



The *Pulpit Exchange*

It pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe. (1 Corinthians 1:21)

So they read in the book in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading. (Nehemiah 8:8) Iron sharpeneth iron; so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend. (Proverbs 27:17)

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Adjusting to Life's Changes: Decreasing Responsibilities

Decreasing responsibilities suggests that we need to address a different age group than our brother did in his talk. We should be careful not to turn down the opportunities and the added responsibilities that would come to us when we are asked to do church work. However, thinking about decreasing responsibilities is a little other vein of thought that needs to be considered on

this. Maybe there does come a time when that needs to happen.

This message is not counsel or advice to the younger who are here today, or to children on how to relate to their upper middle-aged parents or to older ones in the congregation. It is meant to be advice to older ones themselves on how they might adjust to decreasing responsibilities. Adjusting to decreasing responsi-

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bilities suggests that the lessening of responsibilities is not necessarily a personal choice. Rather, it is something that occurs as a result of the passage of time and the aging process.

This term, *decreasing responsibility* could be thought to be synonymous with the term (as we sometimes hear it) retirement years. I am not suggesting that we should be putting forward the idea of retiring. However, I do think there is such a thing as

retirement years. They have come to call it in our country *senior citizens*. I believe that is the terminology that we hear mostly. Yet, responsibilities begin to decrease often before what is commonly thought of as the retirement years. When we think of decreasing responsibilities perhaps one of the first Scriptures that would come to our mind is when John the Baptist said in reference to Jesus, "He must increase, but I must

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decrease” (John 3:30). Had John become aged and therefore wanted to let the younger man increase? I do not think that is how it is. It is one of the first that we think about. Usually for us, the decreasing responsibilities are not so much that we are seeing someone who is so much more superior to us as was Jesus compared to John the Baptist. Rather, we think of decreasing responsibilities based on this: As we age, someone else takes up the work. That was not the connotation necessarily between John and Jesus there.

Responsibilities decrease for various reasons and I will list several right now and then I want to build the rest of the talk on these four considerations. 1) Responsibilities decrease because children grow up and leave home. We then have what is sometimes referred to as the “empty nest syndrome.” That is where parents feel kind of at a loss to know right what to do and may need to learn again to live with each other alone and those kind of things. 2) Responsibilities decrease because of physical and mental limitations due to aging.

3) They decrease because someone younger is assigned to the positions or tasks that the older one has had. 4) They also

decrease because one chooses to quit his occupation to take up a work that is less demanding or maybe even quit work altogether. These are reasons why responsibilities decrease. As I said, I want to think of these categories as my points for the message.

1) *Children reaching adulthood.* God gives us children who are totally dependent. That is how they come into the world, and they are very thankless about the care they are given. They do not express any appreciation for what we have done for them, or we may soon see signs of their delight in our care for them. Basically they come into the world totally dependent, and it is our responsibility as parents to bring them to the place of total responsibility. We bring them to the place of total responsibility by about twenty or twenty-one years, hopefully. Maybe we do not get it done at that time or at least we think we did not because as it goes we tend to look at twenty-year-old and think that they are not nearly as mature as what we were when we were that age, but that is not really true. That is simply a vision or a perspective problem.

Whether our children marry and leave home around twenty or twenty-one, or whether they stay around, the fact of the matter is

that they have become adults and our responsibility in training diminishes. This does not mean that we have said or done all that we should have in training. Nor, does it mean that there is nothing more we can do. However, child training is over and as older ones we ought to recognize that. It is over. Yet, this change is not necessarily a distinct cutoff. It can be observed that often, for approximately eight to ten years after children reach adulthood they still depend a good bit on the advice and help their parents give them. Perhaps with the younger children, no doubt, your children will ask, "What did you do when the baby had a fever like this?" Or, "What did you do when it seems they need some sort of discipline," and they do not know how to discipline in a particular situation." No doubt your children often ask you that.

Eventually, things begin to change. As the children with families grow older, the children more and more begin to look out for their parents. They become more protective of them. They are bound to start giving you the lighter end of the workload. They also show other considerations to your age. These things can be quite easy to receive and gratifying as long as they stay in that protective category.

However, with these considerations and this thoughtfulness oftentimes advice and instruction also start coming from our children. They say things like, "Dad, it is time you stayed off the roof." Or, "I do not want to see you climbing that ladder again." Or, "Do not try and do that job unless one of us is here to help you." "Mother, you are not going out into the pea patch to pick those peas. You cannot take it." "Let someone younger take your place on the board."

Now we are faced with someone different, and the first inclination or reaction of parents is to not take their children's advice too seriously. We maybe are inclined at first to say, "Are they really serious? Are they simply trying to be kind or are they trying to be protective?" It is usually not a problem for the children, at first, if we do not listen so well. However, if you do not want to exasperate and frustrate your children you will need to acknowledge and accept this change in roles, and graciously learn to listen on them at least some times.

You may say, "After all I know my limitations. I was not born only yesterday," and "I have more experience than they do." Remember that one of the marks of wisdom is openness to take

advice and instruction. I do not know that there is any place where we reach in life where God says, “You have attained that age where you do not need to listen to anyone else anymore.” I do not think so. Proverbs 9:9 says, “Give instruction to a wise man, and he will be yet wiser: teach a just man, and he will increase in learning.” If you want to prove your wisdom, or if you want to prove that you know a good bit and are wise in what you know, then one way to prove and demonstrate it is to be open to take advice. Many times older ones prove that they are not so wise because they refuse that instruction.

