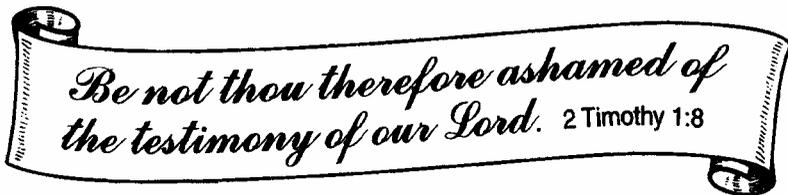


THE EASTERN MENNONITE TESTIMONY

SELECTED ARTICLES FROM THE MONTHLY PUBLICATION
OF
THE EASTERN PENNSYLVANIA MENNONITE CHURCH
JANUARY 2010



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.

Epidemics of the past have claimed many lives. The bubonic plague of the Middle Ages claimed sixty million lives, and the influenza of 1918 caused twenty million deaths. God has mercifully spared us from a severe influenza. Although the acuteness of H1N1 (Swine Flu) may have been overplayed, it was nevertheless very widespread. Solutions to halt its spread were futile. What if it had been a terminal illness?

God speaks through man's helplessness in the face of disease and death. Doctors acknowledge their inability to cure many illnesses. Panic over rumors of strange diseases reveal the insecurity of a self-confident society. God desires that we would turn to Him for healing.

At the dedication of the temple, Solomon made a profound parallel between man's physical dependence and his spiritual need. He prayed, "If there be in the land famine, if there be pestilence, blasting, mildew ... what prayer and supplication soever be made by any man, or by all thy people Israel, which shall know every man the plague of his own heart, and spread forth his hands toward this house: then hear thou in heaven thy dwelling place, and forgive, and do, and give to every man according to his ways, whose heart thou knowest" (1 Kings 8:37-39).

Did our bouts with the flu remind us of the plague of our hearts? Is our sympathy aroused with a brother's spiritual struggles as it would be if he was diagnosed with cancer? God delights in healing man, especially of spiritual illness. Our physical needs are divinely crafted to portray the paramount need of our soul.

The contagious plague of sin spreads rapidly. "Be not deceived: evil communications corrupt good manners" (1 Corinthians 15:33). "And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them" (Ephesians 5:11).

Often the symptoms of a disease are not immediately evident. Even after symptoms appear, we may ignore them. "Yea, gray hairs are here and there upon him, yet he knoweth not" (Hosea 7:9). Only after we "know ... the plague of [our] own heart" can the Physician freely heal us.

Our spiritual virus may be detected first by others. They may observe a dull look in our spiritual eyes. We should seek spiritual counsel from healthy Christians rather than from those who carry the same infection.

A virus can be deterred with certain precautions. Hand sanitizes is encour-

aged to avoid infection. God specified that the priests "shall wash with water, that they die not." Daily washing with the soul-cleansing detergent of the Word is imperative. We must scrub between our fingers and under nails!

Quarantine is also an effective disease deterrent. Those with lower resistance must be given special protection. Parents who allow youth unmonitored use of cell phones, computers, or music players may someday stand trial for reckless endangerment. However, total quarantine from evil is not possible (1 Corinthians 5:10). We cannot get away from ourselves (James 1:14), and the sick need the care of the healthy.

Treatment for illness is costly and disappointing at times. Although God's prescriptions cost dearly to the flesh, they surely heal. The cost is less in the end.

Quackery is rampant today. The devil takes advantage of our gullibility and advertises an alternative remedy. It is sad to see his poisonous philosophies sincerely administered instead of God's cure. Parents with spiritually sick youth tend to dispense the same faulty medicine that contributed to their illness. We ensure chronic illness if we pamper relationships when the true love of firm direction and discipline is needed.

There is a cure for the plague. "The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin" (1 John 1:7). Jesus' victory over sin provides us with the antibodies needed to resist infection with sin. This vaccine works! "Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh" (Galatians 5:16). Victory through Christ builds immunity to sin.

