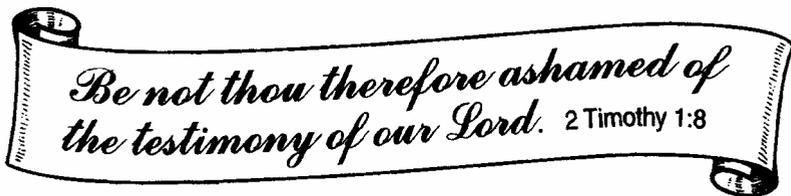


THE EASTERN MENNONITE TESTIMONY

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Jesus used questions to nurture spiritual curiosity and teach truth. He also encountered questions arising from ulterior motives and closed minds. Some questions He avoided. Others He answered with a parable or another question. Since we do not have Jesus' ability to see into the heart, we are wise to usually accept men at face value. But in our day of religious skepticism, parents, church leaders, or others in authority must at times "try the spirits" (1 John 4:1). A question may clearly reveal an attitude that is more important than the question.

Does it reveal an open or a closed heart? Some questions are simply an opener into a pet argument. "But foolish and unlearned questions avoid, knowing that they do gender strifes" (2 Timothy 2:23). We are not instructed to avoid the person—only the distracting question. By God's grace and wisdom, every discussion should be steered into redemptive and instructive channels. But if the heart is closed, we should not "cast [our] pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend [us]" (Matthew 7:6). "And the servant of the Lord must not strive" (2 Timothy 2:24).

Is it submissive or rebellious? Satan queried, "Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?" (Genesis 3:1). Satan clouds simple truth with confusing questions. God determined that husbands should answer their wives' questions at home because the teaching of truth can be clouded by questions (1 Corinthians 14:35).

A rebellious question should be regarded as seriously as an antagonistic statement. Although leaders should not be overprotective of their own authority, they are accountable to cultivate reverence for God's authority. Blessed are the parents and church leaders who soberly realize the investment of authority which God has entrusted to them.

Is it constructive or critical? Questions are easier to raise than answers. And questioning the consistency of another's position is easier than forming and keeping one of our own. But if we do not react defensively, a critical question may be an opportunity to convert a cynical, sideline mudslinger into an engaged soldier in the battle for truth. And blessed indeed are those who can craft a tactful question to humbly suggest a remedy rather than give a blunt opinion.

Is it true or false? A right answer cannot be found for a wrong question.

Korah and his cohorts demanded, "All the congregation are holy, every one of them, and the LORD is among them: wherefore then lift ye up yourselves above the congregation of the LORD?"(Numbers 16:3).

Moses called on God to answer this question based on a faulty premise. Many questions are too complicated for a simple yes or no answer. And a multiple-choice question may list three wrong answers and omit the option of truth. For example, one can debate that family time must come before church activities when actually materialism may be driving his business pursuits to the detriment of his family.

Is it willing or willful? If a child asks, "Why do we have to go to church again?" the attitude is more important than the answer. The young man who asks, "Must I wear my suit?" reveals that he is not self-inspired. Wise parents answer the attitude as well as the question. Parents also guide a child's conscience by teaching him how to ask a question respectfully and submissively. The door of communication must be kept open and swing both ways, but children are commanded to "hear the instruction of thy father, and forsake not the law of thy mother."

Does it edify or entertain? "But avoid foolish questions, and genealogies, and contentions, and strivings about the law; for they are unprofitable and vain" (Titus 3:9). Some questions lead to endless discussion. If God's Word does not have an answer to the question, it may be fruitless to discuss it. Theoretical discussions such as, "What would the world be like if Adam had not sinned?" rarely edify. Our efforts should be invested in understanding what God has revealed rather than in pointless speculating.

Although we should be alert for flawed questions, we should look for the good in others and not assume the worst. And may we analyze our own attitudes as we ask questions of God and our fellow men. We are grateful that God answered our questions in the Bible. "For all the promises of God in him are yea, and in him Amen, unto the glory of God by us" (2 Corinthians 1:20).

