



The *Pulpit Exchange*

It pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe. (1 Corinthians 1:21)
So they read in the book in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading. (Nehemiah 8:8) Iron sharpeneth iron; so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend. (Proverbs 27:17)

Volume 5, No. 1

Issue # 501

The Garden City Confession

Article I

OF THE WORD OF GOD

The Inspired Word of God

I would like to look at the first article in what we call our confession of faith. "Of the Word of God." Probably one of the most relevant Scriptures to that consideration is 2 Timothy 3:14-17. The apostle Paul writing to this young man Timothy "But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been

assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them; (15) And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. (16) All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for

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instruction in righteousness: (17) That the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works.”

I will read article I,

We believe in the plenary and verbal inspiration of the Bible as the Word of God; that it is authentic in its matter, authoritative in its counsels, inerrant in the original writings, and the only infallible rule of faith and practice.

The Mennonite Church has historically been far more con-

cerned about living godly lives in practical obedience to the Scriptures than in producing written documents about what they believe. I said that this was article I in what we call our Confession of Faith. Therefore, we do have some written articles and documents. The Anabaptists and all those who by faith sought to follow the Lord Jesus by their life put their theology on display. “Do you want to know what I believe? Then observe my life.

Vol. 5 No. 1, Issue # 501. The Pulpit Exchange is a compilation of written sermons without commentary, published as often as possible, in the interests of promoting sound preaching in our conservative Anabaptist churches. All sermons have been transcribed and printed with permission. Names are removed so that we can focus on the message and content rather than on a certain speaker or style. (Names will be published in the next issue).

Messages have been selected on the basis of topic rather than the speaker. Messages have been selected from congregations or speakers within the Berea Amish Mennonite Fellowship, Conservative Mennonite Church of Ontario, Conservative Mennonite Churches of York and Adams Counties, PA., Eastern Pennsylvania Mennonite Church, Mennonite Christian Fellowship, Nationwide Fellowship Churches, Ohio Wisler Mennonite, Washington-Franklin Mennonite Conference, and certain selected unaffiliated Amish Mennonite congregations.

We welcome submission of recorded sermons, topics, school meetings, writer's meetings, and special conferences by ministry and laity (where recording is permitted) provided permission has been obtained by the speaker for the recording. Submissions must have a title, the name of the speaker and the congregation responsible for recording (date would be helpful).

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That will state more clearly than any written document what I believe.”

Too many, in years past and in our time in which we live, accept as normal a wide rift between what I believe and what I live. There are many that would live that way. In fact, most professing Christians, if you would ask them “Do you believe in separation from the world?” would say, “Why, of course I believe that.” However, if they would take and outline their life and try and decide how they live separately from the world, the conclusion would be that we believe in separation from the world, but we do not live that way. There is a wide rift between what some say they believe and what they actually live like.

Many believe in separation of Church and State. That is why for some time (I do not know if it is still current any more today) I understand that the Catholic Church refused to accept government support for their schools. However, individual members readily received government funds and were involved in government functions. There is an inherent incongruity in that position because the members are the Church. I remember discussing that with an individual one time and it sort of startled me when he

made comment of that nature. I think that was related to school. Yes, their church believes in separation of church and state and they do not accept government subsidies for their schools. However, then he went on to describe how he personally was involved in receiving some of that type of thing. It dawned on me that it is incongruous. It does not fit together because the Church is the members. If I as a member am not living up to what I say I believe, then I am really not contributing to the position of that church, or what I believe and state the Scriptures teach.

What good does a written treatise do if my life does not measure up to it. Therefore, I again restate, historically the Mennonite Church has been far more concerned about living godly lives and practical obedience to the Scriptures than in producing written documents in what they believe. However, there were some written documents made as a basis for union of various far-flung groups of believers and even in an attempt to unify some schismatic tendencies in the Church. A number of confessions of faith were written and received wide circulation and acceptance. There were quite a few.

I will not mention a lot of

them, but I will mention the two that we are most familiar with. The one was called originally, not a confession of faith, but “The brotherly union,” more commonly known as the Schleithem Confession of Faith of 1527. You maybe are familiar with that term, but it was actually originally called “The Brotherly Union Document,” (I am not even sure it had the word document behind it). It was a writing which was designed to state what various brethren who were scattered throughout Europe believed and could agree on, and they were standing together on. The Schleithem Confession of Faith in 1527, was largely written by Michael Sattler. You can read it in J. C. Wenger’s book *Glimpses of Mennonite History and Doctrine* and probably some other places as well.

The Dortrecht Confession of Faith of 1632 which was written one hundred years later has been probably the most widely accepted confession in our church history. In fact, I think it is still the only accepted Confession of faith of the Old Order Mennonites and Amish today (at least as far as I know).

