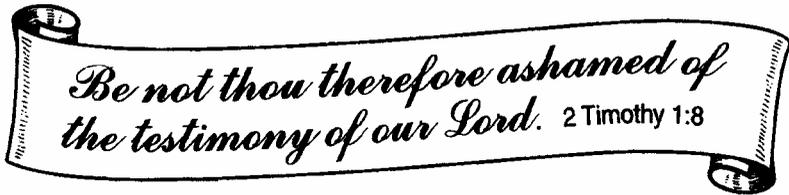


# THE EASTERN MENNONITE TESTIMONY

SELECTED ARTICLES FROM THE MONTHLY PUBLICATION  
OF  
THE EASTERN PENNSYLVANIA MENNONITE CHURCH  
MAY 2009



The Eastern Mennonite Testimony is the official organ of the Eastern Pennsylvania Mennonite Church. That publication seeks to promote the historic Anabaptist-Mennonite faith and practice. The Testimony is published monthly by the Publication Board of the Eastern Pennsylvania Mennonite Church. Subscriptions are free. Forward subscriptions and contributions to Eastern Mennonite Publications, 40 Wood Corner Road, Ephrata, PA. 17522 U.S.A. Telephone (717) 733-7988 Fax: (717)733 2757.

**NB.** Only limited extracts from The Eastern Mennonite testimony are published on this website. No addresses or personal details will be published for privacy reasons. The views expressed in the articles are those of the individual authors.

Editor: [anabaptistmennonites.org](http://anabaptistmennonites.org).

*"How Should We Then Live?"*

It was a cry of despair. The promised judgments of God were being poured out on the house of Israel. Things looked dark, and more judgments were on the way.

God's people knew that if this judgment continued to fall, their very survival as a people would come into question. If things continued to decline, the ultimate issue would have to be faced—"How should we then live?" Or, "How shall we continue as a people of God?" (See Ezekiel 33:10-11.)

We may rightly ask this question today, albeit in a different context. How should we then live? What must we do to survive as a people of God? Is it possible for us to lose our identity as a separated people and become assimilated into the world around us? In these end times, when many people live rebellious, selfish, and ungodly lives, the question comes to us, "How should we then live?" How can we continue to be part of the people of God?

"We should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world" (Titus 2:12). Only by God's grace and power can this be done. We cannot live like the world today and expect to be with the peo-

ple of God in the future. We must live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world.

We should remember that "none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself"(Romans 14: 7-8). Our first accountability is to God. No one can live an independent life and thereby expect to avoid God. Whether in life or in death, "we are the Lord's."

We can continue as the people of God if we maintain an emphasis on the distinctive New Testament doctrines. Separation from the world, nonresistance to evil, separation of church and state, holiness of life, and the practice of the Christian ordinances are direct Bible teachings. They apply to all who name the Name of Christ, not only to certain ethnic groups. To discontinue, as a group, the practice of any one of these is to drift away from the truth of God.

One of the tests we face in the practice of the ordinances is to maintain and propagate the Christian Salutation as taught in the New Testament. Are our youth practicing the Holy Kiss when they meet their peers in church settings? Most of the youth of the early revival movement were enthusiastic about

returning to a more Scriptural belief and practice. And to this day, we have many dedicated youth who are glad to follow this practice. To continue living as we should, we need to continue emphasizing that each member of each age group practice this ordinance. We need to help our youth to practice it among themselves lest the ordinance be neglected in this age group, and this neglect naturally envelops the entire group.

How should we then live in order to continue as a people of God?

Ministry, parents, Bible school administrators, and all of us have a responsibility to live as we should and to teach the rising generation how they should live. Those in leadership need to also administer their charge according to these principles if we are to keep Scriptural convictions alive. Only as we are fully committed to our historic Biblical practices can we continue to find the answer to the question: "How should we then live?"

—JWB



## The Gifts of the Ascension

Many people do not realize or consider the important event marked by the special day known as Ascension Day. Normal business activity continues nearly as usual on the day set aside to remember the ascension of our Lord. We do well, however, to consider the many blessings that come as a result of Jesus Christ being received up into glory.