—BAS



RELATING TO COMMUNITY EVENTS

Man is a social being who enjoys fellowship. Men of this world who do not find their fellowship in a church will create fellowship opportunities in the community. Consequently, the local town's community days with its parades, fundraisers, and chicken barbecues present some pertinent questions for the child of God. How do strangers and pilgrims evaluate the so-

cial and spiritual implications of such events in order to remain "in the world," yet not "of the world"?

Ever since the beginning of time, community events have been a rallying point for mankind. The Tower of Babel was a community event which united men in the defiance of God. Lot sat in the city gate at the heart of Sodom's community events.

Some would say that socializing with community folks expands our field of witness. This may be true to some extent, but Abraham, who kept his distance from Sodom's community, was more effective in his preserving influence than Lot was. Twice, Abraham postponed the coming of destruction on Sodom. He rescued Lot, along with other men of the city, and later interceded for them in prayer. Lot, in contrast, lost his family and almost himself.

Another red-flag incident from Scripture involved Peter as he sat at the fire with the community people at Jesus' trial. We should learn from Peter that socializing with the unregenerate in a cozy manner will cause us to camouflage our real identity, thus losing out spiritually. Peter was entertained at the fire, but it caused him to shed tears of repentance less than two hours later. What might we reap in the lives of the next generation for a few hours of idleness at our community's events?

"Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord.... and I will receive you" (2 Corinthians 6:17). A clear line of separation in social and community events will be more of a preserving salt than joining in with the local fire company's pedal tractor pull for children or the youth community car wash to raise money for the poor Haitian children.

What testimony do we leave when we participate in the neighborhood two-cylinder "putt-putt" plowing day? What is communicated when we allow our children to join in the local hardware store's barrel train rides? Is our identity clear when we attend the threshers' reunion?

Perhaps these activities seem innocent enough, but a common thread in them all is their entertainment. How much better are they than farm shows or tractor pulls?

Should we participate in fundraisers such as bake and quilt sales, even when the funds are destined for a worthy cause and may be managed by other Mennonite groups? What if the fundraiser is held in the context of an antique tractor show? Although nothing is wrong with the quilts, cookies, barbecued chicken or even antique tractors, are these consistent with the Biblical teaching on sacrificial giving?

Our giving should be offered primarily to God for His glory and channeled through the brotherhood. "Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him" (1 Corinthians 16:2). A regular weekly offering in the church at Corinth eliminated the need for a fundraiser.

Community events are planned to encourage social exchange. The greater the turnout, the greater the success! But where should we find our social needs met? Is it not within the household of faith? Would not support and patronage of worldly social events constitute an unequal yoke? If we are honest with ourselves, again the answers are yes! "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness?" (2 Corinthians 6:14).

Some stores offer promotions such as free ice cream, hot dogs, or coffee as a method of attracting customers. If we happen by on that particular day or week, to accept free offers for things we may have bought is not wrong. But should Mennonites flock in for the free food and fun? Is our shopping driven by free food or by a genuine need for the items on sale? Entertainment and the free often go together and become an atmosphere with temptations like Peter's.

What similar strategies should our businesses avoid when competing for customers? Appealing to high class and the elite of society may be more profitable, but is it consistent with Biblical simplicity? Eating is a big part of sales efforts today, but is it right to take prospective customers to a restaurant for breakfast or lunch to groom them for a possible sale? What about taking our own employees out to eat once in a while? The love of eating and the fleshly indulgence compete with good stewardship and lay a snare for the soul. Spiritual priorities such as bearing the reproach of Christ are neglected and forgotten.

If we do not support community events, does that mean we are passing judgment on those who organize such events? Although our precautions are primarily for our own safety, our absence does leave a message. The world covets our patronage to assure themselves that we are all one big family. Laxness on our part will deceive them as well as ourselves. We are responsible to guard our fellowship lines and be consistent in what we support.

