

THE EASTERN MENNONITE TESTIMONY

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OF
THE EASTERN PENNSYLVANIA MENNONITE CHURCH
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Editor: anabaptistmennonites.org.

Some may never notice the change. But the next issue will be the work of a fresh team of editors. Brother Scott Martin has consented to serve as the next editor. Brother Eugene Nolt will serve as his assistant. Brother Lester Boll has also completed a five-year assignment of contributing the prayer requests.

In some ways the change of editors is like a change of shoes. Feet (and the shoes with which they are shod) are typical of humble Christian service (1 Corinthians 12:22). They are the little-noticed members of our body that carry us forward on kingdom missions. Publication work also involves many little-noticed members. They spend many late and early hours arranging and rearranging words to form clear thoughts that will encourage a life ordered after God. "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace; that bringeth good tidings of good that publisheth salvation; that saith unto Zion, Thy God reigneth!" (Isaiah 52:7).

New shoes may require some adjustment on the part of the wearer, yet they can help one stand a little straighter and just a little taller. The regular change of editors has been a blessing to this periodical. Although care is given to include a wide variety of subjects for editorials, the regular change of editors contributes to a fresh and balanced perspective. Brother Aaron Shank, who served as the first editor, established this precedent by requesting to be relieved after the first five years.

The work of editorship is at times somewhat dusty and plodding; nevertheless, it is a noble work. Writers need reminders of due dates. Their very carefully crafted handiwork may seem to undergo a serious scrubbing as it moves through the editing and reviewing stages. Editors and reviewers struggle to find a balance between correcting grammar issues, accuracy flaws, and unsound doctrine and preserving the writer's style and content without adding one's own perspective. But these shoes of the kingdom bring the fulfillment of carrying the cause a step forward and upward.

The review panel is a great aid in keeping the shoes of publication work from becoming sidetracked or following a personal rut. Three bishops (along with the EMT committee, the associate editor, and the church extension correspondent) provide a critical safeguard by sharing comments every month on the doctrinal accuracy and spiritual tone of the articles. Some

of these assignments change every five years as well.

Other valuable servants to the publication are more long-term contributors. The editor relies on the knowledgeable staff at the Eastern Mennonite Publication office. The secretaries typeset articles, prepare the layout copy in preparation for printing, and manage the mailing of the periodical. Brother Bruce Good has been serving for some time as the manager of the copyediting team, which gives the final grammatical and punctuation corrections to various of EMP's publications.

The periodical is also kept fresh by the selection of article writers from across the church. This spreads the work, broadens our perspective, and develops the latent talents of the church. One of the most common responses an editor receives from a prospective writer is a disclaimer of ability or a complaint that he finds writing to be very difficult. The editor can assure such a person that this is a common problem. But practice makes perfect and spiritual perception and insightful observations do not always spring from the most gifted writers. Reprinting old articles may have a place, but the present generation must have the opportunity to frame the faith in their own words. Volunteer articles with self-inspired freshness are received with appreciation.

Shoes do affect the image of a person. Work shoes carry a different identity from the latest fad of sportswear. The passing of generations and the accompanying changeover of responsibility make the church vulnerable to changes in doctrine and practice. But the institutions and publications of the church will be only as sound as the conviction of its members. We are confident that the next editorial team, although representing a change of laborers, will continue to build upon Scriptural doctrine and encourage the Biblical practice that has blessed our church. May our change of shoes never be a change of identity!

Shoes need to be changed at times because they wear thin or wear out. Although the spiritual exercise of analyzing and discussing the doctrine and practice of the church has been enriching, we look forward to a change of pace. May God bless the new team with fresh zeal and enablement for this good work.

—BAS



Principles for Interpreting the Parables of Jesus

The Bible contains at least eighty different parables. Many of these parables were spoken by Jesus as He taught His disciples and the multitudes. The writings of Ezekiel and some other prophets contain nearly thirty parables.

