

THE EASTERN MENNONITE TESTIMONY

SELECTED ARTICLES FROM THE MONTHLY PUBLICATION
OF
THE EASTERN PENNSYLVANIA MENNONITE CHURCH
APRIL 2016



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

NB. Only limited extracts from The Eastern Mennonite testimony are published on this website. No addresses or personal details will be published for privacy reasons. The views expressed in the articles are those of the individual authors.

Editor: www.anabaptistmennonites.net

As the years progress, the spectrum of groups descending from Anabaptist origins is increasingly variegated. This spectrum includes not only the conservative Mennonite groups but also the liberal Mennonite conferences, as well as the Old Order Amish, with whom we have a more distant ancestral connection.

From the context of our origins in southeastern Pennsylvania, our not-so-distant denominational relatives certainly include the Lancaster Conference, from whom we have received our authorization. "In an attitude of openness and love the Bishop Board agreed to the release of the [MMM] bishops ... and to recognize the organization they feel led to develop. We do not speak of this as a withdrawal ... but as a mutual amiable agreement to have separate organizations." *

Our spiritual relatives also include the Old Order Mennonites. We may tend to think that the Old Order (Jonas Martin) Division of 1893 was a long time ago, but 123 years is not a long period of time in comparison to the broader scheme of history. Prior to the Old Order Division, the (Old) Mennonite Church, including the Lancaster Conference, was essentially the sole progenitor of the American Mennonite heritage.

In consideration of both our history and our present constituency, we are closely related, some of us biologically, to the Old Order Mennonites originating in southeastern Pennsylvania. This includes the Weaverland Conference (1893) and the Groffdale Conference (1927).

As a bona fide church group, recognizable and viable for over forty-five years, we may wonder if we are really so indebted to our ancestral church groups. Indeed we are! We have benefited in numerous ways from the contributions of other groups. Many applications and practices we hold dear have been handed down to us. Tests the Old Order Amish faced contributed to the toleration we enjoy today in operating our own Christian day schools without government intrusion.

As we understand our history and recognize the contribution of the past, we will value the heritage we have been given. This helps us to respect our spiritual relatives.

We show our respect for these church groups by speaking respectfully of them. In answering the questioner who wonders if we are Amish, we do not hesitate to explain the common heritage of faith and the shared Anabaptist identity. We may not belittle their ways even though they appear

quaint to the modern man. We do not speak disparagingly, because in many ways we appreciate and embrace the same values.

If an individual desires a more comprehensive answer, we may have opportunity to explain the differences that exist between us and other groups. Perhaps we can share the historical perspective that gave rise to some of those differences. But we explain respectfully.

We respect our spiritual relatives by recognizing the validity of the lines of separation they draw. Those who make applications more conservative and more restrictive than ours are drawing lines and making applications in obedience to the Scriptural doctrines of separation and nonconformity—just as we are. We should not highlight those applications that may seem to us to be somewhat incongruous. Instead, we should understand that any line, wherever it is drawn, may be made to appear somewhat unreasonable. Consequently, if we mock or belittle the more conservative applications, we are simultaneously chipping away at our own foundations and Biblical applications.

Regretfully, a great divide exists between us and the course the liberal Mennonites have taken. We are troubled by their disobedience to Scriptural truth and by their toleration and even endorsement of sinful living. When we discuss these issues, we must do so frankly but kindly. We should not speak derisively or disrespectfully.

Most importantly, we show due respect to those of common heritage by being faithful to the trust we were given. We can easily look back and see mistakes of the past. We can look around and glibly highlight the inconsistencies of others. But our time and our place are our opportunity and our responsibility. What are we doing with the charge given us?

The path of faithfulness is marked by Scriptural values and tested in countless ways in everyday applications of daily living. Among many other things, faithfulness also requires a regard for our heritage and a respectful attitude toward those with whom we share a common spiritual ancestry.

