

# THE EASTERN MENNONITE TESTIMONY

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OF  
THE EASTERN PENNSYLVANIA MENNONITE CHURCH  
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True Christian piety is a desirable virtue. A pious person will demonstrate fidelity and devotion to Christian duty. His life will be characterized by humility, simplicity, sobriety, and separation from the world. He will adhere to sound doctrine and be loyal to the church.

But piety is not to be confused with Pietism. Pietism as a movement originated in Germany in the latter part of the seventeenth century. "Pietism emphasized a 'heartfelt' religion accompanied by a self-analysis based on a personal emotionally experienced conversion resulting in the application of this experience in daily life."<sup>1</sup>

Pietism emphasizes God's "inner word" to the individual. This emphasis minimizes the authority and the role of the church brotherhood in the life of the individual believer.

Since its beginning, Pietism has influenced the Mennonite Church. Mennonite historians observe and evaluate this influence. In all countries except the Netherlands, "no other single religious movement has had such an impact on the Mennonites."<sup>2</sup> Robert Friedmann concluded that Pietism "blunted the essential thrust of Anabaptism as discipleship in conflict with the world."<sup>3</sup> As a result, Pietistic Mennonitism "was much more ready to accommodate itself to the prevailing culture and abandon such characteristic Anabaptist teachings as nonresistance and nonconformity."<sup>4</sup>

While we may study and evaluate the effects of Pietism upon Mennonites in the past, the more urgent matter is this: Do the errors of Pietism influence us? In what subtle ways might pietistic thought affect our thinking about Christianity and church life? To be a Scriptural church, we must continue to reject Pietism and its faulty emphases.

To focus on one's emotional experience in worship is pietistic. God is the object of worship. We come before Him in adoration and reverence; we come bringing our sacrifices of thanksgiving and praise. We come to hear God's Word, to learn of Him, to better understand His will and way. As we worship in spirit and in truth, our souls are fed, our spirits are renewed, and our emotions are uplifted. Worship will move our emotions, but it must motivate our spirits. Our feelings are not the measure of whether or not we have had a meaningful worship experience. Expressions that overemphasize emotions in worship are pietistic whispers.

An individualistic "God and I" mentality about one's Christian experience reflects pietistic thought. While repentance, salvation, and victorious Christian living are intensely personal matters, none of us are in Christ without our brethren and sisters. The church is the body of Christ. We cannot divorce the body from the Head. "Our relationship with Christ is often clearly demonstrated by how we get along with other members of the body."<sup>5</sup> As individual believers, we each need the collective body of Christ to nurture spiritual life, to discern a safe course in life by making practical applications to Scriptural principles, and to safeguard our souls while living in a corrupted society. But subtle references that minimize the role of the brotherhood or that tend to distance the individual from the collective body of Christ are pietistic whispers.

Pietistic whispers also come to us through appealing phrases such as "Relationship not Religion" (seen on a church sign). These assertions subtly suggest that doctrine is not all that important. Those who pursue this vein of thinking will have little interest in doctrinal teaching or confessions of faith. They will tend to think that church-issued statements and church standards are bothersome and inhibit spiritual vitality. But they fail to understand that sound indoctrination and statements of faith and practice help to provide a stable church structure wherein spiritual life can flourish.

We cannot silence these pietistic whispers. They will continue to be a pressure that bears upon us. And if we will not learn from the errors of history, we will repeat them. We must continue to teach and to preach Scriptural truth about conversion, about worship, about living the Christian life, and about the role of the church in the life of the individual believer. "Speak thou the things which become sound doctrine" (Titus 2:1).

