

THE EASTERN MENNONITE TESTIMONY

SELECTED ARTICLES FROM THE MONTHLY PUBLICATION
OF
THE EASTERN PENNSYLVANIA MENNONITE CHURCH
AUGUST 2008



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

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Editorial.

Weddings That Complement Scriptural Church Life

The commercialism and fanfare that generally surround the weddings of the world indicate the flimsy foundation on which many marriages are based. This extravagance violates many Scriptural principles and tends to weaken, rather than strengthen, the homes that are being established. We must reject the wedding practices of the world and rather look to the Word for guidance in planning our weddings.

The wedding standards the church has established are a sincere effort to keep our wedding practices Scriptural. Early in the formation of the Eastern Pennsylvania Mennonite Church, the need for more consistent wedding standards became apparent. Wedding practices had been drifting worldward over the previous decades and had added momentum to apostasy in the Mennonite Church. Scriptural teaching and establishing more consistent wedding standards have helped us regain much conviction.

The potential is always present to accept deviations and innovations in our wedding practices that will influence the church to drift worldward. What basic principles must we continue applying to maintain

weddings that complement Scriptural church life?

Worship. The weddings of society usually focus on the nuptial pair and especially on the bride. Although the wedding does mark the establishment of a home and is therefore very special to the couple, honoring God must remain the key focus. The worship service and ceremony should honor God as we draw truths from His Word. Our chief goal needs to be that we "do all to the glory of God" (1 Corinthians 10:31).

Christian stewardship. The weddings of society are generally extravagant events; sometimes expenditures exceed the financial means of the individuals and families involved. Christian weddings and lavish spending do not mix; the Scriptural principles of economics fully apply to this special day. Rather than encouraging expensive and extravagant tastes, our weddings should testify to our wise stewardship of the resources that God has so graciously given.

Although weddings tend to be large because of the many friends and relatives involved, stewardship and humility call for a reasonable limit to their size. Photographs do help preserve precious memories, but the principle of stewardship must also be applied in this area. We need to follow the Bible principle of using but not abusing our

possessions (1 Corinthians 7:31).

Modesty and simplicity. Weddings in society are generally bride-centered celebrations that flaunt fashion and physical attraction. In contrast, simplicity and modesty help us to focus on the spiritual principles that produce a truly stable and happy marriage. Ornamentation and finery detract from the beauty that simplicity possesses. So much time and emphasis can be spent on color schemes and elaborate preparations that the beauty of simplicity is ruined.

The attire of the couple joining hands and of others involved in the wedding must be in harmony with the standards of the church. The directives given in the booklet *Preparing for Christian Weddings and Godly Homes* are considered a part of our church discipline and should be followed when planning weddings.

Joyful solemnity. The weddings of society tend to be frivolous celebrations. Inappropriate remarks and inferences detract from holiness and encourage sensuality. This atmosphere is not suitable at any time, and both the wedding service and the reception must avoid this lightheartedness. A frivolous atmosphere will detract from the sound Scriptural exhortation that is given in the wedding service. The public comments made at the reception should be joyfully subdued

rather than laced with hilarity or bathed in foolishness. Our weddings too need to reflect sobriety and godliness (Titus 2:12).

The wedding day is the first day for the new home that God is establishing. Bible principles should be applied that will help build a solid home for the two who are joining hands and for the next generation. The wedding day is the first opportunity for this new home to let its light shine as a spiritual beacon. The wedding ceremony and the reception will either provide the first gleams of that witness or cast a shadow that mars its brilliance—GEA



The Spirit of Korah.

The rebellion of Korah, recorded in Numbers 16, reveals a dangerous spirit that brought much judgment on Israel. Can this spirit be found in our time, in our congregations, and even in our own hearts? A look at this account should help us to identify the spirit of Korah and its expressions.

The spirit of Korah is set against divinely appointed authority. "They gathered themselves together against Moses and against Aaron" (Numbers 16:3). Moses and Aaron had been called by God to lead His people. This insurrection against them was an affront to the

One who had placed them in authority. Moses identified the issue clearly: "thou and all thy company are gathered together against the LORD" (Numbers16:11).

Any rebellion against parental authority, school administration, church leaders, or civil government is rebellion against the One who set up these institutions for our good. If seeds of contempt and disdain are sprouting in our hearts against those over us, the spirit of Korah may be there.

The spirit of Korah is contagious. Korah and his three partners "took men" (Numbers16:1). Soon they had two hundred fifty princes who were famous men (Numbers16:2). Next "Korah gathered all the congregation against [Moses and Aaron]" (Numbers16:19). In just two days the revolt affected the whole camp.

The Lord hates the person "that soweth discord among brethren" (Proverbs 6:19) If we are influencing others to turn against authority or if we are allowing others to turn us against authority, the spirit of Korah may be at work. The spirit of Korah piously professes holiness. Korah argued that "all the congregation are holy, every one of them, and the LORD is among them" (Numbers16:3). It was not holiness that led Korah to turn God's chosen people against His leaders. True holiness on the

part of the congregation would have expressed itself in respect for Moses and Aaron and would have made their leadership much easier.

