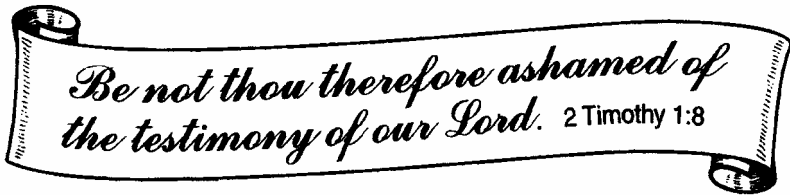


THE EASTERN MENNONITE TESTIMONY

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The God-ordained ceremonies of the Old Testament contain a wealth of inspiration. "The water of separation" was a God-prescribed method of recognizing the confession of defilement and finding cleansing (Numbers 19). Human nature has not changed, and God's principles relating to the absolution of sin are remarkably similar.

Sin can be cleansed only through the work of Christ. All three ingredients of this cleansing water point to the attributes and death of our beloved, cleansing Redeemer. Perfect red heifers without spot or hair of any other color were prized genetic stock. The Egyptians worshiped the red bull. Jesus is our priceless, spotless sacrifice. "For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh: how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?" (Hebrews 9:13, 14).

The cedar wood, hyssop, and scarlet used in this ceremony were a triplet used in many ceremonies that typify the work of the Trinity in providing sanctification. The royal but mortal nature of cedar wood portrays the humanity of Christ. "For he shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground" (Isaiah 53:2). Cedar was a precious wood that was resistant to insects and rot. It was the main frame of Solomon's temple, which prefigures the church.

Hyssop was a small brush like plant (1 Kings 4:33). It was used at Passover to strike the door with the blood. It typifies the righteousness of God, who struck the door of the house (Christ) with the blood of the lamb (Christ) to provide a refuge from the destroying angel of justice (Exodus 12:22). As part of the ceremony of Passover, it became synonymous with atonement. The psalmist prayed, "Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow" (Psalm 51:7). Hyssop had a fitting part in the crucifixion scene as a medium to offer Christ vinegar in His dying moments (John 19:29).

Scarlet wool accompanied the hyssop in sprinkling the blood. Its soft, comforting application typifies the gentle influence of the Holy Spirit's work. "For when Moses had spoken every precept . . . , he took the blood of calves and of goats, with water, and scarlet wool, and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book, and all the people" (Hebrews 9:19). The scarlet thread

was woven throughout the tabernacle, was hung from Rahab's window, and was sown into Christ's robe of mockery. It is the color of sin and of the blood that atones for it. "Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow" (Isaiah 1:18).

Sin defiles the flesh. Touching a dead body defiled an Old Testament saint for seven days. On the third day he was to confess his defilement and be sprinkled with the mixture of water and ashes. The effect must have been a striking reminder of God's view of uncleanness. Do we take care to avoid contamination with the spiritually defiling influences of our society? We must remember that spiritual uncleanness may not be visible, but it separates us from God nevertheless.

Sin must be voluntarily confessed. The third day after defilement, a person was to present himself to the priest to be sprinkled. Anyone who did not was to be cut off from the congregation. "Because the water of separation was not sprinkled upon him, he shall be unclean; his uncleanness is yet upon him." Sin does not go away by itself. It must be humbly confessed to be released.

Sin must be publicly confessed. Through the body of Christ, the dirty, ashy water is applied by public confession and restriction from fellowship. Sin must be washed away in the sight of God and man. This redeems one from being cut off from the congregation.

Public confession has therapeutic value both for the individual and for the church body. Personally, although it may carry a stigma, it impresses us with the seriousness of sin and drives a stake for future victory. Honest confession is good for the soul. Collectively, it stirs our spirit sensitivity and warms our hearts with the evidence of God at work and souls being redeemed from sin. Just as the angels rejoice, the saints also rejoice to see sin washed away. Together we rally to support each other as we see Satan once again defeated.

"What can wash away my sin? Nothing but the blood of Jesus." In order to receive this blessing, however, we must be willing to accept the dirty, loathsome, ashy condemnation that comes on the flesh through confession. But "it cleanseth me!" May we praise God for His mercy and courageously avail ourselves of His provisions.