—ism

**Bishop Board Statement to Fall Session of Lancaster Mennonite Conference, September 19, 1968, cited in Keeping the Trust, (Ephrata, Pa.: Eastern Mennonite Publications, 2013), p. 187.*



"Called to Be Saints"

Depending upon one's frame of reference, the word saint evokes differing mental pictures. One individual might picture an aged, godly grandmother who is always kind and good. Others might think of those who were formally recognized for their supposed exceptional holiness and who have been elevated to the status of saint by a religious organization. But all those who "are sanctified in Christ Jesus [are] called to be saints" (1 Corinthians 1:2).

Ultimately, God is calling everyone to this position. He is no respecter of persons; He desires the salvation and sanctification of all mankind. An individual might try to excuse himself and say that perhaps God is calling others to be saints, but certainly He is not calling me. That individual should know that God "now commandeth all men every where to repent" (Acts 17:30).

But how can man who is unlovely, dead in trespasses and sin, be transformed into someone who is spiritually beautiful, accepted in God's eyes, and called to be a saint? That is almost more than we can comprehend.

God's mercy and great love enable us to become saints. "But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved)" (Ephesians 2:4-5). The blood of Christ is our provision into this blessed experience. "But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ" (Ephesians 2:13).

We become saints by God's grace through the exercise of personal faith. "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God" (Ephesians 2:8).

As a Christian considers his position in Christ before God, he might feel unworthy to be called a saint. However, we turn our focus to God and His plan for mankind, and then we fit into that plan. God is looking for individuals who are willing to follow Him. As they follow, they are being molded into His image.

In this life we will never fully understand the marvel of God's grace, but as saints we thank God for calling us out of darkness into His marvelous light. God has blessed many of us with Christian parents who have shielded us from exposure to a host of evil influences—influences that would have caused many hindrances and unpleasant consequences in our "called to be saints" walk with God. But those who have been exposed to harmful influences find God's power to be their sufficiency as they yield to God,

"as becometh saints" (Ephesians 5:3).

Before God, all believers are justified and sanctified by virtue of what they are "in Christ." In our actual experience of progressive sanctification, we are not each at the same place in our Christian walk. Some believers have progressed further than others.

The call to be saints is a call to a worthy walk. "I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, with all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Ephesians 4:1-3).

Our position in Christ needs to affect our everyday lives. The more our lives conform to our position, the more we will manifest practical holiness as the children of God, His saints. We must guard lest we fail in this high calling. Are we "Christian" in name, but fail to live in a way that is pleasing to God? Are we indeed showing to the world that we are saints--children of the King?

God has many blessings for those who accept the call to be saints. One of the greatest blessings is the knowledge that God so loved us that He gave of Himself through Jesus so that we could be reconciled back to him.

We live without condemnation. "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh but after the Spirit" (Romans 8:1).

We know a peace that the world knows nothing of. "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid" (John 14:27).

As we maintain our walk with Christ, we are secure in Him. "And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my Father's hand" (John 10:28). Consider Romans 8:35-39.

We are empowered by the overcoming power of God within. "Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world" (1 John 4:4).

As we occupy till He comes, may our lives and lips communicate to the world around us that we have been with Jesus. Then God will not be ashamed to call us His saints. "O fear the LORD, ye his saints: for there is no want to them that fear him" (Psalm 34:9).

Brother Kenneth



The Imminence of Christ's Second Coming

Part 3: The Practical Motivation for Us

The realization that Jesus Christ is indeed coming back for His own and that He could appear at any moment has a definite effect on our manner of life.

We must be ready to leave at a moment's notice. "Therefore be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh" (Matthew 24:44). Jesus did not say, "Get ready." When the trumpet sounds, no one will have even half a second to get ready—to repent of some evil thought or action, to clean out some skeleton in the closet, to be reconciled to another. We must live in a constant state of readiness. We must keep our lamps trimmed, and our vessels (lives) filled with oil (the Holy Spirit). We must be looking for His coming (Hebrews 9:28), not shackled to pleasures, possessions, or politics. We must be watchful at all times (Mark 13:32-37). "Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless" (2 Peter 3:14).

We must be growing spiritually. The new birth is not a once-and-done transaction that forever seals the believer as a part of Christ's bride. The Scriptures teach a progressive sanctification in which the believer works out his salvation (Philippians 2:12) throughout the probation of life. "And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure" (1 John 3:3).

