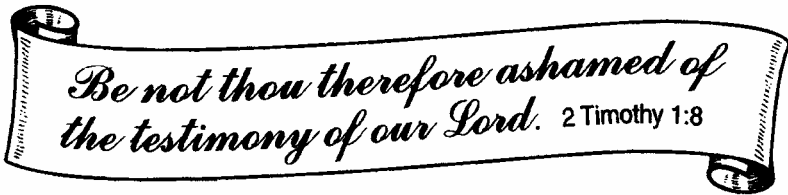


# THE EASTERN MENNONITE TESTIMONY

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OF  
THE EASTERN PENNSYLVANIA MENNONITE CHURCH  
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### Benefiting From Boundaries

Many professing Christians regard church regulations critically. They often deride conformity to church standards and idealize individual interpretations and applications. Charges of legalism are often leveled when church standards and discipline are discussed.

Church restrictions, however, are Biblical. The Book of Acts gives an example of setting church standards and shows the stability and growth that resulted (Acts 15; 16:4, 5). Church restrictions have proven to be a spiritual blessing both to the individual believer and to the church. What are some of the benefits of Scriptural church standards and disciplined church life?

Church standards are necessary because of our human tendency to condemn ourselves in the things that we allow (Romans 14:22). We need standards that help us to overcome the flesh and thus help us to remain on the narrow way. We are at war with the flesh and need reminders lest we succumb to its dictates. If the flesh is allowed to rule, we soon will find ourselves slipping over the edge of a spiritual precipice. "Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall" (1 Corinthians 10:12).

A written standard is an aid in avoiding the drift into apostasy be-

cause it provides a practical measure by which we can gauge our current practice. Human nature generally judges right and wrong relative to what others think and do. If change in practice comes gradually, it tends to be overlooked. For example, attire that was once identified as immodest will gradually be seen as neutral and eventually even as relatively modest. Printed standards clearly delineate any drift from a previously safe position. An ignored standard bears quiet but persistent testimony if the current position is falling short of what was previously considered an appropriate application of Scriptural principle.

A written discipline fosters uniformity in applying Bible principles. Human nature, with its inclination to drift worldward, will usually weaken practical applications of Bible truth. Group uniformity and a written discipline help to avoid this tendency. Uniformity also helps to build and maintain conviction for the practical applications of the Word. Maintaining uniformity helps the rising generation to embrace consistent applications of Bible principles. "Nevertheless, whereto we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same thing" (Philippians 3:16).

Written statements do not provide a guarantee that we will benefit from them; many churches that once had consistent standards have failed to maintain them. What is necessary for us to benefit from church standards?

Church standards are effective only as they are the unified expression of spiritual people. More rules will not remedy the worldly-minded spirit. Members must be building Bible-based convictions that go beyond the letter and legality of a written discipline. The Word of God and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit must remain our primary motivation.

We must cultivate appreciation for both the standards and the Scriptural principles that give rise to them. Church membership is voluntary, and church members must willingly commit themselves to the regulations of the church. Our children need to sense our love for the Word and our appreciation for the practical applications the church has made. They will know whether we rejoice to be a people separated unto God or whether we cringe when practical applications are given.

Solid Bible indoctrination is needed to maintain the faith. Bible-based messages and articles need to include practical applications and emphasize how those applications relate to the Bible principles in-

involved. The home, the Christian school, and the church must all be diligent to do their part in teaching the Word and the importance of Biblical obedience.

Church standards must be more than lofty ideals or guiding principles; they need to be standards by which we live. A written discipline without practice or administration has little benefit. Each of us as members needs to first of all understand the commitment that we have made to follow the standards and then be fully committed to doing so by the grace of God.

Church leaders are responsible to maintain a consistent compliance with the standards. The membership, too, is responsible for maintaining the standards of the church and should be alert to standard violations. The written discipline should be regularly presented to our congregations as a reminder of the standards to which we have committed ourselves. We do this before our semiannual council meetings.

