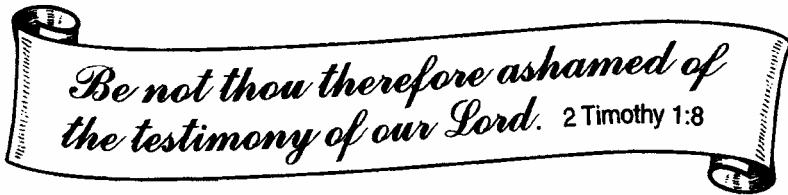


# THE EASTERN MENNONITE TESTIMONY

SELECTED ARTICLES FROM THE MONTHLY PUBLICATION  
OF  
THE EASTERN PENNSYLVANIA MENNONITE CHURCH  
JANUARY 2011



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](http://anabaptistmennonites.org).

The battle was over, the enemy was defeated, and it must have been with relief that Ahab's warriors returned home. Thirty-two kings had effectively been subdued "with a great slaughter." An unnamed prophet, however, wisely admonished Ahab, "Go, strengthen thyself, and mark, and see what thou doest: for at the return of the year the king of Syria will come up against thee" (I Kings 20).

This account certainly mirrors the conflict with the enemy of our souls. We may have valiantly gained the victory this past year, but past success can never guarantee future victory. However, having knowledge of our enemy's methods will prepare us for his advances.

*The enemy aggressively claims that which is our charge* (20:3). God has given us the responsibility to nurture our families in His ways. He has blessed us with wealth, and He holds us accountable for its use. A frugal and self-sacrificing lifestyle, fostered by consistent training and discipline, will serve as a line of defense for our families. Regular family worship and church attendance will keep the family God-conscious.

*The enemy is invasive and never satisfied* (20:6). Give a finger, take the hand; give the hand, take the body; give the body, possess the affection; give the affection, steal the soul. Our enemy knows that if he can possess the inner recesses of the heart, he can also control our actions. He is continually presenting new offers, new threats, and new demands. "Whom resist stedfast in the faith" (1 Peter 5:9).

*The enemy is proud and boastful* (20:10). Israel's army of seven thousand must have appeared very small in comparison to the massive Syrian host. Big, bold, unfounded claims may strike a note of fear in our hearts. But remember that "greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world" (1 John 4:4). "Those that walk in pride he is able to abase" (Daniel 4:37).

*The enemy is heartless in his approach* (20:18). The tyrant commanded, "Take them alive." Intimidation has been one of Satan's effective weapons. Many have reconsidered their separated stance under insinuations such as, "You really can't win the world if you are separate from the world" or "Conservative Mennonite practice opposes Biblical principle."

*The enemy desires to bring us into captivity* (20:18). Benhadad's goal was to capture them alive for slaves. Our enemy desires to deceive us and steal our loyalty to Christ. He knows that an empty profession advances his program more effectively than bold defiance.

*The enemy will return* (20:26). The prophet's warning to King Ahab is pertinent. "Go, strengthen thyself, and mark, and see what thou doest." The battle may be personal or collective, but our enemy will return, and his repeated attacks tend to weaken our resolve. One of the best defenses against drift is to be "stedfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord" (1 Corinthians 15:58). Firm conviction will thwart repeated attacks.

*The enemy presumes upon godly virtue* (20:31). Ahab's distorted affection resulted in cloudy vision. He extended mercy to one he should have utterly destroyed. To the undiscerning, drawing clear lines in relation to illegitimate marriage arrangements or other moral perversions may seem cold and heartless. But God calls us to "put away ... that wicked person" (1 Corinthians 5:13). A lax approach to discipline under the guise of being long-suffering always fosters a downward course. A proper understanding of Bible doctrine will keep our vision clear.

*The enemy is still an enemy regardless of the garment he wears* (20:32). Sackcloth was the coarsest and most uncomfortable of any available cloth. For the king's servants to wear such garments indicated utter destitution and, in this case, penitence. Jesus warned us to beware of wolves in sheep's clothing.

We need to see beyond the appealing offers of the world. That attractive license plate or the animal rescue postage stamps champion a cause outside the realm of acceptable principle. The seemingly harmless educational assistance so freely offered by the state to private schools has a hidden agenda. These are examples of promotions that, if uncovered, will reveal the enemy's intent.

*The enemy offers conciliatory, terms* (20:34). The enemy cringed to restore the cities to Israel, but if allowed to live, he would have opportunity to come back later. Step by step, he would buy time and still ultimately accomplish his goal.