We are always glad when our children and others have been responsive to our instruction and advice. It gratifies us. It is pleasing when someone believes that we have sound advice for them and that they are wanting to hear and receive it. We love it when our children ask us what they ought to do about this or that. If you know that you like it when others receive your instruction, be ready to do the same. If you can be open to hear what they have to say of their input and evaluation (though you might have more experience than them) it does not say necessarily that you have more wisdom.

I remember how it was with Elihu. He was the youngest of those friends of Job — the fourth. There were three older ones. Elihu listened to those older ones talk for a while and then could not contain himself anymore. He said, “I am young, and ye are very old; wherefore I was afraid, and durst not shew you mine opinion. (7) I said, Days should speak, and multitude of years should teach wisdom. (8) But there is a spirit in man . . . [and I know that these people are not talking right” (Job 32:6–8). Thus, it does happen even for those who are much older and have had much experience that we do not always talk right, and it takes our children sometimes to show us that. That is not a really easy thing to receive. I am suggesting, be ready to listen, and to take advice. If you do, you will be adjusting well to decreasing responsibilities with the family. You might even, in the end, grow old gracefully from the family’s point of view. That would be a great blessing and pleasure to the family.

We might get the notion that we are growing old gracefully from our perspective and point of view. It is not very hard for us to conclude that. Most people think they do quite well, and if there is any trouble around it is with

someone else. That is not really the way it always is. Again, doing what I am saying is not easy, especially if you have always been in charge and have enjoyed calling out orders. It is not easy, but that is part of adjusting to decreasing responsibilities.

2) *Let us think of decreasing responsibilities due to physical and mental limitations.* I have already alluded to that in that maybe the children tell us we should not do this or that work. There does come a time when with things like teaching, preaching, or even having devotions, and maybe sewing, things start going that hard that it may be best to decline doing it. It may be best to let another do it. I am not suggesting giving up easily. Rather, I am suggesting that there does come a time when we may be wise to decline the request to have devotions, teach, or to preach. No doubt it will take your companion or your children to help you see and know this. This is because we think, if we were asked, we are inclined to look at it this way (probably naïvely so) that if we were asked to fill this or that role, it must mean that the other think we can do this effectively, but not necessarily. There is such a thing as graciousness and consideration on the part of others that makes

them want to make you feel useful. I said my advice was not to the younger ones on how to be gracious to the older ones. It is rather how we might be gracious, and how we might behave so that younger ones enjoy having us around.

My advice is to open yourselves up to those who know you the best on these matters. We know that as far as when you should no longer do this or that, will vary a good bit from person to person and depending on other factors. Sometimes older ones say that it has come to the place where they have become very nervous about having a devotional or teaching Sunday School and it goes hard.

With that, my advice is open yourselves up to those who know you best and you do want them to be honest. You may say, "Well, will people not be honest with me?" Maybe not as honest as you wish they would, but on the other hand, the Bible commands that we should speak "the truth in love" (Ephesians 4:15). Sometimes people are not so free to tell us the truth because they do not know how to say it in a nice way. That is all right too. I am telling you a lot of things that I did not experience, so I still have it to prove. However, I think if we open ourselves up

then, at least we make a climate where others can share with us what they are observing.

While you are cutting back on your work load perhaps in a spiritual ministry, avoid talking about being shelved, unless you can talk about that with a really good sense of humour. Such talk about being “put on a shelf,” or “They have shelved me,” and all that kind of talk tends to make others feel guilty, and feel a little bad that here was a vessel that was so very useful and now he is not needed anymore.

Avoid talking about how poor it is going for you. I am talking about the physical and mental limitations that come. Others know that by their own observation. You do not have to tell them. You may say, “Can I not talk about my aches and pains? Is it not one way to acknowledge that I am aging?” Well, I suppose it is. Yes, but it is also one way to seek attention. In the process of decreasing responsibilities we will be less in the limelight and more to the side where folks will not seem to notice us. That can be quite a little pill. Thus, it is a way to seek attention by talking about your aches and pains and it is a way of wearying your listeners too. It is a way also of complaining. The Bible calls us not to do that. Again, if you have

serious aches and pains, they will soon realize that they are there and if they do not it does not really matter a whole lot. You could see a doctor. Most certainly that is in order. I will not get into the disappointment side of things because that is another subject.

Avoid predicting. Another thing, I think that happens for us older ones after we have had some surgery and we have had perhaps arthritis for a number of years, soon we have a lot of weather prognosticators, or people who predict weather on the basis of their joints, and this kind of thing. I think we ought to avoid predicting the weather based on our aches and pains, unless others ask us. If they ask, “Father, will it rain in two days?” and you say, “Yeah, I can tell will is by the way my knees feel. That is all right. However, if they do not ask for it let, it be. You will be more pleasant to be around.

It is better, I think, if even husband and wife learn that though they each have some of their own aches and pains that they are not telling each other about those all the while. Take your pills. See the doctor once in a while and live with each other cheerfully without seeking to be nursed and pampered. That is the big issue I suppose. Self-pity comes to the

surface quite readily in the human “make up” so be aware of that.

3) *Responsibilities decrease because younger ones are appointed to fill our positions and roles.* Sometimes they fill those roles by our request. If you are a minister, you might reach that age where you ask for another to take your place. That is commendable to ask for help. Exactly when that ought to be, I will not put forward. There is a little mistaken notion, I believe, when ministers think they need to make another preacher so that they can get him trained well before they are no longer around. I rather believe (my own observation and opinion) that a minister will get his training even if the older brother is not around. He has plenty of other younger people who will train him. Therefore, do not get a notion you must put somebody in place that you must train. That is part of this problem of aging, though there can be some value in it. If you think of that as an important mission probably you are not quite on target.

