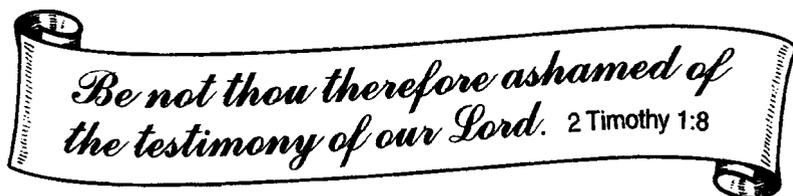


THE EASTERN MENNONITE TESTIMONY

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Editorial.**What Is More Important Than Relationship?**

God created man in His own image for fellowship. But when man fell into sin, God terminated the relationship. God would not compromise His holiness in order to retain a relationship with sinful man. Ever since God has worked to restore this broken relationship but never at the expense of His holiness. "The LORD is longsuffering, and of great mercy, forgiving iniquity and transgression, and by no means clearing the guilty" (Numbers 14:18).

Sin brings a breach in human relationships as well. When sin enters the church, God has commanded, "Put away from among yourselves that wicked person" (1 Corinthians 5:13). However hard it may be, holiness must matter more than relationships.

In order to have a relationship with God and His people, some have needed to sacrifice family relationships. "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" (Matthew 10:37). Following Christ may be viewed as family betrayal, but sincere seekers will not betray their Lord by denying Him. Yes, a relationship with God is more important than any other relationship.

Good relationships should be a tool to influence others for God. Godly parents train children with the power of relationship. In a good relationship children covet the warmth of a smile and are warned with a disapproving frown.

Deceptive influences of modern psychology emphasize relationships but without regard for righteousness. By ignoring disobedience, weak parents communicate that a relationship is more important than insisting on obedience. This creates insecurity in the child as he senses the insecurity of the parents. Rather than avoiding confrontations at all cost by "good words and fair speeches," parents should see every misdemeanor as an opportunity to communicate love by teaching the child the joy of submission and surrender. If only parents would remember the bond of love that occurs when wrongs are cleared by a suitable punishment!

The authority structure in the home becomes inverted when a child learns that he can use the relationship weapon to manipulate his parents: "I will

be nice to you if you give in to me." Parents must develop a relationship with the child that he does not want to break, but this can never be done by compromise. And the time comes that even the best of parental relationships will not govern the child. Children must learn a fear of God and a relationship with Him that will finally guide them through life. Living under a parental smile prepares one to rest in submission to God.

As children grow older, the resolve of parents to stand for truth is tested. They may fear that standing firm on home standards may strain the relationship. The older a child becomes, the greater will be the parental temptation to avoid risking a breach of relationship by confronting his will. The challenge of communicating love and standing firm may seem to conflict. At this point, the foundation parents have laid in requiring submission and communicating love through more than feelings and talk will be critical. Parents who submit to other godly authority are on a solid foundation to expect their children to submit to them.

A good relationship is like happiness—when pursued in itself, it is elusive; but when the conditions are right, it will be present. Psychology emphasizes relationship but has the wrong recipe for obtaining it. The Scriptures emphasize unconditional and sacrificial love that will not compromise under pressure.

Homes need the support of a strong congregation. If a relationship is strained between parents and a youth because of insubordination, blaming the parents for the problem will do the youth eternal damage.

The priest Eli failed God and his sons by keeping the peace with them at the expense of honoring God. "Wherefore kick ye at my sacrifice and at mine offering.... and honourest thy sons above me?" (1Samuel 2:29).

These principles also apply to adults who are only older children with the same human nature. Church leaders face acute pressure to coddle relationships at the expense of standing for truth. The human desire to be loved is acute, but winning God's smile must remain the highest motive of the heart. This is really the highest expression of love to man.

God has communicated the perfect expression of love by His example. We will be blessed as we live by faith and follow His pattern. "But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy" (James 3:17). "And the work of righteousness shall be peace; and the effect of righteousness quietness and assurance for ever" (Isaiah 32:17).

—BAS



The Personification of God

"The LORD'S Hand Is Not Shortened"

Hands are the main instrument of human skill. God's skill is also revealed in His hands. "Behold, the LORD'S hand is not shortened, that it cannot save" (Isaiah 59:1). What a wonderful promise! What hope and deliverance! What calmness and reassurance rings forth!

"The LORD'S hand"—not my hand, not your hand, but the hand of the Almighty will save. God is all in all, God is perfect, God always was, and God always will be. There could be no greater hand! It created everything—the earth and heavens, and even you and me. This great hand of God has no limitations!

"The LORD'S hand is not shortened." It is outstretched and open to all. We are all drawn to an open outstretched hand. It is a sign of friendship, peace, and warmth and can even be clasped in our own hand in a warm handshake.