A deadly epidemic is afloat. It has claimed the lives of billions. May we spread forth our hands to God that the "plague of [our] own heart" may be healed. "Should not a people seek unto their God?" (Isaiah 8:19).

—BAS



"Great Riches Is Come to Nought"

The destruction of Babylon as foretold in Revelation 18 will be complete and dramatic. Babylon is the worldwide commercial center. The luxuries of life are bought and sold in Babylon. People go to Babylon to trade and display their riches. It is the hub of wealth and wickedness. But suddenly,

the judgment of God will fall. The merchants go down in tears. The city goes up in smoke. "For in one hour so great riches is come to nought" (Revelation 18:17).

The destruction of Babylon will certainly not be the first time that great riches came to naught. In one generation, the golden splendor of Solomon's kingdom was reduced to the imitation of brass. Rehoboam's brass shields had similar yellow color as his father's golden ones, but the riches had come to naught. In one decade the financial exuberance of the Roaring Twenties was replaced with the grim depression of the thirties. The artificial prosperity was based on debt and credit, so the riches came to naught. Recently, the world of finance and commerce has been shaken as fiscal mistakes and mismanagement have borne fruit, and great riches have come to naught. Since it is the nature of riches to come to naught, how should God's people live?

We need to be separate from the world. A voice from heaven warns of the dangers of the Babylonian commercial system. "Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues" (Revelation 18:4). Separation from the world begins in the mind. We must think differently if we would live and act differently.

I once received a credit card application with this note: "Some people pay their credit card balance every month. Then there are those of us who live in the real world." We need to avoid the mentality that it is normal to carry credit card debt.

Business management seminars have become popular in many trades. While we may learn some valuable tools for successfully running a business, their goals differ from ours. Growth, expansion, and progress are usually emphasized with disregard for the principles of separation and non-resistance we hold dear. We cannot trust the world to advise us on how to run our businesses and yet be separate from their financial philosophies.

We should live simply. In North American culture many people have more time and money than they know how to use wisely. It is the natural tendency to accumulate things—things that other people have, things that seem to make life easier—simply because we can afford them. It takes discipline to curb our natural tendencies.

Jesus instructs us to be content with the basics of life (food, clothing, and shelter) and promises that God will provide the rest. Do we sense our need of God's help when we do such a "good job" of providing for ourselves? It is very easy for the luxuries of life to become necessities. Ezekiel warned that the iniquity of Sodom was rooted in "pride, fullness of bread, and

abundance of idleness" (Ezekiel 16:49). Contentment protects us from getting caught in materialism and debt.

We should work hard. Our society has developed an aversion to hard work. Many want an education to protect themselves from the rigors of manual labor. An investment portfolio is built to inject easy income into their financial equation. People want something that will provide them with money without their direct involvement. But the Christian is not afraid of hard work. There is dignity in an honest day of toil. The fourth commandment begins with the words, "Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work" (Exodus 20:9). It is still right to work six days a week.

We need to be skeptical of investment schemes that promise wealth without work. Often, the most successful projects are those that involve an investment of our own time and energy. We should remember that Proverbs says, "Wealth gotten by vanity shall be diminished: but he that gathereth by labour shall increase" (Proverbs 13:11). A good work ethic is a virtue and a protection against poverty.

We need to beware of fictional wealth. We should not allow our property's appreciating value to skew our fiscal outlook. It is often hard to realize that increase. Usually when people sell property they still need a place to live and therefore need to buy a property that also has an escalated value.

We need to be frugal. The present economy seems to be based on spending instead of saving. Easy credit makes it easy for people to live beyond their means. Loans for anything from vehicles to furniture make it easy to "buy now and pay later." Saving and self-denial seem like forgotten qualities, but they are actually priceless virtues.

Parents must teach children that the satisfaction of saving outlasts the thrill of spending. A man once acknowledged that the reason for replacing his cell phone was because "New is nice." A frugal person must have better reasons for replacing an item. We should be proficient at repairing in our throwaway age.