The Lancaster Conference began to relax the discipline statements to accommodate standard violations. With each such change, the pressure increased for more change until hardly any restriction remains. Compromise has surely been an effective weapon.

Another year has dawned, bringing with it new opportunities, but the same enemy remains. May the Lord help us to "be sober, be vigilant; because [our] adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour" (1 Peter 5:8).

— *Brother Jacob*



## ***The Perfect Praise of Children.***

The exaltation of our great God is important to all of His children. We often think of praise radiating from those who have experienced redemption and are now serving Him. However, innocent children add a unique dimension to the praise that ascends from God's footstool. "Yea; have ye never read, Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings thou hast perfected praise?" (Matthew 21:16). Jesus also said, "Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God" (Mark 10:14). Although innocent children are not directly accountable to God, their unassuming lives bring Him honor and glory in many ways.

Likely the foremost place where children praise their Maker is in the home. God is glorified when our homes are examples of orderliness and decency. God notices when His outline for the home is followed. When young children are taught to submit to their parents and respect their siblings, "there is beauty all around."

As families, we collectively praise God in family worship. Certainly God is pleased as the Scriptures are read and explained. We should encourage our children to ask questions and then carefully answer them in the best way that we can. At times we may need to tell our child that he will understand better when he is older. However, we dare not allow this line to be a recording that our children hear regularly.

Children bring honor to their Maker as they sing His praises. Singing should be a normal part of family worship. Often in this setting young voices learn the harmony that will serve them for life. Participation should not be optional. We teach our children to enjoy singing by making it a frequent activity throughout the day. If children hear their parents singing, they will likely catch the fervor and sing of their own volition as well. Foolish rewording of songs does not honor God and should not be permitted.

Although a child's prayers are often short and simple, they are an important part of his reverence for God. God is honored when parents help children develop the habit of praying at bedtime. A memorized prayer that is doctrinally correct certainly fills a place in teaching our children to pray themselves. We should not allow them to ramble through the recitation in an indecipherable manner. They should learn at a young age to pray distinctly. Often in the "prayer before bed" setting, children desire to add their own special requests or notes of thanksgiving. We should not squelch this interest. However, we must be careful that the child does not begin to feel that he is personally accountable to God. Young children often enjoy re-

peating a prayer that their parents dictate. This is an excellent opportunity to teach children not only to make requests of our great God but also to praise and thank Him for His many blessings.

God is glorified as children attend worship services with their parents. A child's orderly conduct during the service and after dismissal is an unconscious recognition of God's greatness. Parents who teach their two-year-olds to sit quietly and calmly for the duration of the service are adding to the environment of worship. Only after a child has been taught reverence does he have the capacity to absorb nuggets of truth from the sermon. School-age children can be an asset to congregational singing. Often a parent's interest in this form of worship is reciprocated in his offspring.

As imitators, children will play church. A certain amount of parental supervision may be needed to maintain sobriety and reverence in this activity. Animated arguing about whose turn it is to fill a certain function in the service should not be permitted. Certainly God is pleased when even church play is kept worshipful.

Children honor their Designer when they, on occasion, have contact with those outside our homes and churches. At times the simple faith of children touches hard hearts in a way that no adult can. We need not be ashamed if we walk up to our neighbor only to hear our little son telling him, "We pray for you because you are divorced and remarried." A child's orderly conduct and obedient responses while in public bear testimony to God's way for childhood instruction. God receives praise when children show respect for the elderly. One way they show respect is by answering questions in an audible voice.

A significant number of a child's days are spent in school. The morning devotional is an opportunity for collective worship. Because rising to one's feet is a sign of reverence, students should be accustomed to standing for singing or prayer. God is glorified when students sing with enthusiasm. Teachers often inspire students by their own enthusiasm. We should strive for a certain degree of musical excellence in our schools. God desires and deserves our best. Bible memory is another God-honoring activity of school life. Often the study of science fills young hearts with wonder as they consider the awesome design of creation. What a blessing to have our children in an environment where God is given His rightful place!

As parents, may we give all diligence to perfect the praise of these little ones. God has an individual interest in each child. He notices each one's praise. May each of us be challenged to give our Redeemer perfect praise, for He is worthy.

