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For many people in our present society, instead of being a hallowed day, the Lord's Day has become a hollow day. Instead of anticipating and preparing for collective worship on Sunday, their focus is a whole weekend of pleasure. Consequently, this holy day has become a holiday.

But as God's people, we desire to keep the Lord's Day for Him. Our church Discipline states that "the Lord's Day shall be well observed." As used here, to observe means "to celebrate or solemnize in a customary or accepted way." What are our accepted customs and practices regarding the keeping of this day?

We observe the Lord's Day by keeping it a day of worship. Very few things should keep us from our regular, timely arrival at the house of worship on a Lord's Day morning. We likewise attend the evening worship services in our home congregation, and should occasionally take the opportunity to attend evening services at other congregations.

We rightly associate spiritual fellowship with the Lord's Day. This should include not only the fellowship associated with the worship service but also the visiting we do in each other's homes. The ties of brotherhood are bound more tightly as we visit from house to house.

The Lord's Day should be a day of Christian service—the service of evangelizing the community; of visiting the sick, the widows, the elderly, and the bereaved; of bringing joy to others through singing. This day should not be marked by a cessation of activity, but by a more specific focus on spiritual activities. Observing God's creation while taking a Sunday walk may have a place, but do we need a renewed vision of the Christian service opportunities this day provides?

If the Lord's Day is to be "well observed," we will avoid labor and business as much as possible. On the typical Mennonite farm of a generation or two ago, numerous additional chores were done on Saturday so that there would be less work on Sunday. Since today fewer are farmers and most farms are more highly mechanized, we may be less likely to impress upon our children the importance of making advance preparation for Sunday.

Long-distance travel on the Lord's Day raises several concerns. Travel should never keep us from attending the Sunday morning worship service except in an emergency. Using a credit card and a self-serve pump to purchase gasoline is doing business even though it may not seem the same as

handing money to an attendant. If circumstances make Sunday travel necessary, we should have the vehicle tank filled before the Lord's Day and pack any necessary food items so that, as much as possible, we can avoid making any purchases on the Lord's Day.

Before signing a contract, we should carefully examine any provisions requiring Sunday labor. Contractual production of livestock and poultry may raise some difficult questions because we are raising their animals on our farms. Service contracts may require Sunday labor for services that can hardly be considered an emergency. We should unashamedly request exceptions so that any Sunday labor and business activity is consistent with our regard for this day.

We must guard lest, while living in a society that has little regard for the Lord's Day, our own consciences become dulled and we fail to give this day the distinction and reverence we should. Are we keeping our consciences keen? Are we instilling these concepts in our growing children? Keeping the Lord's Day holy is a pertinent subject for every generation of God's people. In an article printed in *The Sword and Trumpet* (January 1936), Ernest G. Gehman addressed Sunday labor, business, travel, and pleasure seeking. While new challenges confront us, the illustrations were not significantly different from what we face. Among other things, he said:

"Of course there are occasions and mishaps which are totally unexpected, but let us not be too ready to put whatever happens in the ox-in-the-ditch class. If our ox gets in too often, it might be good to leave him there a Sunday or two, just to teach him a lesson. And if that doesn't help, we might fill up the ditch or get a new ox...."

"Let us make the Lord's day just as attractive spiritually as it can be made. Let us delight in attending public worship. Let us make the day interesting to children by reading for them and singing with them. Let us visit the sick and the widows, and joyously do works of mercy and Christian service of every possible kind.

"Let us show the world what they miss by not observing the Lord's Day. Let us by our example demonstrate that it is a day for the soul and that men need God's day to remind them that they are more than flesh—that they are not bodies, but souls."

—JSM



"Is There Any Word From The LORD?"

"Then Zedekiah the king . . . asked [Jeremiah] secretly in his house, and said, Is there any word from the LORD? And Jeremiah said. There is" (Jeremiah 37:17). Zedekiah was not an obedient king, so we may wonder why he asked this question when he probably had no intention of obeying. He asked secretly because he did not want his princes to know that he had talked to Jeremiah. (Read the whole story in Jeremiah 37)

Over 2,600 years later, we should ask this same question. But we must ask with due respect and the desire to obey. The answer is the same: "There is!" God has never left His people without a word from Him. What word has He given us today?

