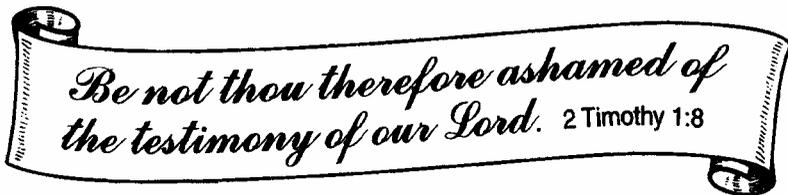


# THE EASTERN MENNONITE TESTIMONY

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## *Enduring Hardness*

Timothy, a young church leader, lived during difficult times. False teaching and widespread persecution threatened the church. Fellow believers were dying for their faith in Christ. For others, the cost seemed too great, and they turned away from the faith. Moved by a deep concern for the church and his "son in the faith," the apostle Paul penned these words: "Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ" (2 Timothy 2:3).

Truly, early believers needed courage to stand firm in the face of opposition from a hostile society and government. To live for Christ, they chose to accept possible hardship, deprivation, or death. Many fled from their comfortable homes to escape severe persecution and to share the Gospel more freely. Many "took joyfully the spoiling of [their] goods" to remain true to Bible principles.

In contrast to Timothy's perilous times, we live in relative peace, prosperity, and ease. We are enjoying comforts of life and religious toleration as few have had. The suffering that our forefathers endured to maintain the faith seems strangely foreign to us. In America, many years have passed without the faith of God's people being tested by persecution. Are we prepared should difficult times again face the church? Could we endure hardness?

The answer to those questions is determined by our willingness to deny ourselves for the service of the Lord today. Can we sacrifice our time, personal comforts, and pleasant surroundings for the sake of Christ and the church? Do we readily forgo material advantage to serve the church in some area of nurture or outreach? Are we living simply and frugally, and giving sacrificially, so that the financial needs of the church and the mission fields can be met'?

Our flesh tends to shrink from the call to endure hardness. We naturally choose the safe, familiar, and comfortable things of life. We enjoy the pleasant times and the tranquil scenes of life. This desire is not wrong. God allows the lines to fall "in pleasant places" at times. We are commanded to pray "that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty" (1 Timothy 2:2).

However, for God's people to continually experience an easy life is not normal. The songwriter raises a challenging question: "Must I be carried to

the skies / On flow'ry beds of ease, / While others fought to win the prize, / And sailed through bloody seas!" The cause of Christ has triumphed through suffering, self-denial, and cross bearing. What we cherish the most, we willingly suffer for the most.

We may face added difficulty to live out our faith in the future. If passed, the pending health insurance legislation will require every citizen to be insured. This concept runs counter to our trust in the Lord. Are we willing to bear the cost of keeping the faith? We commit uncertainties like this into the hand of our sovereign God. Yet we ought to "arm [ourselves] likewise with the same mind: for he that hath suffered in the flesh hath ceased from sin" (1 Peter 4:1).

Even in the midst of affluent times, we face subtle snares and seductive trends that wear out the saints. The watchman's vigilance is tested most when no danger is apparent. The water seems calm and still when we are floating down the river; but hard, steady rowing is needed when we choose to counter the current. Separation from the world may be ridiculed, and we may need to stand with the minority or alone. But God has promised to be with us. This cross presents an acid test of our willingness to endure hardness.

The true believer will graciously follow the example of Christ, who endured hardness and suffering to provide salvation. Rather than complaining, we should "rejoice, inasmuch as [we] are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, [we] may be -lad also with exceeding joy" (1 Peter 4:13).  
—ELG



## *When Things Go Well*

"And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose" (Romans 8:28). Things do go well in the ultimate sense for the child of God who is in the center of His will and under the shadow of His wings. However, we will consider the effects of things going well from a human perspective.

Our song leading goes well, others appreciate our labors, our business is prospering, our vehicles are serving well, or the family is healthy. Who of us cannot identify with things going well? True, we all face adversity at

times, but when we stop to count our blessings, many things are going well for us. When things go well, we may face special temptations.

**Beware of pride.**

God's judgment fell when Nebuchadnezzar said, "Is not this great Babylon, that I have built ... by the might of my power, and for the honour of my majesty?" (Daniel 4:30).