—BAS



"Publish ... Great Things"

Salvation will produce a response, and the Gadarene demoniac truly showed his gratefulness. After Jesus healed him and the swine ran into the sea, the alarmed people asked Jesus to leave their country. Although he wanted to accompany Jesus, "Jesus suffered him not, but saith unto him, Go home to thy friends, and tell them how great things the Lord hath done for thee, and hath had compassion on thee. And he departed, and began to publish in Decapolis how great things Jesus had done for him: and all men did marvel" (Mark 5:19, 20).

"And it came to pass, that, when Jesus was returned, the people gladly received him: for they were all waiting for him" (Luke 8:40). The Gadarenes brought their problems to Jesus and followed Him for three days in spite of a lack of food (Mark 7:31-8:9). What wonderful things result from publishing great things!

How do we publish great things? The Greek word *kerusso* used here means "to herald ..., especially divine truth." It is also translated *preach and proclaim*.

The first practical and probably most important way to publish great things is to believe and live them ourselves. How effective would the Gadarene demoniac's witness have been if he still had a few fits of devil possession? Unless self is entirely crucified and all sin has been cleansed, we will do more harm than good in our efforts to publish great things.

The potential of the printed page in publishing great things is phenomenal. The number of books, tracts, and periodicals that have been printed in the last forty years is amazing. This represents an immense amount of time, labor, and cost. But has not God given these three things to us with greater abundance than many former generations have had? Printing and postage are probably as affordable as ever before.

Publishers are doing a commendable work of printing affordable and often free literature for distribution, such as the *Living Waters* or *Star of Hope*, book packages for donation to public libraries, or Bibles for free distribution. But the printed page does little good buried in boxes. We need to be faithful in doing our part in spreading the Gospel through mailings, tract racks, and personal distribution.

Consider how much more convincing the story of the Gadarene demoniac was because of his personal experience of Jesus' power. Our personal testimony, when backed up with a consistent Christian life, is our most powerful tool in evangelism.

When one of our life goals is publishing great things, opportunities abound. One business put a *Living Waters* paper with each mailing they sent out. Another family installed a help-yourself section with free CDs where they sold their produce. We can reach out as a family to our neighbors by visiting them or inviting them into our home. However, we need to use extreme caution with the influence and exposure that we allow to come to our children. Just being kind, courteous, and helpful to everyone we meet will give us many opportunities for witnessing. The simple act of one brother helping two teenagers pick up their spilled groceries opened the door for them to find the Lord. Oh, to be more like Jesus, who took everyday happenings and used them to share great things!

While many times we are too reticent, neither should we be offensive by pushing our beliefs on people who are not interested. May God give us the wisdom to know when to live as the Book of Esther illustrates, God is not mentioned by Name, but He shines out of every page. And then at times we need to be like Paul, boldly spreading the Gospel.

As a church, we can hold special services at a more convenient or neutral place than at our own church building. One church kept a book and tract table in a local mall and gave out "*A Hive of Busy Bees*" to children. Perhaps a local paper will allow you to write a spiritual column. Postage-paid reply cards in regular mailings encourage people to request information they want. And when the time is ripe, we must be ready to move out and start a new church where there is no other conservative witness.

What great things should we publish? The demoniac published what Jesus had done for him. We too need to tell others that peace and joy come from yielding our lives to Him. The Gospel offers victory over sin and a promise of heaven to all who obey His Word. He will surely do the same for them as He has for us.

We must keep in focus the primary call of the Gospel. Persuading people to stop smoking, drinking, or taking drugs is not the first goal of evangelizing, nor is our first purpose to teach people to sew and plant gardens or adopt a more frugal lifestyle. We must keep a firm Scriptural connection in our minds as to why we practice certain things. Rather than attempting by our works to gain favor with God or man, we must sense our duty to serve and obey all of God's commandments for all that He has done for us. Like Paul, we must preach Jesus Christ and Him crucified (1 Corinthians 2:1-5).