In the early part of the Twentieth Century there was a need sensed to clarify some

issues. These were not necessarily deemed important in the earlier confessions because they were so commonly accepted but were now being threatened and contended against. Therefore, the Church felt the need to give some specific clarifications to some doctrines that were being attacked and being compromised in the matters of Christian living. Our discipline says, “This statement of Christian doctrine was adopted by the Mennonite Church in 1921 at Garden City, Missouri. This statement we accept as our creed. We also have an appreciation for the Schleithem (1527) and Dortrecht (1632) Confessions of faith.”

This statement was not considered something to replace the Dortrecht Confession of Faith, which the churches accept as their creed. Rather, as I mentioned, it is simply a clarification of some issues that were not as specifically mentioned or even in some part, possibly it was a bit summarized because of the present situation. They did not call it a confession of faith. It was simply called the “List of Christian Fundamentals.” It was adopted by the Mennonite General Conference in Garden City Missouri in August of 1921.

Those eighteen articles of faith

are what we refer to as the Garden City Confession of Faith, and they were not called (as I said) a confession of faith but the Eighteen Articles of Christian Fundamentals. An interesting historical note: The Mennonite General Conference, which was a body of brethren that were representatives of various district Conferences, felt the need for this clarifying document. They were the ones who had this meeting. They gathered together in August of 1921 to formulate and adopt this confession of faith as we call it today. That Conference session was in a tent not in the church building, at the Sycamore Grove Mennonite Church, which is about 45 miles from our church at Warrensburg.

Another interesting note that some of you might be familiar with is the fact of brother Leroy Gingerich and his sister rode the train from (I believe) Tipton, Missouri to Garden City, because his father as a minister was attending that Conference. He and his sister in 1921 travelled there by train and joined their father. When that Conference was completed, they travelled with their father to another Conference session out in Kansas by car. After that they drove all the way back to Versailles to their home. This was quite an eventful

and rather interesting and a lengthy trip for a boy of thirteen years old. If you get a chance to visit with brother Leroy, ask him about that trip to Garden City and out to Kansas and he will be glad to tell you about it. Time moves on and there are not many people who are left that can do that anymore, but Leroy still can. It is worth your while to have him share that. He does not remember the proceedings of the Conference, but he does remember the trip and the journey with his father.

We, have adopted this as our Confession of Faith. I could not find any reference to the acceptance of this statement by the Lancaster Conference from which we derive most of the blueprint for our discipline. This Confession of Faith however was accepted by them. The Lancaster Conference never was a part of the Mennonite General Conference, so I do not know how that fits together, and I could not find anyone who did or any historical reference to it. It is however in our discipline. It was in the Lancaster Conference discipline. I suppose they accepted it as a part of their statement of doctrine along with the Dortrecht Confession when it was accepted by the Mennonite General Conference in 1921. That is as

near as I can come to it. I do not find any record of it being officially accepted as their Confession of Faith.

I read Article I — On the Word of God. I now want to look at this article. We hope that the hand of our Lord is with us here again that we would be blessed and challenged together as we look at the article of the Word of God. 1) *The first phrase of this article is, “We believe in the plenary and verbal inspiration of the Bible as the Word of God.”* Plenary as used here, means “full, or complete, absolute.” I think this Scripture that I read in the opening, “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God,” is where we base that belief on. Some would contend that the Bible contains the Word of God, but not all the Bible is inspired as the Word of God.

The Scripture’s own testimony is that all Scripture is inspired by God. Therefore, it is so, or it is not so at all. Do we understand the thought that “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God,” and therefore that is the truth, or else it disqualifies the whole Bible? For “God, that cannot lie,” (Titus 1:2) either said it and meant it, or else it is something totally different from that. Therefore, we would say in that sense we believe in the plenary inspiration

of the Bible. In addition to the “All Scripture,” in the use of the term “plenary,” is the thought of fullness and completeness of the Scriptures. Not only do we believe that this all is inspired of God, but we also believe that this is the whole of divine inspiration as revealed to us. We believe that it is complete.

We believe that it is not to be added to or subtracted from. That is very clear in Revelation 22:18, 19, “For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book: (19) And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book.” We believe it is spiritually damning to accept as equal to the Scriptures additional Scripture, or to regard as not necessary the writings of Scripture. Is that making it too strong? Well, not according to Revelation 22:18, 19. Rather, the Lord is saying, “This is what I intend for you to have as Scripture and that is all.” It is complete. It is absolute. It is full. It is everything that we need. It is that which “thoroughly

furnishe[s us] unto all good works.”

The present Canon of Scripture that we have is what is called the *Textus Receptus*. That is what our Bible was translated from. That would leave the thought of the *Received Text*. It is that which the apostles and the faithful Church accepted as the inspired Scripture and we are content to accept it as such. Sometimes we hear that the Apocrypha should be added to the Canon of Scripture, or should be included in the books of the Scripture. There is some idea afloat that the book of Mark is uninspired and that there should be 29 chapters in the book of Acts instead of 28. We simply do not accept those ideas. We believe our “God so loved the world,” that no one need perish (John 3:16). Therefore, our confidence stands that God has preserved the Word down through the ages with sufficient purity that we can have all things that pertain to life and godliness even in our day.

