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The rapid march of the generations continues incessantly. So soon one generation passes, and another takes its place. The danger of losing the faith in the shift of the generations is always with us. We must be on guard lest we forget some basic principles for transmitting the faith.

God's heartthrob for Israel was that they faithfully teach the rising generation so their days of faithfulness would be prolonged in the land they were to possess (Deuteronomy 5:33). The principles God outlined to Israel in Deuteronomy 6 apply to us today.

Careful obedience to divine direction is essential for transmitting the faith. "God commanded to teach you, that ye might do" (Deuteronomy 6:1). A careless response to Bible teaching will have a hardening effect on the young. We must maintain a strong Biblical base in our teaching and preaching. Diligence in observing and doing the commandments of God is necessary in passing the same heartthrob to the rising generation (Deuteronomy 6:25).

Each generation must have a strong love and commitment to the Lord if they would inspire those who follow them. Spiritual apathy will undermine the faith. The Scriptures warn us that "the love of many shall wax cold" in the end time. If we want to inspire those who follow us, no substitute can replace spiritual fervency.

We must cultivate a proper fear of God. We need a fear that brings a constant God-consciousness. This fear brings a keen sense of accountability to God. The ease and prosperity of our day can soon result in a self-sufficiency that undermines our fear of God and our dependency upon Him.

We must establish a keen sense of right and wrong in our children. The culture we live in has few moorings. Anything goes; restraint is thrown aside; tolerance is held up as the ideal. For the faith to endure, we must have firm conviction—conviction that does not compromise to cultural pressure. This is developed by holding children accountable for their actions beginning at a young age and continuing through the teen years. We must provide an anchor to our children in their developing years.

A diligent teaching program is essential for transmitting the faith. Teaching must be a way of life for us. It involves Mother answering the questions of the young child. It will affect our interaction with our children. We

teach by what we insist on. Our desire to teach the rising generation motivates us to take advantage of the excellent opportunities we have. We are diligent in church attendance and send our youth to Bible school. A new generation, who must be taught, is always growing up among us. Let us not be weary in our teaching efforts.

We must know and teach our history. God told Israel to instruct their children about their past deliverance. He wanted them to know what had happened before the very eyes of their fathers. In teaching our history we should not be glorying in our past, but glorying in what God has done for His people. We directly benefit from the faithful of the past. This understanding helps us to keep our focus in the present.

The ever-rising generation will benefit as we maintain a respect for established practices. A Biblical lifestyle becomes a tradition that can aid each generation. We face the pressure of traditionalism. But we also face the pressure of having a negative view of traditional practice that will destabilize the rising generation. In a day of rapid changes, a cautious approach that respects past patterns and applications can help provide stability to us.

Respect for authority is essential for the longevity of faithful generations. A right view of delegated authority will contribute to a right view of divine authority. We live in an age of extreme disregard for and abuse of authority. Those who are in authority often do not set a good example. So easily we get caught up in prevailing attitudes that take a negative view of all authority. When proper parental authority is established and when parents have a right regard for authorities over them, a solid base is laid for children to respect God's authority. Respect for authority is a very basic principle that directly affects the outlook and course of the rising generation.

Our generation is certainly benefiting from houses we did not fill, wells we did not dig, and fruit we did not plant (Deuteronomy 6:11). We have partaken and are full. We do not know what the generation to come may face. Will we be faithful in living the principles that bring endurance, or will our failure hinder the generations to come?

—JMS



Of Creeds and Confessions

According to the dictionary, these two words can seemingly be used interchangeably. Why did our Anabaptist forefathers typically refer to their statements of beliefs as confessions? Would it be incorrect to call them creeds? In our (Eastern Pennsylvania Mennonite Church) Statement of Christian Doctrine, under Confessions of Faith, we affirm that we accept the Garden City Confession of Faith as our creed. Yet it has been said that the Mennonite Church is not a credal church.

The earliest statement of Christian beliefs was called the Apostles' Creed. It included three sections dealing with God the Father, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Ghost. Most Catholic and Protestant churches still use this today. While different printings of this creed contain some variations, here is a basic form as given in the Mennonite Confessions of Faith and Minister's Manual:

"I believe in God, the Father, Almighty Creator of heaven and earth: And in Jesus Christ, his only begotten Son, our Lord; who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried. On the third day he rose from the dead. He ascended into heaven, and sitteth at the right hand of God, the Father Almighty, from whence he shall come to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Ghost; the General Christian Church; the Communion of saints; the Forgiveness of sins; the Resurrection of the body, and the Life everlasting. Amen."