In our time, cries arise for more spiritual life. "Let us just go by the Bible" is one such cry. And indeed, we are ever in need of spiritual growth, and all our doctrine and practice must be based on the Bible. But when these cries are actually calls to turn against established church institutions and standards, the spirit of Korah may be taking root.

The spirit of Korah uses false accusations. "Ye take too much upon you" (Numbers16:3) was not at all true of Moses, who has been called the meekest man that ever lived (Numbers12:3). They also falsely charged, "Is it a small thing that thou halt brought us up out of a land that floweth with milk and honey, to kill us in the wilderness?" (Numbers16:13) This charge did not accurately portray their past condition or God's future purposes.

We must beware lest untrue reports are circulated and believed among us. 'A false witness that speaketh lies' is also on God's list of hated things. If our "concerns" must be reinforced with exaggerated statements or misrepresentations of facts, the spirit of Korah may be hidden underneath.

The spirit of Korah boldly per-

sists when challenged. When Moses presented the plan to let the Lord choose between Aaron's censer and the two hundred fifty censers, these men should have feared. But Korah boldly "gathered all the congregation" (Num.16:19), expecting the outcome to be in his favor.

When usurpers are taken to the Scriptures to show them their error, too often they will not see it. When pride takes over a person's thinking patterns, spiritual blindness sets in. When we are no longer willing to heed warnings from our leaders and brethren, the spirit of Korah may be gaining ground.

The spirit of Korah provokes the Lord. "Moses said, Hereby ye shall know . . . , if the LORD make a new thing... then ye shall understand that these men have provoked the LORD" (Num.16:28-30). The Lord indeed made a new thing, and the earth closed on "all the men that appertained unto Korah, and all their goods" (Numbers16:32).

God is no more tolerant of rebellion today. His judgment may not fall as immediately or come in the same manner, but it is sure. "Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousands of his saints, to execute judgment upon all, and to convince all that are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have ungodly committed, and of all

their hard speeches which ungodly sinners have spoken against him" (Jude 14, 15). Hard speeches, spoken against God and God-delegated authority, are expressions of the spirit of Korah.

The spirit of Korah dies hard. "But on the morrow all the congregation of the children of Israel murmured against Moses and against Aaron, saying, Ye have killed the people of the LORD" (Numbers16:41). The whole camp called Korah and his mutineers "the people of the LORD," they falsely charged Moses and Aaron with murder, and they were unwilling to see God in the whole picture. What a false summary of all the sin that we just noted! Again the Lord was indeed provoked! But for Aaron's intercession, the whole congregation would have been consumed.

"Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth!" (James 3:5). Eternity will reveal the far-reaching effects of rebellion today. Congregations are affected. Generations are affected. Godly patterns for living are lost. The world ever has its mouth open to swallow, through apostasy and worldliness, all that give themselves over to the spirit of Korah. And no one with the spirit of Korah will escape the eternal judgment of God.

"Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves:

for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you" (Hebrews 13:17) J.S.,
Sunbury, PA



The Immutability of God

God is immutable. This means that He is not liable or subject to change or alteration. The word immutable (or any of its forms) is used only twice in the Scripture (Hebrews 6:17-18). However, the thought of God's unchangeableness is found in numerous other Scriptures. Hebrews 6 begins with the challenge to go on unto perfection and warns about the dangers of backsliding (Hebrews 6:1-6). Later in the chapter the example is given of the patient endurance of Abraham (Hebrews 6:13-15). In the next few verses, the certainty of God's promises is emphasized by comparing God's promise to Abraham with the oaths men make. When men want to make something sure, they swear by something greater than themselves to make certain that there is no more argument. They promise, and then they swear that they will keep their promise.

This is what God did to give Abraham confidence in His immutable promise (Hebrews 6:17). First, He gave His promise of blessing and multiplied seed. This also in-

cluded the promise of the Messiah. God's promise in itself was immutable because it is impossible for God to lie (Hebrews 6:18). Secondly, He confirmed His promise with an oath, which is the second immutable thing. God made it sure and then confirmed it to show that His Word is unchangeable. God's immutable promises are a strong consolation to us as well as to Abraham.

Because of the immutability of God's promise, we have an anchor to which we are grounded when the waves of despair and hopelessness threaten our bark. We can always stand firmly on this promise: God has a place prepared for all those who patiently endure through faith. The changelessness of God is the very basis for the Christian's hope. In what other ways does His immutability affect His children?

"The counsel of the LORD standeth for ever, the thoughts of his heart to all generations" (Psalm 33:11). What God has said in His Word still applies to us today. His love for righteousness and hatred for sin remain the same.

He does not change concerning what He loves and what He hates. Even the fulfillment of the Old Testament Law in Christ is an expression of His immutable purpose regarding salvation (1 Peter 1:8-20).