God has given us His written Word, the Bible. We have Bibles in abundance. This is our "word from the LORD"! Wicked men have often attempted to totally destroy it, yet God, who wants His people to have His Word, has preserved it. History demonstrates and evil men have discovered the truth of Gamaliel's statement: "If it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it" (Acts 5:39).

God preserved His written Word because it is timeless, as pertinent today as when it was written. It is pertinent to every era and culture. As we read and study the Word, God will help us find the answers to life's questions. Though civilization makes significant advances with modern ideas and inventions, and our society is supposedly enlightened with new spiritual revelations, God's Word never changes. It is true and sure, regardless whether man is willing to accept it or not.

God's written Word is the gentle guide for the seeker. "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path" (Psalm 119:105). But His Word is also the judge for the sinner. Romans 2:12 warns that "as many as have sinned in the law shall be judged by the law." God's Word will be the Law in that last great day, wreaking vengeance on the sinner and bringing perfect justice to all.

The Bible is the surest word that we have from the Lord. God does speak to us in other ways, but these are always subject to the principles of His written Word. If what we are hearing does not measure up to the Bible, it is not a "word from the LORD." God cannot contradict Himself.

God has "spoken unto us by his Son" (Hebrews 1:2). The Person of Jesus Christ is God's Word. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.... And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us.... full of grace and truth" (John 1:1, 14). Jesus left us a

perfect example. Like Him we should live non-resistant lives, return good for evil, serve sacrificially, love all men unconditionally, and obey authority. This is the "word from the LORD" to the New Testament church!

God speaks to us through His Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit lives in every true believer's heart. Jesus promised this "word from the LORD" to His disciples before He went away: "But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost.... shall teach you all things" (John 14:26). We reject God's Word when we go against the promptings of the Spirit. When we have quieted the promptings often enough, the Spirit may no longer speak to us. What a dangerous place to be!

Because Satan presents himself as an angel of light, we must make certain that we are listening to the right spirit. "Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world" (1 John 4:1). If a spirit is telling us to violate God's written Word, we can know that it is not the Holy Spirit. God cannot contradict Himself. We should be sensitive to the voice of conscience and the advice of spiritual brethren.

God gives us His word through the church. The early church received "decrees for to keep, that were ordained of the apostles and elders which were at Jerusalem" (Acts 16:4). When the church speaks to current issues and makes applications to Scriptural principles, we have received a "word from the LORD."

Through sermons, Sunday school classes, and topics, God uses faithful brethren to share the word that He has given them. This word is based on the written Word, clarifying and defining it, applying it to our everyday lives. Because we receive the spoken word as a "word from the LORD," we must be very careful to whom we listen. Thank God for Spirit-filled brethren whom we can trust to share only the true Word of the Lord with us.

If we pay attention, God will speak to us through nature. Take time to watch a pair of birds fledge their brood. Study the stars. Ponder what makes the seedlings come through the ground in the spring. Smell the roses. Admire the beautiful hues of the rainbow, and stand in awe of the powerful lightning and majestic thunder. What is God saying? He is declaring that He is in control and that He will take care His own. 'Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear ye not therefore, ye are of more value than many sparrows" (Matthew 10:29-31).

God can speak to us through the circumstances of life. An accident or illness claims the life of a loved one, or perhaps claims our own health and vitality. We may suffer paralyzing financial reverses or devastating material losses. Is God telling us that we have not been trusting Him fully? that He wants our complete attention? Are we open to His Word as Job was when he suffered all those things and more? He "fell down upon the ground, and worshipped, and said, ...the LORD gave, and the LORD hash taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD" (Job 1:20-21).

Do we have a "word from the LORD"? We do! The Bible, the Spirit, the church, the preaching of the Gospel, the details of nature, and the circumstances of life all bear a "word from the LORD." Will we obey it? If we do, God's Word will guide us through life instead of condemn us at the end of life. "He that is of God heareth God's words" (John 8:47).

Brother Luke



When Boys Become Men

One of the great blessings God has bestowed upon mankind is the blessing of children. Countless times, their open innocence and trust has caused an adult to meditate on nobler things. Their simple faith in the wisdom of their parents has also proven to be a valuable lesson for many.