Other times, we are replaced, simply by a majority vote. We have been Sunday school- superintendent maybe for several years. I suppose most of our congregations have these offices

rotating, but I can remember hearing brethren talk about having taught Sunday School for maybe fifteen or twenty years almost without a break. That may have been kind of an oversight on the part of those in authority. However, many preachers are preachers for a long, long time also. There does come a time when others will perceive that we are not quite as good as we had been and they will choose in another direction and we will be without the job that we had for many years. That does not come easy.

One of the reasons it does not come easy is not so much that it will make the workload lighter. Most of us like to work, but on the other hand we all like to look for ways to shortcut and do things a little bit easier. Thus, it is not that it is hard from the standpoint of having less work. As long as our responsibilities are increasing, we also have an increase in authority. With the decrease of responsibility also goes the decrease of authority. That is not easy, because the human heart loves to rule rather than be ruled, and so it is even for those who are Christians. We enjoy that place where we call out orders and have people to do what we tell them to do.

It is my opinion that after any

one of us has served on a board for many years, there comes a time when you ought to resign cheerfully and quietly from the board, without fuss, fanfare, and without checking with a lot of people whether you should do so or not. When you start checking with others they want to be kind to you and they will say, "Oh no, stay on. We need you," when in fact they might know that there would be no problem at all if you were not on the board anymore. Maybe there would be fewer problems.

Someone has said it this way, "If you are sure the committee from which you resigned will not make out well without you, and you do not tell anyone else, the others will never find it out." I think that is about right. It is good if we could take that seriously. Others will not find it out. Sometimes people say, "I hope I do not outlive my usefulness." That does sound a little sad to come to a place where you have outlived your usefulness. It is an honourable wish. We do not have that to decide (not entirely) but maybe to a greater degree than what we sometimes think. My belief and notion is that if you get old enough then you are liable to outlive your usefulness. I do not think that if you know and believe you have reached

that, you should complain a lot about being in the way and not being useful. That would be another danger or way to elicit some self-pity. I am sure of this: outliving our usefulness will happen much sooner if we are bossy and grouchy in our old age and do not learn how to be cheerful even though we are less involved. Remain cheerful though less involved. That is a challenge.

Part of the whole issue here is, wherein has been our life's fulfillment? Has it been merely in being prominent and involved and active? Or, has it been in our relationship with the Lord. The Bible puts forward the idea that it is not a matter of needing the Lord, and this and that and the other thing. It is a matter of finding our fullest satisfaction in knowing the Lord. Then, the other things are kind of peripheral. They are sidelines. Since we are Christians, we want to serve. We want to make a contribution to His cause and kingdom. However, you see the problem of "I" can so easily get in the way and focus can be wrong. We can find that after all, our life was not consisting in the abundance of things, but our life was consisting in the abundance of responsibilities. Now, when the responsibilities are gone, we become moody, grouchy and hard to live

with. If you do that, then of course, you will outlive your usefulness a good bit sooner.

4) *Responsibility decreases because we choose to change occupations to something less strenuous or less demanding.* Sometimes an older person needs to sell his business so he has less responsibility, and/or quit his job for less responsibility. When we need to do that varies quite a bit from one person to another. We realize that. It does not simply happen for most of us like it did for Caleb who said when he was eighty-years-old “give me this mountain” (Joshua 14:12). Those are nice things to think of and consider. Give me this mountain — it was not the mountain where there was a cabin to be at ease. It was to do battle with the enemy. The Scripture does say about Caleb that, at eighty-years-old, he was still as strong as he was. Sometimes eighty-year-olds boast that, and everyone else knows that it is not true, or that they say they are still as bright as they always were which we could question too perhaps. Occasionally that does happen, I suppose. Probably the more active your mind was earlier on, the better you will be at eighty. On the other hand with Caleb apparently it was true of him that

he was as strong at eighty as he was at twenty or thirty.

Moses was told that it was time to make another leader, so he did it. We could say he did it gracefully, and he did it right. On the other hand God said to Moses “Get thee up into this mountain Abarim, unto mount Nebo . . . And die in the mount whither thou goest up” (Deuteronomy 32:49, 50). The Scripture says of Moses, “And Moses was an hundred and twenty years old when he died: his eye was not dim, nor his natural force abated” (Deuteronomy 34:7). He did not die of old age. God said, “Your work is finished,” and the Lord took him. That however, does not usually happen. We do not see that very often.

When you need to change your occupation to something that is less strenuous or less demanding, do not think that life owes you a retirement and that other people are indebted to you for vacation or retirement of whatever sort. Do not quit and go on extended tours and vacations. Stay engaged, active, and busy. Romans 12 does not seem to have any age limits when it says that we are supposed to be “Not slothful in business; fervent in spirit; serving the Lord” (Romans 12:11). Those words “slothful in business,” I under-

stand, does not mean “do not be slothful in your material pursuits,” but “do not be slothful in the work of the Lord.” “Fervent in spirit” — keep enthused. Keep interested. Stay active. Stay busy. Stay available to help your children and grandchildren and others in the congregation without expecting pay for everything you do. Also, as I said, do not let on as though others are indebted to you for all your wisdom and all your godly counsel and all your good heritage and all of that, that you have left. Let others praise you, if they will, for the legacy of faith that you leave. Do not expect them to nurse and pamper you, though we will be glad for their help when we are disabled.

I like so much the story of Barzillai in 2 Samuel 19:31–39. Barzillai was an aged man when David was fleeing in exile from Absalom. He was very helpful to David though he was eighty years old, when David needed to cross the river and escape. He helped him a lot, and he helped him back across again, so much so, that David felt indebted to him. David said that he wanted him to come along and that he would take care of him the rest of his life. He was going to put him in an old peoples home. Well, not really that. He was wanted to

give him a place in the palace and take care of him at his table. Instead, at the request of Barzillai, he gave it to another.