The ascension concluded Christ's earthly ministry. "When he had by himself purged our sins, [he] sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high" (Hebrews 1:3). It also resulted in giving gifts to men.

"When [Christ] ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men" (Ephesians 4:8). What are some gifts that are a result of the ascension?

*The gifts of spiritual leadership.* "And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers" (Ephesians 4:11). The early church was blessed with an array of gifts that aided in its establishment. The Holy Spirit enabled Peter to preach boldly on the Day of Pentecost and guided the apostles as they led the infant church. The church today is still blessed with the gifts of leadership. The plural ministry

has been a great blessing to the church, and we must continue to appreciate the work of our leaders in providing a safe haven for our families.

*The gift of the Holy Spirit.* Jesus' ascension opened the way for the Holy Spirit to come. "If I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you" (John 16:7).

The Holy Spirit dispenses gifts to the church today. Christ uses men to display God's power to the world. He uses many individuals with varying talents to build the church. The services of godly Sunday school teachers, song leaders, mission workers, committee members, and many others are all gifts of the Holy Spirit. Each Spirit-filled member makes a valuable contribution to the spiritual life of the church.

The Holy Spirit enables the believer to give an answer to those who question his faith. When we follow the right way, the Spirit is faithful in giving us words to speak. "For the Holy Ghost shall teach you in the same hour what ye ought to say" (Luke 12:12).

The Holy Spirit contributes to unity in the church. When our unity is tested today, the Spirit is able to bring us together on issues. When we in humility mind the Spirit, He will be able to do His work in our lives. "Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of

peace" (Ephesians 4:3).

The Holy Spirit gives us power to fulfill the Great Commission. The apostles were to wait at Jerusalem till they received the Holy Spirit. Then they could go on mission endeavors. Through the Holy Spirit, God will give us power to teach others to observe the "all things" of the Word of God.

The Holy Spirit enables the believer to possess the love of God in his heart. "The love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us" (Romans 5:5).

The Epistle of John clearly shows that a test of our love for God is whether we love our brother. "He that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?" (I John 4:20). As we remember the love that God had for us when we were dead in trespasses and sins, we should be inspired to love our fellow men.

The Holy Spirit aids in our personal relationship with God. "We know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered" (Romans 8:26). We as finite beings do not always know how we should pray. The Holy Spirit is our connection to the Father, and He carries our burdens to the Lord. The Holy Spirit helps us to remain true

to God.

*The possibility of victory over sin.* Christ led the way in the triumph over Satan. Ephesians 4 pictures Christ leading a train of freed captives back from a war. Jesus conquered Satan, the one who took others captive. Christ divided the spoils with others, and we are recipients of the spoils. We are now equipped to face the enemy. All that we need to be victorious is available to us.

To stumble in defeat reveals a lack of faith in Jesus Christ and a weakness of commitment to do His will. Those who have gone on before us have proven that the victorious life is attainable through the work of Jesus Christ.

*The privilege of sitting together in heavenly places in Christ.* We enjoy the fellowship the church pro-

vides for us. We need our brethren to help us keep our eyes fixed on the goal. The world should catch a glimpse of these heavenly places as they observe God's people working together in unity and love.

A new dimension of Jesus' work as Intercessor We now have the Daysman that Job longed for and the Advocate that pleads our cause before the Father. We should thank the Lord daily for the present work of our Lord Jesus Christ.

*A comforting promise.* "This same Jesus ... shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven" (Acts 1:11). This promise brings joy as we by faith anticipate our own ascension to meet our Savior face to face. May our hearts echo John's words, (Rev.22:20)

"Even so, come, Lord Jesus."