Probably most adults occasionally muse upon cherished childhood memories. The memories may include lessons learned, life-changing happenings, or occasions that brought us either much happiness or great sorrow. But one fact that cannot be avoided is that those happenings are in the past; much has changed since then.

What is the difference between childhood and adulthood? What happens when boys become men? There is growth and development in body, in intellect, and in understanding. The body changes from small and helpless to developed and useful. The innocent mind awakens to the facts of responsibility and accountability, not only to the parents but also to God. Things that once had little value now begin to make sense—to take on new meaning.

As boys become men, they grow in their understanding and perception. A child views the deeper truths of Scripture rather vaguely, but as his understanding develops, he comes to see them face to face. With that under-

standing comes the realization that there is much more to learn—more, in fact, than can be learned in a lifetime. An adolescent takes a big step in his own development toward maturity when he understands that the reason his parents do not know everything is that they are still learning themselves.

Time also brings experience. A normal fifteen-year-old has a fuller understanding of right and wrong than a three-year-old. Time has brought enough experiences to develop that understanding. A properly trained adult will have realized long ago that kicking and screaming when the will is crossed results in more pain. He will also realize that to be concerned only about himself results in unhappiness and loneliness.

Some people say, "Boys will be boys." But boys will become men. To become men of character, they must begin acting manly as they leave childhood. Reflecting on his experience, Paul testified, "When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things" (1 Corinthians 13:11). In becoming men, boys must put away the playthings of childhood and accept the responsibilities of manhood.

When is the line crossed between boyhood and manhood? When has a boy truly become a man? Unfortunately, no distinct, single step defines an individual's development status. The march to manhood is a path that is taken, not a line that is crossed. It is a process, not an instantaneous occurrence. How sad indeed when boys attempt to become men in a single, sudden step, such as when they declare their marriage vows or when their children start to display a carnal will!

The path to manhood is shortened when children are raised in a godly home environment. For some boys the path has been shortened considerably by difficult circumstances such as the loss of a parent or a life-changing accident. But the path cannot be avoided altogether. No single step makes one a man. This is a path that every boy should embark upon with resignation, determination, and anticipation.

Time stops for nothing. Today's children will become tomorrow's adults. Will these adults be mature, or will they be simply overgrown children? Will they have gained a proper perspective of life, or will they discover that they are ill prepared?

Brother Linford



" *With Good Advice Make War*"

This noteworthy proverb (Proverbs 20:18) was penned in the Old Testament setting. Before a king declared war on another nation, he did well to seek counsel as he considered the involvements of such a move. Did he have a legitimate reason to make war? Did he have sufficient resources to reasonably expect victory? Was his plan of approach logical? Other persons not as closely involved in the emotions of the moment could help the king more accurately evaluate these matters. If they thought the move a wise one, the king could move ahead with greater confidence and "with good advice make war."

This proverb also has applications for us. As New Testament believers, we follow Christ's teaching of nonresistance and do not "make war." But we make many decisions that have far-reaching implications. In facing the questions and challenges of life, we benefit from good advice. For God's people today, the proverb could read, "With good advice, serve on the mission field" or "With good advice, purchase that farm." We need and we seek good advice because "with the well advised is wisdom" (Proverbs 13:10).

Everyone needs good advice. David benefited from the advice of Abigail. "Blessed be thy advice, . . . which halt kept me this day from coming to shed blood" (1 Samuel 25:33). Young people need the advice of their parents. Parents can benefit greatly from the insights of grandparents as they endeavor to provide for and raise their families. Grandparents need the input of their children in relating to the decisions that come with old age.

Schoolteachers benefit from the advice of co-teachers and the school board. Employers and employees are bettered by the advice and suggestions they give to each other. Church leaders rely on the insights of their fellow leaders and church members to lead the church effectively. No one is exempt from needing good advice.

Seeking good advice must be preceded by prayer. When facing major decisions, we must first implore the wisdom and direction of God. One of the ways God reveals His will to us is through the counsel of others. Spending time in prayer helps us to go to the right sources for advice and also prepares our spirit for receiving that advice.

