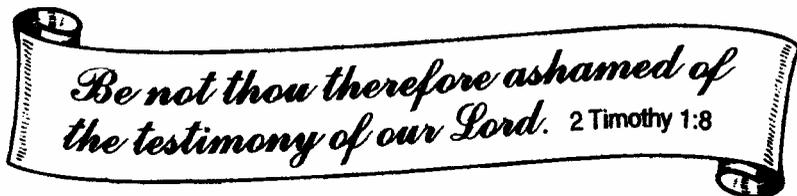


# THE EASTERN MENNONITE TESTIMONY

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## **Divine Forgiveness.**

One word that sets Christianity apart from any other religion is forgiveness. No god of man's vain imagination is presented as being forgiving as is the true God. "Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage? he retaineth not his anger for ever, because he delighteth in mercy" (Micah 7:18).

Atheism, the humanistic teaching that denies that God exists, certainly offers no forgiveness. If there would be no God to forgive us, there would be no forgiveness transcending the human level. On the human level forgiveness would become relative and dependent upon conditions established by each person's feelings.

The dualistic religions of the ancient Greeks offered the small hope that if you could somehow appease the anger of the many fierce gods with sacrifices, you might be spared their wrath. But no assurance was given that this would actually be accomplished.

The pantheistic religions such as Hinduism and Buddhism offer only a supposed chance at doing better in future lives as one struggles to move up the ladder of reincarnation. For them there is no such

thing as a clean slate. They teach that you get another chance only by reincarnation into some form of life over which you have little control.

Islam offers its followers the false hope that somehow one's good works will outweigh his failures on the balance scales that Allah is said to use to determine justice for each person.

Some of this nation's founding fathers were deists. They believed that God created this world. But for some reason unknown to man, He then withdrew, leaving the universe to itself. They believed that we are on our own to fend for ourselves with no help from above, no real purpose in life, and ultimately no hope for the future, because God is not interested in us anymore.

But the true God, the God revealed in the Bible, is interested in His people. He is present and is aware of our conflicts and troubles. He is so concerned about humanity that two millennia ago, His Son became one of us so that He could experience firsthand our trials and tribulations and ultimately die to provide forgiveness for all who would truly seek it. God became man so that He could reconcile us to Himself. The miracle of the Incarnation of Christ was born in the holy mind of God.

Man and woman were created perfect and good in Eden. In fact, they were Godlike. "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him-, male and female created he them" (Genesis 1:27). Absolutely no blemishes marred them physically, emotionally, socially, or spiritually. They lived in a world where all things were perfect, complete, unblemished, and faultless. In such a world forgiveness was hardly a word as there was no need for it.

Sin marred that perfect world. God and man were no longer at one with each other; they were now separated. Man was separated from his fellow men—Adam even blamed Eve for his failure. And man, having become carnal, was also divided within himself in many ways, desiring to do right and not finding the power to do so (Romans 7). Forgiveness became imperative.

The only possibility for man to find a way out of the resultant chaos of sin was and is to follow the way God provided. The bridge back to God is the cross of Calvary, upon which the Lamb of God forgave those who put Him there. "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." Forgiveness is offered to any who will come to Him in true sorrow for their sins and by faith accept it freely.

Even before dying on the cross, while Jesus lived among sinful men and women, He offered this forgiveness. The man lying on his bed, sick of the palsy was told, "Son.... thy sins be forgiven thee." That statement may have been more than he expected. He came to be healed, and he received both healing and forgiveness.

The woman taken in adultery heard those forgiving words from Jesus, "Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more." Those kind words must have been a healing balm upon her sin-scarred soul. They must have been the kindest words that she had heard in a long time. Her accusers had only criticism and faultfinding; Jesus had forgiveness for her.

The thief hanging beside Jesus on his cross had a change of heart in the latter stages of his crucifixion. "Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom." Jesus' answer, "Verily I say unto thee, To day shalt thou be with me in paradise," reveals His complete and absolute forgiveness to this poor, dying soul.

God takes us as we are when we come to Him in true repentance. He gives us a clean slate, a new beginning, a new day. He forgives us completely. The words of one elementary schoolteacher say it so well:

He came to my desk with a quivering lip;  
The lesson was done.  
"Have you a new sheet for me, dear teacher?  
I've spoiled this one."  
I took his sheet all soiled and blotted  
And gave him a new one all unspotted.  
Then into his tired heart I smiled,  
"Do better now, my child!"

I came to the throne with a trembling heart;  
The day was done.  
"Have you a new day for me, dear Master?  
I've spoiled this one."  
He took my day all soiled and blotted  
And gave me a new one all unspotted.  
Then into my tired heart He smiled,  
"Do better now, my child!"  
Every day we owe a debt of gratitude to God,  
to thank Him for His forgiveness.