We need to lay up treasures in heaven. We are stewards of the material wealth and possessions God has entrusted into our care. We must develop godly financial habits. But, most important of all, a faithful steward will take riches that will come to naught and translate them into heavenly treasures that will never be lost, squandered, or destroyed. He will invest in evangelism, share with the needy, and support the Christian school. He cultivates a generous nature.

But God needs us even more than our money. We must not be so busy

working to "have to give" that we have little time for God. When God has us, it will be easy for us to invest our treasure with Him. "For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also" (Matthew 6:21). Where is our treasure? Some had their treasure invested in the financial markets, and it evaporated into thin air. The merchants of Babylon had their treasure in Babylon, and it all went up in smoke.

Recently, a neighbor we have known for fifteen years died. He left everything behind— his tractor, his snowplow, his shop and tools, his wife and family—everything. Each of us will also leave everything behind. Our riches, great or small, will come to naught. Today is our opportunity to convert our earthly riches into heavenly treasures.

Brother Robert., BC.



PRAYER POINT

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

Pray for God's blessing and direction in the New Year.

"It is not in man that walketh to direct his steps"

Jeremiah 10.23

*Pray that those who are called to shepherd the flock may be
alert to Satan's tactics and prevent spiritual casualties.*

Thank God for the peace and tranquillity we enjoy.

"See then that you walk circumspectly...."

Redeeming the time, because the days are evil."

Ephesians 5:15-16.



Walking With God

Editor's note: This article is a fitting tribute to our deceased brother's walk in spite of his handicap.

"And Enoch walked with God: and he was not; for God took him" (Genesis 5:24). Noah also "walked with God" (Genesis 6:9). These men, who lived thousands of years ago, continue to challenge us. What does it mean to walk with God?

The words walk and walking are descriptive of one's conduct, or way of life. Enoch and Noah followed a course of life according to the will of God. They walked with God by living in obedience to Him.

We walk with God as we keep in touch with Him, assured of His indwelling Spirit. We enjoy fellowship with Him and sense His nearness. We believe that He hears and will answer our prayers in His own right way and time.

Enoch walked steadily with God rather than only on rare occasions. He continued his walk for three hundred years after the birth of his son, Methuselah. After all those years of faithfulness, God took Enoch to live with Him in glory. Enoch was translated that he should not see death (Hebrews 11:5). His translation before the first destruction of the earth typifies the rapture of the living saints before the next judgment of God. He passed into the future life that is promised to all those who continue to walk with God. To begin a walk with God, we must first confess our need of Christ and believe the Gospel. We must be sorry for all our sin. In order to walk with God, who is holy, all sin must be put away. We are assured of His desire to walk with us as we have faith in His cleansing blood. We cannot walk with the world and Christ at the same time.

To continue to walk with God, we must submit to those He has placed in authority. This means obedience. Jesus said, "If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come to him, and make our abode with him" (John 14:23). How wonderful! He lives and walks with those who keep His words.

We must also be regular in our worship and devotion to Him. Remember that He is for us and with us. We learn to appreciate His love more and more as we think of Him and speak to Him.

A walk with God results in a life of great joy. We are sometimes in heaviness through manifold temptations, but in Christ we find "joy unspeakable and full of glory" (1 Peter 1:8). Our experience is comparable to

Christ's earthly life. Although he was "a man of sorrows," yet His joy shines through. "These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full" (John 15:11).

Walking with God brings enlightenment. The two disciples on their way to Emmaus were sad and perplexed over Jesus' death. But as they walked with Jesus, their hearts burned within them, as "he opened to [them] the scriptures" (Luke 24:32). As we walk together with Him, we understand His Word more perfectly.

Walking with the Lord results in purity of heart and life. We are sanctified by His presence. A consciousness of His presence assists us in victory over temptation. You may have witnessed an unsaved man apologize for using foul language in the presence of a Christian. How much more influence does the Lord exert upon those who walk with Him!

Walking with Jesus issues into a character of beauty. We become more like Him through walking with Him. Others should recognize in us a resemblance to Christ. "Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John.... they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus" (Acts 4:13).

