

ENDURING UN

An interview with Bro. Dean Stump

The Heartbeat of the Remnant: Good evening, Bro. Dean!

Dean Stump: Good evening to you!

THTR: The seed for this interview was actually planted a couple of years ago while looking through some of the old issues of *The Heartbeat of the Remnant*. I had gathered one of each back issue and placed them in the office for reference. The first issue came out, what, 1995 or 1996?

DS: Maybe earlier ...

THTR: Anyways, paging through them, I noticed quite a few testimonies and testimonial-type articles in the 1990s and early 2000s issues. And to be honest, my heart just kind of sank, because too many of those who had given those testimonies have not gone in a good direction. Some have turned away totally, and maybe do not even profess any Christianity. Some of them still profess, but do not seem to be in as good a place as when they gave the testimonies.

This last while we have not printed too many conversion testimonies, mostly because hardly any have been sent in; maybe one in the last couple of years. But to be dead honest, after reading some of those earlier testimonies and articles, I feel a bit “scared” to publish any—although let me say that we certainly are willing to do so. My “fear” is this: what if we print this great “born-again” testimony, and three years down the road we are embarrassed or ashamed of the direction the person has gone?

In thinking about all this, I thought maybe it would be good to have a testimony about enduring. In fact, it would be good for all of us to yearly, on the date of our spiritual rebirth, to take account of our life and review our progress.

So in thinking of a testimony of endurance, I thought of you. I have known you for 20 years or more now, and you have not totally thrown in the towel nor drifted seriously off into error. And, you have been in some of the very same type of churches and situations that some of those who have drifted or fallen away were in, so you know the same temptations they knew.

In light of all this, I would like to ask you a few questions. First of all, have you experienced a time in your life where you kind of “woke up” one day (or over a period of

days and weeks) and realized, “Hey, I need to do some backtracking here ... I’ve drifted off the course or gone down a side trail”?

As an example of someone who did just that, I am thinking of a former New Order Amish couple I knew in another state. They had felt they had come to a new-birth experience, and for whatever reason they left that church and started going to another one. A couple of years down the road, the man suddenly realized, “Whoa! Where are we going?” He sat down with his wife and they realized that they had drifted to the point of feeling comfortable wearing shorts and having a TV in the house. It was like, “Whoa! How did we get here? We abhorred these things a few years back!” So have you ever experienced a drift like that in your life, maybe not even that far, but something similar?

DS: I would say that in my experience, when I had been a Christian about one year—and let me say that up to that point I had not had a lot of fellowship and my work environment was not very good—I started realizing, “Hey, where am I spiritually? Where am I going?” I determined at that point that I was going to “plug in” at a church somewhere. I was converted in February of 1989, and I started attending Charity Christian Fellowship in December of 1989. In March of 1990 I started working for Bro. Denny [Kenaston]. I had quit my job and felt from my prayer time that God was going to allow me to have a Christian employer. So I quit. They didn’t want me to quit, and asked, “What are you going to do?”

I told them, “I don’t know, but the Lord is going to lead me.” About a week later Bro. Denny approached me with an offer for a job.



INTO THE END

concerning perseverance in the faith



It was at that point in my life that I made some definite choices to go a direction that would help me put my roots down and set me on course.

THTR: So before you made that choice, you could look out into the future and see where you were headed—and it was a place you didn't really want to end up at spiritually ...

DS: Right. I made a definite choice there. It was a choice of "I want to go deeper with the Lord. I don't want to live my life 'on the edge,' so to speak." That was in 1990, which is 22 years now, and I have been in the same type of church since.

About 10 years ago I started really thinking about the question, "Where are we going? I have a family, children growing up here. Where are we headed as churches? Are we passing on the faith to the next generation?"

That became a real concern to me and it helped me to take a more open approach to other conservative Anabaptist groups, and I have grown in my appreciation for the more conservative groups that have maintained a spirituality and keep many of their young people. This has helped me maintain a course for my family.

THTR: I am glad you mentioned this. I had planned to divide this into

two parts, first in a personal way, then in a corporate way. So I am glad you brought out about enduring corporately. But I want to talk first about the personal aspect.

One thing I have said in reference to "backsliding"—and I don't know where I heard this from or if I just made it up myself—is that some people seem to get converted and six months later he/she may be back out wallowing in the mire ... drinking, nightclubs, etc. So we say, "He/she backslid." But I have made the statement, "Half of the people who backslide do so a quarter of an inch at a time." What do you think of this saying? Is it valid?

DS: I heard a person making a confession in one of our solemn assemblies one time, repenting and turning back to God. He made the statement, "I think the Devil's middle name is Gradual!"

When I take inventory of my own life, I cannot say that I am where I want to be in my devotion to Christ ... the cares of life, a full life can distract from our love to Him.