To determine whether a passage should be regarded as a parable or a direct statement of facts is sometimes a bit difficult. Many times Jesus clearly stated that He was speaking in parables. It would be a mistake, however, to conclude that a direct teaching of Jesus is only a parable. Some have made this mistake in relation to Jesus' account of the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31). We can know that Jesus' teaching is not a parable if the people involved are named, such as Lazarus in this account.

During His teaching ministry, Jesus related to both open hearts and closed hearts. (See Matthew 13:10-17, 34-35.) In answer to the disciples' question, "Why speakest thou unto them in parables?" Jesus stated or implied four reasons for teaching in parables:

1. To make spiritual truth more understandable.
2. To put the truth in a form that can easily be remembered.
3. To cause humble souls to seek after the truth.
4. To hide truth from proud hearts who deliberately refuse the message of God. Keep in mind that this action is always on man's part first: "their eyes they have closed" (Matthew 13:15).

The Kingdom Parables (Matthew 13) form a basis for understanding all the parables of Jesus. 'And he said unto them, Know ye not this parable? and how then will ye know all parables?' (Mark 4:13).

Each parable from the lips of Jesus has a definite goal, an eternal truth to ponder. In the account of the marriage of the king's son (Matthew 22:1-14), Christ states the reason for the parable—"For many are called, but few are chosen." (See also Luke 18:9.)

Parables may not be used as a sole source of doctrine. The interpretation must be in keeping with the general teaching of Scriptural truth. The people and objects of one parable must be in tune with the truth of the other parables. In Matthew 13, the man is always Christ, the seeds are truth or the children of the Gospel, the birds are the wicked one, and leaven represents sin and evil.

When interpreting the parables of Jesus, a basic step is to understand the kingdom concepts. In quite a few of Jesus' parables, He uses the term

"kingdom of God." The Matthew 13 parables and many others in the Book of Matthew refer to the "kingdom of heaven." And at times we see that neither description really fits the true church. Without carefully dividing the truth we may teach false doctrine.

In the parable of the sower (Matthew 13:39), "the wicked one" catches away the good seed that is sown by the sower. The ground is stony and thorn-choked. This is not the condition of the church but of the world in which the kingdom operates. The kingdom of God is in the world but not of the world.

In the parable of the tares (Matthew 13:24-30), an enemy sows tares among the wheat. But at the end of the world the Master will gather the tares out of the field and gather the wheat into the barn. "The field is the world; the good seed are the children of the kingdom; but the tares are the children of the wicked one." Some teach from this passage that the kingdom of heaven will include both sinners and saints and that they should not be disturbed. God will clarify who is saved in the end. This view ignores the fact that "the field is the world."

Likewise, the parable of the mustard seed has often been misunderstood (Matthew 13:31-32). But if we study the explanation Christ gave about the parable of the tares (Matthew 13:36-39), we can draw parallels for understanding the account of the mustard seed.

The man (verse 31) is Jesus. He sowed the good seed. The field is the world, not the church. The enemy is the devil. Just as the fowls in the parable of the sower, the birds in the branches of the mustard tree represent the wicked one inside the professing church. The abnormal growth of the tree has occurred many times when emperors, nations, and peoples embraced a watered-down form of Christianity.

The parable of leaven (Matthew 13:33) has been controversial to interpret. Leaven in the Bible is a type of sin. Some have understood the leaven to represent good in both Leviticus 23:17 and Matthew 13:33. But a careful study reveals that leaven was included in the Feast of Pentecost only. This represented the fact that church-age saints are not perfect and still have the fallen nature. And note carefully that the leaven was "baken." When the leavened bread is baked, the fermentation process ceases. So it is in our lives. Though we still have the fallen nature, it is "baken"—rendered powerless through Christ (Romans 6:6-11). By contrast, the offerings that represented Christ had no trace of leaven.

Is it Scriptural to believe that the influence of the church will eventually fill the world, or are there indications that at the end of time deception will

saturate the professing church? (See Matthew 24:12; 2 Thessalonians 2:3; 1 Timothy 4:1.) The church of Laodicea (Revelation 3:14-22) may be a picture of the professing church at the end of the church age.