Good advice must be sought in a spirit of humility. Am I committed to following the direction I receive even if it runs counter to my thinking? Sometimes seeking good advice necessitates sharing personal information. Am I humble enough to share the needed details with a trustworthy brother

so he can give effective counsel? When we find ourselves in personal straits, turning to the professional world of counselors who do not know us may seem easier. While this may have its place at times, sharing humbly with church brethren many times results in much more sound and beneficial advice. "With the lowly is wisdom" (Proverbs 11:2).

Good advice can be obtained from various sources. Youth must regularly seek the counsel and direction of their parents. Whether choosing a life's companion, pursuing a job opportunity, or considering Voluntary Service work, youth need parental advice. As young people marry and begin their own homes, they still need their parents' advice.

We have been blessed with a brotherhood that has been given many perspectives of life. Much of the advice we need can be found right within our own brotherhood. Faithful fathers and mothers who have raised their families for the Lord can give insights and pointers to the young parents of today. Faithful parents who have needed to relate to wayward children can encourage others in a similar situation.

Even in the continuing modernization of our day, older businessmen among us can still give valuable advice to the young man seeking to start his own enterprise. Seasoned schoolteachers can share directives and tips with the rising generation of teachers. Beyond that, we have faithful church leaders ordained of God to lead and direct His people. We do well to share spiritual or emotional struggles with our minister to find help. We must involve the local deacon in the financial crises we face. Church leaders have wise counsel and can direct us in seeking further good advice.

We should proceed with caution and reservation when we consider seeking advice from the world. Business seminars, agricultural meetings, counseling services, and specialized support groups abound in the world around us. Can the Christian safely use these services? Our Master's word, "My kingdom is not of this world" (John 18:36), should caution us. Many of the world's philosophies run counter to Scriptural principles. For example, some of the promoted advertising schemes and techniques simply do not fit with a humble and honest Christian business.

The socializing that accompanies many of these events also poses a threat to the Christian. Many times a meal is offered to provide a time of socializing. How much can we mingle and socialize with the world and still maintain a clear separation in thought and practice? "Come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord" (2 Corinthians 6:17).

Perhaps an even more subtle danger comes from so-called Anabaptist-based advisory groups. These arrangements bring individuals together

from various religious circles, seeking to unite them behind some basic Bible doctrines. While we acknowledge some of the good intentions and goals behind these arrangements, a tremendous ecumenical pressure exists in such settings. These pressures may affect our thinking as we conclude, "These 'brethren' believe the Bible and seek to practice it as we do. Yet their position on technology and nonconformity is not as radical as my church's position. Are all my church's standards necessary for one to be a sincere Christian?" These thought processes can be beginning steps to an unrest and dissatisfaction with one's own spiritual life and church setting. Once again, much of the advice we need can be and must be found within the circle of our own brotherhood.

Good advice will sometimes vary in its voice. One brother may encourage Brother John to serve on the mission field as requested. Another brother cautions Brother John to consider the age of his children and the influences that exist on the field. Perhaps now is not the time to go. Can the counsel of both brethren be called "good advice"? Yes, one benefit of seeking advice from several sources is getting various perspectives on the matter. This helps us to more fairly analyze the involvements and to reach a safe decision. "In the multitude of counsellors there is safety" (Proverbs 11:14).

Life's decisions can be difficult, but as we seek and accept good advice, we can proceed with confidence and "make war." Let us be faithful in using this valuable resource God has provided for our direction and safety.

Brother Nelson



The Tract Committee

Under the oversight of the Publication Board, the Tract Committee consists of a small group of brethren who meet several times a year in the interest of publishing tracts.

Because a large number of tracts are already available from several conservative Mennonite publishing houses, we may ask the obvious question "Is there really a need for more new tracts?" We understand that an evangelistic effort helps maintain a healthy church life. The Tract Committee represents an effort to meet any tract needs that the Literature Evangelism Committee (or other individuals) may experience. Also, the passing of time

can place a dated feel upon the literature. Part of our goal is to keep fresh, current literary pieces available for distribution. A summary of our work follows.

First, new tract ideas and possible titles are brought to a meeting. These ideas may originate in a number of different ways—personal inspiration of a Bible truth, an idea that an individual suggested, comments from reviewers about the need for a better tract on any given subject, or requests for a specific subject in tract form. We check to see if any recent tracts are available on the suggested subject, and we try to evaluate whether the new idea could fill a place.