—JSM

<sup>1</sup> *The Mennonite Encyclopedia, 1955-90, article "Pietism."*

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> *Publication Board of the Eastern Pennsylvania Mennonite Church and Related Areas, Instructions for Christian Living and Church Membership, (Ephrata, Pa.: Eastern Mennonite Publications, 1984), page 55.*



## "Gird Up Now Thy Loins"

For an individual living in the Bible times, the command to gird up the loins indicated that something laborious or urgent was about to take place. The clothing worn during this time period was basically a long tunic. This tunic was held to the waist by a girdle of leather or coarse cloth. To gird up the loins meant to tuck the hem of the tunic into the waistband or girdle. By doing so the individual was able to obtain greater freedom of movement which enabled him to run or perform manual labor. This became known as "girding up the loins." Therefore, "Gird up thy loins" meant about the same as the command "Time to get to work."

At various times the Scriptures use this phrase when men faced special responsibilities. Elijah girded up his loins, and, with God's hand upon him, he outran Ahab and his chariot. Gehazi was to go and lay Elisha's staff upon the face of the dead child. One of the young men of the prophets was to take a box of oil and anoint Jehu to be king over Israel. These men needed to gird up their loins literally in order to do Elisha's bidding.

This phrase also became a metaphor for preparedness similar to the way we tell people today to "Roll up your sleeves" or "Put on your apron." Two times in the Book of Job, God commanded Job to "Gird up now thy loins like a man" because He had some hard questions to ask Job. This was more than just a simple command to prepare for manual labor. God was calling Job to focus his attention on what He was about to say. The questions that God would put to Job demanded his full attention and, as Job soon realized, went far beyond his ability to comprehend.

In the Book of Jeremiah, God commanded the prophet Jeremiah to gird up his loins in preparation to deliver the Word of God to the people. The message that God gave Jeremiah to convey to Jerusalem was not a message that they wanted to hear. In fact, God told Jeremiah that they would fight against him, but they would not prevail, because God would be with him.

Why was the command given to Job and Jeremiah to gird up their loins because God wanted to speak to them? God had some hard assignments for these men. God demanded their full attention as He spoke to them. God is an infinite Being speaking to finite man. When He speaks, God deserves man's fullest attention. An omniscient God speaks to limited man.

In the natural sense, the Christian is called to gird up his loins today in his work. In a society that seeks ways to make easy money, God's people should be willing to dress in work clothes and perform hard manual labor. Nothing is wrong with hard work that leaves us tired and dirty at the end of

the day. The Christian needs to be on guard lest the easy-money mentality from the world rubs off on him and affects the way he views good, honest labor.

In the spiritual sense, God is calling the Christian to gird up the loins of his mind. God still speaks to men today through His Word and the Holy Spirit. Whenever God's Word is read, it demands man's utmost attention and reverence. To read the inspired Word of God with a halfhearted attitude or with disinterest is not girding up the loins of the mind. To handle God's Word without proper attention and reverence will cause one to view this inspired instruction as optional instead of necessary direction for life.

***To gird up the loins of the mind speaks of sobriety.***

An ungirded mind seeks for worldly frivolity and short-lived happiness. A sober mind understands the lateness of the hour and the importance of focusing on eternal issues. A sober mind realizes the help and instruction that can be found by meditating on spiritual truths.

***To gird up the loins of the mind demands discipline.***

For the twenty-first-century American, discipline is a concept that is becoming more and more uncommon. Relatively few people are interested in disciplining their minds to read or to listen to admonition that tells them how they should live. A disciplined mind understands the value of living in victory over self. A disciplined mind will produce frugal living and diligent labor.

***To gird up the loins of the mind calls for clarity.***

A clear mind untarnished by worldly philosophies and focused on what God has to say, pleases God. A mind that has been freed from the guilt of sin and the stain of riotous living is one that God can fill.

God is still calling us today to gird up the loins of our minds. In a world that is growing progressively evil, an unguarded mind is very susceptible to trouble. God needs people today who have their attention fully focused on Him and the hope that is to come. "Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 1:13).

*Brother Linford*



## **The Privilege of the 4029 Exemption (Part 2)**

Indeed it is a privilege. Webster's defines privilege as "an exceptional law made in favor of or against any individual . . . granted to some person, group of persons or class, not enjoyed by others." And a privilege or favor, granted on the basis of changeable popular opinion, is uncertain at best. We should be thankful for our continued exemption. Public opinion is not as favorable toward Biblical convictions as it has been in the past.

