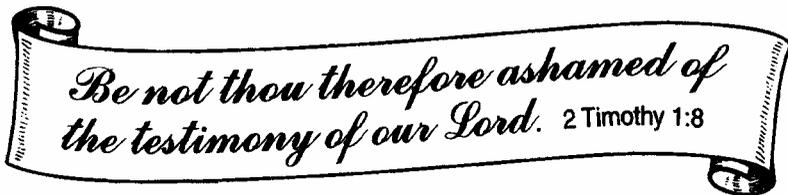


THE EASTERN MENNONITE TESTIMONY

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

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Editor: anabaptistmennonites.org.

School is planned to be a temporary assignment. The goal is that we learn not only our lessons but also the joy of learning. We need the help of a schoolmaster till we have learned sufficiently to teach ourselves. Living under the Old Testament Law was like being under the discipline of a schoolmaster, which was also a temporary provision, Galatians 3:24. Through faith in Christ we, as sons of God, have come home to be trained under our Father's eye. 'And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father" Galatians 4:6.

We all grow up under the elementary training of law. Children are not naturally self-disciplined. Parents and schoolteachers use both punishment and reward to teach children the lessons of life. However, sometime, and sooner rather than later, everyone should learn to be self-disciplined. Parents are not finished training until children not only tolerate but also enjoy work, study, service, and sacrifice.

The elementary grades of life are vital to our spiritual lives. Wise parents realize that, unless their children submit to character training under their care, they will not be adequately prepared for God's school. Self-discipline and self-motivation are prerequisites for discipleship.

Diligent Christians, who carefully follow the leading of the Spirit, do not rely on a written law as a daily prod. "But the anointing which ye have received of him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you" 1 John 2:27. The Spirit faithfully tutors us with the Word and through the brotherhood. We are delivered from doing what we have to do, to the freedom and power of choosing and doing what is right to do. This is Christian victory. If we continually chafe at being prodded along, we are still in elementary law training.

Graduating out of this school is our choice. It is primarily a choice to make a change of attitude. We must choose to give up our will and take pleasure in seeking and following God's will. Many do not maintain the blessedness of this better relationship. Too many professing Christians struggle along, conforming themselves to the wishes of the church but longing after the forbidden things of the world, and do not realize that they are still bound by Satan. "For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live" (Romans 8:13).

The church is entrusted with disciplinary methods to help failing

students. This is absolutely necessary. To attempt to administrate the church without discipline is as foolish as to train children without discipline. Soon after the church began "it seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to [the apostles]" to establish "decrees for to keep." This position was formed only after extended discussion.

The apostles recognized the danger of tempting God by placing a yoke of law on the necks of the Gentile converts that would discourage them from salvation. This concern was balanced by the need for a standard of "necessary things" that would unite the church in separation from the world. This established the foundational principle of limited law. Occasional additions have been made that define a minimum standard for acceptance in the brotherhood. It was never intended to be exhaustive. We must never begin to trust in compliance to church standards to earn our salvation as the Old Testament saints trusted in the Law, or we have fallen from grace.

As churches age and face the tendency to regress, there is a pressure to strengthen the elementary law to counter carnality. And for those who are no longer living after the Spirit, they have no other law. Let us remember however "that the law is not made for a righteous man, but for the lawless and disobedient" 1 Timothy 1:9. Merely conforming one-self to a written or verbal standard is still substandard with God.

Cain was the first of many legalists who attempted to satisfy God's law without the devotion of the heart. And although men may make very severe laws, law is easier to obey than the sanctifying scrutiny of the Spirit. A law will always have loopholes and does not deliver from the flesh, Colossians 2:23.

Collectively, a church rises with the fresh zeal to follow God. When there is a burning desire to obey the Word, convictions are established and solid church positions are formed. Conversely, churches apostatize when they weary and regress to grudging obedience.

We recall with tender affection the value of our elementary training but rejoice in the joy and peace of maturing under our Father's apprenticeship. "Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage" Galatians 5:1.

—BAS



The Teaching Commission of the Church

Jesus commissioned the church with a teaching ministry. "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen" Matthew 28:19-20. This commission contains three all-inclusive dimensions—"all nations," "all things," and for all time.

All Nations

God wills that all men come to the knowledge of the truth. The church is charged with being the teacher. Teaching "all nations" requires a staff larger than an individual church group can provide. We believe that we should do what is within our power to do. As the calls keep coming, we need to discern the Lord's leading and to analyze our resources to meet the new needs. As our membership grows, we should sense an obligation to enter into sufficient outreach to utilize the growing group of potential workers.

Because we cannot meet all the needs, we should have a healthy regard for the work of others. We rejoice that other groups also teach the "all things." This calls us to respect their labors. We should also respect the work of those with whom we would not directly associate. However, we should not join so-called missionary alliances. These will hinder our ability to teach the "all things." Maintaining fellowship lines is not a judgment of others as much as it is a protection to ourselves.

