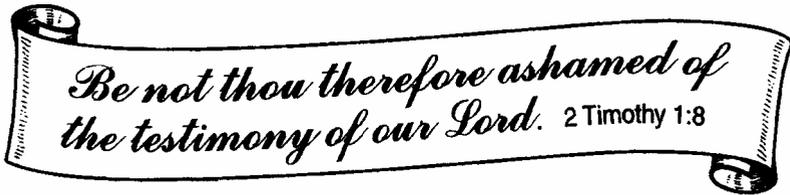


THE EASTERN MENNONITE TESTIMONY

SELECTED ARTICLES FROM THE MONTHLY PUBLICATION
OF
THE EASTERN PENNSYLVANIA MENNONITE CHURCH
FEBRUARY 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.

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

Editor: anabaptistmennonites.org.

God's goodness is always right, and His righteousness is always good. Not so with men. Righteousness is often compromised in a futile attempt to be good. And, whereas God is good because He is righteous, men seek righteousness by attempting to be good. But this always results in the compromise of righteousness. To avoid deception, we must cultivate a fervent love for righteousness as the ultimate expression of goodness.

Satan introduced in the Garden of Eden the age-old accusation that God is not good and His righteousness selfishly withholds good from man. The deception continues in our world today. Religion is blamed as the cause of war, evangelical Christians are labeled as religious fanatics who disturb the peace, and God's law is viewed as an aggravating shackle to freedom. Humanistic arrogance denounces God's righteous law and instead exalts humanitarian benevolence, ecumenical tolerance, and liberal relativism.

Philosophies that carry the same ring confront the church. Concerned church leaders may be labeled as obnoxious nitpickers. Youth may resent a strict home standard and envy others who seemingly do as they please. Fellowship lines may be labeled as self-righteousness. But these conclusions are very shortsighted. Church division has at times preserved a remnant from the course of apostasy. Church discipline is a Scriptural necessity for maintaining a pure church. And faithful parents who give clear direction and discipline reveal genuine love and goodness.

God's righteous law is His love. God's righteousness disquiets slumbering souls, at times seemingly rudely. But guilt stirred by Spirit prompting is evidence of divine mercy. "For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth" (Hebrews 12:6). Do we thank God for a good, righteous brother who rebukes us? "Let the righteous smite me; it shall be a kindness" (Psalm 141:5).

Righteousness is the salt of society. It stays God's judgment on sin. Just as a sharp, sensitive conscience guides good character, so a Christian witness is a lighthouse to society. Are we faithfully filling that place in the world? Lot was vexed with Sodom's sin, but, because he did not vex its godlessness, it claimed his family.

Righteousness is the path to life. "There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death" (Proverbs 14:12). Many covet the blessings of the way of righteousness but shrink from the cost.

Righteousness is the path to peace. 'And the work of righteousness shall be peace; and the effect of righteousness quietness and assurance for ever" (Isaiah 32:17). "And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace" (James 3:18). Peace is God's gift wherever righteousness prevails.

Faith perceives that even God's judgment is always good. Whether it be Eden's curse, Noah's flood, Jacob's limp, or our chastening, we read in it our Father's redemptive love.

Human nature shrinks from conflict, but a battle rages between righteousness and evil. Soldiers of the Lord are not always appreciated. "The more abundantly I love you, the less I be loved" (2 Corinthians 12:15). Righteous youth will suffer stigma from the carnal. Preachers need courage to address practical issues without fear or favor of men. "The battle is the LORD'S" (1 Samuel 17:47).

Brotherly love should cultivate an open discussion of current sensitive issues. This is edifying when each one desires to know and to do the right at all cost. God's Word must rule. The flesh must be crucified. Love for truth must override the protection of our reputation, the fear of rejection, and our nature to compromise, tire, or give up.

Too often the discussion of right becomes a two- or three-sided argument pitted against each other instead of against wrong. But the discussion of doctrine and practice is good. Ideas have consequences. Permitted heresy will have a payday.

However, we must determine by God's Word on which issues it is right to agree to disagree. Oh, that we could discern the difference between the defense of truth and the defense of self! How often has righteous indignation been a "cloke of maliciousness"?

May our zeal for righteousness be good. And may we always graciously and thankfully accept the righteousness of God and others as it touches our lives.

—BAS



The Humanity of Christ

Since Jesus is the divine Son of God, how can He possibly empathize with us poor, mortal human beings as we face the temptations and struggles common to the human experience? We understand that while Jesus is and always was fully divine, ever since the time of His earthly ministry He has become fully human. Let us explore the Biblical basis for this assertion.