What challenges do we face today? This nation grows increasingly socialistic. From the beginnings of the New Deal to the Affordable Care Act, government entitlements have grown to touch almost every area of life. These entitlements provide increasing numbers of Americans with food stamps, Section 8 housing, immunizations, retirement benefits, medical care for the elderly, disability, cell phones, internet, utilities, subsidized school lunches, secondary and post-secondary education, financial aid programs for private secondary school students, tax subsidies such as the earned income credit and the refundable portion of the child tax credit, farm subsidies, subsidies for alternative fuels, and, now for the first time, subsidized medical care for the masses. Those at or below 400 percent of the federal poverty level (for example, \$94,200 for a family of four in 2013) are eligible to receive generous cash credits from the government to help pay for the insurance.

The Affordable Care Act involves two mandates. Beginning in 2015, the employer mandate requires all employers with fifty or more employees to provide medical insurance for their employees or pay a substantial penalty. The individual mandate requires all individuals not covered by an employer's plan to purchase medical insurance or face penalties beginning in 2014. Further, the government mandated specific minimum coverage requirements, some of which would violate our religious convictions. For now, the government has provided certain limited exceptions to the individual mandate. One exception covers individuals who are 4029 exempt. What a privilege!

Another challenge is the growing anti-Christian sentiment in this country. In the military, for example, chaplains are admonished they may not pray "in Jesus' Name," members may not proselytize, and Christianity was added to a list of terrorist organizations. In society many laws sanction immoral living that violates long-standing Biblical principles. These laws are already being tested with the results going against Christianity. For example, a state court recently upheld charges against a baker who was sued for damages for refusing on religious grounds to cater an ungodly wedding.

Conflicts are beginning in other areas such as rental real estate, photographers, midwives, and so forth. Prayer and Bible reading have been banned from schools, religious organizations are being refused rental of government property, "In God We Trust" has been challenged, and many are actively pursuing "cleansing" of all society from any vestige of Christianity. A recent popular television program features ex-Amish and ex-Mennonite actors that inaccurately portray the Amish and Mennonite life in a very negative light to receptive audiences.

Given the changing sentiment of society and the approaching insolvency of the social security system, with the government's entitlement-driven, multi-trillion-dollar budget deficits designed to redistribute income, how long will our privilege continue?

What are the criteria to be exempt? Only members of recognized religious groups may be exempt. To be recognized, a religious group must apply to the IRS and the Social Security Administration and must meet the following requirements: The group must be conscientiously opposed to accepting benefits of any private or public insurance that makes payments in the event of death, disability, old age, or retirement; that makes payments for the cost of medical care; or that provides services for medical care (including social security and Medicare benefits). The group must show that it has provided a reasonable level of living for its dependent members. The group must have existed continuously since December 31, 1950.

When you sign Form 4029, you promise and commit that you are a member of the Eastern Pennsylvania Mennonite Church (a recognized religious group); that you follow the established teachings of that group; and that you are conscientiously opposed to the things listed in the paragraph above. This means that you are conscientiously opposed to receive medical insurance, disability insurance, retirement annuities, life insurance, and pensions.

Take careful note of the words "any private or public insurance." Public insurance is defined as any insurance system established by the Social Security Act. Private insurance is any other insurance.

Also notice the qualification the government used. "Conscientiously opposed" is not just opposed. It is not just because you have a personal preference or because you do not want to pay the tax (many do not want to pay the tax). Rather, it is a matter of religious conviction, which rises to the level of the conscience. In other words, when you sign this, you are stating that to receive any of these benefits would violate your own conscience.

You must notify the IRS within sixty days if you are no longer part of the group or no longer follow the teachings of the church, at which time you are no longer exempt and must begin paying social security taxes.