## Watershed Issues of the Twentieth-Century Mennonite Church (Part 3)

### **The Rise of Revival Groups**

The conferences in the East had for years heroically resisted liberal influences and especially the influence brought by the Western conferences. In 1907, Lancaster Conference voted to use only ministers from Lancaster Conference as evangelists.<sup>1</sup> In 1914, Lancaster

Conference started their own mission board in protest to the liberal tendencies of the mission board at Elkhart, Indiana. In 1942, Lancaster Mennonite School was established, in part, to keep youth from attending the liberal Mennonite high schools and colleges. These con-

ferences also repeatedly protested the liberal leanings of the Mennonite Publishing House.<sup>2</sup>

But these conferences of the East did not reckon with all the undercurrents. The publishing was still in the hands of the Western conferences, meaning that Sunday school literature and family periodicals had an increasingly liberal bias. The youth that had mingled with other groups and conferences in the CPS, I-W, and VS programs were now becoming church leaders. Higher education was still a criterion for missionaries and general Christian service. Fellowship lines were blurred through joint relief efforts, through mission projects, and through cooperating with the Western conferences in the various church-wide boards and committees.

Gradually, the more stable conferences of the East began to succumb. They became increasingly lax in enforcing church standards and gradually loosened the standards themselves. More and more was left to the individual rather than the church giving direction and keeping house spiritually. Jewelry, cut hair for sisters, and divorce and remarriage began to make their appearance. Conservative bishops attempted to maintain the discipline of the church by withholding Communion from disobedient members, but other bish-

ops of the same conference sometimes gave Communion to the dissenters. With such a situation, the conservatives gradually reached a point of desperation.

In the late 1950s and early 1960s, brethren from various conferences across the United States and Canada began to meet out of concern for the liberal Sunday school materials and family periodicals coming from the Mennonite Publishing House. Out of this burden began a movement known as the non-conference movement. Rod and Staff Publishers very early became the rallying interest. Later the largest segment of this movement became the Nationwide Fellowship Churches.

In the mid 1960s, a group of concerned bishops and brethren in the large Lancaster Mennonite Conference began meeting to discuss the need for a more conservative and more supervised (Voluntary Service) VS center for young men who were drafted for military service. To meet this need, a new mission board, the Mennonite Messianic Mission, was formed to provide a VS center. This interest eventually led to the formation of the Eastern Pennsylvania Mennonite Church, which separated from Lancaster Conference in 1968 with the approval of the Conference.

Other regroupings also took place in this era. Efforts were made to

somehow find a conservative footing in varied settings. By the close of the twentieth century, these regroupings, although rather varied in practical application, had become a sizeable minority within the spectrum of Mennonite groupings. God alone deserves the praise that non-conformed groups have emerged from the Mennonite Church as she rapidly changed in the late 1900s.

In observing history, we have a special accountability for the lessons that can be learned. We should learn from this period of history that the following principles need to be practiced in order to maintain a faithful church.

### **1. A Simple Lifestyle**

We should be satisfied with a nonprofessional approach to life. We should be content with the low and slow. We should be the farmers, the tradesmen, the unknown and unnoticed. We may not be featured in the newspaper or displayed as having "the prettiest place in the country." We may not be the elite of society; we must be strangers and pilgrims—the people of another kingdom.

We need to be aware lest the encroachments of technology rob us of our simple lifestyle. We must be very selective in what we use, employing guidelines that keep us from the cutting edge of technology and its ensnarements.

### **2. Guarded Fellowship Lines**

We could easily repeat history by mingling too freely with broadly based "conservative" relief organizations, counseling retreat centers, and business seminars. These efforts bring together a broad spectrum of "conservative" people, bringing mixed influences to bear. We cannot rub shoulders in such efforts with groups with whom we would not exchange pulpits without experiencing an eroding effect.

### **3. Proven Church Administration**

Some have concluded that the apostasy of the twentieth century was the result of a conference approach to church administration. While the cohesiveness of the conference structure may have hastened apostasy once the church began to drift, we believe such cohesiveness also served as a force in helping the church go right. It is generally understood that Lancaster Conference maintained conservatism longer than the Western conferences largely due to its bishop board and conference structure. It provided a necessary solidity and a unified front to withstand the pressure of the end times. It also provided necessary checks and balances, helping to maintain administrative restraint and balance.

We too face pietistic attitudes toward church administration today. Statements such as "We should sit with our people, not on them" re-

flect this. While statements such as this contain some truth, they can be subtle reflections against church discipline. Too many are looking to themselves for the answers rather than to the church as the Lord intended.