Thus, we see him reaching a good old age having grown old gracefully. That is one of the challenges to learn how to be doing less and yet to be helpful, not overbearing, seeking to minister to others but not manipulating them to get them around to do what we want them to do.

Learning how to grow old gracefully — every one of us wishes that we could do that. We see older ones who we do not seem to be so graceful in their aging years. Likely many of us will not be as graceful as what we now think we will. Be gracious, patient, kind, courteous, loving, and forgiving. Be those now young parents and youth. Live like a Christian now. Maybe that does not guarantee with the failing of mental powers. It may not guarantee that you will be that congenial when you become older, but I believe it is a good step in that direction. People who were once congenial can become quite hard to handle in their aged years, but I do not recall hearing otherwise that someone who was quite bossy and grouchy when they were younger had become so sweet now that they are older. I do not

know that I have heard it that way. It seems that it only gets a little bit worse.

I did not take you to a lot of Scripture but here is a prayer for the aged that I would like to leave with you that I think shows the burden which I was trying to share with you.

“Lord, Thou knowest better than I know myself that I am growing older and will someday be old. Keep me from getting talkative and particularly from the fatal habit of thinking I must say something on every occasion. Release me from craving to try and straighten out everybody’s affairs. Keep my mind free from the restlessness of endless details. Give me wings to get to the point. I ask for grace enough to listen to the tales of others’ pains. Help me to endure them with patience, but seal my lips on

my own aches and pains. They are increasing and my love of rehearsing them is becoming sweeter as the years go by. Teach me the glorious lesson that occasionally it is possible that I might be mistaken. Keep me reasonably sweet.”

He goes on to say, “Some of them are so hard to live with, but a sour old person is one of the crowning works of the devil. Make me thoughtful, not moody, helpful not bossy. With my vast store of wisdom it seems a pity not to use it all, but Thou knowest Lord that I want a few friends in the end.”

May the Lord help us to learn how to have the Lord as our Shepherd so that at least He may be our Friend in the end and that we may have others who have rejoiced in the blessing that our lives have been.

Reaffirming Our Position on Youth Activities

I am happy to be part of a group that realizes the need to give some direction to youth activities. It was not always that way. There was a time where perhaps I was on the other side where I was a part of the youth and needed some direction. Thus, I am glad to be a part and identify with a group that says from the Word of God that we

need to give Biblical direction both from the parental aspect and from the aspect of the ministry.

As we think of reaffirming our position on youth activities, I would like to raise three questions to discuss the message. The questions are rather simple, elementary questions, we would say, and I think we would all agree I think the answers are not

that simple. 1) *What is our position?* If we will reaffirm our position, we certainly need to clearly understand what we mean by our position. First of all, when we think of the word ‘our,’ in perhaps the narrowest sense, I think we are thinking of the Eastern Pennsylvania Mennonite Church position. We are certainly glad for those who have gathered in among us. We will say, first of all, as I define this that we are endeavouring to base that position on the Word of God — the Scriptures. Therefore, in that sense I believe it includes all of us. It is the group burden and consensus that we give such directives to our youth such that they can live in spiritual victory throughout those years in which they do face some special temptations. I believe, it is a realistic goal that we strive to that end. We believe that the Word of God is faithful and that the Spirit of God is able to enable our youth to be spiritually minded such that they can enjoy peace and Christian victory through the years of youth and adolescence.

Thus, in defining our position, we are looking at it in the broader perspective, first of all, and then endeavouring to narrow it down. I will look at, or endeavour to answer that question in four points. 1) *We want to look at*

some Scriptural principles. I This is where we need to begin. We ever need to be sure that what we are saying is in truth based on the Word of God and from the Word of God. It is what we would say is our understanding of these Scriptures and therefore we make them practical.

Looking at several Scriptural principles, A) *This responsibility of giving direction rests primarily with parents.* We always want to be clear on that point and we want to reconfirm that again. When we are looking at this as a church, we are not trying to bypass parental responsibility, nor are we trying to usurp that in any way. Rather, it is always our goal that we want to enable our parents to fulfill their God given calling and responsibility. “Lo, children are an heritage of the LORD: and the fruit of the womb is his reward” (Psalm 127:3). Parents are stewards of the Lord’s heritage, and we ever want to reckon with that. They become accountable before God and we want to endeavour to help them to fulfill that stewardship and accountability. Thus, while we do give direction, we never bypass the parental responsibility. We work with that, enhance it, and complement it through our efforts. It is never in competition with that, as it were. That is one

principle we look at.

B) *We believe that every area of the believer's life, must bring glory to Christ.* That includes the areas of youth and the activities of youth. Scriptures are so clear in that. "Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God" (1 Corinthians 10:31). We do not make any parenthesis in the Christian experience in the time of youth and say, "We give more latitude here," as it were. We believe that the grace of God is able to touch every area of the believer's life and can bring that to a place where they are glorifying Christ in that experience, and we endeavour to give direction to that end such that every one of our youth can come through to Christian victory.

C) *We recognize that youth will face special temptations.* In 2 Timothy 2:22 Paul, giving direction to the young man Timothy says, "Flee also youthful lusts: but follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart." That stands in contrast to the youthful lusts. We recognize that adolescents and youth do face a period of special temptation and will face some issues that they do need some directives. They need some help.