The IRS has given warning that it is aware of some inconsistencies by exempt individuals. The sincerity and the consistent living of our stated beliefs will be noticed, especially if and when the spotlight might come. In the 1972 case of *Wisconsin v. Yoder* when the Amish were granted the right to stop formal education after the eighth grade, the Supreme Court was impressed how "the Amish have demonstrated the sincerity of their religious belief, the interrelationship of belief with their mode of life, the vital role that belief and daily conduct play in the continuing survival of Old Order Amish communities." The Court tested whether the Amish religious claim was merely a subjective evaluation and rejection of secular values or a matter of conscience, finding that "the record in this case abundantly supports the claim that the traditional way of life of the Amish is not merely a matter of personal preference, but one of deep religious conviction, shared by an organized group, and intimately related to daily living. That ... Amish daily life and religious practice stem from their faith ... in ... their literal interpretation of the Biblical injunction . . . be not conformed to this world." Further stating that their "religion is not simply a matter of theocratic belief" but "pervades and determines virtually their entire way of life, regulating it with the detail of the Talmudic diet through strictly enforced rules of the church community."

Will living consistent lives guarantee our continued privilege? No. But society does notice our lives. How do we respond to the increasing pressures of entitlements? If we would lose our privilege, how would we respond? In the face of changing societal opinions and values, let us live as pilgrims and strangers, citizens of a heavenly country. Let us remain separate from a socialistic society that hates and rejects God and would rob us, not only of the joy of Biblical alms-giving to meet the financial needs of the brotherhood but also of our very faith in God.

The psalmist said, "I have been young, and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken" (Psalm 37:25).

God is able to provide. Is our faith strong enough to trust Him?

*Brother Randall*



## Bishop Statement for Unifying and Strengthening Our Position

The following statement, dated September 24, 1990, was prepared by the Eastern Pennsylvania Mennonite Church bishops. It was approved at a churchwide ministerial meeting on January 9, 1991. It was first printed in the June 1991 issue of the Testimony and was reprinted in the October 1995 issue.

Those of us who experienced the renewal of conservatism in the late twentieth century should readily identify with these issues and be ready to promote and practice these concepts in our time. The Bible, however, makes it clear that there will be an end-time "falling away" that will challenge time-honored practices (2 Thessalonians 2:3-13).

This statement is a call for us to appreciate the church and to keep what has been established over the years in Mennonite church life. It should again inspire in us and in our posterity a determination to "stand fast, and hold the traditions which [we] have been taught" (2 Thessalonians 2:15).

—*Brother Alvin*

1. We believe that Christ and His Body, the church that is loyal to Him and to His Word, are one. We recognize that Christ's call to the believer will result in loyalty and commitment to the church. To emphasize that loyalty to the church is inferior to loyalty to Christ or to emphasize loyalty to Christ in a way that reflects against loyalty to the church results in undermining the New Testament place of the church. While it is understood that Christ is infallible and that the church on earth is ever imperfect and prone to apostasy, loyalty to Christ without a definite call to loyalty and commitment to the church is an imbalanced emphasis. A basic proof that the individual is loyal to Christ is his loyalty and faithfulness to a Scriptural church. John 17:21-23; Acts 2:41; Ephesians 1:22, 23; Colossians 1:18; 2 Thessalonians 2:15, 3:6; Revelation 1:20.
2. We believe that spiritual gifts are given to the church. The body is made up of many members. No one member has all the gifts given by Christ. Therefore, we conclude that a spiritual group's judgment on issues and interpretations of the Scriptures are safer than the individual's. Even though we recognize the individual's contribution

and that the individual may be more right than the group in some instances, the individual still has a responsibility to the body so long as the overall position of the group is in harmony with the Scripture, and should first of all question his own opinion in favor of the group. Matthew 18:17; Acts 2; Romans 12; 1 Corinthians 12; Ephesians 4:8-16; Philippians 2:1-2; 3:16; Hebrews 13:7, 17; Revelation 2:7, 11, 29; 3:6, 13, 22.