Walking with Him will inspire us to be useful in His work. Enoch served his generation well (Jude 14, 15). He warned the ungodly of the coming judgment of God before the Flood. Warning the wicked is part of God's plan for us too. The closer we walk with God, the more useful we are to Him.

We please God by a close walk. "[Enoch] had this testimony, that he pleased God" (Hebrews 11:5). He walked by faith. "Without faith it is impossible to please him" (Hebrews 11:6). A life that pleases God brings joy to our parents and brethren in the church. Christian parents rejoice as their children walk in glad obedience to Christ and the church.

A walk with God will result in eternal life and fellowship with Him. "And Enoch walked with God: and he was not; for God took him." If we are faithful in our walk, He will someday take us to live in glory with Him. "And so shall we ever be with the Lord" (I Thessalonians 4:17).

"Blessed is the people that know the joyful sound: they shall walk, O LORD, in the light of thy countenance" (Psalm 89:15).

Brother Amos., PA



Tracing the Development of Our Church Schools.

Who is responsible to teach "the children which God hath graciously given"? "Ye fathers.... bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord" (Ephesians 6:4). Fathers are also directed, "Thou shalt teach them diligently" (Deuteronomy 6:7). The church assists parents to fulfill this responsibility by sponsoring Christian day schools with a Bible-based curriculum. This practice is wholeheartedly supported in our churches.

How did conviction develop so that all our families support our church schools?

Early settlers that came to America for religious freedom were eager to preserve their religious convictions. The Puritans in Massachusetts, the Quakers in Pennsylvania, and the English Catholics in Maryland diligently established their own schools. Early Mennonite settlers had schools in their churches or built schools on their church properties. They zealously taught their children in the way of truth. This included a nonresistant and a separated lifestyle.

By the 1830s, tax-supported public schools had developed. By 1850, the compulsory school laws were in place. Mennonite elementary schools had vanished by the dawn of the twentieth century. Most Mennonites assumed that public school education was adequate and acceptable for their children.

What brought this drastic shift?

Several reasons may have contributed to this transition. Early public schools were small in the rural areas where the Mennonites lived. Education was basic elementary instruction. Most Americans were honest, thrifty, and hard working. Educators taught good moral virtues.

Even President Theodore Roosevelt said, "When you educate a man in mind and not in morals, you educate a menace to society." Moral training was part of public school life. In established Mennonite communities, Mennonites served as school board members and teachers. This seemingly safe and convenient shift to public schools eventually proved to be a threat to the convictions of plain Mennonite families.

The (Old) Mennonite Church began to counter these influences in the realm of higher education. By the late 1800s and early 1900s, some Mennonites were pursuing higher education in secular colleges. The church responded by starting Goshen College in 1894, Hesston College in 1909, and Eastern Mennonite College in 1917.

Church-operated high schools came in the period from 1942 to 1954. At-

tending public high school involved going to town (away from the supposedly safe rural settings.) Courses mostly consisted of secular materials and featured state accreditation. While the church's efforts to start their own high schools seemed to be noble, they nevertheless failed to preserve the faith as the founders had hoped. While these efforts were disappointing, they may have fanned the flame

Disappointing conviction that bore fruit in keeping the Christian school vision alive.

Mennonites renewed their own elementary education in a two-decade period beginning in 1939. The one-room public schools had been replaced by large consolidated schools that gave exposure to the varied backgrounds of a large group of community children. The morals of society were declining in an increasingly permissive trend. Nonresistance and nonconformity were being threatened.

During this period about thirty schools were established by the (Old) Mennonite Church. Nearly half of these were started by Lancaster Conference. While this was a start, they were few and far between. Most Mennonite children were still not attending a Christian school. Many of these schools were operated and controlled by parents rather than by the church. Others were operated jointly by several church groups.

While some of our families had the privilege of using these schools, it eventually became a struggle to maintain conservatism in a setting where a liberal drift was taking its toll. A departure was evident from what our people felt was needed to preserve the faith.