In all church history, there has been only a step between the Biblical church and creeping apostasy. By the grace of God and the aid of the Holy Spirit, this step need not be taken. Scriptural church standards that are clearly taught and consistently applied as an expression of spirituality are boundaries that help us avoid this deadly step over the spiritual precipice. *GEA.*

## **"I Am But a Little Child"**

King David had died. The large work of leading Israel fell on young Solomon's shoulders. But how could he proceed? In helplessness he responded, "I am but a little child" (I Kings 3:7).

*Why did Solomon feel as a little child?* First of all, he felt small when he glimpsed the greatness of God. This almighty God was calling Solomon to labor for Him. Solomon realized his personal inadequacy for the work. It made him feel little.

Also Solomon felt small as he viewed the life of his father David and wondered how he could live up to it. He knew of his father's willingness to accept advice, to admit wrong and repent of it, and to lead a nation in worship.

Furthermore, Solomon felt small because the kingdom was large. The nation of Israel had reached an unusual height of power and glory under King David. Solomon needed to maintain peace and order. Justice needed to be upheld and evil punished.

Besides, Solomon felt as a child, for he was the leader. He was responsible to see that everything was done right. Multitudes would either climb to new heights of worship and dedication to the Lord or else sink lower into sin because of his leading. He realized that this included making many decisions.

No wonder Solomon felt as a little child. He did not feel like a child, eager to proceed as soon as possible; he felt like a little child, totally incapable. Each of Solomon's feelings has a parallel to our day.

*Why should we feel as little children?* Like Solomon we realize that we are not sufficient for the tasks at hand. We see God's greatness and lofty requirements, and we feel as little children.

Also, because of the faithfulness of those who have gone before who now leave the great work with us, we feel very small. Our spiritual fathers left the errors of a false church, planted seeds of faith in a new land, and strove to maintain the complete, untainted Gospel. How can we ever live up to their faithful example?

Furthermore, we feel small because the kingdom is large. We have home responsibilities. Innocent children need to learn the lessons of life to prepare them to choose to serve the Lord. We have school responsibilities. Both academics and spiritual values need to be taught. We have church responsibilities. Devotions, Sunday school lessons, and messages require our committed application. A safe course must be charted for the church. We have responsibilities in foreign lands. Some have never heard the truth. Others do not know

how to apply the truth to everyday life. Certainly we feel small.

And God calls us all to be leaders. Some lead the church. Some guide the home and children. Others direct the classroom. And still others provide role models for younger brothers and sisters. This includes making many decisions. What will we work? Whom will we marry? Where will we live? By now we certainly feel as little children.

*How will a childlike attitude express itself?* Sometimes we are mistaken about how this attitude should affect us. We think that it is humble to balk when given an assignment and that we should say how we are not qualified or how poor our labors are. Such comments are usually begging for a little praise.

In contrast, like Solomon, a humble person will ask God for wisdom. A child asks his father what to do when he does not know how to proceed. This is a daily need.

We will also ask others for counsel and direction instead of thinking we know it all. We realize that others may have ideas that we have not considered. We will not only ask for advice but also use that advice. Interestingly, the older we get, the more we realize we need others.

We will be glad to see our brother succeed. We know that this is not a struggle to see who can be ahead. If our brother advances, the work of

the kingdom is going forward.

When we feel as little children, we will trust our Father because we realize He is in control. Not much can scare children when their father is nearby. It is when we are trying to manage things ourselves and cannot that we face unnecessary tension.

Because of his attitude, Solomon experienced untold blessings. The Lord was pleased. Solomon received not only wisdom, as he requested, but also riches, honor, peace, and long life. We will receive abundant blessings as well.

*What are the blessings of feeling as little children?* If we have a little child's attitude, the Lord will be pleased with us. Pleasing God is our highest goal in life.

The Lord will give us wisdom, specific wisdom suited to the calling. The more we ask for, the more God will give. He gives liberally.

While the Lord is blessing us with material riches, His spiritual riches supersede them. He showers us with His Word, His Spirit, and His church.

And God gives us peace. What a blessing! Above all this, we will receive long life, yes, eternal life.