The parable of a treasure hid in a field (Matthew 13:44) has at times been interpreted to mean that we must sell all that we have to buy Jesus, the treasure. But giving all that we have can never buy salvation. Rather, Jesus gave all that He had to purchase the world (John 3:16) so that He could have the treasure of the church.

The pearl-of-great-price parable (Matthew 13:45-46) is full of typical meaning, again portraying Christ as the wealthy merchant who buys a pearl that began with a speck of dirt but through time was changed into a jewel for God's glory.

Today we rejoice to be part of the Scriptural church. We live in a time when the tares are flourishing, the leaven is spreading, and the birds are roosting. In times like these, we will find our salvation in our readiness for the heavenly Bridegroom and our fellowship with those that have their lamps burning.

Brother James



" Thy Gentleness Hath Made Me Great"

"Thy gentleness hath made me great" is a key statement of this psalm of David (Psalm 18:35). This psalm was written by David in the day that the Lord delivered him from the hand of all his enemies and from the hand of Saul. It sums up David's thoughts on how God led him and superintended in his life to bring him to his present state of rest, contentment, and happy lot.

The word gentleness is found only four times in the Bible. Psalm 18:35 is a quotation of 2 Samuel 22:36. Paul besought the Corinthians "by the meekness and gentleness of Christ" (2 Corinthians 10:1). Still another use of the word occurs in the list of the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22).

Gentleness as an attribute of God is synonymous with compassion, loving kindness, tender mercies, and goodness. God's goodness is spoken of over and over again in the Bible. Very often the goodness of God is not referring to His moral uprightness, but rather shows that God is good-natured, cordial, and gentle.

David confessed by his declaration that his own goodness had not brought him to his present greatness. God had gently worked with him through the years.

How then ought we think of God's gentleness?

Gentleness is by no means a form of weakness. It is an evidence of strength. It is the way God is. Though God is perfect and infinitely just, righteous, and holy, yet He has a genuine interest in and care for finite, failing, fickle humanity. He graciously works with each of us as individuals. He seeks to redeem us from our unrighteous and unholy ways.

Though God desires justice, righteousness, and holiness from all men, in His gentleness He does not in any way force them to become something they do not want to be. He allows people to despise His goodness if they will. He gives each one freedom to choose or refuse repentance and amendment of life.

Sometimes we may question in our minds, "Why does not our just and holy God intervene and put an end to the gross injustices that men inflict on others?" The answer is God's gentleness. Certainly God does not delight in seeing innocent, righteous people suffer at the hands of wicked men. But in God's sovereign purposes He has chosen to give sinfulness its time.

Think of all the difficulty David faced as he fled from Saul's hatred. This hardship went on for years. Could he not rightly question God's goodness? Yes, if he had thought only of himself and his comforts. But David knew God well enough to realize that God's gentleness not only was active in his life but also was at work to redeem his enemies as well.

God's gentleness is demonstrated in His forgiveness. "He hath not dealt with us after our sins; nor rewarded us according to our iniquities.... As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us" (Psalm 103:10, 12). God in His gentleness has brought us salvation and reconciliation through Christ. "But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). Again Paul states, "In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins" (Colossians 1:14). God's coming to earth in the Person of Jesus Christ to die for fallen mankind is to this hour the greatest expression and demonstration of His gentleness.

How does God's gentleness make one great?

Perhaps in David's statement, greatness included his well-received kingship over God's chosen people and his victory over opposing nations. Undoubtedly, David also believed that God's condescension and His patience with him had molded and shaped his character. David, a man after

God's own heart, had learned and demonstrated gentleness and large-heartedness not only to friends but also to those who despised him.

God's gentleness is powerful. It changes people's lives by leading them to repentance. God expects His gentleness to be contagious in the lives He has changed. We are to learn to be tender, forgiving, and accessible to all. We are not to use our power (of whatever sort it may be) to manipulate, intimidate, or tyrannize others. We are to demonstrate "the wisdom that is from above," which, among other virtues, is "gentle, and easy to be intreated" (James 3:17). When we do so, we can rightly and humbly acknowledge with David of old, "Thy gentleness hath made me great."