We must walk as "children of light." "But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief. Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness. Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober. For they that sleep sleep in the night; and they that be drunken are drunken in the night. But let us, who are of the day, be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love; and for an helmet, the hope of salvation" (1 Thessalonians 5:4-8).

We must relate to our fellow servants with a sense of accountability. Jesus indicated something about our tendency when He warned of the evil servant who "shall say in his heart, My lord delayeth his coming; and shall begin to smite his fellowservants, and to eat and drink with the drunken" (Matthew 24:48-49). This warning is especially directed to one who has been "made ruler over his household" (24:45). Every person in authority must honestly consider the tendency to abuse that authority by mistreating those under his influence or to neglect his authority by being caught up

with eating and drinking. The principle applies to all. "Let your moderation [sweet reasonableness] be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand" (Philippians 4:5). "Be ye also patient [long-suffering]; stablish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh. Grudge [murmur] not one against another, brethren, lest ye be condemned: behold, the judge standeth before the door" (James 5:8-9).

We must be faithful doers of God's Word. Jesus spoke this very solemn warning: "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? ... And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity" (Matthew 7:21-23). "Behold, I come quickly: blessed is he that keepeth the sayings of the prophecy of this book.... Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city" (Revelation 22:7, 14). What an incentive to dig into and meditate upon the meat of the Word! to take the Bible at face value! to crucify every fleshly impulse and human reasoning that offers an excuse to water down the message of truth!

We must endure unto the end. "And the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God, and into the patient waiting [cheerful endurance] for Christ" (2 Thessalonians 3:5). "For ye have need of patience [cheerful endurance], that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise. For yet a little while, and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry" (Hebrews 10:36-37).

We must serve the Lord with a keen sense of urgency. To all His servants, Jesus says, "Occupy till I come" (Luke 19:13). And the work is indeed urgent. "Say not ye, There are yet four months, and then cometh harvest? behold, I say unto you, Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest" (John 4:35). All that we possess is the ever-present, ever-passing now. We must not rest on the laurels of our past labors or presume upon tomorrow as another opportunity; the work is staring us in the face right now. Now is the time to study my Sunday school lesson; now is the time to train our children; now is the time to write the story or article that the Lord has stilled my spirit to write (or that I have promised an editor to write); now is the time to use the brotherly address; now is the time to witness to the salesman at the door. Like Jesus, we say, "I must work the works of him that sent me while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work" (John 9:4).

How can the servant who senses the awful solemnity of the coming day of reckoning be casual and lukewarm? Will he fill his moments—of which he will someday give account—with daydreaming, with adorning himself, or with securing and beautifying the things he expects to leave behind at any moment? Will he relate to his God-given talents—of which he will someday give account—as if he has nothing to return to the Lord or as if his service is a notch above that of others? Will he devote his material resources of which he will someday give account—to staying a step ahead of others? to enjoying an extended vacation that contributes little or nothing to the Master's gain? to accumulating an array of hunting gear, electronic gadgetry, or antiques?

Will he not rather seek "first the kingdom of God" (Matthew 6:33)? Will he not rather seek to "excel to the edifying of the church" (1 Corinthians 14:12)? Will he not rather use "the mammon of unrighteousness" to bring as many souls as possible "into everlasting habitations" (Luke 16:9)? "Surely I come quickly. Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen" (Revelation 22:20-21).

Brother Bruce



The Water of Cleansing

Naaman, a Syrian, was the only leper who found cleansing in the days of Elisha. Ironically, he found that cleansing in the water of the Jordan River. Obviously Naaman was cleansed by the power of God and not by the composition of the water. Is it possible, though, that the waters of Jordan had more to do with Naaman's cleansing than we, at first, think? Is God still calling people to a similar experience today?

Naaman was a proud man. Even before he came to Elisha, God was working to break his pride. Leprosy was a disease that ultimately would relegate him to a place among the meanest outcasts. It would bring him down to the lowest social level and eventually to death. Begging for healing from the king of Israel, whose land he had invaded repeatedly, was a drastic step of humility for Naaman, but one he was willing to take.