Therefore, we believe in the plenary inspiration of the Scriptures. This states that we also believe in the verbal inspiration of the Scriptures. The word verbal simply means word for word, word by word. We believe that the Lord gave the words that

He wanted us to have in the Scripture. We know that the Lord did not inspire these men to write English Scriptures. They wrote in their native tongue and there were two or possibly three native tongues used in the original writings. We believe that God gave the words that He wanted us to have even down to the detail of singular versus plural or vice versa and there are a number of Scriptural illustrations of that.

Galatians 3:16 says, “He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ.” It is not plural but singular. In Mark 12:26 as He was discussing with the Sadducees the doctrine of life after death, the doctrine of the resurrection and life after death, He quoted in Exodus 2 where God said at the burning bush, “I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob?” Long after Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were dead. And so Jesus said God, “is not the God of the dead, but the God of the living” (verse 27). Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were not dead. Yes, they were no longer living on earth, but they were not annihilated like the Sadducees wanted to teach. Therefore, Jesus used those words, “I am” to substantiate the doctrine of the resurrection, life

after death and the resurrection.

In Genesis 3, I think there is an interesting usage of words and again, I believe it speaks of the placement of words the way the Lord wanted them, where it speaks of the seed of the woman that would bruise the head of the devil the serpent. If you would look elsewhere in Scripture, the seed is generally attributed to the father. However, in this case, the prophecy of Jesus Christ's conquest over the devil was not an earthly progenitor. Rather, He was conceived of a virgin by the Holy Ghost. Therefore, the Lord in the usage of those words said it shall be the seed of the woman that shall "bruise thy head" (Genesis 3:15). There would be more that we could use, certainly, of illustrations of verbal inspiration. Inspiration simply means "God breathed."

Revelation is "God revealing." Illumination is "God through the Spirit, giving enlightenment." We believe that God inspired the Revelation of the Scriptures. By Revelation, we mean unveiling what we could see no other way. Part of the Bible was divine revelation. Part of the Bible was inspired recollection. Part of the Bible was inspired prophecy. There are a number of things in the Scripture that we confine to the category of revelation

because that is what they are. Who was at the Creation the first five days to observe what took place there? Well, certainly none of us were, and neither were any of our progenitors. No man was there. Therefore, by divine revelation, God let us know what we could know no other way. We have the account in the Bible by divine inspiration, God unveiling what we could not know by experience or by observation.

Messianic prophecies are an example of divine revelation given by inspiration. There was no way that Israel could have known how their coming Messiah would be, other than by God revealing it to them. They could not search and find out in any other way but through the Scriptures. God revealed in the Scriptures things that related to the future coming Messiah which could only be known by divine revelation. There are future prophecies that we study today, and there are descriptions of eternal destinies that again are only made possible by divine revelation. No extensive exploration of mind or matter could have given us the knowledge that we have because of divine revelation. Therefore, we believe that part of the Canon of Scripture is divine revelation that was inspired by God. In fact, some of that reve-

lation, men who wrote, knew not what they were writing about. God was revealing to them things that they could not envision because it never had happened. Part of that still has not happened.

Has revelation stopped? Has inspiration stopped? We believe that revelation has stopped as far as progressive revelation. What I mean by that is that progressive revelation from the Old Testament to the New there was a progression of unveiling of God's person and His will and plan. That was revelation. That was something that could only be known by God choosing to reveal it to us through the Scriptures. As time went on, He revealed more of Himself and His will, and so on. We believe progressive revelation has stopped. We come to the Scripture in Revelation 22:19 where it says if we add to, or take away, there are serious consequences. It is true that today, we know more of the will of God than did the Old Testament saints because of progressive revelation.

However, we believe that today any divine revelation or supposed divine revelation, is always subject to this revelation (the Bible), because we believe progressive revelation has stopped. Therefore, if someone

supposedly has a divine revelation that they are supposed to take off their covering . . . is that from the Lord, or is it not? Has progressive revelation continued and is this an example of it? "No," we say. "We believe in the plenary and verbal inspiration of the Scripture," and it is complete. Therefore, any revelation that comes to us now must be gauged by the Scriptures that we already have.

I remember some time ago there was a man who attended services in one of our churches. He told me that the Lord told him that he was to go and marry a certain woman. Therefore, he went to visit the woman, and she sort of had a feeling that way too and so they got married. Was that divine revelation? The fact is they were not eligible to be married according to the Scriptures because divorce was involved. Therefore, we do not believe the Lord told him that. We do not believe it because progressive revelation has stopped. We believe that the Bible is complete and whenever anyone feels he has been revealed some direct message from the Lord, it must be gauged by the Scriptures or it is invalid.

The New Testament is His Last Will and Testament. We believe the Spirit still inspires.

We believe the Spirit illuminates the Word, but all within the context of the holy Scriptures. May we never move from that position. We believe in the plenary and verbal inspiration of the Bible as the Word of God. That is the first phrase.

