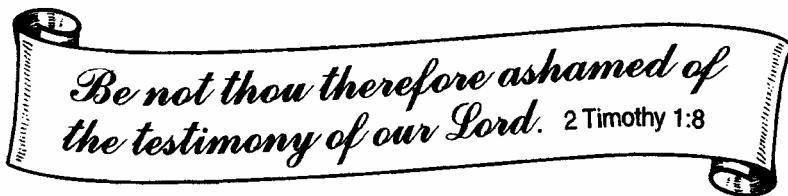


THE EASTERN MENNONITE TESTIMONY

SELECTED ARTICLES FROM THE MONTHLY PUBLICATION
OF
THE EASTERN PENNSYLVANIA MENNONITE CHURCH
DECEMBER 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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Editor: anabaptistmennonites.org.

Editorial.

"Good Tidings of Great Joy"

More than two millennia ago, an angelic messenger proclaimed to humble shepherds the wonderful message, *"I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people"* (Luke 2:10). The angel also proclaimed the joyful news that Christ the Lord had been born. This wonderful message was then confirmed by a host of angels praising God in glorious harmony.

Even before the angel brought these glad tidings, God had revealed to some of the faithful that Christ's advent was very near. Among these was Zacharias the priest, the father of John the Baptist. Before Christ's birth, he rejoiced to see by faith the rising of the "dayspring from on high." Being filled with the Holy Ghost after John's miraculous birth, Zacharias prophesied concerning the joyful blessings signified by the coming of Christ (Luke 1:68-79). Why was this message one that brought such great hope and joy to this priest of God? Why does it give us abundant cause to rejoice today?

God *"hath visited and redeemed his people. . . . The dayspring from on high hath visited us"* (Luke 1:68 & 78). Zacharias both began and concluded his prophetic psalm with joyful praise. Christ's coming is

supreme evidence that God has been mindful of man and has visited him.

About four hundred years had passed since God had last spoken "by the mouth of his holy prophets." Now He visited mankind in a far more glorious way by sending His Son Jesus Christ. God's work of mercy toward mankind was continuing and still continues today.

God *"hath raised up an horn of salvation for us"* (Luke 1:-69). Although Zacharias' prophecy focused on Israel, the angel proclaimed to the shepherds good tidings "which shall be to all people." The message of Christ's coming signified that salvation was being offered to "whosoever will." Before Christ's coming, the world was very dark because of man's sin. Because of Christ's coming, that dark world now contains the glorious light of the Gospel of Christ Jesus. The "horn of salvation" that God has raised up, everlasting life, is available to all who believe (John 3:16).

God has fulfilled His promise spoken *"by the mouth of his holy prophets, which have been since the world began"* (Luke 1:70). Zacharias rejoiced that the imminent coming of Christ signified the imminent fulfilling of the Old Testament Messianic prophecies. God, in mercy, had remembered His

holy covenant (Luke 1:72). How great Zacharias' joy as he realized that he was witnessing the early dawning of the fulfillment of those precious prophecies! How great our joy as the significance of His coming dawns in our hearts! How glorious to realize that all the prophecies regarding God's work with His people will surely come to pass!

God has opened the way *"that we should be saved from our enemies"* (Luke 1:71). The work of Christ has opened the way to deliverance from the power of Satan, *"the prince of the power of the air"* (Ephesians 2:2). Christ's coming as Savior signified deliverance from the guilt of sin and its power today and from eternal death and the presence of sin in eternity. As we faithfully remain in the love of God, *"neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord"* (Romans 8:38, 39).

God has opened the way that we *"might serve him without fear in holiness and righteousness"* (Luke 1:74, 75). God's Old Covenant was

glorious, yet the New Covenant brought far more excellent glory (2 Corinthians 3:10). The New Testament provides the Sacrifice for sin that the

Old Testament sacrifices anticipated. It provides for us a perfect love that casts out fear (1 John 4:18). We can come to the throne of grace with confidence rather than needing to remain separated from God's presence (Hebrews 4:16). The indwelling of the Holy Spirit calls us to a higher standard of holiness and provides the power for us to fulfill that high calling.