Interestingly, Job thought about this problem long before God revealed Himself to mankind through His Son Jesus Christ. Job recognized the sovereign right of the holy God to give and then to take again as He saw fit (Job 9:1-4), but he wondered if God actually comprehended the extent of pain, suffering, and humiliation that his change of circumstances was costing him. Consequently, he longed for a "daysman betwixt us, that might lay his hand upon us both" (Job 9:33). This desire was met when divinity took on humanity.

One of the most obvious evidences of Christ's humanity is His birth. While His miraculous birth to a virgin speaks of His divinity, it also speaks of His humanity. "But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law" (Galatians 4:4). Mary was an ordinary person, not some semi-divine mother of God, as evidenced by her surprise and questions when Gabriel came to inform her of her very special role. She also needed to experience the salvation that Jesus came to provide for all men.

The genealogy of Jesus as recorded in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke is also worthy of consideration. To be the legal heir to the throne of David, Jesus needed a connection to the kingly line of Judah as shown in the genealogy of Matthew 1, which includes his father, Joseph. But since Joseph was not physically His father, Luke's genealogy (Luke 3:23-38) describes how Jesus was also a physical son of David through His mother.

Immediately after reviewing Christ's genealogy, Luke describes the temptations of Jesus in chapter 4. Experiencing temptation is another evidence of the humanity of Jesus. Nor were His temptations confined to this one forty-day experience. He identified Peter's protest to His crucifixion as a temptation from Satan (Matthew 16:22-23). And during the hours immediately before His passion, Jesus gave numerous evidences of the intensity of His struggle with His flesh. He wanted the support of all His disciples, and of Peter, James, and John particularly (Matthew 26:36-38). He pled with them repeatedly to stay awake and to pray with Him. "His sweat was as it

were great drops of blood," and He was refreshed by the ministry of an angel (Luke 22:43, 44).

An oft-debated question is whether Jesus, the divine Son of God, actually could have sinned during the time of His humanity. Jesus is compared to the second Adam (Romans 5:12-19); and just as Adam disobeyed God and brought condemnation on the entire human race, so Jesus, who, like Adam, did not have a fallen human nature, fully obeyed God so that all of humanity was offered salvation. We can hardly fathom the importance of Jesus' obedience during His earthly ministry! But neither did Adam fathom the significance of his decision to disobey! Could Jesus have sinned? The fact is, He did not!

Another evidence of Jesus' humanity is the description of His suffering and death. This was graphically foretold by Isaiah, carefully detailed in the Gospels, and referred to again in the Epistles such as in Philippians 2. His inability to carry His cross the whole way to the place of crucifixion speaks of the weakness of His humanity. When else was a man compelled to help God?

Of what significance is Christ's humanity? The Book of Hebrews emphasizes the divine yet human nature of Christ. He "was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin" (Hebrews 4:15) and "in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted" (Hebrews 2:18).

Because of His humanity, we can think of Christ as a brother. "Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same" (Hebrews 2:14). In His humanity He could then "taste death" and offer His body as a perfect sacrifice for our redemption. As Christ tasted of death and rose again, He destroyed the power of the devil to bring death upon humanity by tempting them to sin and thereby bringing them under God's condemnation.

Another aspect of Jesus' becoming human and being the second Adam relates to the instruction Adam received from God to dress the Garden and to keep it. Psalm 8 suggests that God intended that Adam and his descendants would extend this dominion over the whole earth, but Hebrews 2:5-8 quotes this passage and concludes, "But now we see not yet all things put under him." When the first Adam fell, he became subject to a cursed creation. "But we see Jesus," who lived in victory over the flesh and died in triumph over death. Because of His ability to do so, we gladly crown Him with the glory and honor that God originally intended that man should have, and He, in turn, "is not ashamed to call [us] brethren" Hebrews 2:9-

Finally, Jesus became human in order to bring us closer to the divine. 'And you, that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled in the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy and unblameable and unproveable in his sight" (Colossians 1:21, 22). But notice the condition in the next verse: "If ye continue in the faith grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel" (Colossians 1:23).

Brother Elmer.



Social Exchange in Congregational Life

The Christian cannot thrive as a social recluse. Rather, he flourishes by interacting with others. Brethren and sisters in the Lord rank high on the list of good associates.