2) *The second phrase is “that it is authentic in its matter.”* Authentic, we could say simply means “genuine,” or “the truth.” In John 17:17 Jesus said, “Thy word is truth.” Psalm 12:6 says, “The words of the LORD are pure words: as silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times.” We can fully rely on the content of the Scripture in whatever realm we consider, because “it is authentic in its matter.” In the spiritual realm we take the Scripture as the facts of the matter. Therefore, it says, “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins” (1 John 1:9), the Scriptures are authentic in their matter. It is genuine. You can count on it. It also says, “he that believeth not is condemned already” (John 3:18). That is equally as true as the other side, because the Scriptures are authentic in their matter. We can depend on the Scriptures. They are genuine. They are the truth.

In the scientific realm, long before 1492 when “Columbus

sailed the ocean blue,” many people were afraid that he would sail off the edge of a flat earth. The Scripture declared, “he that sitteth upon the circle of the earth” (Isaiah 40:22). It was authentic in its matter even though the Bible was not a science book. Whatever it says relating to science is authentic. It is true, genuine, and factual.

In Deuteronomy 33:24, “let [Asher] dip his foot in oil.” I understand that there may be a large deposit of oil under the land that was the tribe of Asher’s inheritance. Technology did not discover that until quite a few years after it was written, but it was there. The Bible talked about it. Have no fear that science or technology will discover something that contradicts the Bible. No. No. I said before, the Bible is not a science book but whatever of science it alludes to, is authoritative. It is authentic and true.

Historical data is another example. For a long time archeologists found no data relating to a people called Hittites. Therefore, they questioned whether there ever was such a group of people. Yet, the Bible repeatedly referred to them. Well, sure enough, the diggers eventually found some Hittite paraphernalia. Be assured, the

God who is all knowing, put completely trustworthy information in the Bible. It is authentic in its matter.

3) *In the third place, "it is authoritative in its counsels."* We might ask the question, "Does the Word of God have anything to say to me that means something and that I should pay attention to?" We would say, "By all means. We believe the Scriptures are authoritative in their counsels." That means that they do have something to say about me, and how I relate to them. Hebrews 2:1–3 says, "Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip. (2) For if the word spoken by angels was steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompence of reward; (3) How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him." The words of the apostles in the Epistles are authoritative in my life. It says, "How shall we escape, if we" will neglect that which was "spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him." That is the apostles and their writings and their word.

We believe that the Scriptures are authoritative in their counsels. That simply means, we must take heed. The Scriptures have something for us to listen to and guide our lives by. Hebrews 10:28, 29 says, "He that despised Moses' law died without mercy under two or three witnesses." Both of these are comparing Old Testament directives to the New. "(29) Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace?"

Yes, we believe that the Scriptures are "authoritative in its counsels." It says that the Scripture "is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness" Those who take heed to its counsels have that to which they stand accountable, and indeed are fully equipped to face life regardless of what they encounter. In years past, one of the outstanding characteristics of those who faced the Inquisition of the Catholic Church (as well as the rack and the persecution and all of that terrible questioning and torture) was that these individuals were grounded in the Scriptures, and

that is what they stood on. That is what they allowed to direct their lives, and indeed even give their lives for. They understood that the Scriptures were authoritative in their counsels. They had responsibility before the Lord to follow that. Brethren and sisters, may we be of such calibre. May we be of such quality that we would allow the Scriptures to be authoritative in our lives.

We say the Scriptures are authoritative because they are true. What they say is that which aligns with reality. And I have used the illustration before (it is a bit crude but) you can argue with eloquence that gravity has no hold on you but if you ignore it, you discover that it has a great hold on you. The same is true with the Scriptures. You can have discourse and write article after article that you are above the Scriptures and do not need to submit yourselves to their authority, only to come face to face with the fact that the very Word you are discrediting as being invaluable and unauthoritative, is the very Word that we will face at the last day.

Yes, here is the Word of God, and it is that which aligns with reality. If I am willing to submit to its authoritative counsels what a blessing, freedom, and liberty. However if I am not, be assured,

this very Word that we hold in our hands, (and we buy new ones every once in a while and they get old and wear out and yet it is established in heaven and it stands forever) is that very Word that we will stand before one day and it will judge us. Let us allow our lives to be judged by the Word now and accept its counsels as authoritative so that when we stand there it will be well with our soul. May that be our goal, desire and aim.

4) *The fourth statement of this article of faith says that this Scripture is "inerrant in the original writings."* We know that we do not have the original writings, so why be concerned about their inerrancy? By inerrant I simply think we mean no errors. The original writings were without error. God did not mistakenly say something that he had not intended to say. That has two sides. God did not leave anything out that He intended to say. What He said, He meant what He said. When God told us what to do and what not to do, He said what He meant and meant what He said.

