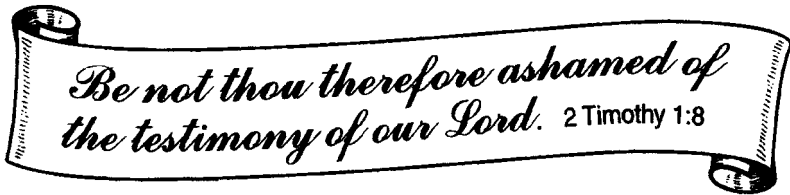


THE EASTERN MENNONITE TESTIMONY

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"Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" (Isaiah 6:8). In asking this question, God reveals His need for men to declare the Gospel message to the world. To Isaiah the call was clear, and he responded in faith.

Today opportunities for service abound in our own church setting. Preachers and teachers faithfully present truth in our worship services. Willing volunteers support community evangelism. They regularly distribute Gospel literature, service tract racks, change Gospel signs, and share in one-on-one discussions. Busy brethren and sisters sacrifice of their time to share the Gospel message in large cities by conducting street meetings to touch the masses of humanity who have not heard the Gospel of Christ. Dedicated teachers, principals, and board members guide our schools in providing a safe environment and faithful instruction to our children. Surrendered families serve as house-parents in various institutions or render service on the mission field.

As we consider the many who are faithfully serving, we thank the Lord for providing these willing workers. However, are we meeting the needs across the church today? Our mission programs face additional challenges when they lack personnel. Where are the families who are willing and able to go for furlough coverage for even two or three months? Someone has indicated that finding personnel for street meeting work is becoming increasingly difficult.

Does this indicate a trend that should concern us? Are we becoming too attached to our material responsibilities? Will sacrifice be detrimental to our families? Are we losing sight of our calling as Christians? Are we willing to forsake all to follow Christ?

To prepare ourselves to respond to this call, we must see the Lord as Isaiah did. This had a humbling and reassuring effect on him. When we see the Lord, we focus immediately on our own need. Isaiah said, "Woe is me! for I am undone" (Isaiah 6:5).

A vision of God also enables us to see His great work and His desire for men. God's holiness and perfection overwhelm us with admiration and respect for His greatness and goodness. This conditions us to surrender our lives and service to Him without reserve. Our desire will be to perpetuate His cause.

A vision of God will provide the remedy for lukewarmness or a half-

hearted response to God's call. This vision will bring a sense of urgency in our support of God's cause. It will affect our view of church standards and practices, as well as our willingness to be involved in the expansion of God's work.

How can we discern if the call is from God? Should we respond in a positive way to every call that comes to us? Is it ever right to say no to a call? A call from God usually comes through our church. Careful consideration is given before one is asked. Approvals have first been obtained from ministry and the boards or committees responsible. Although there may be legitimate reasons to refuse a call, every request to serve should be seriously considered.

How can we prepare more ready workers? We must emphasize strong spiritual vitality and live lives of self-sacrifice. We must portray the blessings of ready service. Cultivating an interest in the outreach work of the church and following with interest the activities on the various mission fields are important. Supporting with letters and visits the families who are serving will keep our interest alive. Above all, we must pray for the work. Should we consider the high cost of serving? Our business or financial opportunities may suffer. The social impact on our family may be challenging. Our parents or other relatives may discourage this involvement. But what is the high cost of not serving?

Ponder with me the direction Jesus gave to His followers. When He called Peter and Andrew, He said, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men" (Matthew 4:19). This indicates a change of occupation. Most of Jesus' disciples were from Galilee, but the church was started at Jerusalem. This indicates a change of community. In Matthew 10:37, Jesus stated clearly, "He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me."

Our first consideration must be "What is God's will for me?" What will further His cause and kingdom? What will have eternal value? God is able to supply all our needs when we by faith respond to His call.

"The harvest truly is great, but the labourers are few" (Luke 10:2). When the Lord calls, will we answer as Isaiah did, "Here am I, send me"?

