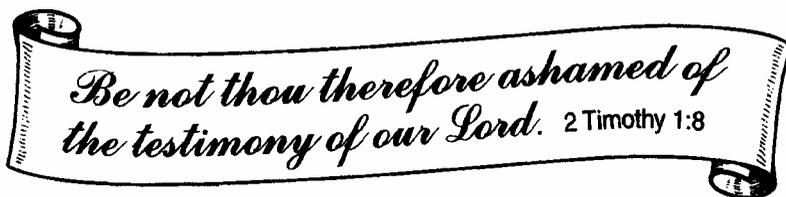


THE EASTERN MENNONITE TESTIMONY

SELECTED ARTICLES FROM THE MONTHLY PUBLICATION
OF
THE EASTERN PENNSYLVANIA MENNONITE CHURCH
OCTOBER 2008



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.

Editorial.

The Quiet in the Land

Plain, nonresistant groups have sometimes been described as "the quiet in the land." This phrase has often been used to reflect against these groups for their reluctance to become involved in mission endeavors. The suggestion is that they were satisfied to be quietly involved in their own affairs and neglected their calling to witness to the world. Although there may be some validity to this criticism, the phrase definitely and primarily has a positive and Scriptural sense.

The phrase "the quiet in the land" is not a direct Bible quotation in our English Bibles, but the German phrase "*die stillen im Lande*" is found in Psalm 35:20 in Luther's German translation. This passage speaks of the enemies of God's people who falsely accuse those who are "quiet in the land." The thought of quiet lives is also found in 1 Timothy 2, where Paul exhorts us to pray "that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty" (1 Timothy 2:2). This passage clearly associates maintaining a quiet and peaceable life with living in godliness and honesty. In the context, it is also directly related to God's desire that all men should be saved (2:4). As we are the quiet in the land in a Scriptural sense, we can truly be effective witnesses to the world.

How can we be the quiet in the land?

In neighborhood relations.

Our neighbors know whether or not we are living quietly in the land. They know if we are truly nonresistant by our reactions to boundary issues and to other difficulties that arise between neighbors. They should sense our desire to be reconcilers rather than dividers. They should also sense our neighborliness and concern, especially during times of death or tragedy in the neighborhood. They should know us as those who wave as we drive by and who take time to visit with them as the occasion arises.

In self-defense.

Psalm 35:20 indicates that it is not unusual for the quiet in the land to be falsely accused and mocked. Historically, this has often been the case. During times of war, nonresistant people were often referred to as cowards and even described as being people of low intelligence. The false accusations against the Anabaptists were often quite vile and warrant less.

Rather than verbally defend ourselves when unjustly accused, we should quietly follow the example of our Lord, "who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously" (1 Peter 2:23). We should not try to correct every

false accusation brought against us. When misrepresented in the news media, we should refrain from writing letters to the editor in self-defense. It is far more consistent to continue living right and give a quiet explanation to those who ask us about the issue.

In community affairs.

We should be the quiet of the land in the local public forum. Sometimes issues arise that polarize a local community. Although we may have opinions on the issue in focus, we should be slow to express them in public. We should not be the vocal ones at hearings in the community. In general, we should remain quiet, speaking only as is necessary. In fact, we should be slow to attend such meetings unless there is a valid reason to be present.

In the political world.

With the national political campaign in progress, political fervor is rising. Some of the issues that are being debated definitely relate to right and wrong. It is right for us to

give our testimony about what the Bible says on these issues and to be glad if evil is restrained. However, we must remember that we are a part of God's kingdom and are not involved in this world's kingdoms. Our actions should match our testimony as to why we do not vote. When others are vocal in their endorsement or condemnation of a particular candidate, government leader, or political party, we should maintain our "quiet in the land" perspective. Our neighbors should know us as the quiet in the land who are praying for the Lord's will to be done and are quietly submitting to the authorities God is raising up.

As we are truly the quiet in the land, living our lives in all godliness and honesty, we can, by God's grace, be effective in our spoken witness. In both word and life, we will be furthering God's desire that all should be saved and "come unto the knowledge of the truth."