Entering into a teaching ministry to other nations calls for the united effort of the church. For this reason we have a mission board to organize the work and to provide cohesion between the sending church and those on the field. Thus the resources of the broader church can be used, and a planned approach can be taken to reach as many areas as our resources allow.

All Things

The injunction to teach "all things" is a sobering dimension of this commission. This includes requiring each new believer to surrender His life in holy Baptism to the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. This requires clear teaching on the way of salvation as provided by the three Persons of the Holy Trinity. But also included is helping individuals to a genuine repentance and a complete renouncing of sin, Satan, and the world.

The injunction to "[teach] them to observe all things" puts the emphasis

on the practical nature of the Gospel message. The same Greek word is elsewhere translated keep as in "keep my commandments." Hence, the emphasis is on teaching a practical Gospel message that not only saves from sin but also offers a way of life that keeps one on the highway of holiness. This would include teaching the Sermon on the Mount and the Epistles as a foundation for fulfilling all the law of Christ. We do not merely go out and lead souls to the Savior, leaving them to find their own way. We have a responsibility to help new believers to "work out [their] own salvation" in practical daily living.

This brings into focus the need of establishing a local church body in order to truly teach the "all things." In the context of the body, the Scriptures are applied to current issues and local challenges. The church should make the same basic applications on the field that are made at home. Some local issues may need to be addressed that are not faced by the home-church, but the basic subculture of Biblical practice can be applied anywhere.

To maintain the "all things," all our churches need to be disciplined churches. Those who violate the standards of Biblical application need to be admonished and helped to understand. Sometimes when those who are new to the faith challenge a practice, we may be tempted to adapt for them. But teaching individuals to learn submission to the body of Christ is important. If members persist in disobedience, the Scriptural practice of excommunication must be used to keep leaven out of the body.

This concept of a teaching commission also limits our humanitarian emphasis. The Gospel calls us to love our neighbor and to be sensitive to his physical needs, but the emphasis of the New Testament is on meeting men's spiritual needs. We have tried to reach out to humanitarian needs within the range of our extended church neighborhoods, but we have not attempted to maintain an ongoing humanitarian program. The historical record of the last century provides substantial evidence that a humanitarian emphasis will eventually replace teaching the "all things" with a mere social gospel.

The ability to print tracts and doctrinal booklets has been a tremendous asset in teaching the "all things." However, it is important that we do more than merely take the printed message. We should be there to help disciple those who respond to the message.

All Time

The final dimension of this teaching commission is found in the closing promise that Jesus made, "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of

the world." The apostles obeyed this commission. "So then after the Lord had spoken unto them ... they went forth, and preached every where, the Lord working with them" Mark 16:19-20).

Some have taught that this commission was given to the apostles and was intended only for the Apostolic Era. But Jesus promised to accompany the teachers of "all things" to the end of the world. We believe that the Lord is working with us today. Though the end of the world is imminent, we should view our teaching as a long-term work. We need to make applications carefully so that teachers of "all things" will be perpetuated by the program that we are promoting. The soft lifestyle of North American culture tends to undermine the traits of sacrifice and selfless service that are needed to sustain a long-term commitment to teach "all things" in all places to which the Lord directs us.

The teaching ministry of our Christian day schools, Sunday schools, and youth Bible schools is an integral part of sustaining the vision of teaching the "all things" beyond our generation as the Lord carries. May the Lord go with us in this great work, "even unto the end of the world. Amen."

Brother Galen.



THE FASCINATION OF CHANCE

A client called a tax preparer to schedule an appointment. The client, an elderly gentleman, mentioned that he had won the lottery. The tax preparer asked him to bring along all tickets purchased during the same year. When he arrived for his appointment, he needed help to carry in three large boxes stuffed full of tickets.

Two clerks spent most of the day tallying his tickets. They found that he had spent 120,000 dollars on lottery tickets and had won 150,000 dollars. With taxes deducted, only a small percentage of his winnings were gain. The man, however, was obviously quite pleased with his first-ever lottery win.

What was the compulsion that drove this man to continue pouring money into lottery tickets? Why would a man waste a lifetime of earnings on gambling? Apparently, gambling becomes an addiction. People are attracted by the possibility of gaining something for nothing. Unrestrained

gambling indicates that a person has become hooked on the chance of winning it big. The reasoning is, "If I gamble one more time, I may wipe out all my losses. If I stop now, I may be missing a chance to win on my next gamble."

But how does this apply within our churches? We do not have this problem among us. However, what about things like taking part in drawings for door prizes? What about business promotions that offer a chance to win a machine just by entering our name? What about speculating on commodities, without handling the actual product, in an attempt to take advantage of price fluctuations? Might such things cover a similar carnal desire to get something for nothing? What are some principles to help us determine where we should be drawing the line on such things?