—*Brother John*



"Every Wise Woman Buildeth Her House"

In a concise but arresting way, the writer of Proverbs depicts the profound potential in the hands of a wife. "Every wise woman buildeth her house: but the foolish plucketh it down with her hands" (Proverbs 14:1). The labor of the one is constructive in erecting a house—a building of stability, beauty, and endurance. In stark contrast, the work of the other produces increasingly dismal, heartbreaking wreckage.

What is the house in view? It is not a material structure of wood and stone. This same Hebrew word is used in God's invitation to Noah. "Come thou and all thy house [household, family] into the ark" (Genesis 7:1). The house, then, is the woman's household.

The difference in the outcome of the efforts of these two women hinges on whether a woman is wise or foolish. In Proverbs, foolishness refers to spiritual deficiency rather than mental disability. Its cause is a heart that is not totally committed to God. Such reservation means spiritual darkness within, which is demonstrated outwardly in unwise and disastrous choices.

How might a woman pluck down her house? The word plucketh indicates an ongoing harmful influence. It means "to pull down or in pieces, to break, or destroy." Some damaging forces a woman could unconsciously exert upon her house are self-assertiveness, love of pleasure or ease, an un-governed tongue, and negative attitudes toward the authority of her husband or the church. Moreover, from an unsundered life goes an influence that tends to produce the same in the family. It is usually from Mother that children tend to take their character. Folly then in the woman of the house is as termites in its very structure. Its debilitating effects can hardly be counteracted.

A wise woman, in contrast, builds her house. With such a noble builder in it, a house is seldom brought to ruin. Woman was uniquely formed for this important responsibility of homemaking, physically, mentally, and emotionally. The Hebrew word for buildeth in our text, interestingly, first occurs in the account of God's formation of mankind's mother. "The rib ... made [built, constructed] he a woman" (Genesis 2:22). So woman was built for the lofty mission of building houses! Her special, God-given assignment is inferior to no other.

In addition to natural qualities endowed in womanhood, another quality is indispensable in home building. This is the virtue of the wisdom that is not inherent in fallen mankind. Wisdom in Proverbs can be defined as the way of life and the understanding that grows out of godly fear and loyalty

to the will of the Lord. Supreme devotion to God is at its center and is shown by obedience to Him regardless of the cost.

The wise woman, in her careful building, manifests a vision that inspires sacrificial labor. She sees beyond the mundane—providing meals, washing dirty laundry, and wiping runny noses—to the house—the solid, spiritual household she seeks to build. That vision has its source in Scripture, the divine Blueprint for her work. What she envisions inspires energetic labor. The word *buildeth* suggests an ongoing work—brick by brick. Each must be laid to the line of the Word day after day if a well-built house is to result. She willingly works with her hands, selflessly spending herself for the welfare of the household. Through prayer she seeks grace to constantly work under the Master Builder. For "except the Loin build the house, they labour in vain that build it" (Psalm 127:1).

How will a wise woman relate to her husband? Our text reveals that a wife can help make her husband a man or she can ruin him. One of the greatest contributions a godly woman can make for the welfare of her husband is sacrificial love (see 1 Peter 3:1-5). In submitting to his leadership, the wise woman finds her greatest liberty and highest position of power. Not being assertive or argumentative in issues, she makes it easy for him to embrace her viewpoint when it is better than his. As a vine, she gently clings to him, thus finding encouraging support to be fruitful in her responsibilities, rather than crashing under them.

A wise woman builds her house by having a family under God's blessing. In this way "Rachel and ... Leah ... did build the house of Israel" (Ruth 4:11). The godly woman rejects the worldly idea that a smaller family means a more rewarding life. Like Hannah, she sees in her cooperation with God in motherhood, the potential both to enhance the home and to strengthen the people of God.

Another way a wise woman builds her house is through the exercise of discipline. She understands that the breaking of the child's self-will is essential if he is to find rest and live a useful life. This will also establish a basis for later enjoyment of a disciplined church life lived under the lordship of Christ. Accordingly, from its earliest manifestations, a resistive will is met with loving but firm measures. These measures put a very costly price tag on disobedience and resisting the laws of Mother. Order and schedule are employed as subtle discipline as well. Putting things where they belong and getting up when it is time help a child to respond to what is expected rather than to the emotion of the moment.