THTR: In our churches we have what I would consider a good amount of teaching on the devotional life. Beyond the typical devotional things of reading the Word, prayer, and church attendance, what are some practical things that you have used to help you keep on track? What do you do to check up on yourself?

DS: Well, I was in business, and I had a great opportunity to "sell myself" to my business and make money. I held myself in check there. I didn't want to bring my boys into the "successful business" world and have it be to them that money is just an easy thing to come by. People asked me, "Well what are you going to do if you sell your business?"

I would tell them that I wanted to raise my boys on a dairy farm. And people would think, "You can't make a living milking cows. What are you going to do, just farm until your money is all gone?"

That didn't scare me so much, because my goal was not to make money, but to raise up godly young men. That's my vision; to raise young men and teach them the disciplines of life.

Another purposeful decision was that when I had the business, most of the value was in the equipment, and I didn't insure that. The temptation was always there to make sure "all the bases are covered" and worry about what if someone has an accident, so that the business wouldn't take any loss. I was always aware that one good-sized accident would put me out of business. This was a way to keep me cast upon God, and a way to keep me from drifting into building up my own little kingdom here on earth.

THTR: Those are some great examples for us North Americans. The deceitfulness of riches has caused thousands and thousands to drift away ... slowly but surely.

In thinking of some real practical examples of how to give ourselves a "spiritual drift checkup," my mind goes

back to something Bro. David Mast preached at Ephrata Christian Fellowship, maybe six years ago or so. He said, “Pull out the photo albums from 10 years ago and take a look at how you dressed.” What do you think about such a suggestion?

DS: I think it is a real indicator.

THTR: That would be in the area of dress. Usually we don’t “blow out” in one area and every other area of our life is in good shape. Some other areas we can check is how much time we spend online or in the newspaper. Can you think of any other real practical areas to check ourselves from where we were 10 years ago?

DS: That is very convicting to me. I am freer today than I was ten years ago to look at “the Holstein world.” We don’t get the newspaper and we don’t have the Internet. No television. So we don’t have a lot of those distractions. But one I can give myself to is the milk cow world.

THTR: I really like that example. When we lived in South America, we had some people who got converted, and when they would get discouraged they would go back to drinking. We would hear that one of the brothers in the church got drunk, and it would hit us pretty hard. I mean, we would ask ourselves, “How could someone turn back to drinking?”

But for people like you and I who grew up in a conservative Christian atmosphere and who never drank a drop of alcohol in our life besides communion wine, when we get discouraged, we don’t turn to the bottle. I go back to sport hunting, and you go back to milking Holsteins. When Peter got discouraged after the death of Jesus, what did he say?

DS: “I go a fishing!”

THTR: That’s right ... “Let’s just go fishing. This Jesus is dead. We might as well resume life as before.” Peter’s life was probably wrapped up in fishing before Jesus came along. So when we think of drifting into world-

liness, each one of us should regularly look at what we were wrapped up in before we were Christians, which for me was outdoor sports, hunting, fishing, etc. From 10 years ago, from five years ago, from one year ago, where are my values in those areas?

DS: I appreciate this talk, brother!

THTR: Let’s move on to corporate drift now. I would like to divide this up into two areas: first, doctrinal or theological drift, and then practical areas. As I looked back

through those testimonies I referred to at the beginning, there was one person who had a testimony, and I was told that this person recently walked out of his Anabaptist church into a Presbyterian church. That is some pretty serious theological drift; to walk out of a church that teaches obedience to Christ’s teachings in the Sermon on the Mount, and into a church that blatantly and willfully teaches disobedience to those same teachings of Jesus. And then you have issues like head coverings and modest dress, not to mention a totally different view of salvation. It “blows my mind” that someone can just walk out of a church that teaches those things, into a church that doesn’t, as if he/she was stepping from the living room to the kitchen of



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his/her house. You know, just taking it all in stride as if nothing major was happening.

Let’s get real practical here. Maybe we’ll step on our own toes. But what are some practical ways to check our “theological drift”? Or maybe that is a weakness in our churches; maybe we don’t check up on this area?

DS: One thing that we are doing is going through our little “Faith and Practice,” just started this last Wednesday evening. I think that is a positive thing we can do to check up on ourselves. We look at how we understood the Scriptures 25 years ago—I guess it was 30 years ago that ours was made—and see where we were and where we currently are in our understanding of the Christian faith and practice. You can hit each point and ask ourselves if

we still believe these things and how they are being put into practice.¹

THTR: Looking back, and contemplating what we could have done better in our churches to hold people in the faith, an illustration comes to mind. The kingdom of God is like a house. The door to the house is called “the new birth.” That one door is the only way to get into the house, and so that door is extremely important. However, the focus really isn’t supposed to be on the door; the focus is the whole house. But what happens is that we sometimes go in the door, and then sit down inside and talk about and focus our attention on the importance of the door, instead of the greatness of the house. Have we perhaps, in the past sometimes, focused too much on the door (being born again) instead of the house (the kingdom of God)?

