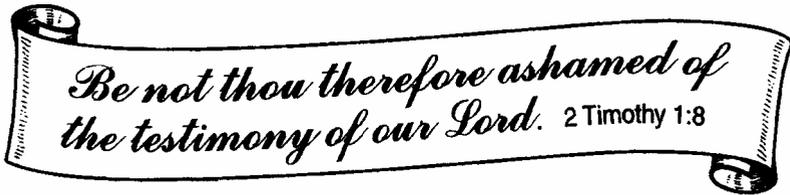


# THE EASTERN MENNONITE TESTIMONY

SELECTED ARTICLES FROM THE MONTHLY PUBLICATION  
OF  
THE EASTERN PENNSYLVANIA MENNONITE CHURCH  
AUGUST 2012



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.

### *"A Nail in His Holy Place"*

Ezra rent his garments, pulled out his hair, and sat down astonished. How could Israel turn away from God's mercy in restoring them to their homeland and fall again into sin? "And now for a little space grace hath been sheaved from the LORD our God, to leave us a remnant to escape, and to give us a nail in his holy place" (Ezra 9:8).

For centuries, carpentry included the skill of fashioning a wooden peg (nail) to fit snugly into a bored hole. This strong, durable joint can still be seen in old structures. Ezra likened this snug-fitting bond to the security found in God's presence and blessing.

Like Ezra, we too have graciously received "a nail in his holy place." We, our fathers, or our grandfathers returned from the captivity of apostasy and found untold blessings in Scriptural church life. The journey back from the land of captivity was painful. Many friends and family were left behind. The way was mocked and scorned. But God gave us a nail! Can we keep a grip, an anchor in truth that will spare us from drifting, damning deception? With time the nail tends to loosen with the frost of carnality and the jarring of worldliness. Some pull out the pegs as only interesting relics of the past. Each generation must tamp the nail securely into place.

Security in Christ is found as we are embedded in the temple of Christ. Nails have no strength in themselves. They are only as secure as the material in which they are fastened. Ezra would not stay in Babylon if he could be in Israel. Individualists who despise closeness with the brethren spin off from the light like "wandering stars" (comets) whose course ends in the black abyss of space (Jude 13).

When Ezra reflected on God's mercy in giving them "a nail in his holy place," he recalled the judgment that fell on Eliakim. As a faithful leader in the midst of Israel's apostasy, God had promised to "fasten him as a nail in a sure place" (Isaiah 22:23). But God further revealed that since Israel hung their relationship to God on Eliakim's faithfulness like an assortment of tin pots and pans on a nail, God would cut off the nail and the collection of vessels, cups, and flagons would come clattering to the ground.

The prophecy was fulfilled. A few righteous patriarchs could not stay the judgment on their sins. Jerusalem was mercilessly ransacked and burnt. The nation was torn out of God's land and away from His temple. Their vain trust in God's protection and blessing was crushed.

So, the church's collective strength and stability is in the firm grip each member has on God. A relationship with God cannot be hung on someone else's nail. The spiritual fervor and faithfulness of our fathers and grandfathers will not suffice for us. We may not "garnish the sepulchres of the righteous" while forsaking their ways. Ezra realized that just a few loose nails jeopardize the whole structure. We keep ourselves secure by keeping our brother faithful.

Security is realized only in the haven of holiness. Ezra accepted God's verdict that sin was the cause of their captivity. Have we studied and do we know how the larger part of the Mennonite Church slowly accommodated to the world's ways? Today they reap the curse of the world's vices.

In the conservative revival of forty years ago, many parted with their guitars: Does the next generation wish they could play them? Tee shirts and white socks were exchanged for plain suits and black footwear: Do our young men wear their plain suits with pleasure or with prodding? Concerned youth and young parents shunned the socials and baseball games of their peers: Are parents convinced today that youth of play do not produce youth of prayer? Many families discarded their radios, scanners, and televisions: Are our homes still silent and free of worldly propaganda, preaching, and politics? By prayer and faith many insurance policies were canceled: Does the same conviction still reign and is the trust still in God? Can this generation keep "a nail in his holy place"?

Ezra inspired a revival of godly fear. Ongoing revival is necessary to "separate [ourselves] from the people of the land." Every generation must choose their own course. But God will "give every one according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings." "Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God: on them which fell, severity; but toward thee, goodness, if thou continue in his goodness: otherwise thou also shalt be cut off" (Romans 11:22).

—BAS



### If All That We Have Were in Satan's Power

"There was a day when" God and Satan discussed Job's integrity. (See Job 1:6-12.) Satan claimed that Job's uprightness was not genuine. "He fears God because there is 'an hedge about him, and . . . all that he hath.' " Further, Satan declared that Job would curse God if the divine protection and material blessing were removed.