A wise woman builds by giving spiritual instruction to her children. The

most golden and never-to-be-repeated opportunities in the earliest and most impressionable years are hers for implanting spiritual appreciations. Concepts of God, His abiding care, and His utter goodness to His own may be taught when one is on her lap or while little ones are about her. Bible stories fascinate and become loved by her offspring as she relates to them. Skillfully and prayerfully, she endeavors to build bias toward truth.

The house of the wise woman is built as she instills the virtue of respect in her household. Because little weeds of disrespect tend to grow rapidly, bringing their destructive forces into homes and congregations, she ever guards against them. Through loving deeds and considerate words, she teaches the law of kindness. Thus, no one is ever to be mocked or belittled. Injuries, real or imagined, are to receive a response of forgiveness and goodwill.

A wise woman builds her house through careful use of the material resources God has placed into her hands. She seeks to guard against waste of food, for even the Master Himself saw to the gathering of leftovers. Clothing that can serve longer is neatly mended when necessary. She demonstrates contentment and teaches it to her household by being satisfied with worn furniture that is yet serviceable. Her thrift and good management aid the family in avoiding economic pitfalls.

Finally, the wise woman builds her house by making home an attractive place to be. Her work helps to make it a haven in a stormy and troubled world. Her building strengthens the home against the evils that otherwise might find a way in. Her gracious presence binds the family together in the ways of the Lord.

Fitting are the words of the writer of Proverbs at the end of his full-length picture of the wise and virtuous woman: "Let her own works praise her in the gates" Proverbs 31:31

Brother Charles



The Significance of the Benediction

The practice of pronouncing a benediction, or blessing, was an Old Testament command and is a New Testament practice. The benediction remains an important conclusion to public worship services today.

The most prominent Old Testament benediction is found in Numbers 6:24-26: "The LORD bless thee, and keep thee: the LORD make his face shine

upon thee, and be gracious unto thee: the LORD lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace." The three phrases of this benediction foreshadow the work of the Trinity in the New Testament era: the protection and goodness of God in action (verse 24), the pardon of God through the grace and work of Christ (verse 25), and the peace of God through the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit (verse 26).

Aaron and his sons were commanded to bless the people in God's Name and to put His Name upon them (Numbers 6:27; Deuteronomy 10:8). At the time of the sacrifice and offerings, 'Aaron lifted up his hand toward the people, and blessed them" (Leviticus 9:22).

As time went on, specific directions were given. The priest was required to wash his hands before he pronounced the benediction. Certain conditions disqualified the priests and Levites for this service. Physical defects, such as partial blindness, and moral failures, such as violating the marriage vows, rendered them unfit. The disqualified were required to withdraw themselves before this part of the service was performed.¹ These requirements present some important spiritual lessons for ordained leaders today.

Without further New Testament enlightenment we could conclude that benedictions were part of the Old Testament ritual that was done away in Christ. Old Testament priests were commissioned to represent the people to God and to invoke His Name upon them. New Testament ministers of God are not charged with this mediatorial work. All believers have direct access to the throne of God through the work of Christ. All saints possess the person of Christ within. His Name is not merely upon us; it is within us!

The Gospels record several benedictions given by Jesus. Jesus took the children "up in his arms, put his hands upon them, and blessed them" (Mark 10:16). After His resurrection Jesus "breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost" (John 20:22). Before His ascension, "he lifted up his hands, and blessed them" (Luke 24:50). These benedictions of Jesus rise far above the significance of any blessing a man can pronounce. Jesus possessed a fullness of Deity and power that believers do not have.

The Catholic religion still regards the priest as endowed with mediatorial powers to bless. Catholics believe the blessing from God is actually conferred upon the people as the benediction is given. Many details are prescribed. In the Greek Orthodox Church the priest raises his hand with the thumb touching the third finger, signifying the procession of the Holy Spirit from God. In the Roman Church, the thumb and first and second fingers

are open to symbolize the Trinity.² We reject these faulty concepts of the benediction.