However, Naaman needed to get down lower than that. Naaman was finally directed to the prophet, but when he found Elisha, the prophet did not even come out to see him. Instead, Elisha sent a servant. As if that was not

lowly enough, the servant told Naaman, "Go and wash in Jordan seven times" (2 Kings 5:10). This added insult to injury. Not only was Naaman treated as a commoner, but he was also told to go down into the Jordan River to become clean!

Both his personal pride and his national pride were insulted. Not only had the prophet humiliated Naaman by sending a servant rather than coming out to see him himself, but he had also told Naaman to wash in a river that was identified with Israel and one that seemed inferior to those of his own land. Naaman went away in a rage, but again God approached him through servants. We should give Naaman credit for listening to their common-sense reasoning.

Many times today God gives direction through a servant to those who seek Him. He often uses the brother of low degree or the one least esteemed. Some people miss the blessing because they proudly insist that God reveal everything personally to them Himself.

In sending Naaman to the Jordan, God made clear that the cleansing was His work and not that of some mystical fountain of youth. Also it was a major step in relinquishing his pride. And, finally, it was an identification with Israel. (Israel was known to be the people of God even though they were a poor representation of Him at this time.)

Like Naaman, all men today are infected with the deadly disease of sin. Some are very proud, but this disease will eventually bring all men to the lowest level (the bottomless pit) if not cured.

The road to cleansing and perfection involves laying aside all pride, coming to the people of God, listening to the servants, giving up our own ideas, and identifying with God's church. Along with surrender, God always asks for identification.

The church is the bride of Christ, which He has purchased and washed with His own blood. He is preparing to present her to Himself without "spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing." Consequently, it may seem inappropriate to compare the church to the water of a common river. But the church is comprised of earthen, imperfect humans.

The church is God's organ for perfecting imperfect humans. Imperfect humans, however well-meaning, make errors in relationships. Interestingly, God uses the human side of us to perfect, or polish, the spiritual side of us.

In our day, the idea of accountability to a disciplined body of believers is often minimized. People offer various excuses for their refusal to cooperate with a group. These excuses include statements such as the following:

"There are hypocrites in the church." "The church is full of pride." "The ministry really mishandled my case." "The administration is inconsistent." "Someone hurt my feelings." and "My convictions (personal ideas) were not appreciated."

Because church members are human, these accusations often contain a measure of truth. There may be some hypocrites, some pride, and some inconsistency in the church. People mistakenly say things that hurt others. The ministers do lack a perfect understanding, and they may fail to communicate the compassion they feel.

Are these facts valid reasons for disdaining the church? The answer is a resounding no! A person who hides behind these excuses is implying that he is never hypocritical, proud, or inconsistent, or at least that his personal virtue exceeds that of the group. He is saying that he has a better understanding of issues than the ministerial body. Actually he is even saying that he is incapable of blundering in relationships. What he is saying and implying would certainly seem to be expressions of pride.

"Many lepers were in Israel in the time of Eliseus the prophet; and none of them was cleansed, saving Naaman the Syrian" (Luke 4:27). Many people today are not finding the cleansing (perfecting) God wants them to have, because they are unwilling to humble themselves and identify with the other imperfect persons in the church. Are you benefiting from this water of cleansing, or are you like one of the other lepers?

Brother John



Church Committee Report

Ashland / Numidia Bible Schools

"Keep that which is committed to thy trust" (1 Timothy 6:20). As a church we have been entrusted with the responsibility of passing on the faith to the rising generations. The 680 students who have attended Bible school this year will have an influence across our churches. Our prayer is that this forty-ninth year of Bible school has deepened our young people's understanding of the Word, has strengthened their convictions, and has given them a greater vision of the work of God's kingdom.