—GEA



Offending These Little Ones

In His earthly ministry Jesus moved through the villages and along the seaside, touching many lives and giving much helpful counsel to the multitudes. He

warned against offending "these little ones" (Mark 9:42; Luke 17:1, 2). This is a warning that also applies to us today. The word offence, as used in the Bible, refers to causing others to lose their way

and stumble. An offense can be intentional or unintentional. The Bible has much to say concerning this subject in both the Old and New Testaments, clearly highlighting God's keen interest in this matter. He shares concern both for the offender and the offended and warns us to take heed lest we become a stumbling block to those who are weak (1 Corinthians 8:9). Jesus' mention of the millstone clearly reveals God's attitude toward those who offend little ones.

To whom did Jesus refer when He spoke of "these little ones"? Little as used here does not necessarily mean "small of stature, of age, or of importance." It rather refers to those who are beginning the steps of growth and maturity.

Who are the "little ones" in the brotherhood?

The newly converted. The babes in Christ cause joy in heaven, but they are so immature, so weak, and so much in need of nurture for this newfound faith to grow and develop.

The carnal as described in I Corinthians 3:1-3. They need to be encouraged to grow and to enter into the comfort of church life. A small boy was asked why he fell out of bed. His reply was, I guess I slept too close to where I got in." Those who stay close to the edge spiritually remain on milk. Their appetite for the meat of the Word is weak, and their spiritual life is

fragile.

Those who have recently come into our fellowship. They are impressed with Bible applications and their fruit, but they often have very little knowledge of Scriptural church life. They often have questions about applications such as segregated seating, our patterns of dress, and our way of life.

Those who are emotionally weak and weary. They may be depressed or overly sensitive and somewhat withdrawn, feeling confused and unsure of themselves. They may face discouragement and struggle with reverses in life. Perhaps they feel that their family is not appreciated and tend to see themselves as second-rate members, withdrawing from the center of church life. Their devotional life is weak, and life seems long and heavy.

Each of us. We need to see ourselves as little ones (Mark 10:13-16) also needing growth. The thought of offenses should cause each of us, no matter how long we have been a Christian, to ask ourselves, "What would it take to cause me to be offended, to hesitate, and to stumble on my way heavenward?" It is said that the true depth of a person's character is determined by the size of the thing that offends him. Our hurts and irritations become less and less as we grow in our love for the Lord, His Word, and His church. Our

heartfelt goal and experience should echo the psalmist's words: "Great peace have they which love thy law: and nothing shall offend them" (Psalm 119:165).

How can we effectively relate to "these little ones" and by God's grace help them find rest, support, and a future in the brotherhood?

By being a good example of the abundant life that Jesus came to provide. A deep, settled peace and an overflowing joy are signs of maturity that the young and the faltering sorely need.

By remaining close to them. In a spiritual sense, we should do as Jesus did in Mark 10 when He took the children up in His arms. A listening ear is needed, rather than a quick answer that fails to sense their grievance and their aching heart. By nurturing and strengthening the faith that they have. The "little ones" in Matthew 18:6 have taken the first step—they believe in Jesus. We are called to nurture this faith till it blossoms into a fruit-bearing life, lest it wither and die. We must determine to avoid anything that would discourage them. We must rather encourage them and seek to draw them into the warmth of the fellowship. Pray with them, pray for them, fervently and often. Help them to develop a meaningful prayer life themselves.

By showing humility toward them. We best relate to the little ones as we learn humility, the lesson that

Jesus was teaching here. Jesus' wonderful example of humility speaks to us today. We too are called to relate to these little ones in all humility.

By relating to them as brothers and sisters that we love. We may never think of them as a burden or a bother. Jesus clearly stated that what we do for the least of these His brethren, we do unto Him (Matthew 25:40). He pronounced woe upon those who cause offense. We must see despising the little ones as a serious matter and be mindful of their proneness to becoming hurt and offended.

Despising could involve the tendency to talk rather freely with others who share our negative feelings about those who are struggling. It could involve bypassing them for dinner invitations or visits. Despising is not only an outward display of words and actions but also an attitude of the heart that reveals itself unintentionally.

God, in His infinite strength, rules over the universe, yet He is gentle enough to help His struggling child. This is pictured by His gathering the lambs in His arms and carrying them in His bosom. The spiritual lesson that this teaches should inspire us to help carry each other through the low spots in life that we all may behold the tender Shepherd in His glory and share the eternal comforts of that prepared place. *D.N.W. PA.*

Satan's Final Defeat

Satan's realm today is in the earth and in the first heaven. He is presently "the prince of the power of the air" (Ephesians 2:2). He seeks to beguile men as "an angel of light" (2 Corinthians 11:14) or to devour them "as a roaring lion" (1 Peter 5:8). As successful as his conquests may appear, Satan's day of final doom is approaching.