We enjoy visiting with others after worship service and in our homes. We take pleasure in inviting our Christian friends to our home for a meal or accepting an invitation to their home. An occasional field trip with another family can strengthen relationships and broaden horizons.

Social relationships help us to maintain our social equilibrium and balance. Indeed, the social misfit becomes quite ingrown and out of touch with others. We need the input of each other and value Christian fellowship. Our social needs are met within the context of our homes and the church.

The Scripture enjoins us to admonish one another, "not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together.... but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching" (Hebrews 10:25). Spiritual encouragement through social exchange should increase as spiritual danger escalates in these last days. We uphold wholesome social exchange as an invaluable tenet of faith and practice.

But can we discern when social life becomes a hindrance to our home life or spiritual life? Can we perceive when relationships and activities begin to deteriorate? Has our social life in recent months included only one or two other families in the congregation? Have we considered the "left out" ones who are also yearning for social acceptance and benefit?

And has our desire for a good time with our friends led us into questionable pursuits or involvements? What restraining factors help to safeguard our social exchange?

Keep social life secondary to worship. The primary reason for meeting at church is to worship as the body of Christ. If the body is not united in collective worship, how can the members blend in other matters? Further, the social exchange that surrounds a worship service is generally more up-building than the interaction when gathering for a purely social or secular event. Therefore limit the birthday parties and the farewell gatherings, especially if they conflict with church functions.

Keep social life secondary to service opportunities. Do you plan other "more important" social activities on the day when volunteers are needed for the local work project? Are you ready to sacrifice your own agenda for a more worthwhile and noble social involvement in the context of the church? An organized sewing circle is a service opportunity with social benefits. But even this can be overdone. The conversations should be respectful and considerate of others. Gossip and thoughtless remarks are especially tempting in collective settings.

Interact socially with all age groups in the congregation. Admittedly, many prefer conversing with those of their own age group. But do not miss the calm and deep-rooted serenity of the elderly nor the invigorating enthusiasm of the youth. Review the entries in your guest book. Observe whether you have hosted a variety of age groups at your house. Remember, a clique of friends separates because it excludes others. To enhance cohesion as a church body, the members must avoid segregation of age groups. Be inclusive in your friendships rather than exclusive. How easily the natural man overlooks the social needs of others and reveals a selfish heart! Consider including that single sister, widow, or widower from the congregation in your next planned activity. Assume that such individuals enjoy fellowship and encouragement as much as you do. Be inclusive!

Limit the frequency of planned social events. However right or legitimate they may be, too many gatherings will overemphasize the social. In fact, too much close association will cause relationships to deteriorate. Familiarity breaks down proper reserve, and communication becomes frivolous or even indecent. To avoid shame and regret, recognize and avoid this pitfall. A special social activity every week will undoubtedly degenerate to the loss of families and churches.

Do you quickly come up with "reasons" for another gathering: "a birthday is coming up," or "a young person is leaving for a few weeks," or

"some other event is coming and we must celebrate," and suchlike? Emphasis on families doing "fun" things together begins to be a carryover of the world's insatiable desire for pleasure. The wise apply Biblical temperance to legitimate social exchange.

Remember the stewardship principle. Too much social exchange with other families in the congregation is not a wise use of time or resources. Young families have many other obligations such as keeping the house, maintaining the property, and training the children. Are you able to override the social pressure to be involved if you are already busy? Frequent special activities sap energy and resources.

Consider the rising generation. Children are secure and happy when parents make the home the center of social fulfillment. Social contacts as a family mold the children's frame of reference. If life is a whirl of one social activity after another, youth will attempt to keep the pace that parents have set. Parents will miss their contribution in the home and lack the connection needed to guide their formative years.

Engage in acceptable social interchange. Visit the various families within your congregation. Ask of their welfare. And be there when they need you most—in times of difficulty and unexpected reverses. Make that phone call to the elderly sister or write that note of encouragement. Seek to enrich the lives of those most often neglected. While meeting the social needs of others, you will find your own needs met in a special way.

Our manner of life in social involvements indicates whether or not we have found true fulfillment in our walk with God. Social enjoyment becomes elusive when we focus on ourselves rather than others.

"But ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost, keep yourselves in the love of God" (Jude 20-21).

Brother

Nathan.



THE ILLUSION OF GREEN GRASS

The sight of cattle reaching under or through the fence to eat grass or of grazing just outside the fence has engendered the statement, "The grass is always greener on the other side of the fence." This adage suggests that the grass is not actually greener on the other side of the fence; it merely has the illusion of being so.

