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Our God is a bountiful Giver. He "giveth us richly all things to enjoy" (1 Timothy 6:17), and in this land we are blessed above most other peoples around the world. What is our response? Are we grateful to God only during this "Thanksgiving season," or does our praise and thanksgiving prevail throughout the year?

One of the practical demonstrations of a trusting, thankful steward is benevolence, which is the disposition to do good, to render acts of kindness. The same passage that warns against trusting in uncertain riches gives God's stewards specific direction for using these richly given natural riches: "That they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate" (1 Timothy 6:18).

The Christian Graces supplement in our church Discipline gives us this practical guidance regarding benevolence: "Members should by love and the exercise of charity render to each other such assistance as may be required in times of distress or want, should especially remember those who labor among them and are over them in the Lord, should exercise Gospel systematic giving, as being faithful stewards over that which the Lord has entrusted to them; and should give of their means to the Lord's cause; to home, city, and foreign missions, and to charitable, benevolent, publishing, and educational institutions of the church".

Benevolence springs from our gratitude to God. Though we labor to provide and obtain, we recognize that God is the Giver of every good gift. We are but stewards of that which He gives. He, the rightful Owner, directs us to share with others. Those whose hearts are full of gratitude freely share God's bounty.

Benevolence springs from a gracious spirit. If we share with those in need or contribute to brotherhood assistance offerings only or primarily out of a sense of duty or obligation, we are not benevolent; we are merely dutiful servants. Kind acts are benevolent acts only when they are the product of an inner motivation of kindness and goodwill. Consequently, benevolence is spontaneous; it bubbles from an inner spring. Perhaps if we were to spend more time nurturing a spirit of benevolence, we would find that we do not have to take time for this or that act of kindness; we will have time.

For the Christian, this spirit of goodwill is more than human kindness. It should and must be the expression of a spirit energized by God's Spirit

within. Those in whom His Spirit dwells exhibit His qualities. Like the Holy Spirit, they too are good, gentle, and gracious.

Benevolence indeed exercises "Gospel systematic giving." But it does more than that. In our day, giving money and things of monetary value, while important, may be the easier acts of benevolence. In some ways, giving our time in deeds and acts of kindness might be more costly and more difficult.

The benevolent person is observant. He has trained himself to see needs. We can see the obvious, the distress that follows fire, accident, or storm. But in the busyness of our bustling daily lives, we tend to become preoccupied with our own activities and fail to see the less obvious. The benevolent person sees more: he has time for others; he sees their needs, and he responds in love and goodwill. Mother sends her teenage daughter to assist the younger mother whose preschoolers are ill. Father can spare his son when he sees that another brother is struggling with his workload. Not only do parents send their children, but they also go themselves and help.

These deeds of kindness should abound among those who are of the household of faith but they reach beyond—into the communities around us. God gives us a broad measure: "As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men." "Withhold not good from them to whom it is due, when it is in the power of thine hand to do it" (Proverbs 3:27). This might mean that we help the stranded motorist change his tire, instead of assuming that he has a cell phone and can solicit help if he needs it. This might mean that we "adopt" an elderly neighbor, helping with his yard work and clearing the snow from his walk or driveway. It means that we visit and listen to the elderly, the lonely, and the bereaved.

"He that hath pity upon the poor lendeth unto the LORD; and that which he hath given will he pay him again" (Proverbs 19:17).

That which we render in benevolence to others was never ours, for it belonged to God. Yet in His goodness, God blesses those who share His blessings—how humbling! "He that hath a bountiful eye shall be blessed" (Proverbs 22:9).



## Using But Not Abusing This World

*"And they that use this world, as not abusing it:  
for the fashion of this world passeth away"*

*1 Corinthians 7:31*

This life is a preparation for eternity. Sensing the brevity of life should help us to keep our sights eternal. We can properly use the things of this world only as we focus on the eternal. We will fail in our stewardship responsibilities if we are living for this present world. We will abuse this world and ruin ourselves if we do not keep an eternal perspective.

We live in this world; we use this world and the things of this world. How can we keep our perspective eternal? What are some challenges to our stewardship? What are some ways we could abuse this world?

In the context of this verse (1 Corinthians 7:29-31), Paul mentions four specific areas that can easily dim our eternal vision: marriage, mourning, mirth, and material possessions. The focus of this article is stewardship of material possessions.