Paul was indeed involved in community events many times. On Mars' Hill he preached to the Greeks who loved to hear and tell some new thing. He was present during the uproar at Ephesus. He was the community centerpiece when he was stoned at Lystra. He fought with wild beasts in the

arena at Rome. But none of these situations were desirable to the flesh. Where do you fit? Do you value "the reproach of Christ" or enjoy the spirit of the world?

Brother Philip



Children's Conduct at Church

The first time a couple carries their infant into church is a memorable day. This event signals the intense church influence we intend for each child in our constituency to enjoy.

During Jesus' earthly ministry, He frequently focused on children: "Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God" (Luke 18:16). Amid a demanding schedule, Jesus blessed and cared for children with great tenderness. "Lo, children are an heritage of the LORD" (Psalm 127:3). Children are a sacred trust from God, and we may not spare any effort to expose them to the knowledge of their Creator. For children's conduct to be positive at church, a vigorous training effort must happen at home.

Telling is helping to know.

Teaching is helping to know and grow.

Training is helping to know and grow and do.'

We gather for public assembly in our churches for the praise and worship of our great God. Parents and all adults need to be role models in these meetings. Reverence for God and respect for each other must pervade the atmosphere.

Church services are geared primarily to persons in their teen and adult years. At the same time, Sunday school and Bible school classes are tailored to specific age levels. To observe a child's eagerness to attend his own class near his fourth birthday is a joy.

Babies are affected by the atmosphere of worship, especially the singing. They too are a special part of the congregation. But crying babies should be taken from the auditorium rather directly and cared for. The elderly are especially distracted by fussy infants. A bagful of toys usually generates a restless child. A single, noiseless, well-chosen toy may be in order at times. As young children become more assertive, sitting for extended periods in a church service becomes a real challenge. But home is the place to develop

this discipline. Family worship time can well be considered an abbreviated church meeting. Parents must be alert to each child's performance, requiring cooperation and full obedience. If the struggles are faced here, church performance of our children should be reasonably in place.

A minister and his wife had four young children—all about sixteen months apart in age. The mother knew it would be her responsibility to care for all four while their father was preaching. She began regular sitting sessions at home where all were required to sit quietly and keep their hands to themselves. Deviations were disciplined and then they sat some more. Today, the oldest child testifies that her childhood training was effective. The preschool child loves his class, yet he may not be allowed to run to it. He is already old enough for some simple teaching on dignity and poise.

The child now faces forward during worship rather than turning around. Giving the child a coin each week to contribute to the offering is a marvelous method to teach the joy of giving. Now is the time to work on the closed-eye practice during prayer as well as simple manners and courtesies. Children learn to extend the right hand when someone makes a move to shake their hand. They should look adults in the eye rather than at the floor. They should be holding the songbook and helping to sing familiar songs they have already learned at home.

School-age children suddenly experience an expanded world. By the time they can read, they should carry their own Bibles. At first they need help to find references. Particularly when devotional passages are read, they ought to be following. They can soon find songbook numbers and enter into the singing. In the Sunday school class, each pupil should have his written work completed. Students ought to be eager to answer questions as well as generating some of their own. An eagerness to learn should be evident. A caring parent will check with the teacher about his child's class performance.

After the service, children at this age may visit in small groups profitably if they are near enough to their parents to be monitored. Never allow a friends' circle to form with one person left standing outside. Children ought to be alert to welcome and be friendly to visiting children.

Youth have had many church conduct directives though the years. Sermon notes should be taken regularly. An interest in the children and elderly will enable youth to greet all the members by name. Visiting together in the general area as the adults and mingling among them will enhance maturity. Prolonged family visiting after services can become detrimental. The alternative is to visit more frequently in our homes.

If children are left to go without direction, they will still grow up. But if we train and nurture in the fear of the Lord and refuse to quit, God will bless our sincere effort to produce another generation for His kingdom.