Brother David



Minutes of the Conferring Fellowship Meeting – April 10, 2014.

Brother Stanley W opened the meeting and welcomed the group that filled the house. Brother Andrew W led us in singing "Come, Let Us Join Our Cheerful Song" and "To Thy Temple I Repair."

Brother Merle R led us in devotions by emphasizing the importance of a personal, growing faith in God and His ability. He cited a number of Bible characters who believed that "with God all things are possible." We were encouraged to keep faith alive.

After a kneeling prayer, the minutes of the September 26, 2013, conferring meeting were read.

Brother David W brought the first message of the day, titled Standing in the Gap, from Ezekiel 22:30. Ezekiel labored in a difficult time. Others down through time have needed to stand in the gap and stand for the Lord. Some were persecuted and died to fill the gap. Many faithful church leaders in the past were willing to stand firm.

He listed a number of challenges that face us today:

1. Bridging the generation gap
2. Relating to progressive Mennonitism
3. Keeping clear lines between the church and state
4. Maintaining a disciplined church life
5. Maintaining simplicity in an affluent society
6. Keeping a vital devotional life
7. Stemming the tide of apostasy

We then sang, "Stand Up, Stand Up for Jesus."

Brother David S then spoke on Article VII of the Schleithem Confession of Faith (Concerning the Oath). An oath is a solemn calling upon God to witness a transaction. The Law commanded that the oath should involve the Name of God. He noted a number of examples of its use in the Old Testament. The New Testament records Jesus' words, "Swear not at all." The Holy Spirit enables us to be honest and truthful at all times without calling on God for a witness.

He shared practical directives for our speech:

1. We must keep our word. Jesus said, "Let your yea be yea."
2. We must never use an oath. In court, we are allowed to affirm.
3. We must always be sincere.
4. We must let our words be few.
5. We must be careful with expressions for emphasis.

Brother Marvin Z then spoke on the subject Acculturation Among Twentieth-century Brethren. Acculturation means "the process of discarding beliefs and accepting the practices of the culture around us."

He discussed the subject in several areas:

I. Who are the Brethren?

They originated in Germany in 1708, embracing a blend of German Pietism and Anabaptism. They became known as the Church of the Brethren in 1908. They were very similar to the Mennonites except in their mode of baptism and their appreciation of their Pietistic heritage.

11. Tracing acculturation

He noted various time periods of Brethren history and steps in the process of change from a uniformly plain church.

III. Areas of acculturation

A. Modernism

B. Structural changes in administration

C. Emphasis on forbearance and unity at any price

D. Change from free ministry to salaried ministry

E. Change from nonresistance to pacifism

E Participating in politics

G. Loss of nonconformity

IV Lessons for us

A. We get weary of pressure.

B. We must be alert to gradualism.

C. Acculturation starts in our thinking.

D. Accommodation increases the pressure.

E. We should be thankful for what we have.

F. We must not squander the heritage of faith.

After singing "I Would Be True," Brother Fred C led us in a closing prayer.

Brother David B served as moderator for the afternoon session. Brother Wilmer B led us in singing "Glory to God on High" and "Above the Trembling Elements."

Brother Harry E led in devotions, reading from James 4:7, 8. Two fundamental principles for success in the Christian life are given here: resist the devil and draw nigh to God. Resist means "to flee with haste." If we draw nigh to God, He will draw nigh to us. Brother Harry led us in a kneeling prayer.

Brother Melvin B shared the secretary's report.

I. Ordinations since last conferring meeting and

II. Ordinations planned.

Brother Mervin M then shared the message Leadership Directives That Bring Rest—Acts 15. He noted there were issues in the church that needed to be addressed. A special session for discussion was called (15:6). Much disputing, that is investigating jointly, occurred (15:7). A record of God's work was given (15:12). Order was maintained in the meeting, and the brethren reached one accord (15:25). Their conclusion brought rest to the church (15:31).