This tendency is not unique to livestock. A child may think his friend's toys are more attractive than his own. A youth may wrongly perceive that his peers have advantages over him in family, home, or possessions. Even adults can come to view what they do not have as more attractive than what they do have.

This tendency can easily become a way of life. The individual has the illusion that somehow, somewhere, better experiences await than what he experiences now. And rather than being effective in his present sphere, he wastes his time in vainly seeking that illusive goal.

Often this search is evidence of a lack of contentment rather than a need for better circumstances. Although better circumstances should at times be sought because the current situation is unsatisfactory, the first consideration should be the need to cultivate contentment within. Following are some Bible principles regarding contentment.

Discontentment is often a product of man's fallen nature. "But the wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt. There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked" (Isaiah 57:20-21).

Discontentment often comes because the soul is seeking but not finding its spiritual desire. The carnal mind mistakenly pursues everything except the true answer. It may be wealth, fame, pleasure, or even legitimate accomplishments.

The child of God can be tempted with this same discontentment. Although his discontentment generally does not drive him to the excesses of the wicked, he still has the feeling that circumstances are better elsewhere. Christian contentment brings great blessing. "But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out" (1 Timothy 6:6-7). The result of a desire to be wholly yielded to God is peace and contentment.

Contentment is not based on circumstances. Being right with the Lord brings peace in any circumstance. Paul's testimony as a prisoner was, "Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content" (Philippians 4:11). Paul, though imprisoned, could give testimony to his contentment in Christ, even in undesirable circumstances. The question often is not the quality of the meadow but the quality of the heart.

Unlike cattle, we bear responsibility for our perception of our surroundings. It is generally possible to come to realize that our meadow actually does contain green grass. What responses will help us appreciate the blessings that our present circumstances contain?

Cultivate a cheerful attitude toward circumstances. Paul, in prison, was not complaining about the disadvantage of his situation. He rather was rejoicing that God's Word was being furthered in unexpected ways (Philippians 1:12-18).

Rather than pining over the seeming difficulty of our situations, we should evaluate our own contribution to our setting. What influence am I bringing to my surroundings? Am I contributing cheerfulness to the situation? Am I exemplifying the Scriptural truth that "the joy of the LORD is [my] strength" (Nehemiah 8:10)?

Do all as to the Lord in present circumstances. "And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men" (Colossians 3:23). Our attitude toward our circumstances colors our evaluation of them. When we see them as opportunities to labor for the Lord, our surroundings will lose some of their seeming drabness. As we consider what our Lord would have done in similar circumstances, those opportunities will add lushness to our souls.

Exert diligent effort in the present calling. "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou guest" (Ecclesiastes 9:10). Daily housekeeping responsibilities rise above drudgery when tackled from the heart. Daily occupational responsibilities transcend the mundane mentality when given our all. Our congregational responsibilities such as Sunday school teaching, song leading, or scrapbook preparation become inspirational as we put our whole heart into them with the realization that "Only one life, 'twill soon be past, / Only what's done for Christ will last."

Rejoice in the blessings God has given today. If we are employed and able to provide a living for our families, we have much for which to be thankful. Sufficient health to be an effective housekeeper is a blessing to be appreciated. Worshiping God openly and enjoying fellowship with the saints are privileges for which many have longed and even died.

Be open to new opportunities while enjoying current pastures. Contentment can be compatible with an open mind to opportunities. "Art thou called being a servant? care not for it: but if thou mayest be made free, use it rather. For he that is called in the Lord, being a servant, is the Lord's freeman: likewise also he that is called, being free, is Christ's servant" (1 Corinthians 7:21-22). Some who became Christians in Paul's time were slaves and were encouraged to be content rather than to fret about their experience as slaves. Paul also encouraged them to see any opportunities for freedom as opportunities for service.

Rejoice that the Lord provides green spiritual pastures for His sheep. "The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters" (Psalm 23:1).

Brother Glenn.



Separation in Business (Part 4)

Trade Shows

Trade shows display and promote business services or wares. Invitations to trade shows are offered in nearly every occupation. A Christian businessman should decline most, if not all, of these invitations because of their negative impact.

Trade shows can fan a materialistic mentality. Those obsessed with material pursuits will be "choked with cares and riches and pleasures of this life, and bring no fruit to perfection" (Luke 8:14). Materialism, with its insatiable appetite, must not be fed.