The present school revival coincided with the conservative movement in the Mennonite Church. The Conservative Fellowship churches in the 1950s and 1960s helped to fan the embers. These schools were under church direction and structured to be an arm of the church.

The conservative element became actively involved. Strong conviction developed that all children of the church should be in our church-sponsored schools. The use of Bible-centered curriculum was emphasized. This movement stressed elementary education and sought no accreditation other than God's.

The formation of the Eastern Pennsylvania Mennonite Church in 1968 provided the needed vision and conviction to establish their own church-operated schools. Conviction and support grew rapidly at this time. The following statistics show the expansion rate of schools in our church.

1970 - 7 schools - 13 teachers with 277 pupils.

1980 - 36 schools - 92 teachers with 1290 pupils.

1990 - 19 schools - 159 teachers with 2000 pupils.
2000 - 56 schools - 196 teachers with 2056 pupils.
2005 - 60 schools - 209 teachers with 2133 pupils.
2009 - 70 schools - 249 teachers with 2385 pupils.

God has certainly blessed the efforts of providing church schools for our families. May this blessing fill us with a sense of humility and gratitude. In light of this privilege and blessing, we face a heart-searching question. Will we teach and command our children after us to keep and promote the way of truth? May they never lose the vision of the need for church-operated schools. The work will require diligence and support by a spiritual church to fulfill its purpose and continue under the blessing of God.

May those who labor in the work be encouraged. "Let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season, we shall reap if we faint not" (Galatians 6:9).

Brother James., PA



Cultivating Godly Character (Part 7)

The Vision of Caleb

Open my eyes, that I may see
Glimpses of truth Thou hast for me;
Place in my hands the wonderful key
That shall unclasp, and set me free.

Do you covet this kind of vision? Caleb possessed a spiritual vision which surmounted the roadblocks looming on the pathway to victory.

Spiritual vision inspires courage. The ten spies warned the congregation that the Promised Land was bristling with a long list of formidable enemies. Caleb immediately countered this faithless fear mongering, saying, "Let us go up at once, and possess it; for we are well able to overcome it" (Numbers 13:30). Spiritual vision penetrates the walls of fenced cities and sees over the heads of giants to a God who enables His soldiers to "run through a troop" and "leap over a wall." God asks us to attack unholy thoughts and crucify old, ugly self. He promises to give us all the strength we need to meet our adversary victoriously. "If God be for us, who can be against us?" (Romans 8:31).

Spiritual vision unifies the church. Moses was eager to enter Canaan, and Joshua and Caleb were anxious to proceed. But since the rest of the congregation balked in unbelief, progress ground to a halt (Numbers 14:6-10). Imagine the outcome had there been twelve spies with Caleb's spirit instead of just two. Israel discovered the literal truth of the proverb, "Where there is no vision, the people perish" (Proverbs 29:18).

Dear young person, developing spiritual vision is not an option. It is your obligation! Church leaders cannot lead the battle today without the unified vision of the members. Cultivate a meaningful devotional life. Missing daily appointments with the Great Physician will cloud your vision with life-threatening cataracts. Spiritually blind church members become a liability to vibrant church life.

Spiritual vision gives perspective. How appalled Caleb was to hear his fellow brethren scheming to return to Egypt (Numbers 14:1-10).

What blindness! Why go back to the bondage from which they were delivered? Yet, why are some fascinated with worldly fads today? Why exchange the "exceeding good land" of Biblical church life for the apostate wilderness from which God graciously delivered the church less than half a century ago? Acquaint yourself with church history and study the earmarks of apostasy. An appreciation for God's moving in the past will give you a clearer vision for the future.

Forty years later, Caleb still longed to prove that the dreaded sons of Anak did not stand a chance when confronted with the power of God (Joshua 14:6-15). His battle cry, "Give me this mountain," continues to rally Christians to take the offensive to the enemy strongholds confronting the church today.

Brother Daniel., PA (end of series)