To whom must we publish great things? Should we go to Asia, Australia, Africa, Europe, or South America? Or should we stay at home? Jesus told the Gadarene demoniac, "Go home to thy friends." We need to start at

home, where the soil has been worked and souls are prepared to hear. We all have an influence in our home, school, or church; but we must not stop with that. If we are not brave enough to witness to our friends and acquaintances, how will we do better anywhere else?

This is not to say that we should not consider other fields. Jesus has commissioned us to begin at home but also to go to the uttermost parts of the earth, which may be across the sea or anywhere in between (Acts 1:8). Like Philip (Acts 8), we need to go where God has called us, even if at times it seems illogical, and actively work the field in which we find ourselves.

What is our expectation in publishing great things? One goal should be that people would be brought to a decision about Jesus. We hope to help them believe in Jesus as did the healed demoniac.

Another result is the encouragement of fellow Christians. Through publishing, the church is blessed with being able to read books and stories of good influence and articles that build and strengthen her convictions.

When we express our thanks and praise for God's blessings, we are encouraged to live up to what we say. Although we cannot gauge our success or failure on numbers alone, people are being added to the kingdom of God. He claims as His children those who choose Him.

This privilege of spreading the Gospel is a responsibility that we will never fully complete. When we get to heaven, we will continue to praise Him for all the great things He has done for us.

Brother Charles



"Love Is Strong as Death"

We live in a society in which men and women intermingle freely and many marriage vows are made for the gain of the moment. Too often these vows are made in conjunction with prearranged agreements on how the union may be dissolved and the assets divided. In light of how unsuccessful many marriages are, society seems to have accepted the view that men and women do not need marriage vows to live together.

How do these views affect us and our beliefs? We do well to take inventory of our thought patterns and to meditate on God's perspective. "Set me

as a seal upon thine heart, as a seal upon thine arm: for love is strong as death; jealousy is cruel as the grave: the coals thereof are coals of fire, which hath a most vehement flame. Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it: if a man would give all the substance of his house for love, it would utterly be contemned" (Song of Solomon 8:6, 7).

Love is "set." Love is an emotion that we possess and display by deliberate choice. We choose to love or not to love. Love is a natural feeling that friends have for each other, but love is a feeling that we must choose to direct. Jesus has even called us to love our enemies (Luke 6:27). In our marriage relationship we must choose to keep love for a friend whom we have learned to know and love. When we choose to marry, we "set" our love only toward this person. We make a choice that this is the only person that we will love in this way.

God gave us the strong passion of love for the preservation and purity of the home. The bridegroom in Song of Solomon 6:8, 9 states that there were many others, but he had chosen to love only one. This is how we are to feel toward our spouse. There are many other noble people, but we have chosen this one to be our only loved one as long as we both shall live. We will choose to love this one even when our passions do not feel so loving. People who fall in and out of love have a very shallow experience. Genuine, true love is a commitment that is present whether the feelings coincide or not.

Love is "sealed." A seal, or signature, is a sign of ownership. We do not need to wear a wedding ring for others to know that we are in a marriage covenant. Our reserve and demeanor should clearly say that we are not free, but sold to the love of a spouse.

We do not allow our minds to wander to what other relationships would be like, or to wish for other circumstances. Neither do we allow our eyes to rove with any pleasure or carnal satisfaction toward unregenerate society's enticement and immodesty. Our passions, minds, and bodies are "sealed" for our spouse and against all others. This "seal" of our affection provides contentment and rest, for both the married couple and for all who relate to them. God's plan in marriage is not designed to make us feel restricted, but rather to make us happy and free.

Love is "strong as death." Just as the strongest wishes or the most dire circumstances cannot bring a loved one back from death, so the strongest desires or worst circumstances do not disannul the marriage vows made before God. When a young couple stands at the marriage altar and vows to love each other and keep themselves only for the other, they promise to do

so in spite of any unpleasant circumstances that may come their way. Marriage commitments are to be kept whether sickness, adversity, or any other crisis comes to test their commitment to each other. Jesus made it clear that from the beginning of creation God intended that marriage vows were never to be broken by anything except death itself (Mark 10:2-12). Just as death is irreversible and unchangeable, so our love toward our spouse is to be unchanging.