We, like Zacharias, can rejoice that God has visited His people in mercy. We have the privilege in this life to receive the horn of salvation, which God so graciously offers to us through Christ. The coming of Christ includes the call and the power to follow a higher standard of holiness as we present our bodies a living sacrifice to God (Romans 12:1-2). As the Day Star has arisen in our hearts, we are prepared, by grace, to joyfully show forth the glorious Gospel of Christ Jesus to those that still sit in darkness, and to eagerly anticipate the glorious reappearing of our Lord Jesus Christ from heaven.—GEA



The Anabaptist Understanding of the Word

Some claim that we cannot understand the Bible. Others imply that there are many ways to understand the Bible. However, the fact that the Bible is understood many ways is not an indication that all ways are right. Many views are opposite from each other, but God never disagrees with Himself! When God spoke through "*holy men of God*" (2 Peter 1:21), He had a clear message to convey. Fog-giness about divine revelation is always due to man's lack of knowledge and Satan's deception.

One of our highest aspirations is to understand the heart and will of God. We were created by Him and will someday see Him and give account for our lives. The regard that we have for the Word of God is an indication of our relationship with God. Our view of the Word will affect every area of life. The course we take as a church will be directly connected to our concept of the authority and relevance of the Bible to our everyday lives.

We most clearly understand a person's concept of God and his interpretation of God's Word by the testimony of his life. "*Ye shall know them by their fruits*" (Matthew 7:16). The life and teaching of the **Anabaptists** have always commanded respect. Even their worst critics at

times broke their cynicism to commend the integrity of their life and teachings. Crowds gathered as their blood was poured out at the hands of executioners. They were drowned, burned at the stake, dragged through the streets, crucified, and buried alive; yet, while dying, they gave a testimony of their faith. Onlookers took notice because these **Anabaptists** were willing to die for what they believed. They were also devoted to living what they believed. This stood in stark contrast to the prevailing laxness of contemporary churches. Their living testimony, possibly even more than their spoken word, incurred the fury of their accusers.

The **Anabaptists** viewed the Bible as a practical handbook for living. They accepted God as the Author and obeyed it to the letter as best as they knew how. Many were tortured for standing for the meaning of a word in the Bible. One, Jacob the candlemaker, said, "*We are satisfied with the simple holy Scriptures; for all that is necessary for us to know for our salvation, we find abundantly contained in them, and we need not to search the doctrines of men.*" The priest who was interrogating him had become frustrated with all the Scripture Jacob was quoting by memory. He ranted, "*Bah, you certainly have the Scriptures at your finger ends; and be-*

*cause you **Anabaptists** will read nothing but simply the Holy Scriptures, therefore it is that you never read of a sacrament of the altar.* "1.

They believed that the Scriptures could be understood by common folk. They put more confidence in the simple exposition of their so-called "hedge preachers" than in the Latin liturgy of the Catholic clergy. They did, however, have some very learned "hedge preachers." Some of the founding leaders were fluent in Hebrew, Greek, and Latin and saw the fallacy of the nominal church by a careful study of the Word. Zwingli had come to understand the Word as the **Anabaptists** did but detoured when he saw the cost of separation of church and state. The **Anabaptists** gave their lives to obey what they knew was right and, in the end, contributed to the freedom of religion that we enjoy today.

The **Anabaptists** believed that the Bible is the highest earthly authority. They did not accept the synods, councils, and confessions of the state churches because those deviated from the Scriptures. They rejected the mandates and decrees of the pope for the same reason. In contrast with the view of the state church regarding the nature of the church, their view rested in the simple sense of the Scriptures. They did, however, sense the need of brotherhood in the interpretation of the Scriptures. One of their oft-

quoted phrases was, "No man is in Christ without his brother." This affirmed the authority of brotherhood consensus over individual interpretation in the context of a Scriptural church. The **Anabaptists** recognized the authority of a church by its adherence to the creed of the Word rather than by a purported lineage of papal connections to the apostles. By the same token, they obeyed God rather than man without hesitation when civil leaders confronted them. When Zwingli faltered in his commitment and decided to consult with the city council for their verdict on an issue, Simon Stumpf made this memorable reply: The Spirit of God decides it.' The latter expression of Stumpf is clearly an appeal to the Scriptures as given by inspiration of the Holy Spirit. 2.