In Matthew 19 (I use this as an illustration) is the account of the Lord giving His direction on divorce and remarriage. The Lord said in Matthew 19:6 "What therefore God hath joined

together, let not man put asunder.” God does not tell us to not do what we cannot do anyway. God does not tell us to do what we cannot do either. He does not give direction to an impossibility. Verse 9 says, “Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery.” The reason I bring this up is because the question that comes to us here is, “Can men put asunder what God hath put together?” If it was a total impossibility then I guess God would not have bothered mentioning it would He? We believe that God said what He said because He intended to say it that way. There were no errors in the original writings.

I realize (coming back to that thought) we do not have the original writings, but we do believe (as I mentioned earlier) that God is so jealous for the preservation of His Word and the cause of His people that He has preserved it in sufficient purity that we have what He intended us to have. Therefore, when God said, “What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder,” He is stating that it can be done. When God says furthermore, that if you get married to someone who is divorced that is

adultery, apparently that can be done too. There are those who promote the idea that the first marriage is the only one that is marriage in God’s sight. I will not go into that. That is not our discussion. We use this as an illustration to help us understand that we believe God intended to say what He said. When He said that if you get married to someone who is divorced, apparently He meant that you could do it. God could have told us not to fly like birds, but that is an impossibility, so when He said something that we are to pay attention to, it was not an error. It was what He intended to say. He meant it for a reason and a purpose.

While we do not have (like I mentioned) the original writings, we believe He had preserved His revelation of His person and His will and His purposeful intent down to our day. Therefore, we take that very seriously. We believe that this Word, though not the “original” writings is sufficiently inerrant that it has revealed to us God’s will. That is the fourth phrase in this article.

5) The last one is that it is “the only infallible rule of faith and practice.” Infallible means, “faultless, not lopsided but completely relevant and timeless.” The constitution of the United

States of America was written, and it was rather an outstanding document. It has been applauded around the world (at least some countries around the world applaud it) as a very outstanding document that promotes freedom for people and a good way to govern people. However, it was not long until there were amendments added to the Constitution. The first ten amendments are called “The Bill of Rights,” because they really were some things that should have been said in that Constitution but were not said. We have pilot programs to discover if a certain plan will work, or what must be adjusted so it does work. Those things are part of our way and our method of functioning.

In contrast, we believe that the Scriptures are “the only infallible rule of faith and practice.” This states that we believe that this Bible does not need amendments. That is what we mean by that. It is infallible. It is fully rounded out. It is not a lop-sided view of the issue. It works from the word, “go,” (like we say sometimes). The psalmist said, “Thy word is true from the beginning: and every one of thy righteous judgments endureth for ever” (Psalm 119:160). There you have it. It is the “infallible rule of faith and practice.”

The Bible shows us God’s plan for the home, marriage, child training, and vocational pursuits. We find God’s plan for government — how to guide and govern the unregenerate society around us — God’s guideline for Church administration — for the regenerate — all of that is infallible from the beginning. It does not need to be updated. There did not need to be a pilot program run first to see what would need to be changed so it would work. It is infallible in this that it actually does what it says it will do and it does not need adjustments, like I just said.

One leading child raising specialist, who promoted free expression so as not to inhibit the child from reaching his full potential, after observing a generation of such thought and action patterns, concluded that there should be some adjustments in strategy or it will simply not work. That does not surprise us, does it? If we leave the only infallible rule of faith and practice, and try to chart a new one, it will need amendment, and amendment, and amendment and will still run right into the ground. However, the infallible rule of faith and practice, we believe that the Bible is true from the beginning and it is complete. We have an infallible Operator’s

Manual. We have an infallible Blueprint for the building of character. We have an infallible projected budget plan that results in laying up treasure in heaven. What more could we ask for?

“We believe in the plenary and verbal inspiration of the Bible as

the Word of God; that it is authentic in its matter, authoritative in its counsels, inerrant in the original writings, and the only infallible rule of faith and practice.” May we stand on the Scriptures so that in the final day we will be on solid footing.

Scripture References

| | | | | |
|--------------------|------|------------------|---------|-------------------|
| Genesis | 19:6 | 12 | 3:14–17 | 1 |
| 3:15 | 8 | 19:9 | 13 | Titus |
| Deuteronomy | | Mark | 1:2 | 6 |
| 33:24 | 10 | 12:26, 27 | 7 | Hebrews |
| Psalms | | John | 2:1–3 | 11 |
| 12:6 | 10 | 3:16 | 7 | 10:28, 29 |
| 119:160 | 14 | 3:18 | 10 | 1 John |
| Isaiah | | 17:17 | 10 | 1:9 |
| 40:22 | 10 | Galatians | | Revelation |
| Matthew | | 3:16 | 7 | 22:18, 19 |
| | | 2 Timothy | | 22:19 |
| | | | | 6 |
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From the Previous Issue:

Things Most Surely Believed Among Us Surrounding Christ’s Birth

From a message by John R. Schrey

Sunday, December 26, 2004

Bethel Mennonite Church, Pleasant Mills, PA

Book Reprint (Continued)

One Hundred Lessons In Bible Study

LESSON 18.

Pentecost.

[Acts 2.]