We thank the many who have helped staff the work for their willingness to serve in this way. We are confident this involvement has enriched their

lives as well. "For we are labourers together with God" (1 Corinthians 3:9). One of the less conspicuous but very needful areas of the Bible school building is the dining room and kitchen. The last report stated that the renovation project of Numidia's dining room and kitchen turned out to be more extensive than anticipated due to the challenges of making changes in an older facility. As you can imagine, this came with a price tag. The total cost for this renovation was \$130,019.41. Some of the major items that drove the cost so high were the new kitchen cabinets, the new walk-in freezer and refrigerator, the hood for the exhaust system in the cooking area, and the outside door. These last two items needed to follow code requirements. Upon removal of the old cabinets, it became apparent that re-installing them was impractical. Because of the age and inefficiency of the coolers, we needed to replace them. We trust this facility will serve for many more years, the Lord willing. Our cooks have expressed appreciation for the new facility. We appreciate the willingness of many who volunteered time and effort to make this work possible.

Though the buildings are closed and quiet, the work goes on. The programs for the Bible Conference Week and the Christian Schoolteachers' Instruction Course are being planned. The board plans to meet this month to begin planning for the 2017 terms.

Continue to pray for the work. We are building for eternity and need the wisdom and guidance that God alone can give. We desire that the Bible schools continue to serve the church.

Brother Joseph for the Ashland/Numidia Board



A God-Honoring Courtship (Part 4) Maintaining Purity

On one of their first visits, John and Mary had discussed guidelines for their courtship. Affirming that they would avoid temptation and have a hands-off courtship had almost felt like an awkward formality. The thought of taking physical liberties with one another seemed so remote.

As their friendship progressed, John and Mary became increasingly comfortable with one another. They freely shared their spiritual insights and the values and goals that were close to their hearts. Being together was always a pleasure! The standards that were built as an awkward formality were

rapidly becoming a critical safety railing.

God has designed the ideal love relationship between man and woman to rest on three primary foundations: spiritual unity, emotional unity, and physical unity. The Bible clearly teaches that physical union outside of marriage is sin. Healthy Christian courtship explores spiritual and emotional compatibility. Physical contact in courtship is dangerous for two important reasons: It feeds an appetite for the forbidden, and it starves healthy spiritual and emotional unity.

Establishing high standards of conduct is the first step in guarding the purity of your courtship. You owe it to one another to address this subject in one of your earliest visits. Waiting till some months have passed will weaken your resolve.

Involve others in your courtship. Limit the time you spend alone. Interact with church families and other couples. Spending time with your family helps you to avoid temptation. Keep the lines of communication open between you and your parents. They are responsible to know how you are spending your time. Knowing that someone will inquire motivates noble behavior.

Employ reasonable safeguards when you are alone. Spend your time where others can see you. Let the sitting room door stand open a bit. A closed or locked door gives you a sense of exclusive privacy that is not yours. Honestly recognize that darkness and tiredness rapidly erode reserve. Invite your parents' direction for long-distance travel plans.

Allow plenty of space. Keeping a healthy distance between one another supports the high standards you have set. Allow plenty of space between you on the couch or in the car. Be cautious when sharing books or looking at things together. Frequently bumping into or brushing by one another indicates indiscreet familiarity.

Maintain a sense of dignity and formality. Keep your posture and activities well within the realm of modesty and dignity. Lounging on the floor or shedding shoes and socks propels you to the threshold of compromise.

Plan profitable activities. The old adage "Idleness is the devil's workshop" applies here if it fits anywhere. Planning how you will spend your time is as important as setting a date to be together.

Maintaining reserve in courtship reveals noble, trustworthy character. Guarding each other's purity lays a firm foundation for a lifetime of marital fidelity.

—*Brother Jesse*



PRAYER POINT

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

Pray for the Literature Evangelism Committee as it directs the city evangelism ministry of the church. Jesus said, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel." In our sprawling neighborhoods and cities, the world has come to us. Pray for a vision to "preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things."

Pray for the presidential election in the United States. As the campaign intensifies, we are reminded of the strife among Jesus' disciples concerning "which of them should be accounted the greatest." Pray that God would overrule in His sovereignty.

Pray for our young parents who are making choices that will affect the future of their families. Parents are accountable for the legacy of faith delivered to them. Pray for church loyalty and stability in a time of many religious voices and options.

Thank the Lord for the generous response to the financial commitments of the Mission Board. Of the total receipts reported for 2015, 95 percent was allocated to the seven foreign mission fields of the church.