### **Challenges to Good Stewardship**

What guides me when I buy—pleasure or practicality? impulse or need? simplicity or status? Does the novelty of something new impress me more than the utility of something used? "My pickup is working fine, but it is time to update." Do the possessions of my peers press me to purchase? This may apply to anything from tractors and equipment to stoves or sweaters. Do I buy in response to advertisements in the paper? "John Deere unveils . . ." "Echo introduces . . ." "Bernina now offers three new models . . ." "A new line of La-Z-Boy. ." If these advertisements compel us to spend, are we indeed strangers and pilgrims? Are we not becoming worldly consumerists?

Does the desire for a change of scenery require a replacement? "I've looked at this sofa long enough." "This room has nothing new in it." "We need some new tools on the job; which ones can we replace?"

Is the availability of funds my most important buying principle? While a lack of money should tell us not to spend, available cash must not force us to spend. "There are two times in life when you need to use care in how you spend your money: one is when you have it, and the other is when you do not."

Is a cheap item automatically a bargain? Remember, no item is a bargain

if I do not need it. Is a cheaper price the only principle I consider when buying? If cheaper items soon fail or fall into disuse because they do not work well, perhaps I am contributing to the throwaway outlook of society. Even if single-use items are cheaper, they can sometimes cause us to throw away too quickly in other areas.

Am I attracted to the buying market because of all the options that this new equipment, tool, or gadget has? Or does a shift in style force me to repaint the house, to redesign the landscape, or to refashion the wardrobe? I am so easily caught up in this world. When I am caught up in this world, I use it selfishly. To use this world selfishly is to abuse it.

Overeating is not proper stewardship of our plenty. Neither is it good stewardship of the body and health. Proper stewardship in eating calls us to eat a broad variety of foods in moderate amounts. As the Plain People have prospered, they have had to pay more attention to self-discipline in eating. Overeating places a stress on the body that makes us less able to serve God and our brethren.

Once we have something, we can abuse it. When we continually try to use a piece of machinery beyond its designed limit, it will show signs of abuse. If we desire to be rich or to use our businesses to build financial empires, we are misusing this world's goods. Rather, we seek to serve others as we provide for ourselves. Are we willing to offer the services of our equipment or our business free of charge in cases of fire or flood?

We try to keep our mortgages modest and our debts manageable. Part of this is to borrow only for things that bring a return on the investment. Another part is to live within our means. We also ask counsel of other brethren to guide us in our financial obligations. If they are uncomfortable, we ought to be also.

We must beware lest we are overtaken with a carnal desire to accumulate possessions or investments. The self-satisfied, self-sufficient attitude that results from an unwholesome appreciation of possessions is not a mark of a good steward.

### **Expressions of Good Stewardship**

Stewardship includes caring for what we have. We look after our livestock. We follow maintenance schedules with our vehicles and machinery. We service our equipment to keep it working effectively and efficiently. We are willing to repair equipment instead of immediately replacing it. We refuse to reflect against someone who can coax more "life" out of machines than we can. Recycling is a practical application of stewardship.

How much shall I give? The good steward sees this as a very important question. While several references may suggest that tithing is still God's call for New Testament believers, the Gospel standard, "as God hath prospered him" (1 Corinthians 16:2), exceeds the tithing standard. While saving funds for a time of need is wise, another way that God has planned for us to "save" for our future need is to give to the needs of others. "At this time your abundance may be a supply for their want [lack], that their abundance also may be a supply for your want [lack]" (2 Corinthians 8:14). We should be sensitive to the Spirit in deciding how much to give and then give cheerfully, "for God loveth a cheerful giver" (2 Corinthians 9:7). Nowhere in the Scriptures do we have commendation for overextending ourselves in business, but we do have Paul's commendation of the Macedonian churches (2 Corinthians 8:2-4) for overextending themselves in giving! How much have we sacrificed (done without) so that we could give more?

A good steward gives more than money. He first gives himself to the Lord (2 Corinthians 8:5). He will then find ways for his time, his abilities, and his possessions to be a blessing to others and an asset to God's kingdom. Do I have time to give in preparing a devotional or topic? Am I in control of my appetite enough that I can fast for the work of God's kingdom? Will I take time to listen and to give emotional support to someone facing disappointment, discouragement, or some other challenge?

How much of this world am I willing to give up? If we will be good stewards, we will give up all of it. We will live in this world, we will use this world and the things of this world to the glory of God. May we use this world to lay up treasures in heaven so that God's blessing may rest upon us in this world and in the world to come.