**Beware of forgetting God.**

"When the LORD thy God shall have brought thee into the land ... to give thee great and goodly cities, which thou buildedst not, and houses full of all good things, which thou filledst not, and wells digged, which thou diggedst not, vineyards and olive trees, which thou plantedst not; when thou shalt have eaten and be full; then beware lest thou forget the LORD" (Deuteronomy 6:10-12).

**Beware of self-sufficiency.**

"I will spue thee out of my mouth. Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing" (Revelation 3:16).

**Beware of hardness and rebellion.**

"But Jeshurun waxed fat, and kicked: thou art waxen fat, thou art grown thick, thou art covered with fatness; then he forsook God which made him, and lightly esteemed the Rock of his salvation" (Deuteronomy 32:15).

**Beware of self-indulgence.**

"Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry" (Luke 12:19).

**Beware of idolatry.**

"If riches increase, set not your heart upon them" (Psalm 62:10). "Mortify ... covetousness, which is idolatry" (Colossians 3:5).

These six points are closely related to each other and are not far from any of us. From within we feel the pull of our old nature and our carnal bent toward self. How subtle these snares can be!

When things go well we need to cultivate virtues. As we look at the temptations that we need to withstand and the positive areas we need to cultivate, we gain a clearer focus of God's will for our lives.

**Remember the frailty of life.** "There is but a step between me and death" (1 Samuel 20:3). "For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away" (James 4:14). When things go well, we need to especially recognize that, "if the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that." God said to the rich farmer, "This night thy soul shall be required of thee," and questioned, "Then whose shall those things be, which

thou hast provided?" (Luke 12:20). Remembering the frailty of life will help us cultivate the following areas of life.

### **Cultivate a heavenly focus and affection.**

"Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth" (Colossians 3:2). We are prone to an earthly focus because of our close involvement with these tangible, earthly goods. Can we say with the psalmist, "I have rejoiced in the way of thy testimonies, as much as in all riches" (Psalm 119:14)? Bible study and prayer are imperative to keep a heavenly affection and focus when things go well. Contentment is also an important virtue to cultivate if we would keep our affection set on things above. Certainly "godliness with contentment is great gain." Can we say with Jacob, "I have enough"?

### **Cultivate humble dependence upon God.**

"And what hast thou that thou didst not receive?" (1 Corinthians 4:7). "For all things come of thee, and of thine own have we given thee" (1 Chronicles 29:14). "For it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth" (Deuteronomy 8:18). When things go well, we need to realize that material things perish and our circumstances could change very quickly. Except for God's daily blessing and goodness, we would have nothing. May we cultivate an utter dependence upon God in prosperity as well as in adversity.

### **Cultivate thanksgiving and praise.**

We are taught to give thanks in everything (1 Thessalonians 5:18). We must recognize God as the giver of every good and perfect gift or we will become "vain in [our] imaginations, and [our] foolish heart [will become] darkened." Thanksgiving is an important antidote to pride. May we ever cultivate a thankful heart of praise to our God.

### **Cultivate generosity.**

"At this time your abundance may be a supply for their want" (2 Corinthians 8:14). Giving ourselves to the Lord and the church opens our purse strings. We will give of our time and means with a willing mind to the needs around us. 'As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith" (Galatians 6:10). When things go well, "see that ye abound in this grace also."

### **Cultivate simplicity and frugality.**

When things go well, we are tempted to spend more money on ourselves and pad our nest. While there is a place to make things more convenient and efficient when we have the means to do so, we should be very careful not to start pampering ourselves. We certainly need to cultivate a keen sense of accountability for our stewardship before God. Simplicity and

frugality make more funds available for kingdom purposes while protecting us and our posterity from the snares of affluence. May we, like Abraham, dwell in tents, and confess "that [we are] strangers and pilgrims on the earth," desiring a better country.

As we apply ourselves in hard work and diligence, may we be sure to give God all the praise and glory for all that goes well. *Brother Carl.*



## *The New Testament Church (Part I)*

### *The Mission of the Church*

"Then said Jesus to them again, Peace be unto you: as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you" (John 20:21). The church has been called to carry on the ministry Jesus began nearly two thousand years ago. She is accountable to Christ, her head.

Ever since her inception the church has been threatened with losing a vision of her mission. To possess form without power is an ever-present danger. To shift her focus from the spiritual needs to the social and material needs of society is an easy deviation. Losing her vision will cause stagnation and an inevitable loss of the faith.