God knew His servant Job, "a perfect and an upright man," and God knew Satan, the liar and accuser. God refused Satan's challenge to test Job, for "God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man" (James 1:13). But God allowed Satan to test Job, saying, "All that he hath is in thy power."

"So Satan went forth," eager to wield his God-permitted power over Job's possessions. Rampant devastation followed. In rapid-fire succession fifteen hundred oxen and asses were stolen, seven thousand sheep burned up, and three thousand camels were taken away. Without divine restraint "the destruction that wasteth at noonday" (Psalm 91:6) erased Job's business enterprise.

Satan's destructive power was not limited to material things. That same day, most of Job's servants were slain, and all ten of his children died in a single stroke of tragedy. Even the moral support that Job likely expected from his wife was reduced to "curse God, and die" (Job 2:9).

Destruction is never satisfied (Proverbs 27:20), and Satan's lying never ends. 'Again there was a day when" Satan accused Job of ulterior motives and inferior faith. He said, in essence, "The former test proved nothing, because 'all that a man hath will he give for his life.' "

Again, God knew Satan's lie, and He understood the enduring quality of Job's faith. "Behold, he is in thy hand; but save his life," God allowed. Without delay, Satan smote Job from head to foot with sore boils.

The test was severe, but the outcome is clear. God was right, and Satan was wrong. Job's faith proved genuine, and the story is written for our learning, patience, comfort, and hope. (See Romans 15:4.)

What would happen if all that we have were in Satan's power?

We would have no earthly possessions. Satan is a devourer, a destroyer, and a death monger. He "cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy" (John 10:10). Like Job, we have possessions because God has restrained Satan's hand. We have life because God has rebuked the devourer and has not allowed him to destroy our sustenance (Malachi 3:11). Our family and every material blessing we hold would quickly vanish if they were in Satan's power.

Every day, with our thanksgiving, we recognize God as the good and gracious Giver of all. When have we last thanked God for also being the Keeper of our souls and our substance? "The LORD is thy keeper" (Psalm 121:5).

Satan's nature would be better understood. Exercising power reveals character. Nature within shows without when it is expressed. Because Sa-

tan is a deceiver, many think he is a giver of pleasures, possessions, and friends. But what Satan did to Job is all that Satan can do—rob, disappoint, and destroy.

Satan cannot create, give, or keep any blessing for men. Even every good thing that ungodly men have points to the blessing and mercy of God, and not to some giving ability that Satan often claims to possess. (See Deuteronomy 8:10-18.)

Our need for God's protective hedge would be better understood. Proud men view themselves as able guardians of their possessions. Many persons are oblivious to God's protective hedge, hardly aware that such protection encircles them. But men who fear God and eschew evil, as Job did, understand this need and pray for God's surrounding walls every day. "Except the LORD keep [our possessions], the watchman waketh but in vain" (Psalm 127:1).

We could be spiritually rich while we are materially poor. When God told Satan, "Behold, [Job] is in thine hand," He placed one limit—"Save his life." But other limits also existed, limits so well-known that naming them was not needed. Satan could test, but not touch, Job's relation with God, his perfect and upright character, and his unshakable faith. Materially, Satan reduced Job to a pauper, but spiritually Job was still "the greatest of all the men of the east."

Why do we so often tremble in the face of Satan's destructive power? If all that Satan can take were removed, would but little remain? Is our love for material things greater than our value on eternal riches? We rightly tremble before Satan's ruthlessness when we understand our stewardship accountability and the weakness of our humanity, especially when trials are severe.

Our faith in God would be tested. To profess faith when things go well is easy. Praise for God's goodness flows freely. Our "lines are fallen . . . in pleasant places," we quote. Yet, in life's sober moments, we sense the subtle tests of prosperity.

But to experience loss, as Job did, would suddenly and severely pull on the roots of faith. With difficulty we would still try to say, "God is great, and God is good." Like Job, we would not immediately understand what God has allowed or why this test came to us. Moments of tears, sleepless nights, spiritual doubts, and logical but unkind statements of well-meaning friends would plague us.

Even if God's last limit on Satan's hand were removed ("Save his life"), by faith we, like Job, could yet say, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him" (Job 13:15).

We would still be secure in God's unfailing care. If allowed, Satan will destroy our possessions, but he cannot remove God's promises. Material loss will test us, but it cannot wrest us from God. Satan's efforts, like the lion's roar, will not harm our faith unless we become fearful. The key to enduring trust is unshaken confidence in God's unfailing care.

We know that sometimes God allows Satan to take every earthly thing that men possess. But Satan cannot touch the soul in God's hand. Jesus said, "My Father . . . is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck [my people] out of my Father's hand" (John 10:29). May we rest and rejoice in this confidence, even if God would allow Satan's power over all that we possess.