Gambling is addictive. Addictions violate the principle of using but not abusing the things of this world. This is not to say that all who take part in drawings are addicted. However, it is true that many who have become addicted to gambling began in small ways. One man traced the root of his gambling back to childhood games when he and his friends played for pennies.

We are commanded to earn so that we "may have to give to him that needeth" (Ephesians 4:28). Scripture consistently teaches that our earthly goods are to be used for the good of others, rather than only to benefit ourselves. Trying to gain money through chance is a selfish activity. It involves gaining at the expense of others rather than through mutually beneficial service. It develops a selfish, inward look rather than a selfless, outward look.

Playing with chance is also a lack of personal responsibility. We are responsible to provide for our families to the best of our abilities. In our businesses, we are responsible to be sure that our financial moves do not unnecessarily put others at risk. Placing our finances at the mercy of chance is irresponsible. Playing with the price fluctuations of a commodity involves balancing the risk of significant loss against the possibility of significant gain. Many of those who have engaged in speculation of this sort lost not only their own money but also borrowed funds.

Christian propriety prohibits involvement in drawings and door prizes. In some cases the prizes are inappropriate for Christian people. They often involve the world's lifestyle, such as tickets to movies or sporting events. Some years ago, a middle-aged, unmarried Mennonite man won a gift certificate to a beauty salon. The editor of the local weekly newspaper considered that to be newsworthy!

The lure of winning is also due to man's effort to bypass God's directive, "In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread" (Genesis 3:19). Manual labor is cast in a positive light throughout the Scriptures. Even in the perfection of the Garden of Eden, Adam was assigned the job of dressing and keeping the Garden. Our income should be in exchange for a product offered or a service rendered, something that makes a contribution to the well-being of our fellow men. It should always be our desire to give good value in exchange for what we receive.

Noting the practical side of this point is worthwhile. One tends to handle money earned by honest toil more conscientiously than money simply handed to him. Many who won large sums of money have learned the truth of the Scripture, "Wealth gotten by vanity shall be diminished: but he that gathereth by labour shall increase" (Proverbs 13:11).

Certainly the possibility of gaining something for nothing is intriguing. However, a number of factors should give us as Christians the conviction to avoid engaging in such activities. May we be careful in this area, as in all areas, to make choices that will ultimately bring honor and glory to our Lord.

Brother Nathan.



The Strait Gate

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus calls, "Enter ye in at the strait gate" Matthew 7:13. He further stresses that "strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it" Matthew 7:14. The word strait has the meaning of narrow (from obstacles standing close about).

In the parallel account of Luke 13, Jesus appears to have been speaking to the religious leaders, and went on to warn, "I know you not." What baggage do we need to unload to pass through this gate? How can we be sure that we are walking in the narrow way?

The strait gate leaves no room for pride.

"God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble" James 4:6. Is it not interesting that the center letter of the word pride is i? Pride is expressed in many other ways than by the way we dress or walk. We reveal

pride when we are discontent with the place God has asked us to fill.

Pride may cause us to be overly conscious of our good workmanship in our trade. Thus, it is possible for us to be inconsistent in the way we advertise our businesses. We can also be proud of our spiritual successes. It may even be that we are proud of what we thought was our humility. Sometimes God may show us an area of pride of which we were not aware by allowing a difficulty where we had anticipated a success. God can use only humble pilgrims who are allowing Him to cast off the baggage of pride.

The strait gate leaves no room for individualism.

The Anabaptists taught that no man is in Christ without his brother. We cannot claim a relationship with God without also having a relationship with the children of God, 1 John 4:20. Individualism wrongly places the individual conscience above the authority of the church. It leads us to think that we are wise enough to discern the will of God for our lives without the help of others.

If we become critical of how the church is dealing with an issue, it must be true that we feel our way of dealing with the issue would be better, thus placing us on the slippery slope of individualism. If we do not appreciate the direction the church is giving to our own lives, individualism again is a problem. God can use only submissive followers who are allowing Him to chisel off the individualism so that He can fit them into His building, the church, Ephesians 2:19-22.

The strait gate leaves no room for materialism.

The affluence of North American society is a threat to the stranger-and-pilgrim lifestyle that we are trying to preserve. "But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare.... For the love of money is the root of all evil" 1 Timothy 6:9-10. When the pursuit of wealth begins to dominate our thoughts, we had better ask God to free us from this snare.

The threat of materialism is likely just as real to the poor as to the rich. Being discontent with the opportunities that have not come to us is no less a sign of materialism than feeling smug about how well we have handled the opportunities that have come. It is true that a Biblical lifestyle includes thrift and a good work ethic, which often lead to financial success. To lay these principles aside is not the answer.