I. Historical.

1. Institution of the Feast of Pentecost.

NOTE. — Also known in Scripture as “A Feast of Weeks,” “Feast of Harvest,” and “first fruits of wheat harvest.”

2. Directions for its observance. — Leviticus 23:15–21; Deuteronomy 16: 9–12.

3. New Testament mention. — Acts 2:1; 20:16; 1 Corinthians 16: 8.

II. Sinai and Pentecost.

Some writers note the resemblance between God's manifestation of His power and His glory when He gave the law upon Mount Sinai (Exodus 19), and a similar manifestation of His power and glory when He gave the Holy Spirit at the day of Pentecost (Acts 2). Following are some of the points of resemblance:

1. The first event took place fifty days after the slaying of the first-born in Egypt; the second occurred fifty days after the slaying of the first-born, upon the cross.

2. On both occasions, God's people were waiting for the "promise of the Father."

3. On both occasions, the Lord appeared in marvelous manifestations of His power and glory.

4. At the former place, God blessed His people by giving them the Law; at the latter place, by giving a spiritual discernment of the law.

III. Preparation for the event.

1. Expectation of divine favor. — Acts 1: 4, 5.

2. Continuous prayer. — Luke 24: 53; Acts 1:13, 14.

3. Unity of purpose. — Acts 1:14; 2:1.

NOTE. — When faith in God, a unity of purpose, and persevering prayer are united in the same church, we may expect great results.

IV. Events of the day.

1. Outpouring of the Holy Ghost.

2. Disciples speaking with cloven tongues.

3. The assembling of the astonished multitudes.

4. Various conjectures as to what this meant.

5. The preaching of Peter.

6. The multitudes convinced and convicted.

7. Baptism of three thousand souls.

NOTE. — Notice the different steps in this narrative: hearing, believing, conviction, submission, gladness, baptism.

V. Results of this event.

1. A spiritual discernment of the law.
2. Confirmation of the apostles in the faith of Jesus Christ.
3. Marvelous growth of the church.
4. Increased boldness and activity.
5. Increased opposition.

NOTE. — The devil is always active; and especially so when God's people are awake. It is pleasing to note, however, that when God's people, filled with the Holy Ghost, are actively engaged in spreading and defending the word of God, the activity of Satan's emissaries serve only to strengthen the cause.

1. How many languages were represented at this gathering?
2. Can a person, after true repentance, be baptized and not receive the Holy Ghost?
3. What is meant by "cloven tongues"?
4. Were the disciples converted before Pentecost?
5. Give two reasons why God should choose Pentecost as a proper time for the giving of the Holy Ghost.

LESSON 19.

The Primitive Church. — Organization, Etc.

I. Historical.

1. Calling of first disciples. — John 1:39–51.
2. Ordination of the twelve apostles. — Matthew 10; Mark 6; Luke 9.

NOTE. — The apostles were the constant attendants of our Saviour, receiving the instruction and training necessary for the work after Pentecost.

3. Suicide of Judas Iscariot. — Matthew 27:3–5.
4. Calling of Matthias to the apostleship. — Acts 1:15–26.
5. The gift of the Holy Ghost. — Acts 2:1–21.
6. The sudden increase of the church. — Acts 2:37–47.
7. The choosing of seven deacons. — Acts 6:1–8.
8. Calling of Saul of Tarsus as the apostle to the Gentiles. — Acts 9:1–16.

II. Description of the church at Jerusalem. — Acts 2–6.

1. Their property. — Had all things common.
2. Their liberality. — Withheld nothing from the service of the Lord.
3. Their piety. — Continued in unceasing prayer.
4. Personal work. — Went from house to house, breaking bread.
5. Their spiritual standing. — They were filled with the Holy Ghost.
6. Their creed. — Unity in the apostles' doctrine, unity in the apostles' fellowship, obedience to ordinances, continual prayer (2:42).
NOTE. — This constitutes the true basis for church fellowship.
7. Their prosperity. — Acts 2:41, 47; 4:4, 32; 5:14; 6:7;
NOTE. — Notice the new class of believers.
8. Persecutions. — There was a determined effort made to crush them.
9. What we learn from the condition of this church.
 - a. Great blessings follow great sacrifice and true consecration.
 - b. The greatest joy on earth is the enjoyment of rich spiritual life.
 - c. When the heart is filled with the Holy Ghost worldliness loses its charms.
 - d. Religious activity awakens active opposition.
 - e. The effect of the persecution of a spiritual church is to strengthen the cause.
 - f. When a church becomes popular, unconverted people apply for admittance.
 - g. When in the height of spiritual prosperity, look out for danger.