*Brother Andrew*



### *The Cost of Connectivity*

We live in a connected society. We live in a world connected to a host of digital gadgets and a flood of information. Many of these connections have been corrupted and are negatively influencing society. As a conservative people, we have tried to remain disconnected from these corrupting influences. With a changing world around us and the generations passing on within our group, we must understand the dangers and costs of connectivity.

What are we talking about when referring to connectivity? A definition for connective as an adjective is "serving or tending to connect." Using the root connect, we refer to relationships as well as to a link between objects. In a general sense, the word connectivity relates to our connection with society—that is, how much we allow the world's mindset to affect us. In a more specific way, this term refers to our use of modern communication devices. To separate these two areas is very difficult because they are so closely related. Our view of connectivity with and our degree of connection to society will affect our use of digital devices.

"Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; 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). What does this separation mean for us? How should it affect our use of communication devices?

The pressure to be connected is not lessening. In fact, we are facing this pressure as never before. In times past, the majority of conservative people raised their families on a farm. Children grew up working alongside their parents. The family worked as a unit and provided for many of their own needs. With the move toward more specialized vocations came more dependence on the world. A trip to town (where we meet many more than just our neighbors) is no longer a once-a-month occurrence. Many of us walk into business places and communicate with those of society every workday. As we communicate more with society, are we allowing our business relationships to cloud our spiritual vision? Are these connections building us up, or are they costing us something?

Connectivity may cost us purity. We must carefully evaluate the influences that we allow into our homes. One such influence that can connect us is a daily newspaper. A father may find it informational, but the content, corrupted with crime and impurity, can cost children their innocence. Even as adults, we need not monitor the corruption of society. We are called to be a separate people. How informed must we be of the impurity around us? Are the connections safeguarded?

Connectivity may cost us meditation. In today's world, the cell phone has become a standard means of communication. It connects people to a wide array of information and possibilities. It has not only the capability of connecting us but also the potential of involving us. When we have a few moments to meditate, the phone can easily fill the time with chatting with someone. When compared with the value of meditation, this type of connection often falls far short.

Connectivity may cost us family time. Fathers know what it is like to be busy when a child comes saying, "Daddy, I want to show you something." The ready answer is "Not just now, maybe later." Are we indeed available later? Or does later usually become never? What prevented you from giving attention to your child? Were you reading a newspaper or magazine? Which activity is the more important?

Connectivity may cost us our life focus. Technology invites us to connect through its ever changing dimensions. Something new is always waiting to be discovered. Something new to try is always ready for your attention. How easily we become involved in new devices! How fascinating to see what develops next! We may feel that we need to try out the capabilities of these new devices and talk about them with others. This web can wrap us up until we have very little—if any—time left to ponder God's mercies and to share them with others.

Connectivity may cost us our connection with God. "Choose you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell" (Joshua 24:15). Today the choice is ours. Natural man would choose to connect with the tangible—the idols of our day. Let us rather choose to be connected with the Creator who sustains man and is soon returning for His own.

*Brother Jason*



Minutes of the Conferring Fellowship Meeting  
Held at Ashland Mennonite Bible School, September 24, 2015  
*Submitted by the assistant secretary Brother Daryl.*

Brother Daniel moderator for the morning session extended a welcome to the group. Brother Kenton led us in singing "In Thy Holy Place," "Enter, Jesus Bids Thee Welcome," and "Lead Us, O Father, in the Paths of Peace." The minutes of the April 9, 2015, conferring meeting were read. Brother Jason led in devotions, reading John 14:20-24. He emphasized the need of love in our response to the Lord and also our relationships with our brethren. True love is shown by obedience to God and by sacrifice for our brethren. He led in a kneeling prayer.

Brother Harold shared the first message, using Colossians 1, especially focusing on verse 29, which highlights God's working mightily in us and our laboring and striving in His cause. He developed the message in the following areas.

**I. The laboring**—means to endeavor with strenuous zeal

A. Why do we labor?

1. Satan is working against God.
2. Men oppose the Gospel.
3. Our natural inclination is to cool off spiritually.

B. How do we labor?

1. According to His working in us (verse 29)
2. By preaching, warning, and teaching (verse 28)
3. In all wisdom and spiritual understanding (verse 9)
4. With the goal of presenting every man perfect in Christ Jesus (verse 28)
5. To help people to receive the inheritance (verse 12)

**II. The glory and the power**

A. The glory of His being

B. The beauty of His holiness and righteousness

C. The glorious salvation (verse 27)

D. His glorious power (verse 11)

**III. The hope**

A. The hope of the Gospel (verse 23)

B. The confident expectation (verse 5)

C. The indwelling presence of Christ (verse 27)

D. The vision of His glory as our strength for today

Brother David spoke on Article III of the Articles of Faith, "Of the Creation." He challenged us to recognize the beauty of the earth and to realize the truth of Hebrews 11:3, that God made it all. He presented four questions.