The first Scriptural prophecy of Satan's defeat is found early in Genesis. 'And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel" (Genesis 3:15). Christ dealt a deadly blow to Satan at the cross (Colossians 2:15; 1 John 3:8), but Satan's final defeat is yet to come.

The Bible warns of the time when the devil will be cast into the earth. "Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and of the sea! for the devil is come down unto you, having great wrath, because he knoweth that he hath but a short time" (Revelation 12:10-12). We observe that Satan is quite aware of his coming demise. Ever since the Fall, he has been attempting to win as many to his side as he can and will persecute and make war with any who do not join his forces.

Ever since Satan's first rebellion (Isaiah 14:12-16), he has had certain limitations. For example, the bounds of the devil are clearly de-

fined in the account of Job. First the Lord allowed the devil to touch all that Job had, but not Job's person. Then Satan was given further liberty to touch Job himself, but not to the point of death.

Revelation 20 details a further limiting of Satan's powers. A strong angel is seen descending from heaven and binding the old serpent with a great chain (verses 1, 2). The express reason for this binding is to prevent him from deceiving the nations (verse 3). The devil, the mastermind behind all evil, will be removed from the scene just before Christ begins His reign of righteousness. Satan will remain bound during this time.

At the end of the thousand years, Satan will again be given a short space of liberty (verse 7). He will immediately plunge into his primary activity of deception. He will lead the deceived nations as they encompass "the camp of the saints about, and the beloved city." These proud cohorts will quickly be devoured by fire from God out of heaven even before the battle begins (verses 7-9).

The Lord will bring swift and final destruction to the archenemy of our souls. Satan will be cast into the lake of fire that was created for him and his angels. There he will be confined to the bottomless pit to be "tormented day and night for ever and ever." The masses of humanity who are not written in the

book of life will be banished to this place (verse 15), "where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched" (Mark 9:44). The weeping and gnashing of teeth (Matthew 8:12) of many others will also add to the misery of all that are there.

What should the knowledge of the coming final defeat of Satan do to the saint of God? We should gain renewed zeal to overcome in every temptation. By sinning in one "small" area of our life, we would become guilty of the whole law. We must side with God today if we want to be with the triumphant King in eternity. In temptation, the escape route is already provided (1 Corinthians 10:13). May we find and use the avenue to victory every time we are tempted.

We must develop a sincere burden for the unsaved. Knowing that multitudes are headed toward a Christless eternity should spur us on to witness for our Lord. We do not know how much time we have, but we do know that each Christian can make a difference. If we are faithful in delivering the Gospel message to the world, we have cleared ourselves of the blood of others. Jude admonishes us in this: 'And others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire; hating even the garment spotted by the flesh'

(Jude 23).

How should these sobering truths affect those who are not ready to meet their Maker? They should stir up consternation in the lost. "What must I do to be saved?" must be the cry of all sinners. Now is the time for all to amend their ways. They must become concerned enough about the future that it makes a difference in the present. The real reason for this life is to prepare for the next.

These sobering facts should also cause the glamour of sin to lose its appeal to the unregenerate. When the final end of indulging in pleasure is fully comprehended, who would choose sin with its follies? A wise person will choose "rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season" (Hebrews 11:25).

Today we struggle with the temptation to sin. We see the debauchery, the empty lives, the unfilled dreams, and the utter chaos that servitude to the devil creates. But the day is coming when Satan will receive his just reward. We cannot imagine the freedom of dwelling in an environment free from defilement. What an impetus to remain faithful today!

And tho' this world, with devils filled,
Should threaten to undo us;
We will not fear, for God hath willed
His truth to triumph through us.
The prince of darkness grim
We tremble not for him;
His rage we can endure,
For lo! his doom is sure,
One little word shall fell him."

—Martin Luther

Article by G. E. B. VT



Simplicity in Life

To carnal man, the most complicated thing about the Gospel message is its simplicity. The way to Christ is so simple that mankind often misses it. Even those who profess to have accepted the Gospel message often neglect the call to Gospel simplicity.

Simplicity in life is one aspect of the Scriptural call to crucify self and to exalt Christ in our lives. This call to simplicity is not difficult to understand. However, the native pride in man's heart makes practical simplicity difficult.