God's Word is the foundation on

which the apostles and prophets are built. It is the force that fanned the convictions of our Anabaptist forefathers. It is this same Word that gives us strong consolation, inspiration for today, and bright hope for tomorrow. "For ever, O LORD, thy word is settled in heaven" (Psalm 119:89).

God's actions are also immutable. "Whatsoever God doeth, it shall be for ever: nothing can be put to it, nor any thing taken from it" (Ecclesiastes 3:14). Man cannot improve on any of God's creation. When He made the world, He balanced everything to perfection. It will continue until God decrees its end. When He made our bodies, He made them perfect in His image. The curse of sin now mars them; but in their original state, they were perfect.

God is also immutable concerning the order in creation. He has set laws in place for as long as the earth remains. "While the earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease" (Genesis 8:22). This order in creation makes possible life as we know it. Only because of our unchanging God can we awake every morning to a new day. Everything is in its time and order. If God would but change one small detail in creation, such as the tilt of the earth's axis, nature would be al-

tered significantly. But God keeps it the same. Only because of this precision can man predict the appearance of comets and lunar and solar eclipses on a specific day, hour, and minute. We have come to take this order for granted, but it is possible only because of the immutability of God.

"Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning" (James 1:17). All our daily blessings—the light of a new day, the warmth of the sun, the refreshing showers, and the crops from the fields and gardens—are perfect gifts from our immutable God.

Does God's immutability make any difference to those who are not His children? Consider the words of Isaiah: "Woe to them that go down to Egypt for help; and stay on horses, and trust in chariots, because they are many; and in horsemen, because they are very strong; but they look not unto the Holy One of Israel, neither seek the LORD! Yet he also is wise, and will bring evil, and will not call back his words: but will arise against the house of the evildoers, and against the help of them that work iniquity" (Isaiah 31:1, 2). Though the Lord tarries long in mercy, yet His word of judgment is sure. The Day of Judgment is com-

ing when God will carry out everything He has spoken. "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of a living God." Why? Because His justice too remains unaltered; it too is immutable.

Today the door is still open; His invitation remains the same. Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28). As the world around us is constantly changing, may our faith remain fixed because of "Jesus Christ the same yesterday and today, and for ever"(Hebrews13:8).

D.M., Danskin, BC



Beatitude Series (Part 2)

"Blessed Are They That Mourn"

"Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted" (Matthew 5:4). The key thought of this beatitude is that those who mourn for their sins will find comfort in forgiveness.

Even as the child of God has a deep joy in the Lord for the forgiveness he has received, he will still be heavy-hearted about the things that grieve his Master. In addition to mourning for personal sin, two basic causes bring tears to the eyes of the Christian: physical death and sin.

Personal sin. All men relate to

their own sins in some way. Some hide them; others show them off and laugh about them. Still others weep because of them. In Luke 7 a sinful woman entered a Pharisee's house where Jesus sat eating. There she washed His feet with her tears and dried them with her hair. She wept because of how sinful she was. And what is the comfort for this kind of mourning? The comfort is in Christ's answer to her. "Thy sins are forgiven.... Go in peace."

The sins of others. Jesus wept over Jerusalem, saying, "If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes" (Luke 19:41, 42). How painful it was for Christ to offer men their only hope of eternal safety, only to have them count it an unholy thing! We weep too because of our helplessness to change men's hearts, because of the dreadful punishment that awaits them, and because of how Satan has blinded the eyes of mankind.

The comfort for this sorrow is yet coming. "They that sow in tears shall reap in joy" (Psalm 126:5). Who knows what the results will be as the Spirit uses the Word that we sow? "Thus saith the LORD; Refrain thy voice from weeping, and thine eyes from tears: for thy work shall be rewarded" (Jeremiah 31:16). Also, we can hardly com-

prehend how thoroughly Satan and his influence will be removed, and how supreme God and His way will yet become. Those who weep now will then rejoice.

Physical death. Many in society avoid the thought of death. They do not want to look into a coffin and weep. Perhaps the world does not dare to mourn because they have no comfort. But the child of God can face death because of the comfort that the hope of the resur-

rection brings. In resignation to God's will, he can weep and know that God sees and cares.

All mourning will be past for the believers when God wipes "all tears from their eyes" (Rev.21:4) "Therefore the redeemed of the LORD shall return, and come with singing unto Zion; and everlasting joy shall be upon their head: they shall obtain gladness and joy, and sorrow and mourning shall flee away" (Isaiah 51:11)



0 man of God, fight on!

**'Tis not the slothful one who wins the crown,
But he who fights and treads the serpent down.
Thou man of God, fight on!**

0 man of God, toil on!

**This is the work thy God hath called thee to—
To strengthen, serve, and cheer—this, love and do.
Thou man of God, toil on!**

0 man of God, watch on!

**Thy midnight watches for some soul that's lost
Thy Father sees. Take heart—mind not the cost.
Thou man of God, watch on!**

0 man of God, hope on!

**That, when thy blessed Lord shall come again,
He'll find thee waiting, and may tell thee then,
"Thou man of God, well done!"**

—RB