This creed was supposedly composed by the twelve apostles, but this claim has not been proven. More likely, this creed grew out of the life of the Christian church, spurred by the erroneous beliefs circulating about the Godhead. We do accept this creed.

Before Gutenberg's printing press was invented, very little printed material was circulated among the common people. In Europe, they generally accepted whatever the Catholic Church said. Because the writings of apostate church leaders were considered equal in authority to the Scriptures, false doctrines were promoted. When certain Catholic scholars began serious Bible study in the early 1500s, they formed what later became known as the Anabaptist Movement. As the Bible changed their lives, they emphasized a Biblical belief and practice.

Throughout its history, the Christian church saw the need to clearly state the essence of its faith. This led to the formulation of confessions of faith or creeds. The Anabaptists never attached the weight to creeds or confes-

sions that some church groups did. They were Biblicists who produced confessions, not necessarily as creeds to which the laity and ministry subscribed, but as (1) instructional material for their youth, (2) a Biblical testimony for distribution in society, or (3) a basis for dissolving differences between church groups. In general the Mennonites have held to the principle that the highest and only norm of all religious understanding, of faith, and of doctrine is the Bible, the Word of God.

This means that the Mennonite Church has not been a creedal church in the customary sense of the term. We are not a creedal church because we do not hold the written doctrinal explanations above or equal to the Bible. We are a creedal church in the sense that we do see the value of explaining Bible doctrines and putting them in written form. But we do not build Bible doctrine on written creeds or confessions. Instead, the opposite is true; confessions of faith are built upon and restate or summarize Bible doctrine. Both creeds and confessions can have Biblical error due to men expressing their views on the outworking of doctrine. Because of the errors of Catholicism that were presented as truth, our forefathers tended not to make creeds binding. Since the Middle Ages, the term creed has increasingly carried the connotation of having binding authority. A minister of another denomination said that his church decided that the "innocent" party in a divorce case could remarry. This is an example of a church that made a wrong decree in direct contrast to the clear teaching of Scripture—an example where creed took preeminence over the Bible.

The question has not necessarily been which term to use (creeds or confessions), as much as how binding the confession or creed should be on the ministry or laity. The early Mennonite confessions of faith were an expression of the confession of the church and gave form to a commonly held content of faith, but they were not issued as church decrees. At various times in the past, attempts were made for creeds to have binding authority on ministry and laymen. In Holland, the Zionists and Lamists divided over this issue. Our ministers today do promise to give heed to all the doctrines of the Word of God, to accept them as a guide for their lives, and to teach and preach them with unchanging fidelity.

Anabaptist and Mennonite Confessions of Faith

Even though many creeds and confessions have been written by different individuals and churches over many years, at least three have stood the test of time and are appreciated by many Anabaptist churches today. Parts of these confessions have been rewritten by some church groups to clarify their position on the different doctrines. Following is a brief historical ex-

planation of these three.

The Schleithem Confession of Faith, the first known Anabaptist confession of faith, was drawn up at Schleithem, Switzerland, on February 24, 1527, by Michael Sattler. This confession explains seven topics: baptism, excommunication, the Lord's Supper, separation from the world, shepherds, nonresistance, and the oath. Each of these subjects is discussed briefly and clearly and is based on the Word of God. This confession does not give a complete rendition of Christian faith, but rather emphasizes the points which were challenged, either by opponents or by misled brethren within.

The Dordrecht Confession of Faith was drafted by Adriaen Cornelisz in the Dutch city of Dordrecht. It was adopted and signed by fifty-one Flemish and Frisian Mennonite preachers as a basis of union on April 21, 1632. It had eighteen articles. At a later date, the Mennonites of North Germany and the Palatinate accepted it as well. The Swiss Mennonites never adopted it, but the Swiss Amish did. The Lancaster and Franconia conferences of southeastern Pennsylvania adopted it in 1725. Historically, this document has been used for instructing applicants for baptism in many Anabaptist denominations.

Even though many Mennonite churches in America recognized it as their official articles of faith, its personal acceptance was not required either for baptism or ordination. This confession places more emphasis on true Christianity and obeying Christ than merely holding to a correct system of doctrine. This mirrors Anabaptist thought.

In the late 1800s and early 1900s, modernism and liberalism were making inroads into the Mennonite Church. This gave rise to the ***Garden City Confession of Faith***. This confession was originally formulated by a committee (Jacob B. Smith, George R. Brunk, and Amos D. Wenger) appointed by the Virginia Mennonite Conference. Their work was adopted by the Virginia Conference in 1919.

