances that make payments in the event of death, disability, old age, retirement, health or for medical expenses, including the benefit of the Social Security system. The church needs a written statement concerning the care of her members."

Requirements for an individual to become Social Security exempt are based primarily on his membership with a qualified church and on his conviction to uphold the teachings of the church. The Social Security Exemption Form 4029 must be completed, signed by the applicant, and also signed by an authorized church representative, which is usually the bishop.

Let us consider some Bible principles that admonish us to remain free from the Social Security system.

Since the Social Security system is administrated by the United States government and the money comes out of the government treasury, it is an insurance fund supported by taxation. Earthly insurances militate against our trust in God. Fear of unknown financial uncertainties can cause young

and old alike to look toward tangible financial securities. God calls us to cast all our care upon Him, "for he careth for [us]." Insurances also promote independence and weaken our sense of dependence on the brotherhood in times of need.

The two-kingdom principle applies to the Social Security question. Jesus said, "My kingdom is not of this world" (John 18:36). If the state gave us no exemption from Social Security, it would be mandatory taxation, and we would render unto Caesar that which belongs to Caesar. But to receive Social Security benefits is our choice. Will we choose the state or the church? Jesus, while hanging on the cross, directed John to provide for His mother. As citizens of a heavenly country and strangers and pilgrims in this life, we must not become entangled in these government insurance programs. "Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord" (2 Corinthians 6:17).

The Social Security system encourages early retirement with payments. The Bible teaches us that, "if any [will] not work, neither should he eat" (2 Thessalonians 3:10). This principle encourages able-bodied persons to provide for themselves as long as is reasonably possible. Early retirement also violates the principle of toiling "till thou return unto the ground," that is, until death (Genesis 3:19). God intended for man to be productive as long as He gives health and strength to do so.

The Social Security system offers benefit payments to survivors. We must view this as a form of life insurance since the beneficiaries receive payment only after the death of a family member. Jesus said, "Take no thought for your life.... Is not the life more than meat?" (Matthew 6:25). The Rules and Discipline of our church, Article VII, #5 states, "Taking out life insurances [is] forbidden." Also, in #6, church members are encouraged not to receive Social Security and health care benefits.
Brother Harold.



THE CHALLENGE OF A GROWING GROUP

"Behold now, the place where we dwell with thee is too strait for us," the sons of the prophets said to Elisha. "Let us go, we pray thee, unto Jordan, and take thence every man a beam, and let us make us a place there, where

we may dwell." And Elisha replied, "Go ye." Then one said, "Be content, I pray thee, and go with thy servants." "I will go," answered Elisha, and he went with them. (See 2 Kings 6:1-4.)

This account illustrates a "good problem" to have in church life. Through the Lord adding to the church more souls locally, through fruitful outreach work in other geographic areas, or through consistent godly living over a period of years, a group grows. Then the meetinghouse becomes too small or the faithful servants are spread too thin. This account also illustrates a most desirable situation where the younger see the needs at hand, have worthwhile suggestions for improvements, and respectfully encourage the older to move forward. Here also we see the older and the younger desiring each other's help and willingly working together to reach noble goals.

Whether a church group is growing in size, in age, in geographic spread or in all of these, the younger need to be nurtured to embrace the faith. Leaders need to be planning for their replacements. The cords need to be lengthened and the stakes need to be strengthened. And responsibilities and opportunities need to be given to the younger in age and in faith so that they can learn by practice while the older are still able to encourage, warn, and guide.

The farther we are "separated upon the wall" (Nehemiah 4:19), the more we will need to listen for the sound of the trumpet calling us to battle, and the more we will need to sacrifice our own interests and "see our brothers' good our own." The truth that "none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself" (Romans 14:7) is magnified, not decreased, as the group grows in numbers.

Extra effort will be required to communicate, lest our motives for building "the altar Ed" be misinterpreted (Joshua 22). The more we have "heard say" about our brethren, the more we will need to make sure that we ask and give our brethren opportunity to speak for themselves lest we judge them unjustly. However, much more than structure is needed to keep a group "striving together for the faith of the gospel."

Great care must be taken to build on the true foundation. Divine guidance and blessing need to be continually sought. Jesus Christ, the Head of the church, must be kept preeminent individually and collectively. The work needs to be spread out to prevent too much focus on any one person. Ministers need to preach the Word, and listeners need to be noble Bereans. False doctrine needs to be challenged promptly.

A clear vision of the conflict is essential. Our adversary seeks to lead us into subtle pride, critical attitudes, rivalry, and distrust on the one hand or

into worldly affections, casualness, and spiritual indifference on the other hand. In the first he seeks to divide and conquer from within; in the second he seeks to snare us from without. We must remember that our battle is against sin, not people, so each must "keep [his] heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life" (Proverbs 4:23). Disciplinary measures need to be appropriate and timely.