Love is "jealous." In a marriage relationship, jealousy for the fidelity of our spouse is a God-given command (Ephesians 5:25-28). Just as God is jealous for the purity of the church, so we as married companions, who are to typify Christ and the church, should be jealous for each other. Husbands have an inspiring goal and a solemn obligation to exemplify the faithfulness that Christ provides. Wives, like the church, should render reverence and fidelity. We have a solemn accountability to not break the type through unfaithfulness.

This jealousy for our relationship should be "cruel as the grave." Just as the grave is certain and unalterable in spite of any other wishes, so must be our watchful commitment toward our spouse. No fleshly desires or carnal interests dare move our commitment to keep ourselves only unto each other as long as we both shall live.

In a healthy marriage, jealousy goes beyond craving the affections of our spouse; it scrutinizes even more closely one's own affections and thoughts. Jealousy causes us to be careful that we do not create situations that look questionable to onlookers, whether they be fellow believers or unbelievers, to whom we are to be the salt of the earth. Travel plans, seating arrangements, business activities, and social interchange where men and women intermingle are all planned in light of both what effect they will have on our relationships and how the arrangements look to others.

We need to look only briefly into society to see what happens when men and women mingle freely without jealousy for the marriage relationship. Our text verse states that the coals of love have a "vehement flame." The original language would bear the thought of the passions of love being set on fire by the flame of God. We are accountable to guard our God-provided gifts with the most jealous attention.

Love is "not quenched." Over the years of the average married couple's lifespan will come many circumstances that either strengthen or jeopardize the marriage commitment. This verse states that love cannot be quenched or drowned. Through all of life's experiences, God's plan for the permanence of marriage is kept in the forefront. As marriage partners, we face

life together. We make plans together. We think together, until in time, we think more alike. We lift each other up when the way is rough.

Undesirable circumstances seem less troubling when we have each other to lean on. Good experiences seem even brighter with our spouse to enjoy them with us. As we follow God's plan for marriage, we are privileged to experience the most wonderful human relationship on earth. "Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil" (1 Corinthians 13:4, 5).

Brother Gerald



"Judas by Transgression Fell"

Judas's failure is a warning that it is possible to be a devoted disciple of Christ, yet through failure lose our salvation (Acts 1:25). The Bible's commentary of his life disproves the Calvinist error of eternal security. Calvinists have tried in vain to explain away this refutation of their system of theology. His life stands as a stern warning even to the seasoned saint.

Calvinists attempt to explain the failure of Judas by claiming that Judas Iscariot never was a true disciple of Christ. But if Judas never was a disciple, how can we have assurance of salvation? Those who promote Calvinism claim to have greater peace in eternal security, but many are plagued with the doubt of whether they are really saved when their lives are not freed from sin.

Satan really has an advantage with those who teach that you cannot be lost. How terrible it would be to live with doubts of whether you ever were saved or whether you are elected to be lost! It is more comforting and Scriptural to have faith that "whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved" (Romans 10:13).

But why did Jesus choose Judas if He knew that he would betray Him? Jesus knew from the beginning that Judas would betray Him (John 6:64), but does this mean that Judas never did believe on Jesus, as some would teach?

Much false doctrine has circulated from a misunderstanding of the fore-

knowledge of God and man's free will. God's foreknowledge does not annul the free choice of man. Although Jesus foreknew that Judas would betray Him, this did not force him to fail. Jesus said, "Have not I chosen you twelve, and one of you is [not was] a devil?" (John 6:70). Many begin the Christian life but are either as seed on the wayside; shallow, rootless seedlings of stony ground; or thorn-choked plants that never bring forth fruit.

Judas allowed Satan to enter his heart. The devil planted in the mind of Judas the seed of evil desire and the act of betraying Jesus (John 13:2). Then, as the result of his own choice, "Judas by transgression fell."

Judas fell when he began to allow selfishness to rule him. Therefore, he did not understand the mission and purpose of Jesus' life, much less His death. He became disloyal and dishonest. He offered to help the enemies of Jesus for personal gain. Judas was in charge of the small funds of the little band of Jesus' disciples. "He was a thief, and had the bag, and bare what was put therein" (John 12:6). This implies that Judas stole from the common purse for his own personal use. His evil and covetous heart came to its full expression when he accepted the thirty pieces of silver for the betrayal of Jesus.