*Brother Duane.*

## *The Kingdom of God Is Not Meat and Drink.*

The early church struggled to reconcile the differences of combined Jew and Gentile converts on issues as simple as their diet. The Jewish believers tended to revert to the ceremonial laws and ordinances pertaining to unclean meats and felt that to disregard the feast days violated God's law. The Gentiles felt no obligation to observe such ordinances that had been done away in Christ.

On the other hand, the Gentile converts that had turned to God from idols associated the eating of meats offered to idols with their former pagan rites and worship. The Jews could eat such meat with a clear conscience since they knew that an idol was nothing. Paul shared a principle that clarified their discussion. "The kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost" (Romans 14:17).

What Bible principles direct our response to variations in background, culture, and frame of reference on matters as simple as what we eat? And how are these differences blended in Christian brotherhood?

"Him that is weak in the faith receive ye" (Romans 14:1). We are wise to focus on spiritual issues and extend latitude on debatable issues. We should not impose our personal opinions on the consciences of others.

"We shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ" (Romans 14:10). Since we are not the final judges, we should use care in our judgment.

"Let not then your good be evil spoken of" (Romans 14:16). The blending of various personalities and viewpoints in the Christian brotherhood has potential for dissension and consequent reproach upon our Lord. The Word of God, group conscience, and personal conscience each have their own place in church life but in the order stated. Personal preference or opinion is on an even lower level. When one attempts to assert personal preference into the God-ordained order of authority, truth is hindered, the vitality of the brotherhood is threatened, and reproach falls upon the testimony of Christ. Unbelievers, as well as some within the church, are disillusioned.

These principles direct us in issues of meat and drink that the church faces today. One of the current trends of society is an emphasis on healthy food. Food producers have found a market niche in supplying organic and naturally produced foods. Is this trend simply a personal preference, or does it carry deeper implications that affect our view of life and the earth?

We are commanded to be good stewards of the bodies God gave us. "What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost" (1

Corinthians 6:19). A good variety of ordinary food is generally sufficient for the maintenance of our bodies and the performance of our daily duties. Overeating any type of food can damage our health and may indicate intemperance.

On the other hand, we may overemphasize bodily health. This may reveal a misunderstanding of life itself. "For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away. For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that" (James 4:14, 15). This does not indicate a fatalistic outlook, but rather states the divine view of mortal life. These bodies are fragile at best. Promoting a specific physical diet as necessary for long life or salvation is adding to the written Word.

We should not promote health issues to the point that we ruin relationships with others by imposing our opinions on them. Advocating debatable health remedies with religious fervor reveals misplaced priorities. Some have become self-proclaimed authorities, offering cures for anything from the common flu to depression to cancer.

What may indicate that an interest in health has gotten out of place? Do natural food advisers have more authority in my choices than the

brotherhood voice? Our fellowship should be among the saints. Do I need certain products regardless of the cost? Many health items are lucrative revenue for their distributors. Do I believe that my life will be lengthened significantly by using certain products? As for man, his days are as grass: as a flower of the field, so he flourisheth" (Psalms 103:15). Certain special diets have not been proven to lengthen life significantly.

We do well to consider the world-view of a movement. Although we may participate in organic projects and even appreciate the concepts of natural food production, we must beware of erroneous philosophies. Many in the organic farming movement overemphasize the preservation of the earth. Some are affected by pantheistic philosophy and "[worship] and [serve] the creature more than the Creator" (Romans 1:25). To many in society, "mother earth" is a god that must be preserved at any cost.

While it is clearly evident that misusing chemicals can damage the creation and destroy life, discreet use can greatly increase the production of food. We should not be party to the antiestablishment attitude promulgated by some toward corporations and the government departments that regulate them.

Sin is the greatest cause of the creation's deterioration. The earth will continue to wax old under the curse of sin until the Redeemer brings in

"the times of restitution of all things" (Acts 3:21). For man to think that he can restore this earth to its pristine condition is folly.

Do I support movements with an established history? How often has my opinion been swayed by a new product or concept? To wait five or ten years to test a concept and avoid the snare of being a gullible fool is wise. Fads of quackery change every few years.

Our energies and time are best invested in the eternal kingdom rather than the temporal earth. "The kingdom of God is . . . righteousness." Since God cannot change, He changes sinners. Perfect spiritual health is found by repentance and faith in the shed blood of Christ.

"The kingdom of God is ... peace." Christ calls us to lay down our personal agendas to blend our practice with our brethren's convictions.

"The kingdom of God is ... joy in the Holy Ghost." The Spirit brings the joy of Gospel harmony to the brotherhood. When we yield to God and one another, the church can flourish. How much sorrow have we suffered because we have failed to take the path of true joy?