3. We believe that the traditional Mennonite understanding and application of Bible principles are valid and in harmony with New Testament teaching and practice. We believe that respect for and adherence to this time-tested "Mennonite way" will enhance stability and spiritual growth. Even though there may be other God-approved alternatives, for us to reflect against this heritage or to freely seek alternatives robs us of our stability and opens us to apostasy. Even though there have been some unwholesome aspects to the past, these inconsistencies should not be used to reflect against the value of the overall Mennonite tradition. We believe that to be overly suspicious of tradition leads to undue experimentation. 1 Thessalonians 5:14, 21; 2 Thessalonians 2:15.
4. We believe that the church is responsible to provide direction beyond the letter of Scripture and the church Discipline. The church has this obligation in the face of ever-changing world practices and in light of the fact that the standards of Scriptures are given mainly in principle form. In addition, our church Discipline is a minimum standard and does not address all expressions of worldliness. We are to discern the "new gods" and the attitudes and patterns of conduct that condition in a direction contrary to Scripture and the Discipline, and to discern that which brings the church in harmony. If administration is limited to the letter only for giving a voice or taking disciplinary action, spirits and attitudes will remain and develop that are destructive to spiritual life and will even be undermining to the keeping of the letter. We believe that an openness and a commitment to the church consensus helps us keep a balance in working this out practically. Deuteronomy 32:16, 17; 1 Corinthians 12:10; 14:29; 1 Thessalonians 5:21; 1 John 2:15-17; 4:1.

5. We believe that a strong teaching ministry coupled with fair and consistent discipline is the Scriptural approach. The teaching ministry is finally understood by what is allowed or not allowed by church administration. Personal conviction develops as the Biblical basis for a position is taught and as sound administration admonishes and insists on compliance in patience and love. To imply that carefulness to detail in regard to Bible application is being legal and is spiritually destructive, and that more tolerance fosters spirituality, is to militate against the Biblical emphasis relating to indoctrination and sound administration. True spirituality is measured by one's carefulness and concern for Biblical obedience. Matthew 7:21; Luke 6:46; Matthew 18:15-18; 1 Timothy 5:20; Philippians 2:12; 1 Peter 1:13-15; 2 Timothy 4:1-2; 2 Peter 1:5.
  
6. We believe that churches which are sponsored in outlying areas or in other cultures should hold a standard that is comparable to that of the sending churches. This is vital to maintaining a conferring relationship and for safeguarding the mission church from independent thinking. It is also necessary for protecting the mission from the influence of the surrounding religious thought and for providing the new church with a sense of stability and roots. To have the difference between the sponsoring and the sponsored churches too broad results in the undermining of the conviction of the home church and in the stifling of the spiritual growth of the developing church. Acts 16:4-5; 1 Corinthians 1:2; 4:17; 7:17; 1 Thessalonians 2:14.
  
7. We believe that one of the dangers facing the church is a distaste for Mennonite practice and the separated life. The present questioning of longstanding practices and subtle reflections against standards and church authority reveal this malady. When expressions of concern about legalism and traditionalism result in a weakening of standards and reflect against careful church administration, the ground is being laid for further drift and apostasy.



## *PRAYER POINT*

*“The effectual fervent prayer  
of a righteous man availeth much”*

Pray for the church in North Andros, Bahamas. The work that began in the early 1980s at Blanket Sound is gradually shifting to the northern region.

Pray for the minister ordination that is planned for November 20.

Pray "for kings, and for all that are in authority."

We are confident "that the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever He will."

We must exercise a prayerful concern related to local and national elections.

Pray for the ongoing efforts to publish a new hymnbook. The publishing of church-approved hymnbooks is part of our rich musical heritage.

Pray that God would bless this joint work and bring it to fruition for the glory of His great Name.

Thank the Lord for the new homes being established among us.

The Testimony records approximately eighty marriages over the past year.

Faithful homes are essential to propagating Biblical church life.

## **My Need**

Lord, give me a faith that trusts in Thee,

For the way is dark; I cannot see.