*C.L. Lancaster, PA*



## **Things That Never Change.**

We are accustomed to frequent change. Time moves on and brings changes. We age with the passing of time. Infants grow to become children. Those who seemingly were school students yesterday are now youth. Those who recently were young parents find themselves to be grandparents. Technology brings about changes such as the computer and cell phone. The presidents of a country change. There are changes from our birth to our death.

Some changes are good, such as the change brought by the new birth in Christ. Other changes are bad, such as the change in the life of a youth who leaves his home because he resents the restrictions of godly parents. Many changes are a result of the Fall of Man in the Garden of Eden. Some changes in themselves are neither good nor bad. Aging is a reality that we cannot remedy. Many of the changes in this category can be a benefit to us if we consider them from an eternal perspective.

There are also things that never change.

**God never changes.** "For I am the LORD, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed" (Malachi 3:6). God is always the same. He loves the good and abhors the evil. He blesses the faithful and punishes those that persist in doing wrong. His attributes of love, justice, and judgment have been the same for all ages. God is eternal; He has neither birth nor death. It is difficult to comprehend that God does not even grow weary. "The everlasting God, the LORD, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary" (Isaiah 40:28). Jesus, the second Person of the Trinity, never changes either. "Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever" (Hebrews 13:8).

**God's Word never changes.** "For ever, O LORD, thy word is settled in heaven" (Psalm 119:89). Ever since Creation until now, God has revealed Himself to man by His audible voice or His written Word. King Jehoiakim tried to burn God's Word. The authorities of various countries have attempted to confiscate it. However, God's Word can neither be changed nor destroyed. God's Word "is settled in heaven"; therefore, it will endure even when the elements of this world "shall melt with fervent heat" (2 Peter 3:12).

**God's will for man never changes.** "He hath sheaved thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?" (Micah 6:8). God's requirements are very simple, but they require a heart that is completely surrendered to God. Jesus summarized the Law with two short commandments: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart," and "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself" (Mark 12:29-31). These divine commandments do not change with time, nor do they change if man refuses to obey them.

How does the fact that there are two covenants relate to this truth? The Old Testament, as well as the New Testament, is part of the eternal purpose of God. The Old Testament Law in itself was never complete; rather it served as "our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ" (Galatians 3:24). All the Old Testament sacrifices pointed to Christ, the fulfillment of the Law and the propitiation for the sins of all humanity. Therefore, both covenants have one important purpose. However, since the New Testament has fulfilled the Old, the New is our guide today.

**God's promises never change.** The promises of God have been an inspiration and comfort to the people

of God in every generation. God has promised His presence, His help, and His protection. There is pardon for every sinner that cries to God in repentance. The promise that Christ will soon return is a steadfast promise that has not yet been realized. We can trust in these promises as we comply with the conditions that accompany them.

**Final destinies never change.** There are only two paths in life, the broad road that leads to destruction and the narrow way that leads to life eternal. There are also only two masters. If we live for God, crucifying our carnal desires and accepting the provision of salvation through Christ, we will reach heaven, the eternal rest of the redeemed. If we live for Satan and self, thereby rejecting the love and mercy that God extends to us, we will be cast into the lake of fire, which is the second death.

The fact that God never changes gives us stability and inspires us to faithfulness. Following are some aspects of our lives that should not change.

Our commitment to God should never change. In our baptismal vows, we have promised "to faithfully abide in the same until death." This commitment strengthens us, even when difficulties face us.

Our commitment to the church should not change. If we are part of a Biblical, spiritual church, we

should support it loyally. Criticizing the church and moving from one church to another produces instability in us and in our families. Should we find ourselves in a church setting that has apostatized or does not fulfill the clear teachings of the Bible, it would be necessary to find a Scriptural church setting. Such a change should always be accompanied by much prayer and the counsel of faithful brethren.

Our commitment to our spouse should not change. When a man and a woman are married, God joins them and "they twain shall be one flesh" as long as they both live. According to the teachings of Jesus, divorce and remarriage are not options. A commitment that never changes extends love, pardon, and patience to our spouse.

Our word should not change. We should be known as honest people who keep our word. It is possible to forget a promise that we have made, or circumstances could make it impossible to fulfill the promise. In this case, we should promptly speak to those involved and arrive at an agreement.

We should also be slow to make other changes. Moving from one place to another or frequently changing occupations can produce instability. It is also good to have a fairly scheduled time for rising in the morning and for retiring for the

night. It brings rest to the family if everyone knows the time to eat and takes his place with the family around the table. We should also be slow to accept new technology. A time of observation gives us time to analyze its impact on our spiritual lives.

God never changes. At times, changes are necessary for us. We

should always analyze the changes from an eternal perspective. May we find peace and stability in our daily lives from a God that never changes.