So Judas fell, and from what did he fall? He fell from "this ministry and apostleship." The Scriptures give no impression that he fell from an empty position to which he had no right. He clearly fell from a place of service to which the Lord had called him and for which he was qualified when he was called. To think otherwise would reflect upon the integrity and authority of Jesus. It would also suggest that God is arbitrary in His calling and relating to men.

Judas also fell from the grace and favor of God. If he always had been a devil, as some believe, he would have had nothing from which to fall. Jesus foreknew the choice and action of Judas, but God did not plan or cause Judas to fall from His grace and favor. It was rather the planned sin of Judas that caused his fall. God is never the author of sin.

And how should we account for the remorse of Judas? He was sorry his plan failed. His conscience smote him soon after he betrayed Jesus and especially when Jesus gave Himself to die. He felt an awful sense of guilt, but he did not truly repent. Having once loved the Lord, having been a familiar friend in whom Jesus had trusted (Psalm 41:9), and having tasted the joys of the world to come, his bitter and fruitless remorse was the reaction of one suffering the loss of the eternal blessings he forfeited by his

deliberate choice to sin. He then committed suicide. Satan may have convinced him that he was elected to be lost.

We may not fully know why Jesus chose Judas as one of the twelve. We do know that the death of Jesus was God's plan to redeem us from sin. Judas became the instrument in God's purpose, but we know God is never the author of sin. Judas was personally responsible for betraying Jesus. Satan tempted, the Pharisees enticed, but Judas committed the act.

We do not know the whole story of the life and ministry of the twelve apostles. Judas very likely had a fruitful life before his fall. He, along with others, was sent by Jesus to preach and perform miracles (Mark 6:7). These were but common men and useful to Jesus only as they followed Him and gave themselves to serve Him. Peter's denial came very close to Judas's betrayal, but evidently it was not with any previous thought or plan, and he truly repented and obtained forgiveness. The record of both Judas and Peter warns us to beware lest we forfeit the grace and favor of God.

To sin presumptuously, as Judas did, is very serious. We must be wide awake and determined to resist the wiles of Satan, and be willing to put away any carnal desire, lest we transgress and lose the blessing of salvation.

—*the late Amos Rudolph*



PRAYER POINT

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

Pray for those who are ministering the Word.

Pray for the board and the workers at the rest homes

and for the guests who live there.

Pray for the youth among us, that they may be spiritually minded

and ready to be involved in the Lord's work.

Pray for our church leaders, that they may faithfully fulfill their ministry

in these last and perilous days.



CONGREGATIONAL OUTREACH - COMMUNITY VISITATION.

Community visitation is an effective method of carrying out Jesus' Great Commission: "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations" (Matthew 28:19). The immediate response to Jesus' commissioning was a grassroots movement. "They that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word" (Acts 8:4). They "[preached] peace by Jesus Christ" (Acts 10:36; 11:20; 28:31). This is the practical outworking of being "ambassadors for Christ."

These Christian workers were not an elite group of specially trained salesman. They were rather an assortment of people who had a personal experience with the Lord. "They took knowledge of them that they had been with Jesus" (Acts 4:13).

Jesus was very involved with the public and offered Gospel remedies for men's ills (Matthew 9:10-13; John 17:15). Today we are the beneficiaries of those who "hazarded their lives" (Acts 15:26) to bring the Gospel of Jesus Christ to our ancestors. Many of us are descendants of the pagan tribes of northern Europe.

There are numerous good reasons for us to visit people and knock on doors. Perhaps the church has set a time and it is our turn, or a neighbor may be sick, or someone is in the hospital from an accident. But a compassion and optimism for sinners because of our knowledge and experience of God's salvation is the most important reason.

We prepare for Christian service by a daily devotional life of prayer and effective Bible study. The essential need is to be Spirit directed. Every person we meet has a different experience, knowledge, and conclusion about life. The Spirit will bring the Scriptures to our mind as issues arise in discussion.

Every individual is different. Meeting the challenge of each situation is a rich reward of working with Jesus Christ in us. He said, "Take no thought how or what ye shall speak: for it shall be given you ... for it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father which speaketh in you" (Matthew 10:19-20).