A faith that clings to the Saviour's hand,

When life becomes hard to understand;

That has learned to smile through tear-filled eyes,

And keep pressing onward for the prize.

When plans have failed and hope has grown dim,

I need a faith that can rest in Him.

—*Sister Ada L*



## *The Power of Prayer*

God's Word tells us to pray without ceasing. Prayer is talking to God. It includes worship and thanking God for His love, mercy, and redemption. In prayer, we seek God's forgiveness for our sins and failures. We ask God to supply our needs and the needs of others. Finally, we thank God for His faithful answers to our prayers.

"How do you explain prayer?" someone once asked me. The answer is easy: we do not try to explain prayer. We pray in simple faith as the Bible instructs us, in this way letting our "requests be made known unto God" (Philippians 4:6).

Before His crucifixion Jesus prayed, "Thy will be done." We likewise should always pray, "Lord, answer according to Thy will." As we submit to God's wisdom and purposes, He will answer in His own good way and time.

Jehoshaphat prayed for deliverance from his enemies, and God saved him. Jonah prayed in the fish's belly, and the Lord set him free. Hannah prayed for a child, and God sent Samuel. Cornelius prayed, and God sent the Gospel light to the Gentiles. Truly God answers prayer.

Sometimes God answers immediately. Other times the answer is delayed. Much time may pass before our prayers are answered. A godly mother prayed fervently for her wayward son. Years after her death, her son became a Christian.

"Pray now" (Jeremiah 37:3) and "pray without ceasing" (1 Thessalonians 5:17) are good admonitions for all of us. Not only do we have special times to pray, but we also pray throughout the day as needs and thanksgivings come to mind. Even in our beds, we should commune with God "in the night watches" (Psalm 63: 6).

We do not just pray hollow words to the Father. But we pray with meaning, faith, and expectancy. We must not be like the lady who said, "We are praying for a revival, but no one is expecting a revival."

We pray in humility, conscious of our need. The proud Pharisee in Luke 18 stood and prayed with himself, telling God how good he was. In contrast, the repentant publican acknowledged his sinful condition and sought God's mercy. And the publican went down to his house justified.

Prayer changes things. As we pray fervently in faith, we receive many answers which encourage us and cause us to give praise and thanksgiving to our Lord. A minister traveled by rail to conduct a series of revival services.

Finding no one at the terminal to meet him, he decided to walk to one of the member's home. It began to rain, and he prayed that God would stop the rain. God did just that. But when he arrived at his destination and stepped in under a protecting roof, the rain poured down.

Sometimes when we pray, we feel that God is not listening. The fault may lie with us. We may be too tired or too busy. We may be lacking faith. We may have sin in our lives. We cry out with David, "Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting" (Psalm 139:23, 24). But there are other reasons that we may not see answers to our prayers. The enemy may be hindering us. It may not be God's will or time to answer. God could be teaching us patience. Once after Jesus had cast out a dumb spirit, His disciples asked, "Why could not we cast him out?" Jesus said, "This kind can come forth by nothing, but by prayer and fasting." Prayer, faith, and fasting may be necessary when we have a burden and unanswered prayer.

What a blessed privilege we have, as God's children, to bring our needs to "him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think" (Ephesians 3:20). His unlimited power works in and through His children.

Where is the blessed place to go? Dost thou ask whereof, O soul? It is the secret place of prayer.

*Brother Norman*



## Church Committee Report

### The Curriculum Committee

The work of curriculum development and publishing is an ongoing work. The Committee has functioned under the direction of the Publication Board for more than twenty-five years. Most of the charter members have been replaced with a younger generation. The Committee has expanded to seven members with each member representing his local district. While time brings personnel changes, the original vision and purpose remain the same. The main purpose of the Committee is to promote and develop a Bible-centered, Anabaptist-oriented curriculum for our own church schools.