*S.B. Arroyo Claro, Paraguay Translated and reprinted from Sendas Derechas, published by Eastern Mennonite Publications.*



## *Lord, Give Us Christian Homes*

Lord, give us Christian homes!  
Homes where the Bible is loved and taught,  
Homes where the Master's will is sought,  
Homes crowned with beauty Thy love hath wrought;  
Lord, give us Christian homes!  
Lord, give us Christian homes!  
Homes where the father is true and strong,  
Homes that are free from the blight of wrong,  
Homes that are joyous with love and song;  
Lord, give us Christian homes!  
Lord, give us Christian homes!  
Homes where the mother, in queenly quest,  
Strives to show others Thy way is best,  
Homes where the Lord is an honored guest;  
Lord, give us Christian homes!  
Lord, give us Christian homes!  
Homes where the children are led to know  
Christ in His beauty Who loves them so,  
Homes where the alter fires burn and glow;  
Lord, give us Christian homes!

—B. B. McKinney

## **The Value of Preserving Traditions.**

Traditional practices, those practices passed down from one generation to another, are found in every culture. They are part of people's lives whether or not they live according to the Bible. We do not live completely without tradition but rather decide whose or what traditions we will follow.

Traditional practices are harmful if we view them as being able to provide for our salvation or if keeping them conflicts with the teaching of God's Word. Paul condemned traditions that are inconsistent with Christian doctrine. "Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ" (Colossians 2:8). Traditional practices are also detrimental if they are used as a substitute for spiritual life or to hide a spiritual need. Jesus severely rebuked the Pharisees for making the "commandment of God of none effect by [their] tradition" (Matthew 15:1-9).

The Scriptures, however, place sound traditions in a very favorable light. Paul commended the church at Corinth for keeping the ordinances (1 Corinthians 11:2). The Greek word translated ordinances in this passage is trans-fated tradi-

tions in the following Scriptures. Paul encouraged his readers to "stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught" (2 Thessalonians 2:15). He further commanded them to "withdraw [themselves] from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us" (2 Thessalonians 3:6).

Traditions fit into several categories. Some traditions are direct Bible commands. The ordinances are examples of this type of tradition. Other traditions are the result of practically applying commands of the Scriptures.

Another category of traditions is those that are neither outlined in the Scriptures nor written in our Rules and Discipline yet have become standard and valuable practices among us. An example of this is maintaining a touch with the agrarian way of life through gardening.

What is the value of preserving Scriptural traditions?

Preserving Scriptural traditions is an aid in maintaining spiritual life. One can maintain an empty form and be devoid of spiritual life. However, it is impossible to maintain spiritual life for any length of time without an outer form that expresses it. When Scriptural traditions are laid aside, it is not long until the world's traditions are prac-

ticed at the expense of Scriptural obedience.

Preserving Scriptural traditions is an aid in maintaining godly worship practices. Traditional Scriptural worship practices such as Gospel preaching, a cappella singing, kneeling prayer, and segregated seating make their contribution to reverence for God and encourage holy living. They help us to avoid contemporary worship practices that often result both in irreverence for God and sacred things and in a casual way of life.

Preserving Scriptural traditions promotes a life of stability. Preserving traditions will help us keep our moorings in a fast-changing world that is increasingly open to experimentation, even in matters of right and wrong. A traditional mindset is not opposed to all change, but recognizes that much can be lost through experimentation. By the time the experiment has proven to be a failure, valuable time has been lost, and correcting the course is difficult.

Life is far too short to learn everything for ourselves; it is much better to build on the tried and proven. Change should be accepted only when, after careful evaluation, it is proven to be for the better and is in harmony with the Word of God.

Preserving Scriptural traditions protects from worldly accommoda-

tion. We practice the ordinance of the Holy Kiss as commanded by the Scriptures and believe that it contributes to preserving true love in the brotherhood. Our Rules and Discipline states that it "should be practiced when meeting for worship as well as when meeting for social fellowship." This practice is being threatened by the social embrace, especially at weddings, viewings, and funerals. Maintaining a consistent observance of the Holy Kiss will help protect against this worldly social tradition.

Preserving Scriptural traditions helps the church project a uniform testimony. Consider the variation that would result if each individual decided what pattern of dress was modest or what type of veiling meets the Scriptural requirements. The Scriptures admonish us to stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel" (Philippians 1:27). Such unity leaves a powerful and convincing testimony to the world about us.

Preserving Scriptural traditions helps us make consistent applications to issues the Bible does not specifically address. Where the Scriptures are not specific as to the details of their practice, the church is responsible to give direction. For example, the Bible clearly states that the Christian woman's head is to be veiled but does not specify

how the covering is to be made. The church has prescribed a style and pattern that meets the Biblical requirement and has become a traditional practice for our church group.