*Brother Simeon*



### ***"THOU ART BESIDE THYSELF"***

The world views Biblical conservatism as eccentric religion derived from an unrealistic, literal interpretation of the Bible. If we are living according to the Scriptures, the world will see us as radical. The apostle Paul was accused by a worldly official of essentially being crazy (Acts 26). Let us examine this account briefly and analyze our own lives to see if we are worthy of the same accusation and to decide how best to respond to it.

Paul stood before Herod Agrippa and Porcius Festus to answer charges of sedition. After Paul gave zealous testimony of his conversion and missionary activity on behalf of a resurrected Jesus Christ, Festus declared, "Paul, thou art beside thyself; much learning doth make thee mad" (Acts 26:24).

In the eyes of the proud Roman official, who likely regarded all religion with contempt, the apostle Paul was a radical. Festus concluded that Paul was given over to sentimental unreality, based on his belief "of one Jesus, which was dead, whom Paul affirmed to be alive" (Acts 25:19).

What about us? Does the world today view us as radical or even eccentric? Let us examine five areas of our lives to consider how we measure up.

#### ***Our Family Life***

Our homes are free from television and radio, and our families are much larger, on average, than those of the surrounding society. We thank God before meals and have regular times of family worship. Our mothers are keepers at home (Titus 2:5), and our fathers lead spiritually and make a liv-

ing for the family. These all make us eccentric by the world's standards. However, we do face pressures to accommodate to worldly innovations in our homes. We should not be ashamed to be reserved in using cyber-communication lest we be "snared by following [it]" (Deuteronomy 12:30). Also, our brethren need to dress in a manner that clearly separates them from society. Buttoning up and wearing the plain hat are effective ways to achieve this. A Christian man should never be ashamed to identify with his Lord (Romans 1:16; 2 Timothy 1:8).

### ***Our Worship***

Nominal Christianity considers our worship practices odd. Segregated seating, kneeling prayer, and rejection of instrumental music make us stand apart from other churches in our communities. We frequently hear "words of truth and soberness" from our pulpits (Acts 26:25), and our ministers are not influenced by receiving a paycheck. We have a written discipline to guide our practice and are admonished by our leaders when we stray from it.

We greet each other with the Holy Kiss, a practice the world sees as strange. We follow the other ordinances as direct commands from God, but the world sees the Christian Woman's Veiling and Feet Washing as "going too far" in following the Scriptures literally. The majority of Christian churches do not follow our worship practices and consider them extreme. We should be both grateful for our heritage and confident in our practice, and should "hold fast that which is good" (1 Thessalonians 5:21).

### ***Our Schools***

We are blessed to have our own schools, where our children can receive a basic education. Christian curriculum, godly teachers without college degrees, and prayer in school make our schools much different from public schools. Still, we must be careful to not allow disrespectful behavior in our classrooms or a sports mentality on our playgrounds. We want to produce our own teachers but must not allow the worldly concept of "the more education the better" to influence us.

The world tells us that education is the key to success, but we know this is not true. Our goal for our children is (in the words of Jesus) "to open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me" (Acts 26:18).

### ***Our Mission Field***

Paul was a passionate missionary who risked his life and sacrificed com-

fort and convenience to spread the Gospel of Christ that people "should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance" (Acts 26:20). We also are called to daily proclaim the need for repentance and a change of life. Scriptural truth is radically different from the relative "truth" and doctrinal accommodation of the world.

As missionaries, we should be as different as Paul was, to be effective for the Lord. Our church also has foreign missionaries on several continents. We must support and encourage them.

### *Our Businesses*

Paul was a tentmaker (Acts 18:3), and appears to have lived a life of subsistence to support his work on behalf of the Lord. The Scriptures suggest a consistency in his lifestyle after conversion, and indicate that the world of his day saw him as a radical through and through. Paul had a zeal for souls, and his main "business" was to appeal to men's hearts (Acts 26:26-28).

In business practices today, the conservative Mennonite Church faces great danger. We must not allow the gap between us and the world to narrow, nor compromise Bible principles for the sake of convenience and profit. We must fear our wily foe more than hardship that may result from our obedience to God. The example Paul set for us should encourage us to fear only the judgment of God and to adapt our practices to His Word, and not to the pressures of this corrupt world. God will always provide for our needs if we are obedient. Let us not participate in the "high-tech" narcissism of a society in precipitous decline.

The apostle Paul was accused of madness because his fervor for the Lord Jesus permeated all aspects of his life. Brethren, may we soberly examine our current practices to be sure they are as consistent with the Word of God as Paul's were, remembering that inconsistency does not just lead to failure, but is failure. May we always be as worthy of the charge of madness as he was.