He then developed the message by giving multiple directives.

I. Leadership directives for our issues today

A. Those responsible responded promptly to the problem (15:6).

B. They sought a word from the Lord (15:7). The tone of the conference was respectful (1 Peter 5: 3, 5).

C. The conclusion was concise and elementary (15:28, 29).

D. They spoke with a united voice (15:22).

F A plural delegation represented the conference. G. Their people were sufficiently informed (15:30, 31). II. General directives

A. Sufficient leadership must be in place.

B. The presence of leadership should not be disquieting.

C. Directives given should not be partial.

D. Leaders must continue to give answers to issues.

E. Patterns of worship need to be stable—such as administering the ordinances.

We then shared in a period of open discussion, when various comments were given on the messages of the day:

1. From Acts 16:4, 5 we learn that rest in church life helps produce expansion.
2. What is the balance between responding promptly and giving enough time to find sustainable answers?
3. Purity in all facets of church life is valuable.
4. The influence of younger ordained men has the potential of hastening apostasy.
5. We discussed swearing of oaths compared to affirming.

After singing one verse of "Like a River, Glorious," Brother Wilmer W brought the message "His Wife Hath Made Herself Ready"—Revelation 19:7. In this passage we have the glorious declaration of victory for the bride of Christ. Here is the promised uniting of the church and her Bridegroom, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Brother Wilmer spoke of:

- I. The identity of the bride
- II. The preparation of the bride

The Bridegroom has set the standard because He has the preeminence. Fine linen means the bride is ready both in her profession and in her expression.

- III. The characteristics of the bride

- A. She has washed her robes—in salvation (Revelation 7:14).
- B. She washes by the Word—in sanctification. Through reading, teaching, and preaching she absorbs the words of the Bridegroom.
- C. She loves not her life unto the death (Revelation 12:11). She dies to self. The primary focus is on spiritual things.
- D. She upholds the doctrine of separation (2 Corinthians 6:17). That line of distinction from the world must be practical and sustainable.
- E. She possesses a burden for the lost. Many will fall under the judgment of God (Revelation 19:15-17).
The true church will be reaching out to save them.

As a closing song, we sang, "The Sands of Time Are Sinking." Brother James M led in a closing prayer. It was truly a day of blessing and challenge.

Submitted by the assistant secretary, Brother Daryl



Church Committee Report: Liberty Ridge Farm

The Liberty Ridge Farm near McAlisterville, Pennsylvania, is an institution that has been established by the Mennonite Messianic Mission to assist our homes with boys who have special spiritual, emotional, and social needs. At our orientation meeting in November of 2011, Brother Lynn stated our purpose—"It is an intense spiritual atmosphere for the purpose of effecting social and behavioral changes in the lives of the troubled boys in a structured, closely supervised homelike setting."

Liberty Ridge Farm is an eighty-acre farm nestled in the Juniata Valley of central Pennsylvania. The Board chose to have a farm emphasis to give the boys the advantage of the therapy and structure that comes from a working farm. The farm came with two operating chicken houses, buildings for cattle and hogs, and garden space to raise the necessary food. Firewood for heating is harvested from the woodland.

In 2013 a fifty- by eighty-foot shop was added to give the boys space to build fiberglass farm gates, to build and repair pallets, and to develop other occupational skills. The boys work side by side with their mentors, which provides opportunity to encourage structure and answer questions about life. Farm life is an excellent place to learn work ethics, time management, and ways to prioritize projects. To see the smile of accomplishment at a finished project or a goal achieved is very rewarding for the staff.

Sometimes we are asked what a normal day is like. The rising alarm rings at 5:30 A.M., and by 5:45 A.M. all staff gathers in the family room for group devotions. After devotions the boys begin their DMI (Daily Moral Inventory), where they record their gleanings from the morning devotions and their goals for the day. Breakfast is served at 6:30 A.M. After breakfast and family worship everyone scatters to his responsibilities—some to feed the animals, some to tend to the chickens, and some to start the laundry. At 8:00 A.M. school begins for the school students.