Anabaptist-Mennonite history is sketchy on the subject, although the benediction was certainly practiced. The Anabaptists took definite measures to counteract the unscriptural, liturgical Catholic concepts and practices. They respected the ministry as ordained by God, but they did not consider them endowed with special power to bless. They embraced the Biblical concept of the priesthood of all believers. Consequently, they closely guarded the forms related to the use of the benediction.

Following is an excerpt from a letter written in 1878 by John Weaver of the Old Order Mennonites under Jacob Wissler. "You asked what different order the other [John Funk] group have in their meetings from ours.... At the close of the meeting, the congregation stands up and the minister in charge holds out his hands over them and pronounces the benediction. These are now such customs as were formerly not considered proper, and are still not customary with us."³

Apparently the old Anabaptist-Mennonite view considered the raising of the hands over the people improper and Protestant. While we appreciate this carefulness and concern, the custom of raising the hand for the benediction, symbolic of divine blessing, did become a tradition in many Mennonite settings. Our ministers follow this practice today.

The New Testament includes at least fifteen benedictions. The focus of these benedictions is clearly on the Person of Christ through the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit. The "full benediction" is found in 2 Corinthians 13:14. Here the three persons of the Trinity are mentioned. Generally the Holy Spirit is implied rather than mentioned. The Holy Spirit applies the blessing endowed by God and Christ.

The grace of Jesus Christ is emphasized in many of the benedictions. Grace is the divine favor of God applied through the work of Christ. The state of grace is especially in focus. We stand favored before God through the merits of Jesus Christ. The benediction is essentially saying, "Go in peace and live in the privileges of divine sonship and fellowship."

Most of the New Testament benedictions are found at the close of the Epistles. Generally the Epistles open with a greeting in the Name of Christ and close with a benediction in the Name of Christ. This practice establishes an appropriate pattern for our church services today. We caution against a casual opening and closing of public worship services.

A Bible-quoted benediction should conclude all regular worship services. A less formal wording may be used at other times. The benediction is not a

closing prayer and need not be closed in the Name of Jesus. When the two are combined, the prayer may be closed in the Name of Jesus, followed by the benediction, including the amen. In settings such as our Bible schools, where the students are together for an extended time, we promote the use of the benediction at the close of every evening service.

The Bible does not clearly specify who should pronounce the benediction. Since our church services should be closed by one of the ministry, the answer is rather evident. Certainly it would be appropriate to quote Bible benedictions in our letter writing and repeat them as we part from one another: "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you."

For the ministry, some variety is good. An overuse of unfamiliar benedictions will tend to detract from their purpose and value. Benedictions should be quoted accurately and recited by memory as much as possible.

For the congregation, we should concentrate on the meaning of the benediction. We should remain reverent and prayerful. The worship service is not over until the amen is given.

We are grateful for this Biblical, time-proven practice, which is part of our heritage of faith. Effort will be needed to maintain appreciation for this practice, especially with the surrounding pressures of a casual approach to worship.

Brother Eby

¹ *James Orr, M.A., D.D., ed., International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, Vol.1 (1952), pp. 434, 435.*

² *ibid., p. 435.*

³ *Unknown source from author's collection.*

Selected Bible Benedictions

"The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all"

2 Corinthians 13:14

"The LORD bless thee, and keep thee: the LORD make his face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee: the LORD lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace"

Numbers 6:24-26

"And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified"

Acts 20:32

"The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen"

Romans 16:24

"The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost be with you all. Amen"

2 Corinthians 13:14

"Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end.

Amen"

Ephesians 3:20-21

"Peace be to the brethren, and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace be with all them that love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity. Amen"

Ephesians 6:23-24

"And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.... The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.

Amen"

1 Thessalonians 5:23, 28

"Now the Lord of peace himself give you peace always by all means. The Lord be with you all. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen"

2 Thessalonians 3:16, 18

"Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen"

1 Timothy 1:17

"Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is wellpleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen"

Hebrews 13:20-21

"But the God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you. To him be glory and dominion for ever and ever.