God is working today in churches that apply His Word and rely on Holy Spirit power and guidance in this holy calling. God is counting on His church to carry out His work until the Lord returns for His faithful servants. He continues to provide the needed resources for His building program.

A consistent example is one facet of the mission of God's called-out people. If this is not primary, the church's message will lack power. It is not possible to fully represent the Gospel through verbal communication. Every member of the body must display what it means to be a new creature in Christ Jesus. It should be clear to those observing that "old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new" (2 Corinthians 5:17). Lifestyle, dress, and speech should all reveal the redemption and regeneration the church proclaims.

The church is called to be an exhibit to the world. Jesus declared, "Ye are

the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid" (Matthew 5:14). Obviously, the church of Jesus Christ is visible. The light displayed by the church is a bright beacon in this dark world. Is our stand for truth and right a con-science to our society? Can others see that we have been with Jesus'? Do men identify us as followers of Christ? Are we consistent in our everyday life? Can men tell that we love Jesus?

Another part of the church's mission is the edification of her members. She is comprised of penitent, believing, and obedient members. Each member is responsible not only for his own growth but also for the nurture of others. Promoting growth and strength in the body is as important as gaining members. The power of the Gospel is magnified by the change that it makes in lives.

God has given many provisions and gifts for the edification of the church. 'And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ" (Ephesians 4:11).

Sunday schools, prayer meetings, revival meetings, and Bible instruction meetings expand and apply truth to the needs of our day. Scriptural applications and convictions from the past are a valuable asset in understanding the Word and will of God. Instruction classes for new believers establish them in the faith. The Christian day school is another important tool that helps families to indoctrinate their children. The goal is to teach the "all things" of Scripture and fortify each member for the tests of faith. These gifts contribute to the church's ability to reproduce the faith.

Evangelism, moved by a compassion for the lost souls of men, is another important part of the church's mission. The goal of evangelism is to open the eyes of those in darkness to the "light of the glorious gospel of Christ." This message is for all mankind.

The commission that Christ gave to the church is not optional and must be borne by us today. As we experience the work of grace in our hearts and are delivered from the bondage of sin, we are moved to declare this good news to others. The disciples declared, "We cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard" (Acts 4:20). History records the spiritual stagnation that occurred when Mennonites compromised in this aspect of their mission. If we shirk this responsibility today, we cannot expect any different results.

Various methods of evangelism are employed by the church. We engage in literature distribution, cottage meetings, revival meetings, street meet-

ings, and personal evangelism. While this begins at home, it must also extend to foreign fields.

Because the work of evangelism must be safeguarded, the church gives direction to outreach efforts. She endeavors to protect her members while reaching out to the needs of humanity. If the influence of the society and culture sways our practice and our families, the world is converting us.

The Good News of salvation must have the preeminence in all of our evangelistic efforts. Material and physical poverty affect our emotions, and it is right for us to assist in alleviating suffering and to share what God has graciously given us. But a social gospel never has met and never will meet the deepest and most important needs of man.

Each member bears a personal responsibility in evangelism. Not everyone can go to distant lands, but everyone can share in the work. The prayers of God's children are so necessary for the mission of the church to be accomplished.

The Lord's work will be carried on by the faithful church until He receives her to Himself. May God help us to fulfill our responsibilities today.

*Brother Dennis.*



## *Wresting the Scriptures.*

God's Word reveals His longing to communicate with mankind. God's faithfulness in providing His Word to fallen sinful creatures causes us to stand in wonder at the richness of this treasury—the Bible. But God provides no good thing that His archenemy will not molest. God's supreme and powerful Word holds high priority in Satan's attempt to destroy God's work. Satan has attacked it relentlessly ever since his first "Yea, hath God said . . . ?" in the Garden of Eden.

Satan is busy today, vigorously attempting to minimize the effectiveness of the Scriptures. He does this by misrepresenting the Scriptures, "in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest [torture], as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction" (2 Peter 3:16). Since God's Word is so rich and valuable and Satan's objective is to destroy it, we should carefully guard our understanding and teaching of it.

The authority of the Scriptures is attacked by critics who do not accept the source of Scripture. The Bible is from God. Although we employ the use of logic and historical or scientific evidence in pointing men to God, the Word is His primary call to mankind (Romans 10:17). The Bible does not attempt to prove itself. And why should it? It comes from the One whose existence spans eternity. We dare not doubt His Word. A reverence for the One whom the Scriptures represent will prepare us to see the sin of wresting Scripture.