At noon everyone gathers in the dining room for lunch, and again at 1:00 P.M., everyone assembles in the basement classroom for Bible study time. This is a very important hour for everyone. In this class we do memory work (several poems and the Book of James) and then study a passage and make it relevant to our day and needs. Then we disperse for the various work projects for the afternoon until supper-time at 6:00 P.M. After supper there is time for finishing laundry, studying memory work, doing writing assignments or reports, finishing their DMI (highlights of the day, victo-

ries, regrets or failures, and things they did to help others today). Lastly, they rate their day on a scale of one to ten. Personal devotions are at 8:30 P.M. and lights out comes at 9:30 P.M.

The doors of Liberty Ridge opened on November 1, 2011 withas the first house-parents for two months. From January through December of 2012,..... served as house-parents. served in January 2013, served February through May, and in June 2013joined the staff and began their term as house-parents. Also in June,returned as administrators and work coordinator.

Currently we have four residents, and each is assigned a mentor who is with them twenty-four hours a day. We are very glad for the work of our dedicated mentors. Their work as a role model and example of stability is of incalculable value.

Pray for the work at Liberty Ridge. The needs are great and very real. The demands are intense. The rewards are rich. May this work redound to the glory of God and to the extension of His kingdom.

Brother Ethan For the Liberty Ridge Farm Committee.



The Abundant Life (Part 6) Godly Trust

The large bull slowly approached the two strands of electric fence. I felt my two-year-old son's hand searching for mine. After feeling the firm grip of my hand, he said, "Hank has such sharp eyes. Daddy, will you hold me?"

Godly trust is placing our hand in God's firm grip. As the songwriter also expressed, "Take thou my hand and lead me unto the end." We are not satisfied or secure until we find God's strong grip on our hand. We want Him to take our hand. It was not enough for my son to be close. My hand had to be gripping his. We need faith like Abraham's servant: "I being in the way, the LORD led me." And when it seems that we cannot go on, He will hold more than our hand. "When thou passest through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee" (Isaiah 43:2).

Where is our trust? On American coins these words are minted: "In God we trust." We easily can recognize the conflict between our trust in possessions and our trust in God. To express trust in God when we feel the coins

in our pocket, the encouragement of others, and the comforts of life is easy.

Each morning we may ask the Lord to go with us through our day. Of course, when things go the way we wish, it is easy to believe He has. But can we try this prayer? "Lord, we want to go with thee today; it is thy day." It was not enough for the disciples to have Jesus lying in the hull of their boat. "And his disciples came to him, and awoke him, saying, Lord, save us: we perish" (Matthew 8:25). These experienced seaman acknowledged, "Lord, this is thy ship. We want thee to be the pilot." Even though He is fully aware of our needs, to give Jesus a comfortable bed in the hull of our boat is not enough. He patiently awaits our cry to him. "Jesus, Savior Pilot Me."

Genuine godly trust may be learned when earthly securities fail—dashed dreams, sickness, death, failures, or abandonment. "I looked on my right hand, and beheld, but there was no man that would know me: refuge failed me; no man cared for my soul" (Psalms 142:4). God, at times, takes us through fire, "that the trial of [our] faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 1:7).

God may use various means to drive out the false refuges. We must not turn from these times but face them with courage, for we are with our Master. As hard labor strengthens our muscles, so afflictions and temptations, however rough and sharp, strengthen our trust in God.

—*Brother Joel* (end of series)





PRAYER POINT

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

Thank God for godly fathers

*Thank God for the Comforter, the Holy Spirit whom the
Father hath sent to abide with us forever*

*Pray for our summer Bible schools and for the children that will attend
from our communities that the seeds sown would spring unto life eternal*

*Pray for “kings and all in authority; that we may lead a quiet and
peaceable life in all godliness and honesty*

*Pray that the annual Bible Conference at Ashland may bless the church
and strengthen us in the faith.*