All our blessings come from "the good hand of our God upon us" (Ezra 8:18). He portions out life to each of us every new day. He gives us everything we need to sustain life. He has even given us His own Word, the Bible, as the road map for all of life. His good hand is not stingy or drawn back in any way, but He "giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not" (James 1:5).

"The LORD'S hand is not shortened that it cannot save." God's hand is outstretched to us and open with the greatest gift that could ever be given—the gift of new life. His hand gives freedom and release from the guilt of sin. It gives hope for eternal bliss with God Himself. He is the only one who has the right to offer such a gift and the only one who is able to do so. Jesus Christ, God's only Son, has provided this gift by giving His own life. Out of His great love for you and me, He allowed those nails of Calvary to pierce His perfect hands.

He had no obligation to offer us any gift at all. We have no right to it and have done nothing at all to deserve it. This great gift of salvation lies solely in God's boundless mercy as He so graciously continues to extend His hand to us. "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way" (Isaiah 53:6). How the heart of God must ache! His thoughts and

His ways are so much higher than ours, yet we turn from His open hand of deliverance and try in our haughtiness to help ourselves.

But—praise the Lord!—He still holds forth His hand. 'All day long I have stretched forth my hands to a disobedient and gainsaying people' (Romans 10:21). Oh, the matchless grace and mercy of our Lord and Saviour! When we finally come to the end of ourselves and see our great need—praise God!—"His hand is still not shortened that it cannot save." By faith we can reach out to those open nail-scarred hands.

We rest our hands and life in His and say, "Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief." When we confess our sins, "he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). 'And I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty' (2 Corinthians 6:17, 18).

But one day God will stretch out His hand in judgment. "For all this his anger is not turned away, but his hand is stretched out still" (Isaiah 5:25). Because He is a God of justice and judgment, He will not always strive with men. His hand will one day open the Book of Life and He will pronounce judgment on all our hands have done. So "to day [not tomorrow] if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts" (Hebrews 3:15). Together we can know Him for all eternity "by the print of the nails in His hand."

Brother Leroy



THE PERIL OF MUSIC PROFESSIONALISM

Music is forceful! It can motivate attacking soldiers, boost patriotic fervor in crowds, increase spending in shopping malls, and distract those who would like to evade the reality of death. But it also can extract tears from the repentant sinner, calm the fearful, inspire saints to meaningful worship, and rise as a sweet savor to the Lord.

Examples from the Scriptures and Anabaptist history indicate that God's children have always been a singing people. In more recent history, some conservative Mennonite groups have accepted four-part singing along with hymns and Gospel songs other than the martyr songs sung by the Anabaptists. Along with this development and the sheer volume of diversity available, two extremes now threaten the church—casual music and profession-

alism in music.

"And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men" (Colossians 3:23). This includes singing. We should increase our music and singing proficiency. Music and singing classes should have a prominent place in our Christian day schools and Bible schools. Periodic instruction to improve congregational singing ought to be a normal part of church life. Song leaders should seek to excel in accuracy and poise without fanfare.

However, we can become too focused on musical proficiency. When does the pursuit of musical excellence compete with true worship? Is it possible to put too much emphasis on the technical aspects of music? When does music become man-centered instead of God-centered? If we are honest, we will agree that professionalism threatens Scriptural, godly music. Following are some possible indicators that we may be unduly influenced by the professional world.

Placing undue emphasis on musical talent and diversity. We recognize that God has given differing levels of musical talent to His children. Some are seemingly born with a natural propensity toward singing and music. However, singing ability is often developed according to a person's interest in music. We should expend most of our energies in improving and inspiring good congregational singing. This minimizes tendencies in music expression that lead to pride. Rearranging traditional songs into elaborate musical style should be viewed negatively. This militates against the congregational singing heritage we want to preserve. If we cultivate an appetite for elite performance, we will soon become disenchanted with good congregational singing.

Promoting specialized singing groups. Our Rules and Discipline states it this way: "singing in small groups may be engaged in for personal enjoyment and inspiration in private gatherings in our homes, for the benefit of the sick and aged, as a Christian testimony in street meetings, in institutions such as jails, hospitals and charitable homes, and in a school setting." This guideline has served us well in curbing the tendencies toward professional and technical immoderation. We must continue to uphold congregational singing in all our worship services, including wedding receptions and funerals. Small singing groups at viewings will encourage special singing in other services.

Singing for performance and entertainment. Our singing must serve one basic purpose—to worship and praise our Almighty God! When singing centers on performance or entertainment, the spotlight shifts from God to

men. "I am the LORD: that is my name: and my glory will I not give to another" (Isaiah 42:8).