Considering all that rests on us, the only right response is, "I am but a little child." We have the examples of spiritual brethren to follow. We have much work to do, numerous decisions to make, and many to

lead. But there is also a God to be with us. "Faithful is he that calleth

### **"Everyone Welcome"**

We should be interested in making those who come to our worship services feel welcome and comfortable. The signs at our churches often have the phrase "Everyone Welcome" prominently printed on them. While that is good, those words alone fall short of actually making a good experience for our visitors. Following are a few pointers to help us evaluate how welcome visitors actually feel when coming to our churches for what might be their first visit to a conservative Mennonite worship service.

We should begin in the parking lot. Suppose the visitors arrive before anyone else. Can they determine what parking pattern is used so they can be confident that their vehicle is parked correctly? One visitor recalls the time he arrived first, parked, and only later felt embarrassed because the others parked in their normal fashion, highlighting his error of not parking according to the established pattern. So before the service started, he already felt awkward for this trifling situation. A few painted lines or a few bumper blocks indicating the normal parking pattern will direct those arriving early.

The main entrance should be

you, who also will do it" (1 Thessalonians 5:24). *Brother Philip, PA.*

clearly marked. Some meeting-houses have multiple entrances, some of which would be awkward or embarrassing to use, especially if the worship service is already in progress. This situation can be prevented by proper signage.

Signs are helpful inside the building too. Restrooms should be properly marked. Years afterward, one visitor still remembers when he entered a staircase after asking where the restroom was. Since the restroom door and the stairway door were side by side and neither door was marked, the error he made was understandable. Signs correct this type of difficulty.

When visitors arrive, they should be greeted warmly. This is done in various ways, depending on the situation. Ushers should be appointed and prepared to welcome the latecomer. The best preparation for this part of accommodating our visitors is to have a sincere desire to indeed make them feel welcome. We should put ourselves in their situation. This might be a little difficult, since many of us have known no other church home. Do they, for example, know that we practice segregated seating and kneeling prayer?

Some congregations print a schedule that states the order of the

service and mentions the practice of kneeling prayer and the procedure for lifting the offering. Most visitors seem to appreciate this; it has a way of making everyone feel welcome. This may avoid the discomfort one visitor remembers when, because of his ignorance, his pew did not collect the offering in a timely way because he did not understand that the envelope lying beside him was his responsibility to pass to the person sitting beside him.

On this welcome sheet, the age ranges for the various Sunday school classes might be listed along with the general areas where the classes meet. If these things are already being communicated without such a sheet, very good! However, this printed information has proven to be helpful to some congregations in their welcoming efforts. The key is to anticipate the visitors' needs and things that might make them feel uncomfortable, and then to address those issues proactively in ways that fit the situation.

Do the visitors have Bibles? This need can be met by having a few available. A hardcover pew Bible is both inexpensive and practical for this purpose. Inside these Bibles might be a note card that tells them this Bible is for them to borrow for the day or to keep. Considering the measureless value of the Word and its centrality to the church and our

lives, this is a small price to pay for the potential spiritual dividends.

Do the visitors have Sunday school books? Someone, perhaps a superintendent, should be assigned to see that everyone has a copy. If a visitor keeps the book, this is not wasteful. The book may provoke further study, even if the visitor never returns. Besides, it will serve as a reminder of the visit.

In most congregations, each family has a mail slot. Are there also mail slots for visitors? Here is another opportunity to help everyone feel welcome. This literature can be valuable to them. The visitors' mail slots should be kept current. Some churches have found that these slots can become a bit like the back of a refrigerator shelf, containing only leftovers. Something seems wrong if we are serving our visitors the leftovers or the stale, catchall items. If a visitor seems appreciative of the literature in his mail slot, more can be offered from the leftovers in storage.

A literature rack marked "Free" or "Help Yourself" is another helpful tool in meeting visitors' needs. A tract may help someone to develop spiritually. This rack might be a place to keep the welcoming sheets, the Bibles, and the extra church mail. Some congregations provide recorded messages or singing for those who might desire them.

Some congregations have the practice of singing a final song after the closing prayer at the end of most services. The ministry then uses this opportunity to walk to the back of the auditorium. This enables them to meet those visitors who might otherwise slip out directly after the service without meeting anyone.