Preserving Scriptural traditions provides a frame of reference to guide the rising generation. Undoubtedly, practices we have learned in our childhood fill a major role in how we live today. Scriptural traditions such as family worship, enjoyable and regular family mealtimes, child-training methods, and regular church attendance fill a vital place in directing our lives.

Preserving Scriptural traditions prepares us to face future tests to our faith. Traditional practices make a contribution to strengthening convictions. Wearing plain clothes helps us bear the cross that accompanies a life of separation and helps us to practice separation

in other areas of life. If we can be helped to faithfulness in these areas today, we will more likely be faithful in the tests that we will face in the future.

What can be done to help the rising generation be convinced of the value of Scriptural traditions? Scriptural traditions are preserved by thoroughly teaching the principles of the Scriptures. These principles must be applied to our lives and reinforced by consistent Christian living. Inconsistent living seriously undermines appreciation for Scriptural tradition. When a traditional practice is a part of church standards, it must also be upheld through church discipline.

A proper understanding and appreciation of Scriptural tradition makes a significant contribution to a faithful life and helps to maintain the faith "once delivered unto the saints." *J.N. Peach Bottom, PA*



## Seasoned Speech (Part 6)

**Apples of Gold** *By: M.S.G.*

*A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in pictures of silver" (Proverbs 25:11).*

The visiting preacher was eloquent and preached a powerful sermon. But to two people in his audience, it soon became obvious that he was

preaching only part of the truth.

They waited quietly until the worship service was over, invited him into their home, and with carefully chosen words, explained to him the missing truths.

This account, found in Acts 18:24-28, illustrates well the effect of "a

word fitly spoken." To be fitly spoken, the right words must be spoken at the right time, in the right place, for the right reason, and in the right manner. By asking **What, When, Where, Why and How** about the words Aquila and Priscilla spoke, we gain a clear picture of the beauty of fitly spoken words.

**What?** Aquila and Priscilla expounded the "way of God" to Apollos. For a word to be fitly spoken, it must be based on God's unchanging truth. We may have our opinions, ideas, and viewpoints, but words of value always point to eternal truth.

**When?** Aquila and Priscilla understood the urgency of fitly spoken words. "When [they] had heard" tells us they wasted no time. The iron was hot, so they struck. For words to be effective, they must be spoken when needed. Too often we procrastinate, thinking a better opportunity to speak will come. Let us not put off till tomorrow the word someone needs today.

**Where?** While the need was urgent, Aquila and Priscilla waited to speak until "they took him unto them." While a public correction may have benefited other listeners, it also may have humiliated and alienated Apol-

los. How much more effective it was to instruct Apollos in private and allow him to publicly finish his message! Fitly spoken words are spoken at the right time and at the right place.

**Why?** Words fitly spoken are spoken for the glory of God and the benefit of others. Aquila and Priscilla had no desire for public recognition for their words. When our words are spoken for God, common though they may seem, God can polish them to shine like beautiful golden apples.

**How?** Aquila and Priscilla explained the way of God "more perfectly" to Apollos. This carries the idea of "exactness." They spoke carefully and plainly, yet tactfully enough that Apollos readily accepted the truth. So often we speak right words in a wrong way. A humble demeanor and a loving tone of voice may communicate more than the words themselves. May our speech be "always with grace, seasoned with salt," so others find our words palatable.

`Apples of gold in pictures of silver" not only feast the eyes but also please the taste buds and nourish the body. May our words, likewise, be beautiful, sweet, and edifying



## *Dear Child, I Understand*

"O Lord, the way You're taking me  
Is long and dark and stony too.  
The thorns are thick, the nights alone.  
I'm full of fear. What shall I do?  
My faith is small. My hope is dim.  
I doubt that I can make it through."

"Dear child:" the soothing whisper comes,  
"I've walked this path—the whole bleak road.  
The way is long? But you forget  
For thirty years, I bore the load.  
The way is dark? Oh, yes, I know,  
'Twas darkness while My lifeblood flowed.

"The way is stony 'neath your feet?  
Do you forget I fell one day,  
Upon the stones strewn in your way?  
My cross was more than flesh could bear.  
The thorns are thick? Ah, you forget—  
The thorns upon My brow did stay.

"The nights alone, so dark, so cold,  
So drear and long? How well I know!  
The many nights I prayed till morn  
For your dear sake My tears did flow.  
And only God could know the pain,  
And thus His precious grace bestow.

"Your faith is small, your fear is great,  
And no one seems to understand?  
Do you forget, child of the dust,  
I also asked God's guiding hand  
To take the cup that I must drink—  
In ease return to glory land?

"Take courage, fearful, faltering one.  
I know your fears, your sighs, your tears.  
The burden was not meant for you  
To bear alone—for I am near,  
And I will lead you safely on  
If you will trust to Me your fear."

—E.M.