One way to start community visitation is to canvass an area and distribute a literature pack with a response card. Individuals can return the card if they have interest in a certain subject, a Bible study, or spiritual help. We should take note of where we receive a friendly welcome and where there are invalids or needy ones that may be open to singing and cottage meetings.

Although visitation can be practiced personally, Jesus directed and the early church practiced going two by two (Luke 10:1; Acts 15:39-40). A group should be divided into pairs with each pair assigned to certain places yet always on the lookout for new opportunities.

Our efforts are first of all to bring people to the Lord. However, we are also inviting people into our fellowship, and this is the way the public sees it. We should not force an unwanted message on others. We are looking for those who want to know the truth. Jesus said, "When they persecute you in this city, flee ye into another" (Matthew 10:23).

After introductions and some general conversation, we should discern the level of their spiritual interest. Soliciting questions helps us to understand the concerns and issues in their lives. We should answer any questions they may have about us. A common point of interest is changing world scenes as powers and morals slide downward. A Scriptural knowledge of God's consummation program becomes a powerful influence to turn people to God.

Whatever the course of the conversation, we should steer it to the Word of God and the spiritual need of the soul. We should keep the salvation message simple. Salvation and cleansing from sin is by faith in the atoning blood of Jesus Christ. We fall far short of the righteousness of God, but "the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin" (1 John 1:7).

Our reputation will likely precede us, and our reception will largely be according to our actions and neighborliness in everyday life. Everyday associations are usually the best opportunity to share truth.

A big hurdle for those of non-Mennonite background is "How can I ever live like you?" But with a choice to follow Jesus comes the spiritual change of heart in which the things we once loved we now hate and the things we once hated we now love. The Scriptures do limit the requirements we place on the Gospel (Acts 15:28; Colossians 2:20-23), but practical applications to the Scripture are not a burden but a blessing.

Involvement in community visitation will have a distinct effect on our own lives. We will grow in the Christian virtues of compassion for the lost, the knowledge of God and His work, and personal consistency in life. By God's grace may we save our own house in the process.

Brother Elvin.



"But I Say Unto You" "(Part 3) Honoring the Marriage Commitment

"But I say unto you, That whosoever shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, causeth her to commit adultery: and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced committeth adultery" (Matthew 5:32). Jesus acknowledged that under the Old Testament Law divorce was allowed, but He simply and clearly stated the New Testament position. Jesus also told the tempting Pharisees, "What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder" (Mark 10:9).

Why would any believer try to justify severance when Jesus' words are so plain? Could it be "hardness of heart?" God has not granted New Testament, Spirit-enlightened saints the loophole of divorce. "Moses because of the hardness of your hearts suffered you to put away your wives: but from the beginning it was not so" (Matthew 19:8).

Many have attempted to justify divorce with the exception clause "saving for the cause of fornication." In the Jewish economy, the betrothed groom and bride were called "husband and wife." When either party was unfaithful during the espousal period, this was called *fornication*, or immorality before marriage.

We honor the marriage commitment by using discretion in relating to those who are divorced or remarried. Those who live in violation of God's standard should not have our approval, and we should not relate as if all is well. In order to be redemptive we may never lower God's standard.

The emotional appeal of human reasoning that changes God's requirements will always result in the greatest pain. Those who lessen the strong commitment of marriage do not realize that they are destroying the rest and security that God intended for the home. We honor God's law by not attending any ceremony that violates His will. For our own good and the protection of our children, we must limit fellowship with family or friends that are in an unscriptural union and be able to gently explain the reason we do.

We also honor our marriage commitments by practicing godly virtues in marriage. "Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church" (Ephesians 5:25). "Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord" (Ephesians 5:22). These commands, when put into daily practice, are a stronghold against infidelity in our marriages. They result in a reserve with those outside our marriage commitment and openness with each other within the commitment. The accountability of the marriage commitment helps to preserve us from the encroaching immorality of our

society.

May we purpose anew in our hearts to hold the light of God's law to a darkening world by honoring the marriage commitment that He has ordained "from the beginning."

—*Brother Ernest.*