This confession was adopted by the Mennonite General Conference in August 1921 at Garden City, Missouri, and named accordingly. It also had eighteen articles, but they were written with the purpose of halting the liberal trends and keeping the various Mennonite church bodies unified on a Biblical basis. It is concise, shorter than the Schleithem, and one-third the length of the Dordrecht. Of Garden City's eighteen articles, fourteen are among the Dordrecht's. The conference stated that "this statement does not supersede the eighteen articles of the Dordrecht Confession, which the Church still confesses and teaches."

Although widely accepted, this confession did not succeed in halting the liberalism or in uniting the church in a common practice. The liberal thinking and trends continued to erode the historic patterns of the (Old) Mennonite Church through the twentieth century.

By accepting and using the Garden City Confession of Faith, we show our appreciation for the efforts of faithful brethren of the past who were interested in keeping a Bible-based church. It has been used in instructing applicants for church membership and is sometimes read previous to the semiannual council meeting. This has helped our church to maintain a Scriptural lifestyle.

Quoting Daniel Kauffman, "Every loyal church adopts the doctrines of the Bible as its creed. The foundation of a heaven-approved creed is 'What saith the Scriptures?'" As we search the Scriptures, the resulting Biblical answers will produce a God-honoring confession.

Brother Richard



THE IMMINENCE OF CHRIST'S SECOND COMING

Part 2: The Witness Throughout the Church Age

The imminency of Christ's return is a fundamental part of New Testament Christian doctrine. Part I of this article examined the New Testament teachings. How did the early church, after the Book of Acts, view their Lord's return?

Early, non-Biblical Christian writers testify that believers in the early church cherished the blessed hope of Jesus' imminent return. The Didache, a Christian text of the end of the first century or beginning of the second century, admonishes, "But be ready, for you do not know the hour in which our Lord comes."¹ Toward the end of the second century, Tertullian wrote that Christ's second coming "impends over the world, now near its close."² In the middle of the third century, Cyprian wrote, "Already His second coming draws near to us."³

Although the Anabaptist-era confessions of faith⁴ do not mention the imminency of Christ's return, the following quotations indicate that they believed and taught this concept. Hans Schlaffer, who was martyred in Tyrol in 1528 wrote: To sum up, a Christian is a follower of Christ. That cannot be changed even if the whole world should end in ruins, which it will

certainly do (and I believe soon). For a thousand years are as one day with God, says Peters

The well-known Hutterite leader, Jacob Hutter wrote:

Be comforted, you chosen of the Lord, for the time of our deliverance is at hand. Lift up your heads to God the Lord in heaven and await your Shepherd and King from heaven with meekness, with great patience in righteousness and truth, in godly love and with strong faith and confidence. For he who is to come will soon come in the clouds of heaven with great power and glory, the King and comfort of Israel.⁶

Menno Simons referred to the imminency of Christ's return several times: Yes, dear brethren, the desirable day of your release is at hand; the day in which you shall stand with great constancy against those who have afflicted you, and have taken away your sweat and your toil, yes, your blood and your life. Then shall all those who pursue us be as ashes under the soles of our feet and they shall acknowledge too late that emperor, king, duke, prince, crown, scepter, majesty, power, sword, and mandate, were nothing but earth, dust, wind, and smoke.?

Watch and pray, the Day is at hand, and comes speedily when we must all stand before the impartial judgment seat of our God, who judges without respect of persons.⁸

The messenger is already at the door, who will say to us, Come ye blessed, enter into the glory of thy Lord.⁹

As both Biblical and non-Biblical writings testify, the doctrine of the imminent return of Jesus Christ has been an integral part of the understanding of the Christian church since its inception. At any moment, "the Lord himself shall descend from heaven [and] we which are alive and remain shall be caught up ... to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words" (1 Thessalonians 4:16-18).

Brother Bruce PA

Footnotes:

¹David W Bercot, ed., *A Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers Marketing, 1998), p. 606.

²ibid., p. 369.

³ibid., p. 606.

⁴Confessions of faith often addressed beliefs or misunderstandings that brought the Anabaptists into conflict with the state and with state church authorities.

⁵Walter Klaassen, ed., *Anabaptism in Outline* (Scottsdale, Pa: Herald

Press), 1981, p. 91.

⁶ibid., p. 325.