As we serve our Lord in righteousness, peace, and joy, we will enjoy God's blessing. Our life will also adorn our profession among men.

*Brother Edward.*



## ***The Sevenfold Secret of Tranquility***

The pronunciation of the word *tranquility* is pleasing to one's ear. It likewise carries a beautiful meaning, for it brings to mind that which is calm, quiet, and peaceful. When used in an objective manner, *tranquility*, may describe, for example, the serenity of a quiet countryside scene. It can also be used subjectively to denote, for example, the peaceful state of an undisturbed mind. Some pills are called tranquilizers because their function is to quiet emotionally disturbed persons.

The Bible contains one occurrence of this word. Strangely, this occurrence is in a context where the use of this expression is somewhat surprising. Nebuchadnezzar, after learning about the judgment that was to be inflicted upon him, was urged by Daniel to repent promptly. Hopefully, Daniel reasoned, such a response would postpone Nebuchadnezzar's punishment and contribute to "a lengthening of [his] tranquility" (Daniel 4:27).

Nebuchadnezzar had been by no means a saint nor a peace-loving mon-



arch. Nevertheless, Daniel's counsel implies that he had been experiencing a measure of tranquility. From this we need to conclude that the term *tranquility*, like many other words, can evidently be given both a narrow and a broad meaning. Compared with the humiliation that he was about to experience, Nebuchadnezzar's former life had been one of what we might call relative tranquility.

Ever since the Fall of Man, tranquility, narrowly defined, has not been a native human trait. The prophet Isaiah was led to declare that "the wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest." He then states in a very categorical way, "There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked" (Isaiah 57:20, 21). In spite of all his searching, tranquility will elude the person who chooses to remain in his fallen state.

To all such persons, the Lord Jesus Christ extends this gracious invitation: "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28). Those who humbly respond can then by faith claim this additional promise: "My peace I give unto thee" (John 14:27). A blessed change then occurs. Instead of an accusing conscience, "the blood of Jesus whispers peace within."

Tranquility is found only in Christ. However, in its perfected form, it may not be found immediately. The appropriation of this gift requires the exercise of spiritual disciplines that a babe in Christ needs to learn.

*Learn to be content.* Paul alluded to his personal progress when he acknowledged, "I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content" (Philippians 4:11). We will remain a stranger to tranquility as long as we cater to unsatisfied and unattainable desires. There are two ways to be rich: one is in the abundance of possessions; the other is in the fewness of wants. The latter is the road to tranquility. God warns against the former because "the abundance of the rich will not suffer him to sleep" (Ecclesiastes 5:12).

*Cultivate a childlike trust in the Lord.* Among children, nervous breakdowns are rare. Why? One reason may be that they so completely trust their parents. Perhaps the Holy Spirit used this observation to prompt Isaiah to write, "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee; because he trusteth in thee" (Isaiah 26:3). Paul was likewise encouraging trust when he wrote, "Be careful for nothing, but in every thing... let your requests be made known unto God" (Philippians 4:6). The trustful person maintains his serenity by turning every care into a prayer. In this respect, Hezekiah left us a wonderful example. The letter that was designed to strike fear into his heart he took up into the house of the Lord,

spread it before the Lord, and then calmly and prayerfully committed the whole matter to the Lord (2 Kings 19:14-20).

*Learn to die to self.* Ill treatment draws no response from a self-crucified person. There is no possible way to disturb the repose of a dead person. In like manner, living the crucified life enables the saint to calmly endure treatment that would enrage non-Christians. Peter, imprisoned, and knowing what likely awaited him, was nevertheless "sleeping between two soldiers" (Acts 12:6) —a picture of tranquility.

*Do not allow yourself to be easily distracted.* Asaph, the writer of Psalm 73, was for a while badly shaken because he committed this mistake. In our kind of world, inequalities will inevitably abound. However much we might wish we could, we can control neither the actions of man nor the circumstances of life. Remaining imperturbable requires that we therefore learn to simply let the world go by. We must not become upset by things over which we have no control. What wicked men do should not disturb our tranquility and will not if we learn to not allow ourselves to be easily distracted. Distracted Peter received from his Lord this counsel: "What is that to thee? Follow thou me" (John 21:22).