**I. When did it happen?**

- A. God created the world in the beginning of time.
- B. We believe in a young earth.

**II. How did it happen?**

- A. By God's power—He is Elohim, the Supreme One.
- B. By God's Word (Genesis 1:3, 6, 9, 11). 'And God said.'
- C. It was finger work for God (Psalm 8:3; Hebrews 1:10).
- D. In systematic steps, God formed an orderly universe.

**III. Why did it happen?**

A. For God's pleasure (Revelation 4:11; Colossians 1:16)

B. For man to enjoy (1 Timothy 6:17)

### **III. What can we learn?**

A. We learn the principle of resting on the seventh day (Exodus 20:9-11).

B. We learn reverence and worship for the Creator (Isaiah 40:26).

C. We should be humbled (Psalm 8:4).

D. The same God who created the world will bring it to a conclusion (2 Peter 3:10-14).

After singing one verse of "Thine Is the Kingdom," Brother Lamar spoke on the subject Moral Purity in a Decadent Age. He looked first at the

### **I. Biblical basis for moral purity**

A. With the introduction of sin came all the things that go with disobedience (Genesis 3:7, 21). Something wonderful that God made was now defiled by sin.

B. The Bible gives clear teaching on moral purity (Ephesians 5:1-17).

C. We still deal with our old nature (1 Corinthians 9:27; Romans 6:11, 16).

### **II. External influences of a decadent society**

A. Our society is morally bankrupt. The changing of legal norms is accelerating this decline (Romans 1:27-31).

B. Situation ethics prevails instead of Christian principles. All cultures will be judged by the Word of God.

C. The edge of evil can slowly dull over time. We must not become accustomed to the shocking realities of evil.

D. The digital cloud is also around us today. We must flee temptation and use God's abundant resources (2 Peter 1:1-4).

### **III. Areas to pay attention to**

A. Continue to teach proper conduct in courtship.

B. Use reserve in discussing motherhood and family life issues.

C. Start early to teach healthy respect between genders.

1. Fathers should teach their sons to be reserved and gentle.

2. Mothers should teach their daughters to be ladylike.

3. The curiosity of children should be guarded.

4. We should be alert to social relationships that develop prematurely.

5. We should maintain modest dress and privacy in the home setting.

6. Fathers should be careful with their daughters.

7. We should strive to maintain holiness in all of life.

As a closing song we sang, "More Holiness Give Me," and then Brother Mervin led in a closing prayer.

Brother Eugene served as moderator for the afternoon session and Brother David led in two songs: "Bless, O My Soul, the Living God" and "Wonderful Saviour."

Brother James shared a devotional from Psalm 50:1-2. The mighty God calls out to the earth and the earth responds. Out of the church, the beauty of God's glory shines. It is the beauty of holiness. Out of the human heart that is cleansed and sanctified, God's beauty shines. We are still being perfected.

After a kneeling prayer Brother Melvin gave the secretary's report detailing:

**I.** Ordinations since last conferring meeting

**II. Transfer** to EPMC

**III.** Deaths

**IV.** Ordinations Planned

The first message of the afternoon was shared by Brother Jeffrey on The Delight of Sacrifice, taken from 2 Corinthians 12:9-15. He shared a number of thoughts that can help us find joy in serving the Lord.

**I.** Sacrifice can produce despair.

A. Because of our potential for pride

B. Because of those who oppose our work

C. Because the servants of God cannot rightly defend themselves (Luke 10:3)

D. Because of physical weariness or emotional turmoil

**II.** God's people must depend on the protection of each other.

This passage gives principles that can help every servant of God find delight in sacrifice.

A. When the grace of God and our own weakness are understood (verse 9)

B. When infirmities, reproaches, and distresses are endured for Christ's sake (verse 10)

C. When genuine humility fills our hearts and guides our conduct (verses 11-12)

D. When we can prosper the lives of those we serve (verse 14)

**III.** What can we learn from the apostle Paul to help us find delight in sacrifice?

A. He had a broad perspective of those whom he was called to serve.

B. He rightly understood what it meant to spend and be spent.

C. He knew the proper place to seek for love and appreciation. We will on-

ly know the delight of sacrifice when we know the delight of the One we are sacrificing for.