I am thinking in particular of those who came from church groups that have neglected the new-birth teaching, and people from those groups sometimes seem to think, “Well, I got born again now! I made it now!” In reality, they just got started!

In real practical terms ... I was in one of our churches some time ago when a family gave testimony for membership. There were several teenage children and the parents, and every one of them gave a testimony of “getting saved” or “being born again” when they were anywhere from four to eleven years of age. All five or six of them. They were accepted as members based on those testimonies ...

DS: Four-year-old conversions ...

THTR: And with several of them basically nothing was said beyond that, as far as what was happening or had happened in their spiritual development through the years. My point is, it seems that if we can give a testimony of “I got born again 10, 20, or 40 years ago,” then they must still be alive today. Shouldn’t we be focused on what has happened since then, and if there is still life and anointing today?

DS: Yes! That is something we have taken a look at recently in our fellowship. Bro. David recently had a message on how salvation is a daily choice to surrender ourselves up to Christ. It is a walk.

THTR: In thinking of corporate drift, I think of an illustration that I heard Bro. Joe Tindall give one time of several boats out on the ocean. They are out there, and it is a calm day, and they don’t even have their sails up. They just want to stay where they are and enjoy the day.

What they are not aware of is an underlying current, like the Gulf Stream. So those boats are sitting there, and I am in one and I look out and see Bro. Dean over there in his boat, and he is still about a quarter mile away. And over there is Bro. George, he is still about half a mile



Is there such a thing as drifting on our own conscience?

away. And Bro. Fred is over there, still about the same place as he was this morning. Everyone is in the same place all day. But what they do not realize is that *all* of them are drifting together. So we say that those boats need an anchor.

Here’s my question: Is it possible that we are using our own conscience for an anchor, rather than something outside of ourselves, like the Bible? Our conscience can drift, but the Word of God never changes. Is there such a thing as drifting on our own conscience?

DS: Yes. The conscience needs to be trained.

THTR: What happens is that people no longer feel something is bad or wrong, and they are basing their righteousness on their conscience, rather than upon the Bible, not realizing that their conscience has drifted (many times along with the whole church conscience). But since “I don’t feel anything wrong with it,” fleshly living creeps in.

DS: It seems to me that too many times things are left too “loose-ended,” and each man can do pretty much what is “right in his own eyes.” We focus our attention on “having grace” and “loving one another.” So the person makes a little change here, and the church “has grace” with them. Then the person makes a little change there, and the same “grace” is extended. We need to make the Word of God practical in *our* day and time. We can’t just have, for example, a beautiful message on modesty, and not ever say what that looks like in our day: modesty is not just covering the body, but also about not being form-

¹ Of course, changes are not always wrong. But if we have changed, we need to ask ourselves why, and what moved us to change.

fitting and showy, and not drawing attention to oneself, not being elaborate or costly. If you're going to be modest you are not going to wear name brands that represent the world, even if it is modest in style.

THTR: I heard a message recently by Bro. Rex Blevins, and he preached very lovingly but openly about some weaknesses he saw in our churches. One of those weaknesses was how that there seems to be an unwillingness sometimes for parents to reign in their youth. He used the illustration of “the tail is wagging the dog, instead of the dog wagging the tail.” Is there some validity to that statement?

DS: There seems to be a full sail in some cases. I have a hard time myself knowing where to draw the lines. It seems like since we are afraid to “draw the lines real clear” ... well, it becomes real hard to do just that with our youth. What I see happening is that the convictions are not there in the youth and they are trying to chart a different course. Instead of the parents saying, “No, we are not going that direction. We are going to cut back on the sports. We are not going to dress that way.” Instead of that we have the parents following the children ... I guess that is what you mean by the tail wagging the dog.

THTR: This gets back to the new birth, and some of those testimonies in earlier issues of *The Heartbeat of the Remnant* where the people have not endured. I saw that happen in a church many years ago where a teenage girl came to the Youth Bible School. While there, she made a confession to some serious sin she had been hiding from her parents—I don't even know what it was, that is not the point. So she made this confession one evening and cleared that up.

The next morning she got up and was, of course, extremely happy to have it off her chest. Well, one of her friends told her, “Wow, you look so happy this morning! You must have gotten born again last night!”

Well, the problem was that she came back to her home church and I think was accepted as a member of the church based on that experience. But ... she never developed convictions. She was outwardly respectful to her parents and such, but she never seemed to grow beyond

just doing what was necessary to not get in trouble with the church or her parents.

When someone is truly born again, convictions build within their hearts, and the church and the parents don't have to keep ...

DS: ... priming the pump.