*Claim the Lord's promised presence.* With Moses, this factor received top priority. "If thy presence go not with me, carry us not up hence" (Exodus 33:15). Young Joseph met wave after wave of unjust treatment without a sign of anger. The secret of his remarkable composure lies in that oft-repeated revelation: "The LORD was with Joseph" (Genesis 39:2). He was keenly conscience of that abiding presence. When Jesus commissioned His followers to go into all the world on their disciple-making mission, He knew what anxieties and fears that could awaken. He therefore gave them precisely what they needed, namely, the promise of His presence (Matthew 28:20). Knowing that he has on board the heavenly Pilot will enable the saint to remain calm amid the fiercest storm.

*Teach yourself to graciously accept disappointments.* For even the saint, the road of life is likely to take him around unexpected corners and into unwelcome territory. More than once he may not arrive at his wished-for destination. All this he will be able to take in stride if he has developed a "not my will but Thy will" mentality. It was this that enabled David to respond so graciously when God modified his long-cherished temple-building dream.

*Work toward the elimination of all conflicting interests.* Conflicting interests are the result of such common practices as fence-riding or trying to be an all-around popular person. Jesus has warned against attempting to

serve two opposing masters, for He knows that dividing one's loyalties militates against the attainment of a unified personality. One person confessed, "Below the surface, I'm a veritable battlefield." There is probably nothing more devastating to tranquility than to live with a civil war within. What then must one do to become an inwardly unified personality? In a nutshell, the answer is: Exercise single-minded devotion to God. You too can then sing

Now rest, my long divided heart,  
Fixed on this blissful center, rest.

May God use these few lines to make the way to tranquility less of a secret and more like a heavily traveled highway.

*Brother Merle.*



## **Cultural Norms That Press God's People (Part 1)**

### **Independent Youth**

Our eighteen-year-old neighbor girl sat in the car in front of us. The car was her own as was the music pounding from it. She drove to her own job and had her own schedule, activities, and appointments. No longer was she satisfied to sit at her parent's table for three meals a day or go to bed when they did. They, like many parents today, viewed her as a normal youth—wild and free—and shrugged their shoulders at the idiosyncrasies of adolescence.

The expected peer pressure, popular culture, and identity crisis of society's adolescence are an invention of modern times. When work was family oriented and children were raised in the home, the lives of adolescents did not revolve around a teen culture of socializing with their peers.

Has the teen culture crept into our church? Many Mennonite youth have their own car and some, like our neighbor girl, avoid the family van. Their music may not pound, but it is contemporary. They and their parents have mutually agreed to go separate paths. They visit different groups. They hold different schedules. Some young sisters are not content to serve at home but feel driven to get a job. Even the clothing style of their parents needs to be modified before they are willing to wear them.

If these issues are left unchecked at home, the conflict will show up at church. The ministry will have the tough job of directing youth who are not accustomed to solid authority. Such youth will be in and out of church fellowship and find it difficult to function under a disciplined three-week term of Bible school.

Rehoboam was an independent young man who "forsook the counsel which the old men gave him, and took counsel with the young men that were brought up with him" (2 Chronicles 10:8). Esau married the daughters of Canaan, "which were a grief of mind unto Isaac and to Rebekah" (Genesis 26:35). Independent youth today often part ways with their parents by a willful choice of a life companion.

The prodigal son said to his father, "Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me" (Luke 15:12). The result of that choice typifies the wasted resources and time that accompany sowing wild oats.

Youth, you do not want to be on your own. Though you may yearn for more freedom, in a few short years you will be glad for broader support. Do not burn bridges you will need later. God's will is that you yoke yourself and pull with the older generation. Do not miss the blessing that many youth find as they enter adulthood with the smile of approval from God, the church, and their parents.

*Brother Stephen.*



## PRAYER POINT

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

As we begin the journey of a new year, let us ask the Lord for direction;  
"for [we] have not passed this way heretofore" (Joshua 3:4).

Pray for those who have responded to the call of God  
during the various evangelistic services.

Pray for the Bible schools held locally this winter  
and at Ashland and Numidia.

May God bless each of us with spiritual growth.

Pray for the ministry of the church as they preach the Word  
and shepherd the flock.

Thank God for the peace and rest we enjoy in America.

Pray that we would have opportunity to tell someone about Jesus today.

Pray, brethren, pray!  
The sands are falling;  
Pray, brethren, pray!  
God's voice is calling.  
Yon turret strikes the dying chime;  
We kneel upon the verge of time:  
Eternity is drawing nigh!  
Eternity is drawing nigh!  
—*Horatius Bonar*