Listening to music without words. Musical instruments are noticeably absent in New Testament worship. Our position as a church prohibits most and discourages all instrumental music. Music without words will reach only the emotions. We need more than an emotional lift in worship. The words of the songs are what touch the spirit and reach the soul.

Displaying contempt for those less musically inclined. Not everyone will have the same interest or ability in music. Abilities will vary because God has not given everyone the same gifts. Some have not had the opportunity to learn the rudiments of music at an early age. The person who is sincerely making a "joyful noise" while singing is just as pleasing to God as the person more musically skilled. God looks at the heart and accepts the praise according to what is in the heart. If we harbor disdain for congregational singing because we think it is too uncultured or beneath our dignity, we have already been affected by the peril of professionalism.

What are some antidotes to avoid the peril of professionalism?

Our singing should glorify God rather than men.

Our singing should always instruct and edify the hearer. "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord" (Colossians 3:16). The message of the words ought to predominate over the magnificence of the music.

Our singing and recorded selections should build appreciation for good congregational singing and the worship hymns of the church.

We must continue to promote wholehearted congregational singing. History has proven that specialized singing and instrumental music will stifle and eventually cause good congregational singing to wane.

We must continue to blend our singing skills and talents within the framework of the brotherhood. Confining our energies to edifying, encouraging, and inspiring the brethren and sisters will spare us from many perils pertaining to wrong music interests. "In the midst of the church will I sing praise unto thee" (Hebrews 2:12). If we are faithful in guarding our music interests now, we will someday join in singing that new song not only "in the midst of the church" but also in the midst of the saints of all ages!

Brother John



**Minutes of the Conferring Fellowship Meeting
Held at the Blue Rock Mennonite Church
September 2013**

Brother David moderator for the morning opened the meeting with a welcome to the group. Brother Lester led us in singing "Eternal Father" and "Glorious Things of Thee Are Spoken."

Brother Clyde shared devotional thoughts from John 6:5-14. The Master that we serve is able to meet our need; His resources are more than sufficient. Jesus offers Himself as the Bread of Life to satisfy our spiritual needs and to lead us into the spiritual kingdom.

After a kneeling prayer, the minutes of the April 11, 2013, conferring meeting were read.

Brother David brought the first message of the day, titled **Five Pleas of Christ's High-priestly Prayer**, taken from John 17. These are special areas of need that Jesus mentioned:

I. That we might know the Father

It is important to move beyond the mere mechanics to true heart acquaintance with God and His power.

II. That we might be kept from evil

Christ's followers are sent on a dangerous mission. They are vulnerable to enemy attacks. We should be helping each other to stay safe.

III. That we might be sanctified

Sanctification makes the truth practical. We need to keep the Word central in our lives and in our church.

IV That we may be one

A. Satan is always trying to destroy unity and create distance, distrust, and discouragement. But the glory of the church is her oneness, which comes because we know the Lord and we are submitting to the same things.

B. How can leaders encourage oneness in the brotherhood?

1. Leading in humility, as servants

2. Leading in submission and surrender to the will of God

3. Leading in love, with patience and compassion

4. Leading by involving others

5. Leading by being impartial

6. Leading by respect, giving value to the concerns and opinions of others

7. Leading by intercessory prayer—as Jesus did for us

V That we might be with Him

This is the purpose for which Christ came.

After the message we sang one verse of "Saviour, Like a Shepherd Lead Us."

The second message was shared by Brother Philip titled **Article VI of the Schleithem Confession of Faith (Concerning the Sword)**. He addressed various aspects of the doctrine of nonresistance.

I. Recognizing the separation of church and state

II. Understanding discipline in the church

III. Relating to civil disputes

IV Serving in political office

V Embracing cross bearing and humility

VI. Expressing the mind of Christ in practical ways

Brother Harold then shared the message on God's Covenant Relationship.

I. The covenant defined

It is a solemn agreement between God and man, where God sets the terms and man meets the conditions. This concept was unique among the ancient religions because it reveals that God actually communicates with man.

II. The covenant expressed

Brother Harold examined the establishment of the covenant with the various patriarchs in the Old Testament. The purpose of the covenant was to give guidance to God's people and to help them do what pleased Him. God wanted His people to be intermediaries to reach a heathen people.

III. The covenant established

The basis of this covenant is the blood of Christ. It effected the change that God knew man needed and allowed God to do through man what He always wanted to do.

At the close of the message, Brother Timothy led in kneeling prayer. After singing "O God, the Rock of Ages," Brother James dismissed us with a closing prayer.

Brother Daryl served as moderator for the afternoon session. Brother David led in two songs: "Channels Only" and "People of the Living God."