There are other areas that may need attention in order to help everyone feel welcome. Do the children of the congregation stare? Do we need to "provoke one another" to visit more freely with visitors

who do attend the service? Is a hostess schedule needed to make certain the visitors have invitations for the noon meal? One family felt ashamed when they saw their church visitors, who had come from a distance, buying at a local eatery because they had not received an invitation for lunch.

The mission of the church is to lead souls to Christ and help them on in their Christian lives. Could we better fulfill our divine mission? One area of this mission we do well to consider is being sure that the sign is true—"Everyone Welcome."

*Brother Jonathan WA.*



### **Current Pietistic Pressures**

Pietism is a teaching that is contrary to sound doctrine. It emphasizes an emotional Christian experience but neglects the suffering and the reproach that the cross brings. Pietism has been described as emphasizing a *sweet* Saviour and having a *smooth cross*.

Pietists consider personal inner experience and feelings as foremost in the Christian life. They place these feelings above obedience. For the pietist, the independent, individual conscience has become the ultimate authority in understanding and applying the Scriptures. This approach is exemplified in open Communion, as each individual

judges for himself whether he is worthy. It destroys the interdependence that is part of every Scriptural brotherhood.

*Caspar Schwenckfeld (1489-1561)*, a religious leader of the Reformation period, was a promoter of the pietistic approach a century before the rise of Pietism as a movement. He has been referred to as a pietist before Pietism. He charged that the Anabaptists were legalists because they insisted on rebaptizing those who had been baptized as infants, maintained outward forms, and had written creeds. Schwenckfeld advocated "standing still" to avoid conflict with state-church authorities and so was able to avoid in-



tense persecution. In his view the term “*church*” was a broad one that applied to all churches even if they were not obedient to the Word.

The term “*pietism*” refers to a movement within the Protestant state churches that arose in the 1600s out of concern for the corruption these churches tolerated. In order to avoid persecution, these concerned individuals, like Caspar Schwenckfeld before them, remained in the state church but emphasized being personally right with God. They tried to justify themselves for remaining in the state church, thus avoiding the cross of persecution.

Although the Pietist movement is now history, the pietistic approach to church life is still common. This approach appeals to the flesh because it avoids self-denial, cross bearing, and discipleship.

- *The term pietism should not be confused with true Christian piety.* True piety is a result of a faith that works as expressed by the call of the psalmist for “clean hands, and a pure heart” (Psalm 24:4). Simeon was known as a pious believer because he was “just and devout” (Luke 2:25). True piety stems from saving faith that is demonstrated by obedience. Those who are truly pious recognize that without obedience, faith is dead (James 2). Although good feeling is not the driving motive for the Christian, faith

that obeys does result in the joyful confidence that we are right with God. When the Gospel of Christ was preached to the Gentiles, Paul said, “Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing” (Romans 15:13).

- *Pietism, with its emphasis on feelings and inner government, undervalues the important place of the church.* Those who have pietistic leanings look with disdain on church discipline and regulations as interfering with their love and loyalty to Christ. In the minds of its adherents, pietism takes away the necessity of outward expression. It may be an overreaction to dead formalism with its “form of godliness” (2 Timothy 3:5) and lack of spiritual life. Those who embrace pietism seem to fear church formality more than carnality and worldliness. This attitude is very deceptive and makes the step into the world very easy to take. The truth of the matter is that, when church voice and guidelines align with Scriptural principles, they serve to express and preserve our loyalty to Christ.

Each generation has faced the threat of pietism and its avoidance of the way of the cross. Our generation is no exception. In fact, the pressures toward pietism may be intensifying in our time.

- *What are some factors that contribute to current pietistic pres-*

sure?

*a) The prevailing religious climate of the day.* Many churches are allowing their people to walk on the broad road that appeals to the flesh. Tolerance tends to blur the line of demarcation between the church and the state, and between the church and the world.

*b) The ease of communication and the abundance of religious literature.* Our people find it much easier to be exposed to pietistic teachings than did earlier generations. This exposure brings great potential for the seeds of pietism to germinate and grow as it makes its appeal because of its failure to deal with the flesh.