They distrusted other sources of purported revelation. Menno Simons confessed,

Brethren, I tell you the truth and lie not. I am no Enoch, no Elias, I have no visions, am no prophet, who can teach and prophesy differently from what is written in the word of God and whosoever tries to teach something else will soon miss the right way and be deceived in his learning. I trust that the merciful Father will keep me in his word so that I shall write or speak nothing but what I can prove by Moses, the prophets, the evangelists, or

by other apostolic Scriptures and doctrines, explained in their true sense, Spirit, and intent of Christ. Judge ye that are spiritually minded. Again, I have no visions nor angelic inspirations, neither do I desire such, lest I be thereby deceived. The word of Christ, alone, is sufficient for me.' **3.**

The **Anabaptists** regarded the Bible as sacred but did not worship it as a sacrament. The Catholic Church made much ado over saints and had many objects, cathedrals, and even ordinances considered to be holy. The **Anabaptists** rather emphasized holiness of life. An accusation they often faced was that they were sacrilegious and desecrated the holy. They carefully rejected any sacrament that was not explicitly commanded in the Scrip-

ture, including infant baptism, worship of saints (including Mary), observance of days, and Mass.

The deception of Satan is working on all fronts to discredit, defame, or simply ignore the divine Word in our day. The glory of God's revelation is revealed by the change that it can make in a life. Has it changed yours?

Bro. Bruce S. PA

1. *Thieleman J. van Braght, Martyrs Mirror, trans. Joseph F Sohm (Scottsdale, Pa: Herald Press, 1950), p. 780.*
2. *John Horsch, Mennonites in Europe, (Scottsdale, Pa: Mennonite Publishing House, 1950), p. 34.*
3. *Menno Simons, The Complete Works of Menno Simons, (Elkhart, Ind.: John E Funk and Brother, 187E reprint, Aylmer, Ont.: Pathway Publishers, 1983), Second Part, p. 248*



The Threat of Relativism (Part 2) **The Snare of Relativism**

The tenets of relativism have become entrenched in the worldview of today's culture. When Cambodia fell on April 17, 1975, the world received a first-hand demonstration of the impact of pursuing the core teachings of relativism to their

fullest extent. Cities were depopulated overnight, and two thousand years of Cambodian history virtually ended as the communist government implemented its ruthless and relativistic socialization program. An estimated one million people perished out of a population of seven million.

On July 31, 1978, David Aikman, who was Time magazine's Eastern European Bureau's chief, gave this assessment:

There are intellectuals in the West so committed to the twin Molochs of our day—"liberation" and "revolution" that they can actually defend what has happened in Cambodia.... In the West today, there is a pervasive consent to the notion of moral relativism, a reluctance to admit that absolute evil can and does exist. This makes it especially difficult for some to accept the fact that the Cambodia experience is far worse than a revolutionary aberration. Rather, it is the deadly and logical consequence of an atheistic, man-centered system of values, who believe with Marx, that morality is whatever the powerful define it to be and, with Mao, that power grows from gun barrels. By no coincidence the most humane Marxist societies in Europe today are those that, like Poland or Hungary, permit the dilution of their doctrine by what Solzhenitsyn has called "great reserves of mercy and sacrifice" from a Christian tradition.

Although this article refers to an era and to events that are now largely history, it does reveal the result when fallen man follows relativistic thinking.

When God is excluded as the ba-

sis for men's reasonings, the moral base is erased and human dignity plunges. As shown above, this has been demonstrated on the global scene. But how might relativism attack, erode, and invade conservative Christian thought? What were the subtle forces that led conservative churches of previous generations to review and restudy Biblical positions for their flocks? How could they so lightly cast aside teachings and practical applications they had formerly embraced as Scriptural and therefore necessary? How are God's people today also vulnerable to being blown off course by the soft winds of man's thinking?

Relativism is a threat to conservative Biblicist churches. If relativism is allowed to make inroads into the church, it will first dull and eventually destroy our sense of right and wrong. Instead of seeing issues as right and wrong, we will view them as circumstantial, as being dependent on the situation. When our ethical values become contaminated with situation ethics, we will no longer clearly discern the Scriptural course in any given issue.

This descent into relativism is at first slow, but it begins as people succumb on one issue and then another, as they first yield on the "little things" and then the "big things." We have seen this in soci-

ety as men and nations yielded one issue at a time in areas such as divorce and abortion. Now those supporting euthanasia and the use of psychedelic drugs are clamoring for legalization. Many churches and denominations have followed the same course and at times have even led the way.