Dealing a deathblow to personal pride and self-exaltation prepares us to make the Gospel standard of simplicity practical in our lives. We will then deny ourselves those possessions that indicate success and status, such as expensive dwellings, showy attire, and the

latest in technology. Christ-like humility presents the key to a life of true simplicity.

"In simplicity and godly sincerity we have had our conversation in the world" (2 Corinthians 1:12). These words reflect the lifestyle of all sincere Christians since the days of Jesus Christ, the supreme example of simple living. However, Satan is ever seeking to corrupt our minds "from the simplicity that is in Christ" (2 Corinthians 11:1-3). As Eve was beguiled by Satan to partake of the forbidden fruit, we too can be beguiled from the simplicity of being a chaste virgin to Christ.

What is necessary for us to maintain the simple way of life?

Simple faith. Faith is the simple acceptance of God's commands to us through His Word. Therein lies the foundation for a life of godly

simplicity. Even in times of affluence and abundance, we need to ask God to give us day by day our daily bread.

Simplicity in speech. "Let your yea be yea; and your nay, nay" (James 5:12). "Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt" (Colossians 4:6). We need to take this as a personal challenge and to make certain that our words carry Christian dignity. To have graceful speech, we will make a definite effort to avoid the use of slang expressions as well as expressions of anger. These unwholesome expressions are a poor testimony for God's people.

Simplicity in possessions. Jesus said that a man's life does not consist in the abundance of the things that he possesses (Luke 12:15). One of Satan's deceptive tricks is to immerse people in a materialistic lifestyle that promises to yield satisfaction by an abundance of possessions. The "buy now and pay later" philosophy, encouraged by credit cards, has intensified this. The result is devastating, spiritually and often financially, as families are both burdened with debt and spiritually encumbered by the multiplicity of possessions.

Simplicity in family life. Satan seeks to beguile us to think that the American dream is the way to satisfaction and is just within reach. Adam and Eve's simple life in the Garden of Eden stands in contrast

to that of many families today. In pursuit of "the good life," both father and mother work long hours at high-paying jobs that keep them away from home for long periods of time. They then use their high wages to live in luxury and pleasure, all the while missing the source of true satisfaction. We can possess the necessities of life on very simple terms, but we put ourselves through great pains for life's luxuries. We like convenience but too often forget that convenience is costly.

Blessed are the parents who are willing to forego higher income and luxuries to invest spiritually in the future of their family. Working side by side with children gives parents many opportunities to teach them Scriptural values and a contentment that will mold their lives for God's glory. Simplicity testifies that we are serious about living Bible principles and passing these principles on to the next generation.

Simple worship services. Our worship services need to be simple so that we can worship God "in spirit and in truth." Simple worship services especially come under test in our weddings. Complex and showy arrangements undermine godly simplicity and sincerity and detract from, rather than add to, the spiritual richness of the service.

Simple attire. We are considered Plain People by society in general.

We say that we believe in simplicity and modesty, but we need to be certain that our understanding of simplicity and modesty is right. Clothing that draws attention to the wearer, such as that having bold or contrasting colors or large print, undermines simplicity. If allowed to express itself, the carnal indulgence of personal pride and the desire for an artificial beauty will most surely rob us of the testimony of simplicity and modesty that our Mennonite churches have practiced for centuries.

Our attire needs to be non-conformed to the world as well as simple and modest. We need to be grateful for church regulations that apply the principle of Biblical non-conformity to simple and modest attire. When the church rises to her God-given responsibility of guiding her members to a consistent application of both simplicity and nonconformity, these principles

can be maintained.

Simplicity in attire is threatened by "changeable suits of apparel." To avoid the "purple and fine linen" mentality, we must appreciate our plain coats and be ready to wear them during the week when necessity dictates a change from our everyday work wear. Why should a young man take an extra set of clothes with him to a wedding so he can change from his Sunday suit to travel a few hours to his home? Casual clothing will undermine the testimony of our simple plain suits.

Our lifestyle does leave an impression on others. The world looks in on the Plain People as a modern-day phenomenon—something to admire in others but not desirable for one's self. Is the way that we are living pointing those who observe us to Jesus Christ and His Word?