*Brother David*



## **Blessings of Home (Part 2)**

### **The Protection of Purity**

Rampant moral corruption in Noah's day brought the judgment of a worldwide flood. The same issue caused a rain of fire and brimstone to fall on Sodom and Gomorrah in the days of Lot. We have been forewarned that, "as it was in the days of Noe" and "as it was in the days of Lot," "even thus shall it be in the day when the Son of man is revealed" (Luke 17:26-30).

Truly, the characteristics of the days of Noah and Lot are duplicated today. Can godly parents construct a defensive hedge which will protect their homes in today's shameless society? The answer is a certain yes. "Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound" (Romans 5:20).

The responsibility to safeguard the purity of the home rests squarely on parents. Every child must learn to maintain a certain reserve about himself and a respect for others' privacy. This is important even among same gender siblings. Regardless of age or activity, children must be dressed modestly to form proper habits. Games involving extended touching and handling of each other may lead children to explore beyond the bounds of propriety.

Mailbox material would litter its garbage within children's reach and therefore must be carefully screened. Home library books require careful evaluation. Mystery stories and romance novels are obvious dangers. Books that include filthy language, unacceptable courtship practices, and loose morals can do equal damage.

When it is necessary to take children among society, we must plan carefully to limit exposure to the unholy. Grocery shopping, auction attendance, and waiting in a doctor's office are activities of life which can be spiritually hazardous. Can a Christian family enjoy a summer picnic at a public waterside park without endangering the purity of the mind?

Parents must be more than guards of purity; they must also be guides to purity. Children need parental supervision because "foolishness is bound in the heart of a child." A sufficient amount of hard work and constructive leisure activities reduce the temptation to impurity.

Concerned parents help their children select godly associates. To know what our children discuss with their peers may enable us to avoid larger problems later. An excessive amount of time spent with school-age friends is rarely edifying.

Parents must discreetly discuss with their adolescent children the origin of life. Young people who are carefully guided into this stage of physical de-

velopment will be spared the guilt complex that comes when they learn these facts from other children. Parents who exercise timely communication on these issues build a relationship of trust and honesty which will bless youth throughout life.

Satan is waging a war against all remnants of holiness. Soldiers are needed to protect havens of holiness for God. "May the Lord depend on you?"

—*Brother Harold*



## **Church Committee Report**

### **Bible Story Book Report**

Bible stories have always been favorites of children. Parents take seriously God's command: "And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up" (Deuteronomy 6:7). But no conservative Mennonite publisher offers a complete Bible story book. Available books generally have some unacceptable artwork, text with too much supposition, or articles with more facts, descriptions, and chronology than story.

For these reasons, Eastern Mennonite Publications has begun to compile a Bible story book. Approximately three hundred stories are written and are in the review and editing process. The EMP Art Department is currently producing the color pictures and the black and white graphics to accompany each story. A full-page color picture will illustrate every third story with a graphic to highlight a detail of the other stories.

The Art Department strives to draw consistent pictures that represent the Bible time period. This involves headgear, hair arrangements, beards, color of clothing, footwear, and so on. The Art Department has a policy of not picturing Christ's face.

The content of the stories is a major aspect as well. Since this book is a Bible story book, where no story can be written, the book may not even mention the Bible account. For example, few stories will come from the Law and the Prophets. A doctrinal review panel evaluates all pertinent Bible details, especially to include overlooked teachings. Furthermore, they try to delete all supposition and nonfactual information, such as three wise men coming on camels to a stable. Commentary, chronology, and geog-

raphy are removed where practical.

These stories target a six- to nine-year-old audience. Questions will accompany each story, with one of the questions being a thought question to involve older children.

A Bible story book should inspire a child's faith in God and His Word. It should be easy to read and understand, yet preserve the dignity of the Scriptures and our appreciation for the King James Version. Exact quotations will be included where practical. Archaic pronouns will remain in some of the familiar quotations, such as, "Where art thou?" and "Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God."

The panel has nearly completed the doctrinal review of the stories. The Art Department has drawn possibly one-third to one-half of the pictures. Final editing of the stories is in progress. Layout and publishing will follow before this project can be made available.

Pray that the Lord would direct and speed each step so that this book could be a blessing to many souls. We want our young ones to be lovers of the Book and servants of the Lord. "All [Bible stories are] given by inspiration of God ... that the [little ones in our care] may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works" (2 Timothy 3:16, 17).

*Brother Mark*



### *PRAYER POINT*

*"The effectual fervent prayer  
of a righteous man availeth much"*

*Pray* for our Christian day schools, the teachers as they teach, and the students as they apply themselves to diligent study.

*Pray* for our fall business meetings as we make plans for another edifying Sunday school year and make decisions concerning the material needs of the church.

*Pray* for our semiannual council services as we examine ourselves and share our peace testimony and support of the church.

*Thank* God that He hath "called [us] out of darkness into his marvellous light." May we show forth His praises.

*Thank* God for the rain and sunshine and the fruitful seasons.