D) *The commands of Scripture*

clearly apply to youth as well as older believers. This is perhaps expanding point number two. What I mean by this is that there are so many Scriptures which give directive to Christian experience such as telling us to "mortify the deeds of the body" (Romans 8:13), to "crucify the flesh" [Galatians 5:24], to live in purity before God, to live in honesty, to live in sobriety, and we believe that all of these Scriptures in that category, certainly apply to our youth as well as other believers. It seems that in some circles they somehow feel that those types of Scriptures apply more to the mature and to the older ones and somehow close their eyes, or 'wink' at the fact that there are youth who are not being mortified, and are living to the flesh, rather than fleeing from those lusts. We recognize that as youth face those special temptations, they need to understand that these Scriptures are for them. "Make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof" (Romans 13:14), "Abstain from all appearance of evil" (1 Thessalonians 5:22), and on and on. I am thinking of Scriptures in that category. We believe they apply equally as much to our youth as to anyone else. We must be convinced of that.

The apostle Paul, when he was addressing Titus in chapter 2, first addressed the aged men and then the aged women, and the younger women, and then he said, “Young men likewise exhort to be sober minded” (verse 6). He covered all categories — the elder as well as the younger. They were also called to be sober minded. That idea there simply means living with a clear disciplined mind — being able to think clearly. This is part of our challenge as ministers give direction to that end.

E) *We believe that the law of sowing and reaping certainly applies to our youth as well as to anyone.* Again, there are those who would somehow think that law does not apply. They have the idea that they are only young once and they need to go over “fool’s hill.” We hear those kind of expressions and excuses. We believe that the law of sowing and reaping certainly applies to our youth as well as to all believers. Galatians 6:7, 8, says “Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting.” We believe that sowing to the flesh will bring a harvest of cor-

ruption. Youth need to flee from those fleshly lusts, and so on.

F) *Our youth are also called to exemplify the Christian virtues.* Again, the apostle Paul made that very clear to his son Timothy. He said, “Let no man despise thy youth; but be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity” (1 Timothy 4:12). Youth, according to the Word of God, are called to exemplify the power of God. There it is. They are called to that. We believe that God can give them the grace and the power to do that. In fact, I believe that is one of the most forceful testimonies when we as a church can produce a group of young people who are spiritual minded — youth who love the Lord and have the power to say “no” to the clamour of sin and to the temptations they face. They give themselves to the work of the Lord. That is a tremendous testimony to the world. When we go out on street work and in the cities, people who have a bit of discernment and are involved in some religious circles and activities are testing us. One of the questions they raise is, “How many of your young people do you keep?” That is one of the questions I have heard again and again, by those type of people. They know that is in truth an

evidence of spiritual power. That is what it is.

G) *We believe that the energies and opportunities of youth should be used for the kingdom of Christ.* That brings much glory to the Lord when we can have our youth enter into the work of the Lord and take up the work of the Church in the various aspects and make a positive contribution. That is pleasing to the Lord. “The glory of young men is their strength” (Proverbs 20:29). “It is good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth” (Lamentations 3:27). It is those type of principles. We believe it is the will of God that the young people have that burden and insight such that they are willing rather than sowing to the flesh, spending their time in the social activities, to do that which will make a lasting contribution to the Kingdom. Those are some of the Scriptural principles that underlie what we have to say in our discipline and our other statements that we have. It is based on these kinds of Scriptures and principles and our understanding from the Word of God.

2) *In defining our position, I would like to note a few things from our written discipline.* I will turn to them quickly and read a few things. We do have some things in our discipline that clear-

ly relate to youth activities. The first one I would like to refer to is on page 20 of our discipline Article VII, under Restrictions. The very first point reads like this:

1. Members shall not indulge in the world's methods of pleasure seeking amusements and entertainments, patronizing or taking part in fairs, parades, circuses, moving picture shows, theaters, drama, public bathing resorts, organized contesting ball teams, dancing, card parties, races, various forms of gambling, scavenger hunts, mystery suppers, hay rides and such like.

I would like you to take note of those last three words. I believe that phrase encompasses all the others, but perhaps brings into focus the last number of them there because we have some other things that are in that category which are not spelled out. I would like you to keep that in mind the “and such like,” of our discipline is something we always need to be paying attention to. I want to come back to that a little later to pick up that thought and expand it a little.

Another article I would like to look at is article V, the article of Separation and Nonconformity. We have two things here that are mentioned that, I believe, do relate. The first article number 1 says,

1. The Lord's Day shall be well observed by God's people and shall be made a day of devotion and worship.

Church services and Sunday schools shall be regularly attended; feasting and pleasure seeking shall be strictly avoided.

Many times, some of the social activities that we are focussing on even come into the Lord's Day category, and then we need to think about a position on that. We see a need for giving direction to keep the Lord's Day in reverence and devotion, as it mentions here in a spirit of worship such that it leads to the building of the spiritual life rather than tearing down. The other point I would like to read under this is number 6 which relates to attire. I will explain while I bring this in why I think it is related to this subject.

6. Parents should dress their children according to Gospel simplicity and teach them the serious results of following worldly practices and vanities prevalent today.

The reason I am bringing this in is because I am convinced there is a direct relationship between the active social games and the problem of casual clothing. They go hand in hand. The one simply compounds the other. Whenever you have a youth group that is given the "rope," or given the liberty to organize some of the active games and that kind of thing, immediately you have a clamour for casual clothing. They go hand in hand. We

could turn it around and say that it is usually the casual clothing group that is clamouring for the activity. I think they are peas in a pod. They go together. They compound the problems. I think if we pay attention to this and understand some of the things that are working behind the scenes, we can know how to relate to it. Thus, I believe it is part of our foundation and our position that will keep us thinking right.

Another one I would like to refer to, is more on the positive side. That is in page 13 article III. Here it is in relation to singing and our position on music and singing in the congregation, in the home and so on. I want to break into the last paragraph on the page.