We too can gradually travel down the same deceptive route. If we begin to waver in our understanding of right and wrong, we too will begin compromising one step at a time. It may begin with compromising on separation and nonresistance, but it will not end there. Relativism is seen within us if traditional and separate clothing is replaced by more casual wear or if we see the plain hat being abandoned as our forward battle-line in the conflict to maintain separation and nonconformity. There is no convenient stopping place on the course of relativism; we would simply be following the world at a distance.

Relativism draws Christians toward self-worship rather than toward God. It is seen about us in contemporary, rather than traditional, worship services and in celebrating life rather than holding solemn, God-focused funeral services. It is also in evidence if our spirit is satisfied with pietistic appeals, yet our lives fall short of the full Scriptural obedience that must

characterize the disciples of Jesus.

Relativism also undermines the issue of moral purity. Since relativism mocks self-control and godly restraint, it appeals to man's lower nature by condoning moral permissiveness. Man is thus encouraged to pursue whatever course is pleasing to the flesh. Therefore, marriage and family values are destroyed because lifetime vows are destroyed by concepts of conditional commitment. If we begin compromising on issues such as requiring high courtship standards for courting couples and insisting on the avoidance of public displays of affection by married couples, we too will be opening ourselves to relativistic thinking regarding morality.

In summary, relativism attacks all absolutes, personal accountability, and eternal judgment. It often begins in small ways, but it does not end small. It rather becomes an avalanche of departure from God in ways not imagined possible.

In contrast, Christ wants His bride to be in step with Him on all issues as we are renewed in the spirit of our minds and sanctified and cleansed by the washing of water by the Word. He has made it possible to escape the snare of relativism. How refreshing it is to avoid or come apart from man's relativistic thinking and draw near to God personally! How spiritually

invigorating to unite with brethren who, having rejected relativism, embrace Scriptural absolutes! How up-building to relate to those who pursue godliness and take up the cross! In opposition to relativism,

they reverence and obey God's Word, find day-by-day fulfillment in their Savior and His church, and anticipate glorification with Christ.

Brother Edward., PA



*How firm a foundation, ye saints of the Lord,
Is laid for your faith in His excellent Word!
What more can He say than to you He hath said,
Who unto the Saviour for refuge have fled?*



"The Image of the Invisible God"

After the Fall in the Garden of Eden, God never fully revealed Himself to man. When He allowed men to receive even a glimpse of His glory, they fell before its brightness. He kept Himself hidden to help man realize His great holiness and man's sinfulness and insufficiency before Him.

However, God did not leave us without a witness, but He sent His Son in the fullness of time. "The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his

glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father)" (John 1:14). Jesus' words, "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father," were His testimony that He is not only the image but also a part of the Triune Godhead. The writer of Hebrews refers to Him as "the express image of his person" (Hebrews 1:3).

What does Christ, "the image of the invisible God" (Colossians 1:15), reveal to us about God? How will this affect our lives as we bring them into conformity with Christ, the image of God?

Christ is "the way, the truth, and the life."

His death on the cross provided the way to acceptance with God, revealing God's fathomless love for man and His desire to buy man back to Himself. God, through Christ's blood, provided eternal life for all that receive Him.

Have we received the gift of redemption? Can we testify to others of being "saved by the blood of the crucified One"?

Christ is our perfect example.

Christ's role in coming to earth included showing His followers how to live. Along with providing redemption, He came to live among men to teach and exemplify the attributes of God that would help man to better understand God and the way to please Him. By His deeds and labors of love for humanity and His sacrifice for others, God through Christ was revealing to man how to live. He showed men the way to find rest and fulfillment and to live in peace among themselves.

Are we walking the way that God has revealed to us through Christ? If others follow the way that we are going, will they be walking the way that Christ walked? "Somebody follows you." Will they be led in the right way?

Christ is the "light of the world."

He radiated the light of the Father. The glory of God shone

through Christ to mankind so we need not walk in darkness. "[He] was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world."

Are we reflecting the light of Christ in our lives? Do others see Christ's light as they see us? A poet wrote these probing questions. "Would men know you've been with Jesus, / Can they feel His presence near? / As with them you joy and labor, / As with them you journey here?"

Christ is the "bread of life," which "[came] down from heaven."

He is the source of true nourishment for mankind, revealing God's desire for man's spiritual nourishment. He was sent by the living Father and lived by the Father, so "he that eateth of this bread shall live forever" (John 6:58). We partake of Christ, the living Bread, as we come to Him for salvation. We find our strength and nourishment in Christ, the Living Word, as we draw from the written Word that He has provided.