#### **4. Service Mentality of Youth**

The Mennonite colleges and high schools promoted sports, skits, and, later, drama. Mennonite Youth Fellowship (MYF), beginning in 1948, fostered some wholesome activities, but this church-wide organization became the seedbed for intense youth activities, including sports and drama. Its emphasis was also somewhat child evangelistic.

Youth-centered social and play activities undermine spirituality and conservative church life. The conservative church's position against these is a matter of survival for the plain churches in our day.

We expect that our youth will find their fulfillment in home life and in the normal church and outreach activities. We have witnessed many spiritual youth finding joy and spiritual growth in the various service opportunities of the church without the youth-centered social and play spirit. We must avoid returning to this play mentality if we desire to avoid apostasy.

#### **5. The Separated Way of Life**

We need to follow Biblical separation in all of life. We face much pressure today and many influences

that seek to rob us of our separation. The end times are indeed perilous times.

We live in more urbanized surroundings, but we do not need to socialize closely with our neighbors. We face a complex business and agricultural infrastructure; we must guard against our associations in meetings such as seminars, business meetings, Ag Progress Days, and business shows. We live in an affluent society and have many consumer goods available. We must follow Biblical principles in our purchases and investments. Just because we can afford something does not make it right. Conviction must guide us in these easy surroundings.

We also face a casual, easy Christianity today—casual worship patterns, casual dress for street wear and even for worship, and casual attitudes toward right and wrong. This casualness reflects a relaxed moral climate and subtly moves us toward the looseness of society. This soft Christianity tends to influence us away from the suffering and cross bearing necessary for discipleship and for transmitting the faith to the rising generation.

We have considered the struggles of the church of the twentieth century. Today it is our turn to face the challenges that arise. Some of the influences and mistakes of the past knock at our doors. Let us "be not

high-minded, but fear," lest, while we have considered others, we ourselves should be castaways.

*Brother L.M. PA*

1. *Eli D. Wenger, The Weaverland Mennonites, p. 107.*

2. *Minutes, Christian Education Committee of Lancaster Mennonite Conference board meetings: October 16, 1964 (No. 7); July 2, 1965 (No. 7); October 1, 1965, (No. 5).*

## *A Charge to Keep I Have*

A charge to keep I have,  
A God to glorify;  
A never-dying soul to save,  
And fit it for the sky.

Help me to watch and pray,  
And on Thyself rely;  
Assured if I my trust betray,  
I shall forever die.

—*Charles Wesley*



## *"Choose Life"*

Choices reflect our values and communicate what we consider important. Although many everyday choices have little impact on our journey of life, other choices will ultimately make an eternity of difference. Considering our own lives and the lives of those about us impresses us with the crucial choices that each individual makes and the results of these choices.

They often affect not only our own lives but also the lives of our posterity.

Many people have been inspired by the faith that Ruth displayed in making choices that reached far beyond her lifetime. At the time, she had no idea of all to which her choices would lead, both for herself and her posterity. From a human standpoint, the circumstances of

life were against her. She was a Moabite by birth, who grew up in idolatrous surroundings and without a godly heritage. She was a widow with a dark and insecure future. She was a stranger who was willing to forego parental security and national identity to surround herself with God's people (Ruth 2:10-11). Yet Ruth made that one important choice that made all the difference in her life. She even became a part of the royal ancestry of Christ. Her choice has for centuries inspired people to follow her example of putting God first.

Lot, in contrast, made poor choices that resulted in the ruin of his family. Lot could have followed Abraham, his uncle, and made choices that would have saved his family from untold corruption. Sadly, he failed, and his descendants became the enemies of God's people. Ruth, who was Lot's direct descendant, needed to leave her people to choose life.

God desires the best for us, and He wants us to make choices that will be for our good and blessing. He, through Moses, urged the people of Israel to choose life (Deuteronomy 30:19).

Choosing life calls for an ongoing series of right choices. We all rejoice when a young soul answers the Gospel call to salvation. This is an important initial choice. But this choice of salvation must be the first

of a continuation of right choices. Each believer must continue to build on that initial good choice and make right choices throughout life.