Singing in small groups may be engaged in for personal enjoyment and inspiration in private gatherings in our homes, also for the benefit of the sick and aged and as a Christian testimony in street meetings, and in institutions such as jails, hospitals and charitable homes, and in a school setting.

I am sharing this because I believe that this is one of the activities which parents can encourage and give direction to that can be done in a right way and can fill some of the leisure time (the idle time) that youth may have on their hands. That is one point that I want to look at a

little later on, which parents and the ministry need to be give attention, such that they do not have an abundance of idle time. It is this type of thing that we are suggesting can be done for personal enjoyment and inspiration when it is done on a limited, small basis. It can be when the group does not get too large and it does have proper parental and ministerial oversight. I believe that is what our discipline has to say. There would be other areas that would be indirectly involved, but we do note that we certainly do give a clear ring in relation to the activities of our youth.

3) The next thing I would like to look at in relation to answering the question, “What is our position?” is *the statement which our bishops have shared dated January 1991 at the Churchwide meeting of the ministry*. This was intended to meet a need at that time and to give some direction so that we would be better unified and find our way through some of the maze that we were in. I feel it has served well. It has helped us to think right in relation to some of these things. I would like to take the time to read this and then bring some of these points in the rest of the questions of the message.

Agreement Among the Bishops on How We View Play Activities Among Church Members.

1. That playing is a normal part of a child’s life. Playing at home and at school with proper parental and teacher direction is considered a part of a young person’s normal development.

2. When a young person becomes a Christian, then the playing should begin to taper off.

3. By the time they are old enough to date, the playing should be about over, except such situations that they play with students or younger brothers and sisters. (We know what that is doing. That is saying the school setting in a school teacher situation, or in a home setting is where that is placing that. Now the next one clarifies that.).

4. Playing among upper teenagers should be limited to a home experience, or where families visit each other.

5. Where groups of young people gather from various areas to attend a service and then to go to a home afterward for social life is not viewed as a good thing.

6. Young people of the church meeting primarily for play activities is not considered acceptable.

7. We see that it is best for the mid teenager and younger to be with their families and not to be left to roam to freely.

8. That we work toward these goals and to keep social interests from becoming too prominent.

[Ed. — This statement was originally adopted December 20, 1990. It was revised and supported by the ministerial conferring body September 26, 2001 — see September 2002 Eastern Mennonite Testimony]

I think we have a very good statement that was shared with us there. We ought to simply pay attention to it and get it out from time to time and be current,

knowing what it says. I would like to come back to that a little bit later.

4) *Over the years, some of our districts have addressed issues and even have written some statements, given some announcement in relation to certain things and that becomes a part of our position.* Whenever the church voices and raises a concern and says this ought not to be, that automatically becomes a part of our position and the voice in relation to youth activities. I thought it would be best if I do not take something real current so I looked back quite a few years, in the records I had of some of the statements. In fact some time ago our secretary of our district compiled the statements that were given over the years and I picked out one. Here is an example that was given a number of years back. This was read in the congregations of the Richland district.

The problems of some of our youth wanting more social activities was discussed. Conviction was again shared that this problem reflects a parental mind set that thinks youth need various social activities away from home. The need for helping parents to have a home setting, where children want to stay at home was emphasized. Parents should try to determine why their children do not find satisfaction at home on Saturday nights and at other times.

It is that kind of statement that

becomes a part of our position in relation to youth activities. We need to pay attention to that and take heed to that and understand it as such.

II) *The second question I would like to look at is, "Why should this position be reaffirmed?"* I would like to quickly and more briefly share a few answers to that question. 1) *First of all, it is because it is one of the active battle lines of the Church.* We all know that we will always face the issue of relating to youth activities and where to draw the line. I am thankful that we are endeavouring to draw a safe battle line. As we look at history, we see that it always was a struggle. It is interesting for me to do a little bit of research on that. There is a booklet, *Christian Youth Wants to Know*, published in 1962, by the Nonconformity Committee of the Lancaster Conference, written by bishop J. Paul Graybill. He made this plea. He was addressing the social life of the youth. I will give it in my own words, I do not have it exactly but the thought was, "If the church will begin giving direction and organizing social activities, we are in deep trouble in the years ahead." That is about how he said it, and he was certainly right. That is exactly what happened. I did

read a few statements there that he was trying to curtail what he already saw, and what was already developing in relation to youth activities.

I am glad that we have the battle line a little closer to home in some of the things that he was addressing in that booklet. That is why I believe it is necessary that we are again reaffirming our position. We do this so that we can keep a safe battle line, because it will always be an active battle line. We will face it right along.

2) *The activities of our youth will have a definite effect on their spirituality.* We need to be convinced of that. You know their activities will make their contribution either for the positive or the negative, either for the good or for their spiritual undoing. We need to be convinced of that and pay attention to their involvements and their activities because it will have an effect on their spiritual life. That is why it is important that we look at this area.

3) We must be convinced that to open the gates on social activities produces a rapid spiritual erosion. We only need to do a little reading in the past to know that, when we allow youth to begin to get involved in that and to get a taste for that (as it were)

you know what happens. They begin to indulge. They begin to not have the maturity to draw the proper lines. They find themselves being fed by it rather than fleeing from it as the Scripture would admonish us.

4) *If it is not reaffirmed from time to time, it will soon be forgotten.* It will soon be a dead position (as it were), unless we determine that we will keep it alive. The way that we do that is what I want to look at in the next question.