The open discussion included various comments on the messages. There were comments about moral purity in our homes and the need for parental discipline and oversight. What does it mean to have our all on the altar of sacrifice? We may receive commendation when the Lord sees we need it and also rebuke when He sees we need it. The article on Creation was not given in former confessions of faith but was included in the Garden City confession to address a current need.

The last sermon of the day was given by Brother Noah titled "Have Salt in Yourselves," taken from Mark 9:50. Pride is the chief enemy of peace. We need the grace of God in our hearts to arrest the decay that would naturally destroy us. The church must have a preserving influence on society. The salt needs to be added because it is not there naturally.

**I.** What are the incentives to have Christ in ourselves?

- A. To experience peace lest our own evil tendencies overtake us
- B. To have peaceable relationship with others
- C. To have a clear testimony to the world that God's ways are not only right but also satisfying

**II.** What is salt that has lost its savor?

- A. Faith without works
- B. Profession without possession
- C. A form of godliness but denying the power
- D. A Christ-less religion that will never save

**III.** What would drain our saltiness?

- A. Our fallen nature
- B. Neglect of our time with God
- C. Neglect of our church interest and loyalty
- D. Close ties with the world

**IV.** How do we add saltiness to our salt?

- A. By adding Christian virtues to our faith (2 Peter 1:3-11)
- B. By showing the character of salt and the path to peace (Romans 12-15)
- C. Through the only happy way to live and the only peaceful way to die (Romans 14:17-19)
- D. Through doing God's will for the church today (2 Corinthians 13:11-14)

After singing "Soldiers of Christ, Arise," Brother Elvin led in a closing prayer.

## **First Things (Part 5) The Duty of Honour**

"Let them learn first to shew piety at home, and to requite their parents: for that is good and acceptable before God" (1 Timothy 5:4).

Ms. Chi is a young woman in China who recently moved out of her parents' home into her own tiny flat. Although the rent costs half of her income, she relishes the privacy and has described her move as "the most courageous decision of my life." Her reason for moving? She could no longer endure the advice of her parents, whom she described as being "controlling shareholders" in her life. So she escaped.

The prodigal son had similar thoughts. His honor for his father had dropped to a low ebb when he left home to live his own life. But before long the money, the freedom, and the thrill were gone, and he was repenting of his folly. On his return, his words, "Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight," show that he understood how serious it was to dishonor his father. Too many young people since then have failed to honor their parental homes. Not all of them have left home running. But they find many other ways to express their lack of honor. How can young people learn to show honor at home?

Parents are responsible to train their children to render due respect. Does your own example command respect, or must you resort to demanding it of your children? The way you honor all men or fail to do so will directly influence your children. How do you speak of church leadership, the school-teachers, or civil authorities? If you treat the beggar and the mayor alike or if you suspend judgment of an obnoxious neighbor, your children will understand. But they will also understand if you belittle or criticize. Children will not be fooled.

Young people, how can you show honour? It starts in the littlest of ways with "please" and "thank you" with a gracious smile. Honor develops when you give up your own will and submit to your parents' direction.

And full-blooded honour goes so far as to obey not only their commands but also their suggestions. Obedience, when propelled by a want-to attitude, becomes a very near synonym of honor. Some young people mistakenly believe that a flowery gift and speech will make up for Biblical honor. But parents will not be fooled.

Honour learned at home is worth it, because honor prepares. It prepares children to respect authority at school. It prepares youth to support the administration at Bible school. It prepares young couples for honorable marriage. Above all, it prepares children to honor God. The fact that God placed the command to honor in the Ten Commandments shows how im-

portant honor is to Him. "Them that honour me I will honour" (1 Samuel 2:30).

—*Brother John*



### *PRAYER POINT*

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

Pray for the Annual Ministers' Bible Study Fellowship and the Christian Day School Institute. After three months of school life, the teachers anticipate this time of fellowship and instruction. Pray for the brethren who will be serving at both of these meetings.

Pray for the Spanish publishing interests. Approximately 2,400 copies of the *Sendas Derechas*, a periodical similar to the *Home Horizons*, are published bimonthly. Pray that God would supply the needed finances and personnel to meet the growth in Spanish publications.

Pray for the mission efforts of the Washington-Franklin Conference in Haiti. The work of our church in the Bahamas has many similarities. Also, many Creole-speaking Haitians live in the Bahamas. Pray for the salvation of souls.

Thank the Lord for the abundant harvest from fields and gardens. "The earth is full of the goodness of the LORD." Grateful recipients will use their resources wisely and share with others in need. True thanksgiving is thanks-living.