Brother Elvin



The Personification of God

"The Eyes of the Lord"

"The eyes of the LORD are in every place, beholding the evil and the good" (Proverbs 15:3). What feelings does this bring? It will depend on our relationship with the Lord. Some attempt to hide. Others feel restful and secure. What makes this vast difference?

"The eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open unto their prayers: but the face of the Lord is against them that do evil" (1 Peter 3:12). Adam and Eve enjoyed walking with God and communing with Him one day, but the next day they hid from His presence. Certainly, if we have sinned against God, we have great cause for fear. Hidden sin will cause us to avoid His gaze. But let us never think that we can hide our sin from His view. God sees just the same in the darkness as in the light. "Yea, the darkness hideth not from thee; but the night shineth as the day: the darkness and the light are both alike to thee" (Psalm 139:12).

No matter how sly we are or how well we have covered our tracks, our great God always sees. "If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there" (Psalm 139:8). Jonah learned the hard way: "For the ways of man are before the eyes of the LORD, and he pondereth all his goings" (Proverbs 5:21). God sees even the motive of our actions. We must be honest with our own heart because God will hold us accountable.

Others fear "the eyes of the Lord" because they have never learned to trust Him. God seems far away and uncaring. Or they may feel as if God were standing over them, ready to punish them if they do not perform just right. These individuals are afraid to enter into a close relationship with God. So, rather than seeking reconciliation with God, they attempt to avoid His eyes. How that must grieve the heart of God, who created us to enjoy fellowship with Him!

But thanks be to God for forgiveness and restoration through Christ. His eyes of love and acceptance rest upon the saints. His precious blood paid

the price of redemption so we can be His sons and daughters. God jealously watches over His children. "The eyes of the LORD are upon the righteous, and his ears are open unto their cry" (Psalm 34:15).

God is keenly aware of our trials and will help us as we cry out to Him. How restful to know that we are constantly under His watchful, caring eye! "For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to shew himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward him" (2 Chronicles 16:9).

We can be assured of victory with God on our side. But will we live so he is on our side? Are we willing to quietly trust everything to His keeping? Those who "did that which was right in the eyes of the LORD" were blessed. For some this brought wealth and prosperity. For others it brought rest from warfare. Although we are not guaranteed physical or monetary gain if we do right, we still experience His blessings. He has promised never to leave us or forsake us if we maintain our relationship with Him. Simply to be claimed as His children brings great joy. His peace keeps our souls fixed on Him.

May we as Noah find "grace in the eyes of the LORD" and continue to place our faith and confidence in Him. As we enjoy a rich relationship with Him each day, we can someday see Him face to face.

Brother David



"Where Is ... Thy Wife?"

"And they said unto him, Where is Sarah thy wife? And he said, Behold, in the tent" (Genesis 18:9). From this brief setting, we observe two principles. The heavenly messengers addressed Abram: He was responsible for his wife's whereabouts. Also, Abram gave a good answer: Sarah was in their tent home—a suitable answer for a godly home!

In our day, the women's liberation movement pressures women to seek fulfillment outside the home. This influence may affect us and runs counter to Biblical principle. Where are our wives? What answer would we give if a heavenly messenger asked us this question?

Here are some answers that conservative Mennonites would have to give. "My wife is at home, talking on the phone." "My wife has gone shopping for the day." "My wife is tending her store." "My wife is in the barn, milk-

ing the cows." "My wife has taken the latest litter of puppies to the vet for vaccinations."

Are these answers wrong? As with all questions in life, the principles for answers are found in God's Word.

The Biblical headship order establishes the husband as the leader in the home. God created man first, and the woman was created as his help meet (Genesis 2:20). Man's leadership was also reaffirmed in the Fall. To the woman God said, "Thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee" (Genesis 3:16). The New Testament also affirms man's authority. "But I would have you know, that the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man" (1 Corinthians 11:3).