Trade shows can gender discontentment with a simple life. How quickly technology antiquates present equipment and methods! Fascination with the latest and greatest destroys Christian contentment. Admiring spectators, peer pressure, and "one-time-only" promotions pressure a person to sign his name for unnecessary things. "Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have" (Hebrews 13:5).

Trade shows can also develop unwholesome associations. Mingling freely around a common cause with the world will subtly steal our hearts. "Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. But his delight is in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he meditate day and night" (Psalm 1:1, 2).

Trade shows often offer worldly entertainment. A fun-charged atmosphere, the music, the crowd, and the food all appeal to the flesh. Crowds are at times entertained by clowns, eating contests, door prizes, or other worldly methods. The Christian should "love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any many love the world, the love of the Fa-

ther is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the word" (1 John 2:15-16).

Brother Joel.



Vocal Vices (Part 2) Lying

"The God of truth" cannot lie. God the Son said, "I am ... the truth." He also promised the "Spirit of truth" to guide saints in the way of truth. The devil, in contrast, is "a liar, and the father of it." All sin, evil, and suffering were born of the devil's lies, and "lying lips are abomination to the LORD" (Proverbs 12:22). Does your speech identify you as a child of the Father of truth or the father of lies?

Lying is native to the sinful nature. We are alarmed yet not surprised that young children lie. But knowing the curse of this vice, we spare no effort to correct it.

The devil lied to undermine Adam and Eve's faith in God. Jezebel lied to malign Naboth and steal his vineyard. The Pharisees used false witnesses to scandalize Jesus, the author of truth, and save their own reputation and position. But lies to slander an obviously good person will mar one's own character the most.

Saul lied to feign innocence when he failed to utterly destroy the Amalekites. Our human nature seeks to avoid the consequences of wrongdoing and failure. Being dishonest to protect our friend in his wrongdoing will hinder his reconciliation and make us partaker of his sin. Truth is never against us; but falsehood is.

Lying for financial gain is very prevalent in society. Some misrepresent the quality or value of a product or service, falsify weights and measures, and cheat on recording job time. If our good deal is another's bad deal, God will require it of us. "A poor man is better than a liar" (Proverbs 19:22).

Youth may be tempted to hide "pleasures of sin" from parents and the church. It may be tapes, CDs, books, magazines, electronic devices, or even e-mailing and text messaging. Whether spoken or silent, this hiding is a form of lying that is a blight of character which will hinder victorious living and spiritual growth. Practicing complete openness and honesty with one's parents and spiritual brotherhood will deliver from this curse.

“A lying tongue hateth those that are afflicted by it” (Proverbs 26:28). Lying is injurious first to the recipient, but finally even more so to the liar. “Wherefore [put] away lying,” for “we are members one of another” (Ephesians 4:25). Christian love will not lie!

“A lying tongue is but for a moment” (Proverbs 12:19). Eventually truth will prevail, either in time or at the Judgment when the “books” are opened (Proverbs 19:5).

One of the things that the Lord hates is “a lying tongue.” Can we claim to love God and practice what He hates? “All liars shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone” (Revelation 21:8). Consider the bondage, loss, and suffering of eternal judgment when tempted to lie for temporary freedom, gain, or pleasure.

—*Brother Roland*



PRAYER POINT

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

PRAY FOR THOSE WHO HAVE GIVEN THEIR HEARTS TO THE LORD DURING THE RECENT EVANGELISTIC MEETINGS AND WHO WILL SOON BEGIN THE INSTRUCTION COURSE.

*PRAY FOR THE TEACHERS AND EVANGELISTS AT ASHLAND AND NUMIDIA BIBLE SCHOOLS.
THANK GOD FOR OUR CHRISTIAN DAY SCHOOLS AND FOR THE TEACHERS.*

PRAY FOR THE SCHOOL BOARDS AS THEY GIVE DIRECTION TO THE SCHOOLS AND AS THEY ENDEAVOR TO SUPPLY THE TEACHERS FOR ANOTHER YEAR.

PRAY FOR THE DISCIPLINE REVIEW COMMITTEE AS THEY FOCUS THEIR ATTENTION ON OUR PRACTICES AND THE SPIRITUAL WELLFARE OF THE CHURCH.

PRAY FOR THE PUBLICATION BOARD AS THEY CONTINUE TO PROVIDE SOUND READING MATERIAL FOR OUR FAMILIES.