⁷Menno Simons, *The Complete Writings of Menno Simons*, trans. Harold S. Bender (Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald Press), p. 613.

⁸ibid., p. 833.

⁹ibid., p. 1047.



STRENGTHENING THE FAMILY BOND

The family bond is the glue that holds the family together when the family is growing and even after the family is grown and scattered. The bond is that inner sense of loyalty and obligation that ties the family together. This bond is to be an anchor and defense in a turbulent world that competes for our love and loyalty. It must ever be guarded and strengthened.

The family bond begins at marriage. A man and wife are bonded together by marriage and go forth as one. When children join the family, the bond expands to envelop them. Infants grow up so quickly, and time stretches the bond as the family grows and matures. The children become aware and responsive to their enlarging world. Ere long they are in school and, almost as quickly, out of school. The competition and pressures grow as the family ages. Various influences pressing in from their expanded world threaten the family bond—and at a time they need it the most.

Pressures That Threaten

The pressures that threaten the family bond are myriad. For Father, these include the constant responsibility to provide for his family. This may take him outside the home and into difficult environments. While he means well, these pressures can become an end in themselves and distract him from guiding the family even when he is at home. He may be so involved with other things (even good things) that he fails to connect with his wife and children. Relationships can become frayed, and the bond of love fades and is threatened. The children he loves so much learn they must keep their distance lest they be pushed aside or rejected. What can he do?

Pressures also abound for Mother in the home. She is on call twenty-four hours a day, seven days each week for the needs of her family—anything from runny noses to bruised teenagers. She even aids her husband, who is laboring under his load.

The children face pressures as their world expands to include schoolmates and other friends and relatives. These relationships can affect their first bond to parents and home because they feel the pressure to be accepted by their peers. Children want that approval, and it becomes especially difficult when those values do not fit with the family values. We call it peer pressure. During this time, youth may feel more obligation to their peers than to their own families. How can this pressure be neutralized so it can be a positive force?

These are real, live matters in the family. As more families urbanize, the advantages of the family farm must be found in other ways. Thank God that family bonds are not limited to certain environments.

Essentials That Bind

What is the family bond about? How can every family member be helped to see his part in keeping the family bond strong?

The family bond is about relationships within the family. It is about respect for each other in the home. It is about responsibility where each needs to do his part. It is about restrictions of discipline and guarding against competitions. It is about doing the right things at the right time for the good of the family.

The family bond is about the natural security, the sense of belonging that is part of childhood. It is an assurance of identity, an assurance of acceptance, love, loyalty, and unconditional support. No one needs to fear rejection and alienation. Where these virtues are missing, the family bond is bruised or broken.

The family circle is where children learn the social graces of sharing and forgiveness—where the child learns that the world does not rotate around him. The child needs to learn discipline and accountability. He needs to be trained to respect authority and the rights of others. The child needs to learn how to be restored when he fails. When disciplined, he needs to feel forgiveness and the assurance of being loved. In it all, the child needs to understand he must do his part if he hopes to be part of the family bond.

Psalms 127 presents foundational principles that must undergird the family bond.

1. The Lord must be central. "Except the LORD build the house, they labour in vain that build it" (verse 1). The family must be built on and around the Lord. Family values and family activities center on Him. The Lord is constantly sought and consulted. When His will is the nucleus of the family, they are bonded in Him. Worship, praise, and a focus on serving the Lord will bond a Christ-centered family.

2. The family is bonded when children are seen as the heritage of the Lord (verse 3). Christian parents see themselves as foster parents, responsible to bring the children God has given them back to Him. Parents make God the acknowledged Presence in the home. Every home should be graced with the truth of the motto that hung over the door of the home I grew up in. It stated, "Christ is the head of this home. The unseen Guest at every meal. The silent listener to every conversation."

3. The family is bonded when children are considered as arrows, which parents are preparing for future usefulness to the Lord (verse 4). Parents and children need to be partners in serving the Lord. This bond ought to make them the best of friends. This bond is strengthened as the family lives, works, and relaxes together in an upbuilding way.

4. The family is bonded when happiness fills the home. Verse 5 describes the happy, satisfied father. A proper response to his parental direction brings closeness. When the children go forth in right living and resist evil, the family is bonded ever more closely in the Lord.

The picture given us in Psalm 128:3 well describes a family thus bonded—a happy mother with her children around the table! The ultimate happiness is verbalized in Psalm 144:12: "That our sons may be as plants grown up in their youth; that our daughters may be as corner stones, polished after the similitude of a palace."