Are we claiming Christ as our strength for the day, our refuge in time of trouble, and our guide in prosperity? Are we taking time to partake of the Word by meditating on it? Do we faithfully present the Bread of Life to our families and help them to partake of its nourishment? Do we, as a poet reminded us, tell them "the stories of

Jesus, [they] love to hear; / ...
Scenes by the wayside, Tales of the
sea"?

Christ is the "Good Shepherd."

He portrays the heart of the Father in His compassion for all mankind. He showed to us the Father's desire for the good of all. He healed the sick and helped the helpless. He pled with both the flagrant sinner and the self-righteous Pharisee. He faithfully sought the "other sheep.... which are not of this fold," revealing God's plan for the salvation of the Gentiles. Christ revealed to mankind God's personal interest in each creature of His creation. He took notice of the least of mankind and ultimately laid down His life for all.

Do we portray the heart of the Shepherd to those for whom we are responsible? Are we more concerned about living for the good of

others and encouraging the right, or about holding a position for ourselves at the expense of others?

Christ gives eternal life.

Christ revealed God's provision of refuge and eternal security for all those who receive Christ as their Savior, commit themselves to being conformed to His image, and continue in obedience to His Word. He promised God's tender care and security above all this world has to offer.

Are we living here as pilgrims seeking a better country? Are we allowing our lives to be conformed to Christ's image? As we allow our lives to be conformed to Christ, who is the express image of God, we can find rest in His promise—
"No man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand. I and my Father are one."

Brother Eldon., PA



Beatitude Series (Part 6) "Blessed Are the Pure in Heart"

"Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God."

Sometimes we think of a pure heart as a *clean* heart. Although a pure heart *is* clean, the word *pure* as Jesus used it in this verse has another shade of meaning. A pure heart is one where good is *unmixed* with anything else. Jesus is saying, "Blessed are those whose hearts are undivided—whose motives are unmixed."

What is a divided heart? What cannot be mixed into a pure heart? Following are a few Scripture verses that make this practical.

A pure heart cannot be mixed with pretense. "Now the end of the commandment is charity out of a pure heart, . . . and of faith unfeigned" (1 Timothy 1:5). "See that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently" (1 Peter 1:22). These verses speak specifically of feigning neither faith nor love.

A man that is feigning faith often has much to say about God. His is a "Lord, Lord" type of experience as he impresses others with how much time he says he spends studying his Bible and praying, how many people he has witnessed to, how many souls he has converted, or what miraculous gifts God has given him.

Likewise feigning charity is more

for the impression it leaves than for the expression of kindness. One who feigns charity primarily considers how he will benefit rather than how others are benefited. His secret, subtle thoughts are, "Everyone will see my generosity. I will be able to convince others to do what I want them to do. I may even be left in on confidential secrets. Certainly I will be treated kindly in return." These thoughts are not a part of the pure heart because they reveal ulterior motives.

An unfeigned faith will quietly and sincerely seek to find the truth in the prayer closet. An unfeigned love will serve out of concern for others' eternal welfare and out of gratitude to God.

A pure heart cannot be mixed with an evil conscience. "Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience" (Hebrews 10:22). This Scripture shows that a pure heart has much to do with our inner private hearts. Our outward appearance and actions must be the response of a pure heart.

In answer to the question "Who shall dwell in thy holy hill?" the psalmist David replies, "He that ... speaketh the truth in his heart" (Psalm 15:1, 2) When we have the strength to acknowledge to ourselves that we are wrong and in this way speak the truth in our

hearts, we will be kept from an evil conscience and be able to draw near to God and someday see Him face to face.

"We shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is" (1 John 3:2). This

will be our blessed experience as we follow the next verse: "And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure."

— *Brother Stephen R.*



Room for Thee

Thou didst leave Thy throne, and Thy kingly crown,
When Thou camest to earth for me;
But in Bethlehem's home there was found no room
For Thy holy nativity.
Oh, come to my heart, Lord Jesus!
There is room in my heart for Thee.

Thou camest, O Lord, with the living Word
That should set Thy people free;
But with mocking and scorn, and with crown of thorn
Did they take Thee to Calvary.
Oh, come to my heart, Lord Jesus!
There is room in my heart for Thee. Amen.

— Emily E. S. Elliott