III. The ministry.

1. Apostles. — No other church officers are mentioned until the growth of the church rendered it necessary to call in help. The apostleship ceased with the death of John the revelator.
2. Deacons (Acts 6:1–6), — Their appointment at first was to distribute the goods held in common, the needy ones to receive their especial care. Whether Philip received a separate commission to do evangelistic work, does not appear in the sacred writings.
3. Bishops or Elders (Acts 14: 23; Philippians 1:1; 1 Timothy

3:1, 2; 5:7; Titus 1:5, 7). — The work assigned to a “bishop” or “elder” seems to have been the same; which was to serve as watchman over the church or churches under his charge. Paul’s advice to Titus to “ordain elders in every city” seems to indicate that he feared a centralization of power. Some believe that the position which James, Timothy, and Titus held would seem to indicate a higher rank than that of an ordinary bishop or elder; but it is more probable that their prominence was one of personal worth rather than of official position.

4. Ministers (Acts 13:5). — A servant or assistant. All church officers are ministers.

5. Evangelists [Acts 21: 8; Ephesians 4:11; 2 Timothy 4:5]. The work of the evangelist was to preach the Gospel either among the churches or in places where the Gospel had not been preached. He had no special charge of any church. There is no record in the sacred writings of any one being ordained for that special purpose.

6. Prophets, pastors, and teachers [Ephesians 4:11]. — Their work not clearly defined.

7. Qualifications for the ministry. — Acts 6:3, 5; 11:24; 1 Timothy 3:1–7; Titus 1:6–9.

NOTE. — As the church grew, the number of congregations multiplied, and the nationality, industries, habits, etc., of the membership became more diversified, church organization was extended to meet the new conditions, and the duties, qualifications, etc., of the church officials more clearly defined. First, there were only apostles. Then, as the needs of the church required, there were added to them deacons, evangelists, bishops or elders, pastors, teachers, etc. The Bible specifies no limit as to the numbers and names of church officials.

1. Discuss the advantages and disadvantages of a having a community of goods.

2. Were there any deaconesses in the primitive church? If so, name some of them.

3. What was the crime of Ananias and Sapphira? What do we learn from their punishment?

4. Repeat the Scriptural qualifications of a minister?

5. How many of the seven deacons are mentioned as evangelists?

Children's Book Reprint (Continued)

Greasy the Robber

Greasy did not understand the meaning of those words, and turning additional pages he read on: "Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God?" (1 Corinthians 6:9). He went on to read the various abominations that follow. He then read the summarizing words: "And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God" (1 Corinthians 6:11).

After this Greasy read the prayer of the man who said, "Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have taken any thing from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold" (Luke 19:8). He turned a few leaves and was gripped by the reading of Luke 23, where the crucifixion of Jesus is depicted. It was of special interest to him that two murderers were crucified with the Christ and that the one who repented and confessed his sins was forgiven by Jesus and promised entrance to paradise.

Greasy shut the book and lay it under his pillow. Rolling himself in his covers, he tried to sleep, but sleep left him. His heart was

very much disturbed, an efforts to put away the thoughts crowding into his mind were useless. Over and over rose the picture of how the two travellers on their knees had pleaded to be spared.

Not until morning did deep sleep overcome Greasy, and he awoke with renewed unrest in his soul. His comrades noticed the strange expression on his face, but they did not know to what circumstance they should ascribe it. Some thought he had become sick. For a number of days he walked around in a daze, and nobody could get out of him what really was the matter. His comrades did not cease to try to find out the cause of his sadness until he finally declared to some that he no longer could be at peace since he had read something in the book that they had taken from the murdered ones. At this declaration all were overtaken with a strange feeling. What kind of book could it be that could bring about such a sad transformation of their jolly comrade?

The band of robbers then demanded that this book of witchcraft be surrendered and burned. Some, however, asked with interest that the book be

given to them to look into. Finally it was decided that the book be read to the whole gang, When they were all together, Greasy read to them those parts which had moved him so greatly. They listened with strained attention. One young robber declared from the beginning with great certainty that the book was the New Testament and that he used to know it. "My mother was a Stundist [believer]," he said, "and always read in the Gospels. She often took me to the children's meetings, where we read out of this book and sang and prayed."

For a long time the men sat listening to the reading of the book, and then they parted silently. Most of them were in a depressed mood. None of them could grasp the reason why the reading of the book should make such a strong impression on them. From that day the robbers came together from time to time to read the New Testament. The effect of the book was so powerful upon them that they could not withdraw from its influence.

Thus a whole month passed. Then the young robber whose mother had been a "Stundist" declared to his comrades openly that he could no longer continue in the criminal trade. Greasy followed him. (The other robbers had already noted that both these

young men prayed with tears in their eyes.) Eventually even the leader of the band followed their example.

Then arose the question. "What do we do now. and how do we start a new life?" They realized, first of all, that it would be necessary for them to yield themselves to the authorities. Since it was impossible for them to reimburse those whom they had damaged, there remained only one thing for them to do: turn themselves in. Although the majority did not agree to this plan, the young robber who was the first to start the new life, Greasy, and five other men decided to acknowledge their whole guilt before the representatives of the law.