Amen"

Peter 5:10-11

"Ye therefore, beloved, seeing ye know these things before, beware lest ye

also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness. But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever. Amen"

2 Peter 3:17-18

"Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, to the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen"

Jude 24-25



Church Committee Report - Literature Evangelism

"Christ's Everlasting Gospel is ringing out again \ Its message of salvation." We rejoice in the opportunity to be involved in the spread of the Good News of salvation.

This year we plan to follow our usual pattern of having four summer trips to Boston and one trip each to Indianapolis and Atlanta.

The dates for the trips to Boston are June 3, 4; June 24, 25; July 15, 16; and August 12, 13.

The trip to Indianapolis is planned for August 6, 7; and the trip to Atlanta for October 8, 9. We look forward to supporting the congregations at Flora and Metter on these trips.

If you would like to go along on any of these trips, please contact a member of the committee, and we will try to accommodate you. We welcome volunteers. Plans for trips are made weeks in advance. Because of the large number of available people to contribute to this work, we generally do not take the same people along in consecutive years. We do have a minimum age of twenty years old.

We know that it is the Lord's will for all men to be saved—to love and to serve Him. We submit these evangelistic outreach plans to His providence. Let us pray that the Lord of the harvest would prosper these plans and that souls may be added to the kingdom through these efforts.

Brother David for the Literature Evangelism Committee



A God-Honoring Courtship (Part 5) Redeeming the Time

Early in their courtship, John and Mary had always carefully planned their time together. But as their courtship progressed, just being together seemed more important than planning what they would do.

Mary's father occasionally inquired about their plans. He was obviously most satisfied when John had specific answers to give. John and Mary accepted the challenge to give more forethought to how they would spend their time.

Fathers are rightfully concerned about how courting couples spend their time. Where wholesome activities are missing, temptation will likely find a place. Well-planned visits include a variety of activities. Observing how your courting partner relates to various circumstances helps you to know who he or she really is.

Plan a spiritual activity for every visit. Devotional time spent together brings a God-consciousness to your developing relationship. Study a passage together or share inspiration from your personal devotions. Make devotional time a priority. Attending worship services together is a highlight for spiritual couples. Discuss what you have heard and note how your partner responds to teaching that is especially challenging. These activities give you an important window into one another's spiritual character.

Include family time in your visits. Arrange your schedule to include meals with the family. Observe how your friend relates to his parents and siblings. Does your friend accept your family and their quirks? Interacting with your families is a good way to learn to know each other better. These signals hint how life will be when the newness of courtship wears off.

Find time to be with peers. Mingling with other couples indicates that you are not too full of yourselves. An occasional double date or some other activity with multiple couples can be pleasant and worthwhile. Taking time to visit with non-courting friends at a worship service or a wedding shows a commendable level of maturity. Time with peers will tell you volumes about your partner's social skills.

Make time to reach out to others. Take opportunities to visit grandparents. Ask another couple to join in singing for some shut-in. Accept some invitations to share a meal with a church family.

Work at projects together. Working together can be an excellent way to learn to know each other better. Doing the dishes, weeding the garden, or helping with the chores can yield clues about work habits or other charac-

ter traits.

Save some time for one-on-one communication. Meaningful communication is the key to successful courtship. This takes time and effort and develops with the help of multiple visits. Be careful not to let the flurry of wholesome activities crowd out time for effective communication.

"Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God" (1 Corinthians 10:31).

—*Brother Jesse*



PRAYER POINT

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

Pray for the churches in Guatemala. This work, which began in 1972, has expanded to six congregations with approximately two hundred members. Pray for the Mission Board as they seek for permanent leadership and for ordained brethren to cover furloughs.

Pray for the work at West Willow Rest Home. Six elderly residents are receiving care and assistance in a home atmosphere. There is a constant need for house-parents and VS workers. Pray for the Committee as they consider the future needs.

Pray for the publishing efforts of the Home Horizons. Approximately 5,700 copies are printed monthly. Pray that this periodical may continue to meet the original goal of printing "practical Bible truth for Christian homes."

Thank the Lord for the beauty and invigoration of spring. "The birds their carols raise, / The morning light, the lily white, / Declare their Maker's praise." May we also daily declare our Maker's praise.