The family bonds naturally at the beginning. As children grow, they must learn to respect their parents. Expressions of disrespect and disobedience must be confronted. Children will respect parents much more easily if the parents are fair, consistent, and current in dealing with unacceptable conduct. In the process, children also need to sense the parents' respect for them. Situations, age, and the level of maturity will affect how parents go about disciplining their children.

Communication in the home is so critical. It is a vital force in bonding. Parents need to take the initiative in sharing in the children's struggles of growing up. Sharing the facts of life and accompanying issues will make the bond closer. Taking particular interest in each child will reassure each of his part in the family bond.

The family bond must be protected from competition of distracting activities. Family worship times, mealtimes, and other special family times are good opportunities to put first things first. The phone can easily be silenced during these times. Overuse of communication technology can ruin communication within the family. The family bond is weakened when family members are preoccupied with communicating with others.

If the family bond is to be maintained, every family member must be resolved to do his part. As each does his part, each one benefits—parents and children alike. And beyond that, God can work in the family to His glory!
Brother David G



Reaching Balaam

Balaam, upon the mountaintop,
Beheld God's people, blessed:
He voiced his longing and desire
That he could have such rest.

But he went down that mountainside
Did not with them unite.
His life came, sadly, to an end
Against them in a fight.

The world looks on with empty hearts
And sees God's people, blessed.
They voice their longing for such peace:
"I wish I had such rest.

Your home life is so orderly;
Your children, well-behaved."
And on they go, yet loath to pay
The price for what they craved.

Oh, heavenly Father, with Your love
Reach down and touch these souls
Through us, Your children. Help us show
They, too, can reach these goals.

—*Sister Debbie*



A God Honoring Courtship (Part 3)

Beginning the Friendship

John had not divulged his interest to anyone. For months John had sought the Lord's guidance, and he had grown confident that the Lord was blessing his interest. He was eager to know what mature people around him would think of his interest. Discovering Mary's opinion would be another step in discerning God's will.

John pondered who to bring into his confidence. He deliberated at length how and when to approach Mary. He realized he had various reasonable options. The time had come to get advice.

Your parents ought to be the first to know your interest. They are more interested in your future than you can comprehend. Since they know your strengths and weaknesses better than anyone else, they may have valuable advice about your compatibility with the person you are considering. Invite their evaluation and candid opinion. Stifling their input or resisting their advice will bring regrets.

Seek advice from someone who knows the person under consideration. Her minister may have valuable insights. Calling him yourself may be good exercise, but perhaps your father or your minister would be willing to make that contact. It is wise to listen carefully and willingly accept the evaluation that comes.

When your parents and her ministry have given their approval, the time has come to contact the sister of your choice. Some young brethren find this a bit daunting. In truth, there are several acceptable ways to begin. The sincerity of your character is much more important than staging the perfect approach.

Writing a letter, making your request in person, or contacting her father are appropriate ways of making your interest known. State your interest clearly, but do not expect an answer quickly. You had the opportunity to choose her; now she needs to make a choice about you.

Do you, the sister contacted, feel inclined to accept his offer? Do not make a hasty reply. Take ample time to seek the Lord's will and the advice of others. Honor your father's perspective. Be careful not to let the excitement of the moment override your better judgment or silence the input of others.

Maybe you feel negative because you hardly know the suitor and the idea seems new and strange. Do not rule out the possibility too quickly. Give the proposal serious consideration. Remember that courtship is for learning

to know each other and that you are not committing yourself to marriage. Take a few weeks to lay the matter before the Lord. If you really have no interest in beginning this friendship, you have the privilege to courteously and simply decline.

"In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths" (Proverbs 3:6).

—*Brother Jesse*



PRAYER POINT

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

Pray for the churchwide ministry as they meet in fellowship and consultation at the spring conferring meeting. As the church expands geographically and numerically, diligent effort will be needed to maintain trust and unity. Pray that these meetings may contribute to that end.

Pray for the church at Wolcott, Vermont. Plans to expand the present facility are facing some permitting problems, delaying the project. Pray for patience and discernment as the congregation continues to seek the Lord's will.

Pray in behalf of the raging conflicts and terrorism in the Middle East. Many innocent people are suffering and fleeing their homes. Pray that God would continue to overrule in His sovereignty.

Thank the Lord for answered prayers. Perhaps we too often respond as the nine lepers did—we go on our way rejoicing, but forget to bring our prayers of thanksgiving to Him.