Choosing life involves making choices from an eternal perspective. Our human tendency is to make choices on the basis of the present without considering what similar choices have done for people in the past or how those choices will affect our future. Our focus may be too shortsighted; we may fail to consider how our choices will affect others. This is especially true as we consider our posterity and the ways our choices will influence their destiny.

The responsibility to choose life cannot be avoided. Some lament their present circumstances, yet use them as an excuse for not making right choices and not living godly lives. Too often these circumstances seem irreversible or too painful to change. Even though the changes may be painful, we need to be willing to make the right choices.

It is true that in our early childhood years, we had little choice in matters that made a major difference in our lives. We had no choice regarding the era in which we were born, our parents, our siblings, our surroundings, our church and school settings, or our teachers and church leaders. Yet these individu-

als and circumstances have greatly influenced our lives.

For many of us, many of the choices over which we had no control were made for our good. We are among the most favored people in the world as regards the heritage of faith. We are abundantly blessed, especially considering that we could have been born in communist China, raised in a heathen tribe in the jungles of Africa, or born in a city to parents who were involved in drugs and general debauchery.

Although we have no choice regarding our early childhood years, we begin to be personally accountable for our choices as we come to the early teen years. By the time we reach the end of the teen years, we are fully accountable for our speech, the places we go, and the friendships we pursue.

Moses is a Bible example of one who overcame circumstances to choose life. In his youth, he was considered to be the son of Pharaoh's daughter, and experienced all that the royalty and the wisdom of Egypt had to offer. Yet Moses turned his back on all these privileges and made the choice of faith (Hebrews 11:24-26). He was ready to forgo the pleasures of sin and the treasures of Egypt for something that was far more enduring and rewarding. He had the opportunity to

experience firsthand the thrill of the self-life, only to see it as something fading and of no lasting value. He rose above his circumstances and chose life.

Choosing life requires an unreserved commitment. Joshua, in giving his farewell address to the twelve tribes (Joshua 24), challenged them to make the choice to unreservedly commit themselves to serve the Lord. He challenged them to be motivated by sincerity and truth (verse 14). We too must make an unreserved commitment. Our choices may not be based on peer pressure or on what others are doing. Rather, they need to be based on a firm commitment to serve the Lord and follow His requirements for holy living.

Today, choosing life or death is our choice. The final results will be either eternity with God in glory or everlasting shame and contempt in hell. Our choice and ongoing choices will also play an important role in whether our posterity choose to suffer with the people of God or to indulge in "the pleasures of sin for a season." As we, by faith, consider the "recompense of the reward" in the choices we make, we can experience divine approval and leave our posterity a heritage of faith.

*Brother D.N. PA*



## **Ambassadors for Christ (Part 3) Seeking the Lost**

As Jesus viewed the multitudes who were faint and scattered, He was moved with compassion toward them. What type of feelings well up within us as we see multitudes headed toward a Christless eternity? Christ's love in our hearts should compel us to help the lost identify with the heavenly country we represent.

To be effective ambassadors, we must live consistently in daily life. How can we hope to convince another to follow the Gospel if we are not consistently following the Bible? At times it seems that our neighbors know better than we know what is consistent for a Christian. May God help us to live above reproach.

We must have a genuine interest in others. Our busy schedules must never override taking time for the needs of others. How much are we caught up in our own little world? Others can quickly determine if we are duty-bound or vision-inspired. A dedicated Christian will go beyond an initial contact and be ready to make follow-up contacts.

Are you plagued with the question of how to begin a conversation? Few things are more powerful than your own personal testimony. Surely God has done great things for you. Why not tell others what He has done? Then try to direct the conversation toward the question of whether they know Christ in a personal way. Conversations of this nature can be very rewarding.

We must have a working knowledge of the Bible so we can answer the questions that come our way. Once a group was holding a street meeting when a pedestrian asked where in the Bible he could find the verse "Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow." What answer would you give to such a question?