From these verses we conclude that for a woman to manage a business entirely separate from her husband's interests is inconsistent. If she does operate a store or some other type of business, it should be under her husband's leadership. He should actively participate in the decisions and finances of the business. In the world around us we meet couples where the wife's income actually exceeds the husband's. In such a setting, does the husband lead out confidently in family finances? Likely they both feel she should have an equal or even greater voice in financial decisions.

A second and nearly inseparable principle is the Biblical definition of roles. In Genesis 3 God addressed their differing roles. The wife's role is in the home, relating to the children, under her husband's leadership. The husband's role is in the field, earning the bread by the sweat of his face. The New Testament further defines the woman's role. "I will therefore that the younger women marry, bear children, guide the house, give none occasion to the adversary to speak reproachfully" (1 Timothy 5:14).

If the wife does earn money, the way it is spent will reveal her motive for earning. Should it be earmarked as "her money" for an anniversary trip or some other nonessential expenditure? Or is it applied to the family fund to cover normal living expenses of food and lodging? The virtuous woman of Proverbs 31 earned money but used it unselfishly.

Many wives assist in their husband's businesses. Some help with the milking, keep the books, or manage an aspect of the business. While her business involvement may not be a conflict of leadership roles, it may create a conflict with her role of wife, housekeeper, and mother. The question "Where is thy wife?" is addressed to the husband. Husbands should not ask their wives to do more than is wise. Her involvement in business must always be kept secondary to her greater calling of being a wife and mother in the home.

The wife's workload is too great, for example, if it limits the family size. Many in the world say, "We're just too busy to have a family." A husband should ensure that she has time to find fulfillment in homemaking and is not unduly pressured with other responsibilities. For example, she should not find it hard to enjoy hanging out the wash because other business beckons.

Likely the greatest reason to limit a mother's business involvement is so that her family's needs are not neglected. Although she may lodge strangers, relieve the afflicted, and diligently follow every good work (1 Timothy 5:10), she must keep these secondary to her greater role of motherhood. For the sake of her family she often needs to deny requests.

Being a keeper at home means limiting outside interests. Too much phone time, a demanding hobby, and extensive shopping (even in the name of housekeeping) can all hinder quality home life. Not only was Sarah in the tent; she also knew what was happening in the home. She prepared the meal; she heard the conversations.

In our materialistic age, many seek fulfillment in things. Both Christian men and women need a clear vision of eternal values. Service and sacrifice in the home will return dividends in time and eternity. "Teach the young women to be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children, to be discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God be not blasphemed" (Titus 2:4, 5).

Brother Andrew



CONGREGATIONAL OUTREACH MEANINGFUL REST HOME SERVICES

"Wednesday evening is our monthly singing at Pleasant Mountain Rest Home." Such an announcement is common in many of our congregations. How can we make these services meaningful for the residents and ourselves?

Do we appreciate this opportunity? Or do we grimace with an inner groaning, "Back there again. My week is so full already, and now I need to quit work early." Or can we be Christ-like and perk up with enthusiasm, counting it a joy and privilege to share with these needy friends.

Jesus took special interest in the impotent, blind, halt, and withered that waited on the five porches of Bethesda. He went out of His way to minister to this needy element of society. He was particularly touched with the man,

infirm for thirty-eight years, who had no man to help him.

We cannot offer healing or move the water, but we can go in Christ's spirit, seeking out those who "have no man" to help them. Some of these residents have no family to encourage them, and our interest in them points them to the One who can help. No nursing home resident where we have contact should need to say like the impotent man of Bethesda, "Sir, I have no man" to help me.

Little practical details make the service meaningful. Everyone should be on time. Late arrivals not only distract but also convey to the residents that this event had low priority in the day.

The songs should be familiar hymns of testimony, praise, and salvation. The singing will be particularly meaningful if the residents can recognize the songs and help along. This is not the place to learn or practice new songs. The audience is blessed if they can give selections even if we can sing only a verse or two by memory.