*c) The threat of dead formalism.* This threat faces every group that emphasizes practical separation. Dead formalism results when there is a failure to teach the reasons for and the values of maintaining our identity and standardized forms of separation. Examples of these practices are the plain hat and bonnet, which have long been part of our spiritual heritage. If the expressions of separation become mere formality, they will soon be despised, opening us to the threats of pietism.

*d) The easy lifestyle and self-sufficiency of the day.* This produces a lack of interdependence in the brotherhood. This tendency toward self-reliance is detrimental to strong brotherhood relations.

*e) The increased exposure from neighbors.* Many of our families are living in more crowded neighborhoods than was the case in previous generations. This brings exposure to Christian-professing yet worldly people. This increases the tendency to allow the corruption of the world to rub off on us (1 Corinthians 15:33).

▪ *What are some key lines of defense against current pietistic pressures?*

*a) Homes that nourish true piety.* We need strong spiritual homes where reverence and respect for God and the church are instilled early in life. Our homes need to build appreciation for a disciplined, separated lifestyle. Wherever our families are, they should be readily identifiable as Plain People, with nothing casual about them.

*b) Church members who submit to the brotherhood.* We need church members who understand that surrender to the lordship of Christ requires submission and commitment to His body, the church. This is an indispensable element of their salvation. They also sense their obligation to be open to the brotherly address and to exercise it for their spiritual safety. God knew we would need the help of the church to reach heaven.

*c) Congregations that insist on true piety.* We need strong congregations, where sound doctrinal

preaching is heard, balanced by church-prescribed applications to unchanging Bible principles and illustrated by faithful leadership (Acts 20:20).

Followers of Jesus may never expect to escape the suffering and the reproach of the cross. "We must

through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God" (Acts 14:22). "It is a faithful saying: For if we be dead with him, we shall also live with him: if we suffer, we shall also reign with him" (2 Timothy 2:11, 12).  
*Brother Noah, PA*



### **Commitments That Count**

Many people make and break commitments on the whim of a moment. If their commitments are challenged, they change them rather than face the difficulties. We, however, must see our commitments as solemn obligations or promises that count in God's sight and have eternal consequences. Being true to our commitments does not just happen; maintenance and determination are needed so that, by God's grace, they will endure.

The greatest commitment we can make is to surrender our lives to Christ when we turn to Him for salvation. It is very important that we make this commitment soon after we become accountable. Those who never make this commitment will die in their sins and reap eternal consequences. This commitment needs to endure throughout life and affect all of life. "He that endureth to the end shall be saved" (Matthew 10:22).

We maintain our relationship with Christ by communicating with Him in daily Bible reading, meditation, and prayer. A firm commitment is needed to deal with temptation and the bombardment of sin. Separation from the world is necessary for this commitment. We must make a covenant with our eyes, ears, hands, and feet that we will avoid those things that would undermine our commitment. Our thought life needs to be pure and holy. What things should we think about? "If there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things" (Philippians 4:8).

Our baptismal vows are a seal of our commitment to Christ. Are we being faithful to our baptismal vows? We promised to submit "to Christ and His Word, and faithfully to abide in the same until death." We cannot trifle with sin and temptation and expect our commitment to endure. Jesus said, "No man, having put his hand to the plough,

and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God" (Luke 9:62).

Our commitment to the church, the body of Christ, is also closely tied to our commitment to Christ. How can a believer be a follower of Christ without being a part of His body? We cannot fulfill the commands to "love the brethren" and submit ourselves "one to another" without being members of the church. We must be willing to fill our place in the church wherever we are called. Are we available for service in the church, whether at home or on the mission field? Faithfulness in attending church services and supporting church activities also shows that church work takes a high priority in our lives.

Our commitment to the church requires obedience and submission as long as the church continues to uphold the Scriptures. We must faithfully follow and support church standards. Some committed brethren in the church are called to fill leadership offices. Those who are called to these responsibilities need to be committed to fulfill them well as good stewards of Jesus Christ and to be faithful watchmen and guardians of the church. Watching for men's souls is a weighty responsibility, but God who called will also bless with sufficient grace for the calling.