We can seize opportunities the Lord brings our way by having appropriate literature on hand. After answering the question of what Mennonites believe, it is quite helpful to say, "If you would like to learn more, I have a pamphlet entitled 'People Called Mennonites' that you may take with you." When asked about the headship veiling, you can briefly describe the practice and add, "You may like to discover more about the subject by reading this tract, 'Why Christian Women Wear the Headship Veiling.'"

The lepers in 2 Kings 7 declared, "We do not well: this day is a day of good tidings, and we hold our peace: if we tarry till the morning light, some mischief will come upon us." We as Christians should view seeking the lost in a similar way. It will not be well with us if we keep quiet. In-

stead we should echo the words of Peter and John, "We cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard" (Acts 4:20).

— *Brother G. E. B.*



## **An Insight Into Evangelism Outreach.**

### **A Church Committee Report Literature Evangelism Report**

In light of the words of Jesus, we understand our responsibility to share the Gospel today with those who are spiritually lost. We can share the Gospel with others in many ways. The Bible provides us with numerous examples of effective outreach. Jesus' life reveals to us the need for compassion toward those in spiritual need (Matthew 14:14). We need to view the multitudes of society in the same light. We have opportunities all around us, and God is calling each of us to sound out the Word of life to a dying world (Matthew 28:19- 20).

This year the Literature Evangelism Committee is again involved in various projects related to outreach work. The mass prison mailing project continues to provide Gospel literature to prisons nationwide. This work begins by purchasing mailing lists of prison addresses. These are then used to forward Living Waters and order forms for books suitable for prison evangelistic work. Another project is the evangelistic singing recording. This project was developed to complement street meeting efforts because many requests come to us from individuals who desire to have "street-meeting singing" in recorded form. A recording that consists of evangelistic hymns of the church was then produced. Originally ten thousand were made, and last year these were distributed in street work with very favorable results. This year twenty thousand have been ordered. These recordings are available for outreach work at very low cost.

The Literature Evangelism Committee is again looking forward to another "street-meeting season." Why do we use the street-meeting approach for evangelism? First, it provides an opportunity to share the Gospel in a group setting. Having the close support of fellow believers gives us the needed stability to offer the Gospel to the world. Secondly, it places us in highly populated areas, giving the opportunity for mass distribution of literature and personal contact with seeking souls. As people pass by the

street meeting, sincere seekers can stop, giving us the opportunity to meet them. Also one significant opportunity we have in the city of Boston is contact with tourists visiting the historic city. This gives the group the ability to reach far beyond the city limits. We sometimes count the number of countries represented by our contacts in a given street meeting trip, and it often exceeds twenty.

Our street-meeting activities include handing literature to those who pass by, setting up a literature rack that displays tracts on various Gospel subjects in many languages, and having a table on which we offer Bibles, children's Bible stories, and recorded messages and singing. In the meantime a program is in progress. This program consists of singing, short topics, and testimonies.

The Boston street meeting dates for this summer are as follows: June 5-6; June 26-27; July 24-25; and August 14-15. There is also a meeting planned for Atlanta, Georgia. That date is currently not available.

In order to hold these street meetings, we need those who are willing to go. Each year approximately 175 people are needed to help with these meetings. Those who are interested in supporting this work are encouraged to forward their names to the committee.

It is our prayer and desire that these efforts and labors would be to the glory of God and to the furtherance of- His kingdom.

*Brother M.F. For the Literature Evangelism Committee*

## *The Joyful Harvest*

Do not weary of the sowing,  
Of the tears that overflowing  
Fall in showers as we sow the grain.  
We shall come at last with singing  
And a joyful harvest bringing  
To the Lord  
—We labor not in vain. —

*JG*



## PRAYER POINT

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

*Pray that our youth will surrender their hearts and their lives fully to  
God, so they can be of use to their Master.*

*Pray for the new congregations being established across the church  
and for the congregations that are involved in this work.*

*Thank the Lord for His abundant blessings that make it possible to  
meet the brotherhood assistance needs among us.*

*Thank the Lord for godly mothers. May each find fulfillment in faith-  
fully teaching her children to love the Lord and to appreciate the  
church.*