The song tempo should match the mood and message of the song. However, the older audience will be able to sing along at a slower tempo. The singing should be slower than our normal worship services.

Should there be a time of Bible reading and prayer? This works the best in facilities where residents can gather in an assembly area. The devotional leader should present simple truths about God and salvation on a level suitable to the audience. The devotions should not Christianize all that are present. Simple questions to engage the audience work well in some homes.

The length of our service should be considerate of the frail nature of the residents. The service is better too short than too long. Thirty to forty-five minutes is appropriate. A prayer at the end may forestall an unwanted round of applause.

We should mingle with and meet the residents of the home after the service. They are blessed with this interest, and they especially light up when young children step up to shake their hands. Our time is better spent inside, visiting with and encouraging the residents, than outside in the parking lot visiting among ourselves. Our purpose for coming is to share God's love with the residents. Extended visiting in the parking area is not considerate of the rest home property.

"Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me" (Matthew 25:40). Let us enter into this work with enthusiasm and joy, considering who we are serving. God is the reason we have a song to sing and the Word to share. May He receive the glory!

Brother Jonathan

Blessings of Home (Part 3)

The Sacredness of Serenity

Drop Thy still dews of quietness,
Till all our strivings cease;
Take from our souls the strain and stress,
And let our ordered lives confess
The beauty of Thy peace.

A calm, well-ordered home amidst a chaotic world is indeed the work of God. A family unit of spiritual parents, surrendered youth, and secure children finds that "time doth softly, sweetly glide, / When there's love at home."

Serene homes result from surrender to and trust in God's providence. Life will bring to our family circumstances we would not have chosen and cannot control: a terminal illness, a financial reverse, a fatal accident. Some of these experiences result from human error, some issue from the spiritual battle between God and Satan, and others occur because God's thoughts and ways are higher than ours. Regardless how trials come, we can rest in the assurance that they have been tempered by our heavenly Father. When we resign ourselves to life's refining fires, life loses much of its complexity.

Respecting God's plan of headship order yields stability and serenity: Father as the steady, understanding leader, Mother as the submissive, loving housekeeper, and secure youth and children who have learned submission to parental authority. A lack of consistency or courtesy from Father or an assertive, critical manner from Mother will likely produce disgruntled offspring. Home life without harmony produces restless youth.

Diligent housekeeping maintains serene home life. Clean, homey living quarters make family life attractive and give a necessary dignity to Christian homes. Well-mended, regularly laundered clothes on a well-combed, clean-smelling child give evidence of a faithful housekeeper. But Mother need not do it all. Even preschool-age children can be taught to keep their bedroom tidy, pick up toys, and wash dishes. Husband and wife must work together to find a balance between perfection and practicality. Decency and order should be the motto of every home.

A realistic schedule is another ingredient of a serene home. Schedules are tools to maximize efficiency and minimize frustrations. But in order to do so they must be tempered with flexibility and patience. Keeping schedule

alterations infrequent and clearly communicating when changes are necessary make home life more enjoyable for everyone.

A lack of discipline drives serenity beyond reach. Noise levels within the house must be controlled. Table manners must be cultivated. Arguments must be resolved and back talk must be punished. Human nature is not inclined toward serene behavior. It must be trained. Yet even with the most diligent efforts, no outward force can produce lasting serenity if God's presence is missing.

Serenity is not the result of a stress-free life. It is rather learning to cope with life's stresses. Few places offer more opportunities to display serenity than home.

Brother Harold



PRAYER POINT

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

*Pray that God would bless the church with a greater love for Him and
the church through the fall conferring meetings.*

Pray for the elderly among us who are experiencing pain and sorrow.

Pray for our government leaders and for those who will be elected.

Pray for the families that have been touched by the death of loved ones.

*Pray that as the cords of the church are lengthened the stakes would be
strengthened.*

*Thank God that "greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the
world."*