Sharing with others in need is one of God's ways to guard us from materialism. But, even in our giving, we can be guilty of materialism if we allow ourselves to glory in our giving as did the Pharisees. Perhaps we need to exercise more sacrificial giving—not just superfluous giving. God

can use only unselfish givers who are allowing Him to collect their treasures in heaven, Matthew 6:19-20.

The strait gate leaves no room for impurity.

"But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart" Matthew 5:28. Impurity abounds around us. We are concerned that our children face these temptations victoriously. Purity in courtship is a special concern. Many young couples have been helped by their parents occasionally asking if they are being successful in keeping a hands-off courtship.

But we must face the temptations to impurity victoriously ourselves before we can expect to help our children. Husbands and wives must maintain an open relationship with each other and refrain from doing anything that could give their spouse an opportunity to doubt their fidelity. God can use only holy people who are allowing Him to unload the baggage of impurity.

The strait gate leaves no room for half-hearted worship.

Faithfulness in personal worship is paramount all the more when our days are filled with other important things. We are so easily tempted to rush on to other duties—duties that are right and good. These last days are not the time for us to become half-hearted in our personal worship.

The same is true for our collective worship. Especially in our times we should not be "forsaking the assembling of ourselves together,....but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching" Hebrews 10:25. How many times have we experienced the reviving of spirit (and body) after a midweek prayer meeting we had at first not looked forward to? God can use only devoted worshipers who are allowing Him to have 100 percent of their hearts.

The strait gate leaves plenty of room for those who seek God's will.

If we seek Him, He will show us what baggage we need to unload. As we face the challenge of deciding between the important and the more important, He will help us to place our priorities properly. As the church seeks to find her way through the maze of twenty-first-century issues, we are convinced that He will lead. May we follow faithfully—through the strait gate.

Brother Matthew.



PRAYER POINT

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

Thank God for mothers with an unfeigned faith in God,
like Eunice and her mother Lois,
who taught Timothy the Holy Scriptures from his childhood
2 Timothy 3:15

Thank God for Christ Jesus, who died, is risen again,
And is even at the right hand of God, interceding for us.

Pray for the street meetings that are planned for this summer,
That the Holy Spirit will take the Word and speak
To those who do not know the Lord.

May we pray the prayer of Jabez,
That we can be a blessing to others.
1 Chronicles 4:10

Pray that the Lord would enable us to forgive those who wrong us
So God can forgive us when we fail.



Cultural Norms That Press Gods People (Part 5)

Lord's Day Desecration

Janet was repainting the sign for her little cafe when we pulled into the driveway. What a splendid day for painting . . . only it was Sunday. I walked over to hand her an invitation to our all-day meeting. She mumbled something in low tones.

"I'm sorry, I didn't hear you," I replied. "Oh," she said, "I was saying that I guess I shouldn't be doing this today."

"Why don't you take a break and come to church next Sunday?"

"Well, maybe I should," she answered, "Thanks for the invitation."

Respect for the Lord's Day could be added to the long list of sliding morals of our culture. Back in 1850, persons were not allowed to ride the Boston & Maine Railroad on Sunday unless they satisfied the railroad officials that they were making the trip to attend church services. One author observed, "Our great-grandfathers called it the holy Sabbath; our grandfathers, the Sabbath; our fathers, Sunday; but today we call it the weekend."

Many use Sunday like a second Saturday—time to catch up on home repairs, time to catch up on sleep, time to go snowmobiling in the mountains or to enjoy themselves at a high-class restaurant. It has been said, "Sunday becomes 'Funday' and the holy day a holiday."

Have these trends affected our thinking? Do we run ourselves ragged all week long and habitually sleep through Sunday's services? Is Saturday evening a late night of pleasure or a "Bible, bath, and bed" preparation for the Lord's Day? After the morning worship service, does the afternoon switch from the Lord's Day to our day? Do we use the evening to inform employees of their assignments on Monday?

How does God want us to use His day? The Israelites were forbidden to do any servile work—no harvesting, no loading donkeys, no carrying burdens themselves, no gathering manna, no collecting debts, no gathering sticks or even lighting fires. But we who live in the New Dispensation can do as we please. Does that sound right? No!

God ordained the Sabbath principle at the Creation. We observe the Lord's Day on the first day of the week because our Lord rose from the grave and the Holy Ghost was poured upon the church on this day. As the Passover gave place to the Lord's Supper, so the Jewish Sabbath gives place to the Lord's Day.

The New Testament says little about how we should keep Sunday, but in light of the past work of God for us on the Lord's Day, should we not willingly consecrate this day to Him? The Lord's Day is more than a restriction of daily activity. On this day we should be involved in thankful worship and service.

As a closing promise, read Isaiah 58:13, 14. —Brother Stephen