It is also important that we heed the contents of Scripture. We must take God at His Word. This is a defining point of every genuine believer (Romans 4:3). We view the Scriptures as absolute. God does not give suggestions or idle warnings. He does not overstate truth. God would minimize His authority by doing so.

Some have implied that when the Bible mentions a subject only once, it is not very important. They fail to recognize that every word of God is authoritative. He spoke the world into existence only once. Since all creation responded at His simple command, how much more should we heed every word? God's Word is seriously wrested if we read it with a take-it-or-leave-it mentality. Ascribing an allegorical meaning to clear teaching is one way this mentality is disguised. If God did not mean what He wrote, why did He write it?

Another very subtle danger is to know the words of Scripture but to miss its message. We do this when we read the Scripture but fail to allow the Holy Spirit to apply it to our personal lives. This is one of the most prevalent forms of wrested Scripture. God's Word is a very personal message that must be applied first to ourselves. Only then can we see its meaning for others (Matthew 7:5). God will judge us by how faithfully we apply Scripture to ourselves rather than how well we apply it to others.

When we refuse to allow our brother to apply the Scripture to our lives, we are also in danger of wresting Scripture. An individualistic approach to Bible study would lead us away from God. A Scriptural brotherhood gives broad exposure to truth that assists us in maintaining truth (1 Corinthians 1:10).

To avoid wresting Scripture, we must emphasize all Biblical truth. If all Scripture is from God and all Scripture is profitable (2 Timothy 3:16), then we should regard all Scripture equally. God's love is often emphasized at the expense of His judgment. Foundational pillars such as compassion, equity, and brotherhood submission may be neglected when our focus becomes clouded with personal agendas of other good things (Matthew

23:23).

A broad-based knowledge of the Scriptures will help us to identify wrested Scripture. We must view the Scriptures as a whole and compare Scripture with Scripture. A proper understanding of the relationship between the Old and the New Covenant is important. The Old Testament beautifully pointed forward to Christ while the New Testament portrays to us the way of salvation. The Old Covenant is fulfilled in Christ (Matthew 5:17-48; Galatians 3:24, 25). This understanding solves many difficulties that come from a "flat view" of Scripture. The errors of the union of church and state, the loss of nonresistance, the leadership of woman, and divorce and remarriage are clarified as we understand the progressive revelation of Scripture.

An important defense against wrested Scripture is a simple willingness to believe and obey it (John 7:17). The Scripture is God's message to us. If we search it to support our own idea, the words become a vehicle of deception and a tool of Satan. Many have tried to twist truth to fit themselves instead of submitting themselves to conform to truth. But truth is an immovable object. If we lean against truth and something moves, it will have been our own feet which slipped.

The Bereans exhibited a beautiful attitude when they "received the word with all readiness of mind" (Acts 17:11). Rather than leaning against truth, they rested in truth by searching the Scriptures daily. Wrestling does not bring rest. Instead of finding rest, those who wrest truth do so "unto their own destruction" (2 Peter 3:16).

*Brother Larry.*



## "Come Over [to Samaria], and Help Us"

Macedonian calls have echoed across many waters. The apostles were directed to carry the Gospel message even "unto the uttermost part of the earth."

We appreciate the sacrifice and service of families who have gone to distant points and helped establish congregations there. These congregations often wish for more personnel to staff their witness. May God bless us with numerous ones who will say, "Here am I; send me!"—even to distant shores and rugged climes.

But Jesus also spoke of being witnesses "in all Judaea, and in Samaria," lands closer at hand. The Eastern Pennsylvania Mennonite Church does indeed have "related areas." Many of the radii extending from her center stop short of "the ends of the earth." Some of these congregations would also welcome additional families.

Many of the outlying congregations have been established with a minimal number of families. Additional families would help carry the load and enhance the outreach.

Those congregations established more from a mission outreach interest, more than from an agricultural opportunity interest, do not find their location to be as attractive to young families seeking farm and family prospects. While such congregations are usually also blessed with various surnames, ranging beyond (Old) Mennonite stock, their growth is limited more to a few prominent surnames of the initial congregational pioneers.