Respect for delegated authority in the church is important. In any role, leaders have authority under authority (Matthew 8:9). No one may rightly assume authority without it being delegated to him. Those who are given responsibility need to be allowed to exercise it. No one is exempt from the Scriptural call to obey and to submit himself to others in the fear of God (Ephesians 5:21). Much will be gained if we entreat elders rather than rebuking them, and if we trust our brethren's sincere efforts to serve faithfully rather than taking it upon ourselves to be "many masters" and judge what others at a distance should have done.

We need a growing appreciation for the contribution of each member God intends that the zeal of the younger and the wisdom of the older complement each other. No one is complete in himself. The simple faith of a newborn saint can inspire the steadfastness of one who has served Christ for fifty years, and vice versa. As each member exercises the gifts God has given him to God's glory, he is truly a church builder.

Openness to the counsel of our own brethren is necessary. The husband who avoids consulting his wife but freely consults with others about how to manage the children is inviting trouble. This is true even if others give some very wise help. The same principle applies in the church. Members or leaders who will listen carefully to those in other church groups but will not give their brethren a listening ear (from the heart) are likely to think themselves into another church fellowship.

A willingness to learn from church history is valuable. Individual "wisdom" that rejects church counsel has repeatedly proven hazardous. New groupings in themselves do not solve old problems. Respect for the godly example and influence of our forebears (without exploiting their weaknesses and failures) builds character. Faith will be lasting only if it is personally embraced and lived. Rejecting the rules of a spiritual body opens doors seldom considered beforehand.

A clear vision of our mission is essential. We are in this world to wholeheartedly serve the Lord, not ourselves. In this large work of building God's kingdom, we should seek to actively employ the energies of every member. Although faithful brethren will unhesitatingly accept

requests for service, the gifts of all need to be exercised for the health of the body. In turn, spiritual health will promote joy in the Lord.

Each soul, in Christ or outside of Christ, is worth more than the whole world. May our hearts humbly concur with Joab's: "Now the LORD thy God add unto the people, how many soever they be, an hundredfold" (2 Samuel 24:3). And may all the glory be His. *Brother Fred.*



Cultural Norms That Press God's People (Part 6)

Affluent Retirement

Mr. Swenson teaches high school in Ontario—well, at least he had. He quit halfway through this school term in December. He was getting tired of it at the end of last term already, but decided to go another year because of a higher pension. So he entered the classroom somewhat unwillingly this past September (his thirty-fifth year). It did not last. By December he decided that his motivation was gone—so he quit, higher pension or not. What would likely shock Mr. Swenson's grandfather is the fact that, although he is only fifty-six, Mr. Swenson will be paid \$80,000 a year for the rest of his life.

According to the World Book Encyclopedia, "The development of retirement as a distinct stage of life took place primarily in the 1900s. Before then people usually worked until they were physically unable to work or until they died. For many years people viewed retirement as a period for a person to withdraw from the workplace in preparation for death. Today, however, people increasingly view retirement as a time to pursue interests and activities."

As little work as possible with as high a wage as possible seems to be the attitude of many in our day. By Thursday or Friday, employees begin slowing down in anticipation of the weekend and drag through Monday from the effects of the weekend. The more paid holidays that they can mark on the calendar the better and if all goes well, they can walk away from it all by the age of sixty—hopefully earlier.

The church continues to need faithful elderly examples. Vacationing in Florida warmth for the winter months or traveling far and wide in

luxurious campers contributes little to meeting the needs of the church.

Grandparents, we need you to visit us. We enjoy coming to your house to visit you. Your presence at church stabilizes our congregation. The voice of your experience helps us connect with the practices of the past. We appreciate when you use your financial freedom to serve on the mission field, at Bible schools, or in other areas you are able. Your hoary head convinces us to take your advice in our homes (Titus 2). Even as you face the discouragement of lessening physical ability, we are encouraged with the renewing of your inner man. Your own faithfulness and your fervent prayers for ours give us the conviction that we can endure to the end too. So please do not retire. The church needs you. We understand if you cannot keep up the active pace that you had, but keep on bearing fruit for God.

"Those that be planted in the house of the LORD shall flourish in the courts of our God. They shall still bring forth fruit in old age" (Psalm 92:13, 14).

Brother Stephen (end of series).



PRAYER POINT

*"The effectual fervent prayer
of a righteous man availeth much"*

*Pray that God would grant wisdom to godly fathers
That they will command their children
And their household after them.
Genesis 18:19*

*Thank God for sending His Holy Spirit,
Our Comforter, who dwells in us as His children.*

*Pray for those who have received the Lord as their Saviour,
That they may grow and be a good witness to the world.*