THTR: Exactly! But this particular young lady, as I watched her life, never seemed to grow. She never got past “being pretty.” And the last I saw her picture a year or two ago, you probably would consider it inappropriate to hang on your refrigerator. Perhaps we are a little weak on the difference between clearing one's conscience—as this girl did by confessing a sin—and dying to self.

DS: Yeah ...

THTR: And the next morning someone looks at her and says ...

DS: ... you must have gotten born again!

THTR: Are we perhaps a little weak on what it means to be born again? What is your comment on all this?

DS: Well, I have always been very careful, or at least I have always tried to be very careful, to tell someone that they got born again. I want them to have the witness within themselves. I agree that *if* they have surrendered their will, there is going to be something within them

where old things have passed away and all things have become new. They are not going to need you standing beside them holding them up; there is going to be a drive in their own heart towards holiness and righteousness. That is not saying they will not need to be disciplined and taught, but there have to be convictions in their own heart. When I got converted that first summer, I worked for some professed Christian people, but at milking time—morning and evening—they had to play their country music, supposedly for the cows' sake. I had tried to turn it off, but that didn't work.

In my heart, I fled from that. I had something within me that drove me to the Word of God, that drove me to convictions. I remember listening to some country gospel tapes that I had in my car that summer. All of a sudden one evening I thought, “You know what? There is higher ground than this!” And I put it away. There was something in my heart when I was born again that drove me



Is the dog wagging the tail, or the tail wagging the dog?

to higher ground, rather than just being pulled back into what I was coming out of.

THTR: To be honest, that is a great concern to me in our churches. We are not discerning sometimes in our children between when they clear their conscience of a bad deed—which is a good thing to do—and when they just totally die to self and take up the cross to follow Jesus. The fruits are not manifesting themselves.

DS: I appreciate that, brother!

THTR: I had some of those childhood experiences of clearing my conscience, but when I was 18 years old, God led me to see myself for who I really was: a self-centered little wretch who cared only about what gave me pleasure. I saw that I was not like Him. I needed something way beyond forgiveness ... I needed to be changed, converted, regenerated into a new person! And if God wouldn't change me, I was a hopeless case, because I couldn't change myself.

Back to corporate drift, you mentioned something that I have pondered for years. You mentioned growing in appreciation for other conservative Anabaptist churches. I grew up in "Holiness" churches mostly. One thing I noticed is that they lose about 80-90% of their youth it seems² ... and you obviously cannot maintain a church that way if you are not making many converts from the world.

But in the past, the "Holiness" churches were very good about going out and evangelizing and winning souls. I am thinking of The Salvation Army and similar groups in its early days, where they would "set up shop" in the roughest parts of the cities and some of those drunken "bums" would get converted and turn from their sin and immorality and live a holy life. There was a real obvious change in their life. But the problem in those churches has been that they have not been very good at keeping their own children.

In contrast, the Anabaptist people are somewhat the opposite. You can trace some of those family lines back 3-400 years and 15 generations, with God-fearing people all along the way. Originally, the Anabaptists were real soul winners, bringing in tens of thousands into the movement. But the last few generations of conservative Anabaptists have not been real successful at winning souls

from the outside ... yet they have a much greater success at keeping what they have. What do you have to say about this?

DS: It is the will of God for both!

THTR: Well, that is what I was thinking. I have been trying to learn the secrets from both sides! I have grown in appreciation for groups that keep their youth. The Old Order Amish keep about 85% of their youth. The New Order Amish keep about 60%. The Beachy Amish keep about 40%.³ "Our" churches are probably closest in application to the Beachy ... and probably in the retention rate of keeping our youth. I have questioned what we could

learn from churches that keep more of their youth than we do? Of course, keeping someone "in the church" and keeping them "in the kingdom of God" are not synonymous, but could we learn something from others?

DS: Yes, I think there must be. Perhaps humility?

THTR: I have wondered if perhaps it is because those churches make a real distinct line between "us" and "them": the church and the world. Now to be honest, we could probably fault some of those churches in their definition of what is "of the world," but that is not my point. The point is that the line is *clearly drawn*. When the line gets blurry, it is easy for young people to meddle around in that "no

man's land" and get lost in there somewhere ... never to return. These are just some things I have been pondering.

Now, one last question: What do you think of the following little saying? "Flies never sit on a boiling pot."

DS: It sounds to me like 2 Peter 1:5-7, where it tells us "And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; And to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; And to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity." Then he continues in verse 8 with these words, "For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ." Then continuing on into verse 10 we find, "if ye do these things, ye shall never fall."

Sounds like a boiling pot to me!

THTR: Thank you, brother Dean, and may your pot ever boil! ~

³ These are figures from an "official" study of some sort, but the source is unknown.



Flies never sit on a boiling pot.

² Personal estimation, not an official statistic.