Multigenerational membership is indeed a reward of faithfulness. However, such settings do hold their own set of potential problems that are minimized by a diversity of families. The occasional addition of families from other areas of the church, helps maintain healthy church-wide relationships, and serves as a deterrent to congregational isolation and in-growth.

There are reasons why some persons may not be able to go to those far fields teeming with ripened grain, yet may be well able to labor in the fields of Judea or Samaria.

There is no foreign language barrier. If old dogs rarely learn new tricks, then there are few tricks to help older people learn new languages. Special family responsibilities, such as periodic assistance for aging parents or married children, can still be met. The economic demands may be less strenuous in a setting where the initial foundations of getting established have already been laid. The extremes of climate and rigors of travel in foreign lands may be more difficult for those with graying hairs. Yet the wisdom of the hoary head is readily welcomed in the younger start-up congregations.

You may never have considered such a call for various reasons. Maybe you were never directly asked. That reason, alone, is not enough. There are appropriate ways to make one's openness to such a move known. Maybe you never considered yourself able to make as great of a contribution as others. Never fear. The church is not built by a few gifted brethren. It is built by many brethren with average gifts.

The specific need may never have been brought to your attention. The

MMM Informative meetings focus largely on the needs among our foreign churches. However, information is at your fingertips. You might note that the 2009 Directory of the Eastern Pennsylvania Mennonite Church records twenty-three congregations with a membership under fifty, of which sixteen are not foreign. Make a visit to some of these congregations and see what the Lord might show you.

Likely, you feel quite comfortable in your present pew. Well, it is true, old hats fit best, and maybe your present spot on the pew sits best too. Moreover, the "related areas" of our church most surely need a strong, healthy Jerusalem. A stable center provides resource for the whole. Nonetheless, Christ has not called us to comfort, but to a life of self-denial and a life of service for Him. He left His home in glory at great cost, to prepare a way for us to return to glory. Is someone calling at your door?

*Brother Lester.*



### ***KEYS TO HEALTHY INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS (PART 1) PERSONAL HOLINESS***

The keys to healthy relationships are bound together by a right relationship with God. After Cain failed to respond properly to God's rebuke, his relationship with Abel deteriorated. Because Saul was struggling with guilt and failure, he became irritated by David's righteous life. At the same time, David's peace with God enabled him to absorb betrayal and injustice. His commitment to maintain respect for Saul, and even offer reconciliation in the face of his unreasonable malice, is outstanding.

Peace with God is foundational to all other relationships. When a man is at peace with God, he can be at peace with himself and others. "Great peace have they which love thy law: and nothing shall offend them" (Psalm 119:165).

Dying to self opens the way not only to God but also to man. A lack of surrender to God, parents, or the church produces a conflict with one's most valuable friends. Inferior friends, who harbor the same spirit, are attracted. The disposition of joy is replaced with the gloom of guilt and rebellion. Man's selfish nature overlooks, disdains, and abuses the feelings and rights of others. Selfless service, on the other hand, develops and pre-

serves lasting and satisfying friendships. "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me" (Luke 9:23).

Humility blends with others and appreciates their strengths. God hates a proud look and men detest it. Jealousy, preeminence, and a competitive spirit are rooted in pride. "Only by pride cometh contention" (Proverbs 13:10).

Purity of thought and life is part of a holy walk that affects our relationship with others. Immoral thoughts and actions are selfish, disrespectful, and degrading to others. Purity promotes an openness and dignity in relationships that contrasts with the off-color, suggestive, and derogatory filth of the world.

Prayer, our vital link with God, can also improve our link with our fellow men. Spending time daily with God gives us opportunity to hear the Spirit through the Word. Too often the weakness in our brother that irritates us is similar to our own. If we ask God to search our hearts, He will reveal our own weaknesses and give us patience with others. How can we hold a grudge against another after we have prayed sincerely for his prosperity?

The quality of our relationships with men is an indication of our relationship with God. "If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?" (1 John 4:20).

May we like David strive for holiness that we may be at peace with God and men.

*Brother Mark.*

### PRAYER POINT

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

Thank God for the contribution Christian day schools make in our lives.  
Pray that God would supply the church with teachers for our schools.

Pray for the aged that they would continue faithful  
and be a right influence on the rising generations.

Pray for those who are writing articles for our church Periodicals that God  
would bless and use them to strengthen the church in these last days.

Pray that God would continue to bless the Bible schools.