The day of separation came; the parting was touching. The comrades asked Greasy to read to them once more out of the New Testament. He opened to the place where the meeting of Jesus with the demon-possessed is described and the Master's power is depicted by the healing of the men and their subsequent loyalty to Him. "Thus it was with us also," added Greasy. "We are about to quit our sinful lives. Let us cease to do evil to people and follow Christ!" After these words Greasy fell upon his knees and with a loud voice confessed his

misdeeds. Others followed his example. Among the general crying and sighing only scattered words and phrases could be distinguished — “Forgive me! “Do not remember my. . . .” “Wash me with Thy blood!” “Give me power!” “I shall no more. . . .” “I promise. . . .” Parting with a kiss from the others, the seven robbers, with their weapons in their hands, left for the nearest town while the others disappeared in different directions.

With a decidedly firm step Greasy and his comrades walked into the city. Immediately they drew the attention of the inhabitants. Who could imagine where this group of colourfully arrayed, armed men could have come from? At the corner of one of the main streets, they asked a policeman where the state attorney of the district court lived. The policeman pointed out a large two-story house in the same street, which the robbers entered. Previously they had agreed that Greasy, the most intelligent, should present their case to the district attorney.

The robbers entered a large, sunny room with hardwood floors in which about twenty people were already gathered, waiting for the district attorney. At the door of the office stood an attendant of the court. Greasy

turned to him with the following words: “Please tell the district attorney that we must speak with him without delay.” The employee looked suspiciously at the armed group and asked, “What case do you have to present?”

“It is something very important,” answered Greasy.

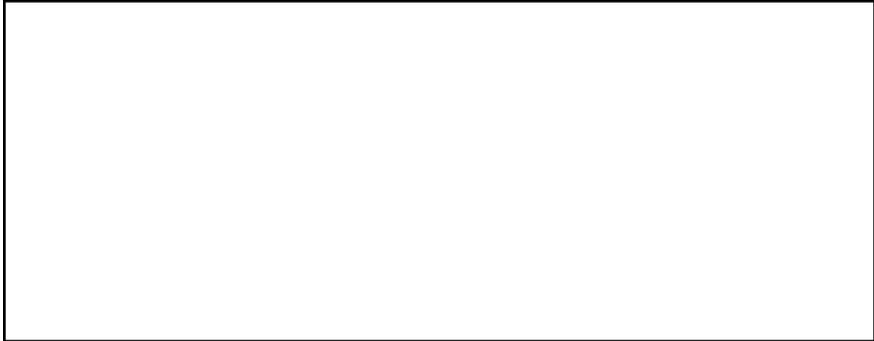
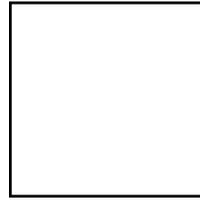
The employee disappeared behind the door. In a few minutes the robbers stood before an distinguished elderly gentleman, who seemed somewhat excited by the unexpected appearance of seven armed men. The robbers, even though they had determined before leaving the backwoods to take the unusual step of free confession, were also noticeably stirred when they stood face-to-face with the representative of the law. “Permit us to explain to you who we are and why we have come to this place.” began Greasy with a trembling voice. “We are robbers, but you need not fear us; we have come to confess our whole guilt to you and take the consequences. We have realized what a great injustice we have done and are here now to suffer the punishment meted out by the law for robbery. Do with us as justice demands. Here are our weapons; take them.” With these words Greasy and his fellows quickly laid down their weapons in a heap.

The district attorney became completely confused and could not immediately control himself. It was the first time in his life that he had witnessed the confession of a whole group of men who yielded themselves voluntarily into the hands of the representatives of the law. After some time he called the police; in a few minutes a small detachment of armed soldiers led by a police captain appeared. The necessary notes of the case were taken and turned over to the department of investigation. As Greasy, in the course of the examination, pictured the story of his life in general terms and spoke of the reason that he and his companions forsook the robber's life in the forest, the district attorney and all present were visibly moved. Only with effort could they hide their tears. It was difficult for them to believe that the thorough change in these robbers was due solely to their acquaintance with the gospel. "I would like no longer to be called Greasy, but instead Paul Tichomirov," said the youth. "I will hereafter serve God and mankind and without murmuring take upon myself the punishment determined by the law. We are now in your hands." All his comrades agreed with this declaration.

Quite excited, the district attorney commanded that the seven criminals be carried into the jail to be kept in separate cells until the investigation be finished. Thereupon the former robbers were led away. The district attorney remained alone with the police captain in the office. For a long time they discussed together this extraordinary happening. They knew that ordinarily criminals denied their guilt or admitted it only under the pressure of undeniable evidence or if they were caught in the deed. These men, however, came of their own free will and confessed all. How great must be the power of the gospel to change the men in this manner!

After the police captain had gone and the district attorney had concluded his office hours, the latter told his wife the experience with the robbers. Her surprise was also great, and after some consideration she said. "One of the robbers that was crucified with Christ turned also, but he could not run away. These men, however, did not need to come; they could have carried on their business and kept hiding in the woods. It is surprising — an unknown case in the history of justice!"

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