III) The third question that I would like to raise is, "How can we keep this position alive?" I believe we would be convinced that this is a Scriptural, safe, and a realistic position and one that brings much glory to the Lord. Now the question is, "How can we keep this kind of conviction alive among us?" When I address this question I mean not only we as a ministry, but I am including our parents. That is my burden. Somehow, we as ministry, must convey that burden to our parents and have them feel that same burden.

The first suggestion I would like to share with that is that 1) *we as a ministry must set the proper example.* I am sure you have heard the saying that, "To teach a child in the way he should go, go that way yourself." That is

about as simple as we can say it. While that is so true in the home, it equally true or even more so in the Church. If we will endeavour to maintain a proper position in the Church and at large, we as ministry must be willing to pay the price to set the example. I know I have heard people say, "We do not want a double standard in the Church. We do not want to give our children the idea that we somehow hold ourselves aloof and higher." No, I am not projecting that. However, the fact is sometimes we need to draw a line where others do not. That is the fact. We need to do that. May we have the courage, strength, and wisdom to know how, where, and when to draw those kind of lines so that our families — our homes — can leave a proper example in this matter of youth activities.

2) *We as ministry must hold this position before our people.* We must make them familiar with it so that they know. Sometimes, we do address issues and then maybe they come back and say, "I did not know," or "I did not think this was out of the way." Maybe we are at times to blame for that. I think we ought to be sharing the working platform — the conviction of the church — what we view acceptable and not acceptable. Our

people ought to be familiar with what we feel the lines are, so that they know that they cannot properly come to us and say, "Well, I did not realize that this would be frowned on," or something like that. Let us keep them well informed.

We do this by sharing in messages related to youth and related to the dress issue, and all of that. We keep our constituency and our congregation well informed by preaching these things and making them familiar with them. Parents, of course, with their familiarity with it, then need to respond and support it. We expect that kind of reaction from them. They will rally and support what we share. We need to be sure that we are informing them well what we expect and what we consider the proper congregational life.

Maybe we take for granted sometimes as ministry that most of our parents feel the pulse of the church. However, the fact is, not all of our parents get to the special meetings, or get to Numidia as they ought to and hear some of the things that they ought to hear. Maybe we ought to be more conscious of that and be sure that those type of parents who are not where they ought to be at the right times get what they need, and that we communicate

that to them. We share that with them and express that kind of familiarity with them.

3) *We need to give some good thought to providing the right kind of activity for our youth so they do not have a lot of idle time on their hands.* You know what I just said about the church getting involved in providing and scheduling social activities. I am not implying that at all. I am saying that first of all, parents need to give thought to the idle time and the extra time, as it were, of their children. That is part of the problem. Sometimes they say, “What shall I do? What can I do this evening?” or on a Sunday afternoon, “What can I do?” Parents ought to have some answers for those kind of questions and they ought to be ready to suggest some things that we would consider — the upbuilding, the profitable activities, of things that bring much glory to the Lord.

First of all, on the family level there are many things that can be done. Then within the congregation, there are scheduled activities such as the literature distribution or the singing for an elderly neighbour and things like that, which are under the direction of the parents and the ministry. There are many things like that which can be done with parental involvement that fill up what we

call the idle time — the spare time, the leisure time of our youth. The positive answer side of it is that we need to be ready to take responsibility and direction in the proper activities lest youth get their own minds to running and try to scheme up something that would be interesting or pleasurable in their mind. Maybe parents ought to be one step ahead of those kinds of things by giving proper forethought.

In number eight of our bishop’s statement, we said that we want to work toward these goals and endeavour to keep the social interests from becoming too predominant. Let us give a lot of thought to that. We want to keep a feel and keep monitoring what the social interests are. If we see that there is beginning to be a restlessness and a stirring among some of our youth, and there are sometimes little telltale signs that this is happening, that is where we need to step in and give some direction, both as parents and as ministry. Let us be monitoring that so that the social interests are not becoming too predominant.

4) The next point I have in relation to keeping this position alive. *We must continually identify the “and such like” practices among us.* We do not expect to be able to spell everything out in black and white. We do not

intend to, and neither can we, because there are always new issues arising. However, I do believe that we need to reread our discipline, get the spirit of it, and feel the pulse of it so that when these things arise, we recognize that these are in the “such like” category, and that we are ready to speak out and give some direction in relation to it. We cannot mention everything in our discipline in relation to birthday parties. I am thinking now of when other youth in the congregation are invited in and it becomes more than a family thing, it begins to grow and grow. We have seen that happen in the past and we know where that leads to.

Or, sometimes there are special youth gatherings where again it is beyond one family visiting another. It may go out to the place where, at times, they want to invite several youth with another over night. I am not speaking about those who are travelling a distance and stay with relatives and that kind of thing. I am talking about where the youth of the same congregation or the same general locality need to make that kind of occasion just for mere social involvement or simply for some added time together. We know that leads to trouble. Again, we ought to be wise enough and we need to

recognize that things of that nature are certainly in the such like category, and we need to address that.

We also need to recognize that youth always have the tendency to think that more is better, and that is as far as the numbers they need to get. It seems to run in their blood that if they can have two or three, it would be so much more pleasurable and interesting if we would have six, seven, eight, nine, or ten, and they hardly know where to stop. They have the mentality that more is better. We know that it does not work that way. It is not that way. In fact, I believe the burden of the bishops’ statement is that we want to curtail those group gatherings that get beyond the family visiting and that type of thing, including the play activities that were organized by a number of young people coming together for that special occasion. That is the primary burden.

We believe there is a place for it on the family level, or for a dating couple to spend some quiet time in a leisurely recreational type of word game or something like that. We are not speaking about that. That is in a different category. I believe there is a place for that. What we are looking at is when it becomes a group thing. Let us recognize that

youth always have this idea and tendency that more is better, but it is not that way. It usually results in making more problems, conflict, and trouble. Therefore, we need to give direction to that and try to help them understand that there is a deceptiveness about the whole matter.