Brother David led in devotions, reading from Psalm 139. He emphasized the wonder of God's knowledge and His ability to search our lives. We should call on God, and He will lead us to Himself. Brother David then led us in a kneeling prayer.

Brother Melvin gave the secretary's report regarding recent and planned ordinations.

Brother Warren gave the first message of the afternoon on **Keeping Our Ordination Vows**.

I. What do the vows involve? The vows involve submission to accept the office and a commitment to be faithful to teach the truth and conduct the church according to the standards of the Gospel.

II. Why do we keep these vows?

A. They are made to God and are meant to be kept.

B. The ministry is a stewardship.

C. The ministry represents God.

D. We want to inspire others to faithfulness. 111. How do we keep the vows?

A. By the power of God—we supplying the yieldedness; God supplying the power

B. With the love of God motivating us to serve God and obey Him

C. By preaching the Gospel—the shortness of time bringing urgency

D. By exercising discipline when needed to maintain a pure church

E. With longsuffering and doctrine, maintaining a shepherd's heart and showing compassion along with firmness

We shared in a time of open discussion. Various thoughts were given to help us to respond to individuals who feel their ministry does not hear them. We should be careful to hear all sides of the issue and always work to build bridges to the local leadership. There were also some thoughtful comments on God's covenant with man.

The concluding message of the day was "**Let No Man's Heart Fail**" by Brother James. These are the words of David to Saul when Israel was facing Goliath.

I. What was the appeal?

A. To action

B. To loyalty

C. To responsibility

D. To collective effort

E. For definition of the issues at hand

II. What devices of our enemy may cause our hearts to fail?

A. Repeated attacks

B. Defeat to the battle weary

C. A well-armed approach

- D. Defiance of God and the people of God
 - E. Subtly incorrect suggestions
- III. What gave courage for the battle?
- A. The Lord was with him.
 - B. David used proven equipment.
 - C. He had the confidence of past experience.
 - D. He accepted delegated authority to move ahead.
 - E. David remained a humble man.

We were refreshed by the inspiration of God's Word throughout the day and encouraged to labor on in the work of the church. After singing together, "God Will Take Care of You," Brother Harold led us in a closing prayer.

Submitted by the assistant secretary.



"Glorify God in Your Body" (Part 5)

Spontaneous Singing

*Singing, singing from the heart
O what joy our songs impart;
Jesus, bless this tuneful heart.
Singing from the heart.*

Spontaneous singing comes from the heart; not mandatory or forced, but bursting forth naturally. A thankful heart overflowing with God's goodness finds release in song. How fitting for a child of God!

God's children have always been a singing people. At Creation, "the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy" (Job 38:7). Imagine the swelling songs of such spontaneity! At the Red Sea, Moses led the Israelites in a song of praise after their miraculous deliverance. During the peak of Israel's national glory, David penned many psalms. After returning from Babylon, the Jews sang as the temple foundations were rebuilt.

At Jesus' birth, the hillsides rang with "Glory to God in the highest." Nearing His crucifixion, Jesus led His disciples in a hymn. Sitting in pris-

on, Paul and Silas sang, and the prisoners heard them. Enduring fierce persecution, Anabaptists met their deaths with a song on their lips. And yet today, the song of saints on earth joins heaven's chorus in praise to the Lamb.

Why should our hearts overflow in song? Hearts which are thankful for the gift of salvation burst forth in songs of redemption. Also, singing can strengthen our desire to do right. One young man sang "Purer in heart, O God" while driving a tractor through town. He preserved his good thought life and unknowingly gave his testimony to those along the street. Singing "Yield Not to Temptation" can aid victory over temptation.

Spontaneous singing brings cheer. Is it unlikely to think that Paul and Silas's midnight singing lifted the prisoners' spirits? Many mothers' daily duties are lightened by children's joyful songs. Singing at the nursing homes is energy well spent. Young people who sing for older church members cheer hearts, young and old alike. Even in times of sorrow, singing can lift our spirits to God and the glory beyond.

Singing from the heart does not require a perfect pitch or even a perfect tune. However, it does require a song. Are we memorizing good songs? Is our song list growing? Using a song-for-the-week (along with another or so) in family worship can be a memory aid. Our children need to hear us sing and learn to help along. Happy is the son who hears Father whistling a tune while he's working!

Cheerful singing should flow from our lips many times throughout the day. Whether in the shop, kitchen, garden, or barn, wherever the cheerful heart goes, a song is likely to spring forth. While we are sewing a dress, mowing the hay, washing the dishes, or shoveling the snow, a spontaneous song—whether heard by many or few—glorifies God.

—*Brother Andrew*



PRAYER POINT

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

May we stand every morning to thank and praise the Lord
And at even likewise – 1 Chronicles 23:30
For the rest He has given us and for all the blessings
With which He daily loads us