D. H. PA



Beatitude Series (Part 3) **"Blessed Are the Meek"**

"I used to think that God's gifts were on shelves one above the other and that the taller we grew in Christian character the easier we could reach them. I now find that God's gifts are on shelves one beneath the other; and that it is not a

question of growing taller but of stooping lower; and that we have to go down always down to get His best gifts." (E B. Meyer)

The meek way is the lowly way, but God rewards those who walk it. Let us consider two practical areas where meekness was expressed in the lives of the "meekest man,"

Moses, and the "meek and lowly" Christ.

Meekness primarily has to do with our submission to God and His direction. Meekness is the choice to accept God's dealings with us as for our good.

Moses was a man submitted to God's direction. He reluctantly left his quiet wilderness and accepted the awesome burden of leading God's people. Years later, when he failed and God decreed that he could not enter Canaan, we read of no bitterness in Moses. His meek heart shines out in his willing obedience to God even after this severe punishment.

Jesus' submission to the Father's will is evident in these statements: "I can of mine own self do nothing: ... my judgment is just; because I seek not mine own will" (John 5:30), and, "I came ... not to do mine own will" (John 6:38).

Can we rest in what God ordains for us? When circumstances are difficult, can we with Jesus pray, "Not my will, but thine, be done"?

The meekness of a man is also put to test in the face of unjust treatment. Rather than defending his dignity, position, or rights, the

meek man sees insults from evil men as something allowed by God for his own purifying.

Christ and Moses are outstanding examples of this. The Israelites blamed Moses for killing them with hunger and thirst, for not sharing his authority, and even for killing the people of the Lord. Jesus was treated even worse. They betrayed Him, derided Him, sought false witnesses against Him, spit in His face, hit Him with their hands, beat Him with whips, and finally nailed Him to a cross.

Both Christ and Moses refused to defend themselves. When God wanted to destroy Israel, Moses even pleaded for their deliverance. As men nailed Christ to the cross, He was offering them salvation. How would we have done?

"The meek shall inherit the earth." Today, in a measure, we can inherit the earth due to the peace and contentment in our hearts. When Christ returns again, He will exalt the meek and usher in a reign where there is no injustice, and where meekness and righteousness prevail (Psalms 22; 37; 76).

—S. R. B.



Beatitude Series (Part 4)

"Blessed Are They Which Do Hunger and Thirst After Righteousness"

How is our appetite for righteousness? The following questions may help us decide.

How am I enjoying my personal devotions Upon being asked, a brother shared that he enjoys rising at 4:00 A.M. to sit down with his Bible. "It's so sweet," he said. "The hours slip by without me realizing it." That challenged me.

Do my private devotions include study helps and a paper and pencil? Or do I only study "in depth" when preparing to teach others? If we have properly fed on the Word, we will, like David, have something to meditate on throughout the day or in the sleepless hours of the night. Do I love the preaching of the Word? Do I regularly take notes? Do I consider it to be a dry thing or drink it in and find it refreshing? How many Gospel sermons are to be found among my recorded selections?

How much is spiritual discussion a part of my life? What do I love to talk about? Vehicles, dresses, business, home decor, church problems, people problems—do these dominate my discussions? Or do I have time to converse on the "hard to be understood" things of the Word, the joys of the Christian walk, or the subtleties of the devil? What is the reward for the spiritu-

ally hungry? "For they shall be filled." How do we reconcile this "filling" with the "panting after God" mentioned elsewhere in the Bible? David, who already knew God, said, "I opened my mouth, and panted: for I longed for thy commandments" (Psalm 119:131).

Two kinds of soul hunger are in focus in these verses—the wandering hunger that takes the sinner from pleasure to pleasure without supplying any lasting fulfillment and the "bittersweet" hunger that draws the Christian back to the living Word. The Christian is not so filled that his appetite is quenched. Instead, he has tasted and, consequently, wants more.

We can easily become sidetracked from our eternal perspective and find ourselves putting all our energies into temporal things. The result of taking this course is to begin to wonder what the point is of the circle of life—only to be reminded by the faithful Spirit of God that life is empty because we have not been feeding properly. This has been called a "sweet bitterness. The next best thing to living in the light of God's love is to be unhappy till we have it" (Spurgeon). Sweet, because God has not neglected us; bitter, because we have neglected Him too long.

"How excellent is thy loving kindness, O God! therefore the

children of men put their trust under the shadow of thy wings. They shall be abundantly satisfied with the fatness of thy house; and thou shalt make them drink of the river

of thy pleasures. For with thee is the fountain of life" (Psalm 36:7-9).

—*S. R. B.*