In the early years, the Committee largely assisted Rod and Staff in the development of textbooks. This focus has shifted to include EMP's own

works including a reading course for Grades 1 to 4, a Bible course for Grades 5 to 10, and a handwriting course for Grades 1 to 8. The Committee continues to work closely with Rod and Staff. Some current joint projects include a Grade 10 algebra course, a world geography course for Grade 10, a lower level math revision, an English revision for Grades 2 and 3, and a lower level music course. The Committee meets occasionally with the Rod and Staff Textbook Committee to share our purposes and goals. This has enhanced our togetherness and helps to keep the lines of communication open.

The responsibilities of the Curriculum Committee include monitoring the schools' curriculum needs and making recommendations to the Publication Board to address the needs. The Committee assists in managing projects. This includes finding writers, editors, and panel members to produce and review curriculum. The panel approach to reviewing materials as they are being developed has proven to be an effective way of perfecting textbooks. This includes field testing materials and then meeting together with teachers to compare their findings, problems and suggestions. These findings are noted, and the editor makes the needed changes to the materials. Problems and mistakes are much easier to identify when teachers use the materials in the classroom. The Committee is grateful to boards and teachers who are willing to give of their time in this work.

The Curriculum Committee publishes the Curriculum Communicator with the purpose of keeping alive the vision for a Bible-centered curriculum. Articles are written to give boards and teachers practical pointers relating to the curriculum. The Curriculum Communicator also includes progress reports of the various projects being developed. This semiannual periodical is distributed churchwide and to anyone otherwise interested in curriculum work.

In this country, the freedom of the press has given us a unique opportunity to produce a Bible-based curriculum for our schools. Let us use this God-given opportunity to benefit the lives of our children. God has blessed the work of curriculum development. As the work goes on, we continue to seek His blessing. Continue to pray for this work.

*Brother B* For the Curriculum Committee



## Anticipating Our Lord's Return (Part 4) Purify

Jesus' disciples were curious about the details surrounding His return. They repeatedly asked Jesus, "When shall these things be?" And Jesus just as repeatedly declined to give them any specific answers; He gave His disciples only general signs. Why was Jesus not more direct? Jesus Himself did not know the day nor the hour of His return (Mark 13:32). But are there any other benefits to us? Does it help us to live the Christian life knowing that Jesus will return without even a moment's notice? "And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure" (1 John 3:3).

The reality of Jesus' return encourages us to live holy lives. One of the involvements of the Christian life is the reality of becoming more like Jesus. We want to reflect His attitudes. We want to walk like Him and talk like Him. In short, we want to become like Jesus, to be a Christian, a little Christ. This sanctifying process will continue all through life until we become like Jesus when "we shall see him as he is" (1 John 3:2). But the hope of seeing Jesus and being like Him in the future will most definitely affect the way we live today. We will live a life that is characterized by righteousness and holiness.

The imminence of Jesus' return encourages us to focus on eternal things. The Book of Revelation repeatedly refers to a group of people as "them that dwell on the earth." These earth-dwellers are not merely living on the earth; their love, their interests, and their hearts are earthbound. We do not want to be identified with those earth-dwellers. Jesus said, "Ye cannot serve God and mammon." We need the imminence of Jesus' return to purify our hearts and focus our lives on eternal realities. As we live with an eternal focus, we will not become preoccupied with the lesser things of life.

The suddenness of Jesus' return helps us to be ready at all times. We must do more than anticipate being ready at some time in the future. We must be ready today—immediately! To live in a state of readiness, our thoughts need to be controlled, disciplined, and brought into captivity to the obedience of Christ (2 Corinthians 10:5). We cannot allow the sun to go down upon our wrath (Ephesians 4:26). We must not allow "the cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the lusts of other things entering in" to choke our spiritual interest (Mark 4:19). We need to keep our Christian life current. We must be ready at a moment's notice—no, we must be ready without even a moment's notice.

The ten virgins slept while they were waiting for the return of the bridegroom. It is not wrong to go to sleep physically as long as you are ready for Jesus' return. Purify your life. Sanctify your desires. Live in holiness. Then you will be ready for the cry, "Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him" (Matthew 25:6).

—*Brother Robert*