Upon Publication Board approval, a writer is assigned and the tract is written, sent to our tract editor, and finally brought back to the Committee. Our goal is to provide a four-to six-page article, written in a captivating, easy-to-follow style. We generally aim for a fairly elementary treatment of the subject, because the audience in focus is usually a street reader. After we are satisfied with the document, the tract goes through a number of doctrinal reviews. Then it moves to the artwork department for the front cover. Finally, the tract is published. Tracts published by the Committee are subsidized by Eastern Mennonite Publishers' Evangelistic Literature Fund.

At this time a number of tracts are in the final stages of publishing. Several of these titles are *"Things That Do Not Change," "Perilous Times Shall Come," "Where Were the Life Preservers? Keys to Emotional Health,"* and *"No Fear of God."*

We welcome your comments and suggestions for this work. Certainly the seed we plant will someday yield a priceless harvest of souls. "So then neither is he that planteth anything, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase" (1 Corinthians 3:7).

Brother Brian for the Tract Committee



First Things (Part 3) The Responsibility of Self- Examination

"Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye" (Matthew 7:5).

He was a typical dump truck driver. He kept an eye on his gauges and mirrors. He even had an accident-free record. But today he was noticing other motorists. That car turned without using a signal. That van had a burned-out headlight. That truck should have had a red flag attached to the

long lumber protruding over the tailgate. Then, without warning, a tremendous BANG! jolted him to a startling reality. His own dump bed had crept up to a deadly height where it struck a massive bridge beam. He could have seen it in his mirrors, but he failed to look.

Surely you have never seen a two-by-four lodged in a human eye. But this hyperbole is startlingly realistic in Christian relationships. We must first deal with faults in our own lives before trying to correct the faults of others.

A beam in the eye is like a mind block. Sometimes a young person has difficulty accepting the truth of the minister's message. Some idiosyncrasy gets in the way—the way he clears his throat or combs his hair. Thou hypocrite! Take notes on your minister's sermon before concluding that it contains little spiritual food.

Consider yourself. Mow your own yard before concluding that the neighborhood looks neglected. First strike up a conversation with the visitors at church before examining them for signs of snobbery. Invite your church families to dinner before deciding that they are the "problem makers." Pray for your church leaders first; it will prevent unsanctified criticism of their directions.

Years ago, surgeons did not sterilize their scalpels between surgeries. Their lack of cleanliness affected others, and many lives were lost. Will the church offer effective solutions to the world's problems if it has not dealt with its own inconsistencies? Will Mennonite youth be motivated to embrace the faith of their fathers if their elders strive against each other?

Is it not significant that beams and motes tend to cause more irritation to the onlookers than to the owners? The beam in your own eye should cause more discomfort than the thought of a mote in your brother's eye. Furthermore, if a splinter in your brother's eye readily irritates you, what damage might a beam in your own eye do to a weaker brother?

Jesus did not condemn splinter extraction. A brother's keeper will sincerely want to help clean up faults in the brotherhood. But the brotherly address works best when brethren with blameless character help each other in the spirit of charity and humility. "Thou therefore which teachest another, teachest thou not thyself? thou that preachest a man should not steal, dost thou steal?" (Romans 2:21).

—*Brother John*



PRAYER POINT

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

Pray for our youth who are seeking marriage partners. Christian courtship should lay a solid foundation for godly marriages and Christian homes.

Pray that our youth may "abstain from fleshly lusts that war against the soul."

Pray for the fall council meetings that precede our Communion services. Giving our personal testimony of peace and our word of support to the church is good spiritual therapy. Pray that all members would respond in sincerity and truth.

Pray for the semiannual conferring meeting to be hosted by the Lebanon District at Ashland. These meetings help keep our ministry and churches informed and connected. Pray that a spirit of Scriptural peace and unity may be nurtured.

Thank the Lord for the privilege of open school doors. We are reminded of our religious freedoms and our accountability for nurturing the rising generation. We should daily remember our schools in our prayers.



**Those who leave everything in God's hand
will see God's hand in everything.**