There would be other things that I thought I could mention. At times, we hear the talk of Bible school term reunions. The Bible School board has spoken against that but we need the support of our parents and the ministerial body. I am sure it is an interesting thing for a few students to share together in that type of thing, but what happens is that they do not know where to stop. They want to invite this friend that was there, this friend, and this friend, and you know what happens. It becomes a rather large group, and it is almost beyond the point of giving proper parental direction to it when a group becomes too large. Therefore, we need to give our voice on that, that we do not want those kinds of Bible school term reunions to be taking place because they just do not know where to stop.

There would be other things of that nature that we ought to be looking at from time to time, and they are constantly changing. May the Lord give us the wisdom and heavenly discernment we need such that we know what it takes to make spiritual youth, what it takes to convert youth, such that they will be transformed and ready to make a contribution for the kingdom of God. The psalmist said, "That our sons may be as plants grown up in their youth; that our daughters may be as corner stones, polished after the similitude of a palace" (Psalm 144:12). I believe that must be the burden of every parent and of every shepherd that finally our youth may be brought to that level of spirituality where they can preserve the church in the years to come. We desire this so that when we lay down a work, there will be those who can faithfully follow after and bring glory to the Lord of the Church. May the Lord bless us as we continue to find our way in relation to the present needs. May He give us the spirit of wisdom that we can preserve the Church until the coming of Christ.

As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby (1 Peter 2:2).

Scripture References

Deuteronomy	9:9	117	5:24	126
32:49, 50	122	20:29	128	6:7,8
Joshua		Lamentations		Ephesians
14:12	122	3:27	128	4:15
2 Samuel		John		1 Thessalonians
19:31-39	123	3:30	115	5:22
Job		Romans		1 Timothy
32:6-8	117	8:13	126	4:12
Psalms		12:11	122	2 Timothy
127:3	125	13:14	126	2:22
144:12	136	1 Corinthians		Titus
Proverbs		10:31	126	2:6
		Galatians		127

From the Previous Issue:

The Influence of Modified Conservatism

From a message by Elvin Graybill, Jr.

Sunday, December 03, 2006

Owasco Lake Mennonite Church

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 12:7
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 Victory in Jesus
 Waxing Strong in Spirit
 What is Your Belief?
 What Will a Man Give in
 Exchange for His Soul?
 Wise Men Still Seek Jesus
 Worship in the Home

*Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have command-
 ed you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the
 world. Amen (Matthew 28:20).*

FIFTY FUNDAMENTAL FACTS

34. The Church is commissioned to evangelize the world with a view to winning lost souls for God.

The attitude of the Church should not be that of hatred for the world of sinners, but rather that of such fervent love for sinners that nothing will be left undone that can be done to save the sinners from their sins. It was the mission of Christ to “save his people from their sins” (Matthew 1:21). The Great Commission requires that we teach all nations “to observe all things whatsoever” (Matthew 28:20) our Lord commanded us. Having made our “calling and election sure,” (2 Peter 1:10) the rest of our lives should be devoted to the great work of winning souls for Christ and building them up in Christ. Christ gave Himself for a world of sinners, with the idea that we “should follow His steps” (1 Peter 2:21) Our greatest task on earth is to bring about the separation of sinners from their sins; thereby winning them for Christ and salvation.

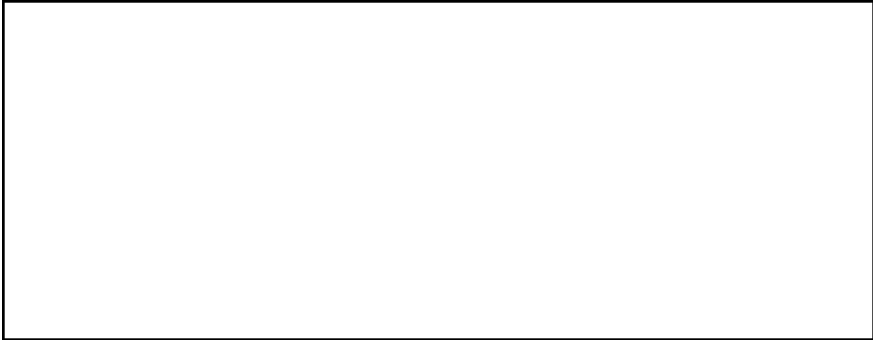
35. Light-bearing Christians are “the salt of the earth.”

This is distinctly taught in Matthew 5:13–16. The warning note is given in these words: “If the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted?” In

other words, if we as individuals or as a church have lost our saltiness to the extent that we are not different from the world, what help are we to the world? The world must see in our business life, in our social life, in our home life, in our daily habits, in our speech, in our appearance, in our true Christian piety, in our likes and dislikes, something to which they are strangers, or we have lost our strongest weapon for God. It is to the light-bearing Christian that God and man look for effective work in bringing lost souls to God and salvation.

36. “Unspotted from the world” is God’s standard for “pure religion.”

You read it in James 1:27. A man does not have to be all over black to be “spotted” and rejected of the Lord. What we want is to be free from all marks of worldliness, not merely part of them. One sin in the soul unrepented of means the death of that soul — unless he repents while there is still opportunity. If total abstinence is the proper rule for intoxicating drink and tobacco, the same logic makes it the proper rule for every form of sin and of sinning. If you would be the possessor of “pure religion” and shine for God, be sure and live the sinless life. You may have



many good traits of character in your life, but one sin harbored in your life blasts your innocence

and your purity in the sight of God.

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