Marriage is a commitment that has many far-reaching conse-

quences. The high divorce rate in society today shows the lightness with which many people view this weighty commitment. We must maintain strong conviction for this ordinance lest our conviction becomes dulled. "What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder" (Matthew 19:6). God's will is that marriage be permanent as long as He gives life. Anything otherwise does not meet God's approval.

For marriage to endure as God intended, it must be entered upon only between believers and only after prayerfully considering the involvements. We must have a commitment to and a love for our spouse that will stand the tests of life. Will we be committed or will we be tempted to give up if financial difficulties, emotional distress, physical changes, or family difficulties arise? A young couple must be committed to each other for life—through the years of child rearing and grandparenting if the Lord so blesses. Death is the only thing that rightly dissolves a marriage. We must never entertain the thought that divorce is an option, or our commitment is already seriously undermined.

The responsibility of raising children is a commitment that has effects lasting far beyond our lifetime. Children need consistent love, nurturing, training, discipline, and

care that allows no release from parental duty. Parents are responsible to provide for the needs of their children. "But if any provide not for his own, and especially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel" (1 Timothy 5:8). Care for children extends long after they are no longer under direct parental care. A faithful example, advice, and spiritual counsel all endure throughout life. Children are a heritage of the Lord, for which we are stewards. Children trained today either for good or bad will greatly in-

fluence the course of future generations.

If we want our commitments to count, we must count their cost before we make them. We must choose whether or not we will be true to these commitments, but in God's sight they are not options. We will need to give account to God for our faithfulness in our commitments. Failure to maintain these costly commitments is sin against God. Let us have a commitment as Joseph had when he said, "How then can I ... sin against God?" (Genesis 39:9).

*Brother Brian, FL*



### **PRAYER POINTS.**

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

Pray for our government leaders. Pray that God may turn the heart of the king toward what is good and right.

Pray that God will overrule in the economic crisis to the good of His people and of the nation.

Pray for wisdom to withstand the deceptions of these last days.

Pray for the workers and their families as they labor on the foreign mission fields.

Pray that God would raise up families to labor in the harvest fields.



## Beatitude Series (Part 8)

### "Blessed Are They Which Are Persecuted for Righteousness' Sake"

Many prisoners think they are being treated unfairly. But other prisoners admit they did wrong, desire to do better, and take their punishment patiently.

We have all probably pitied ourselves when we were punished. God calls us much higher than this. We also have probably taken deserved punishment patiently, and this is the only right thing to do (1 Peter 2:20).

There are also times when we have been doing right and receive the sneer of rejection or even the abuse of men. It is tempting to complain to ourselves and others. But God calls us even higher. "For this is thankworthy, if a man for conscience toward God endure grief, suffering wrongfully" (1 Peter 2:19). These verses imply that our suffering loses its acceptability in the sight of God if we complain about it. "But if, when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God" (1 Peter 2:20). This is what God calls us to—so much higher than our natural reactions.

Humanly speaking, we have difficulty accepting ill treatment for well-doing. Here are five instructions from the Word concerning wrong responses to ridicule or persecution that we should avoid.

"Not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing" (1 Peter 3:9).

Each persecuted saint can claim the promise, "If we suffer, we shall

"Be not afraid of their terror, neither be troubled" (1 Peter 3:14).

"Think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you" (1 Peter 4:12).

"Let him not be ashamed" (1 Peter 4:16).

Do not become "wearied and faint in your minds" (Hebrews 12:3).

Here are five instructions from the Word as to what our response should be.

"Take it patiently" (1 Peter 2:20).

"Be ready always to give an answer" (1 Peter 3:15).

"Rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings" (1 Peter 4:13).

"[Commit yourself] to him that judgeth righteously" (1 Peter 2:23).

"[Take] joyfully the spoiling of your goods" (Hebrews 10:34).

Are you persecuted? Jesus said, "If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you" (John 15:19). We are glad we live in peaceful times. But most surely if we are Christ's, we will bear His sufferings in some form. At the very least the world will "separate [us] from their company" sometimes or "cast out [our names] as evil" (Luke 6:22). Often the more clearly we speak for Christ, the more the world will reject us.

also reign with him" (2 Timothy 2:12).  
*Brother Stephen, BC.*