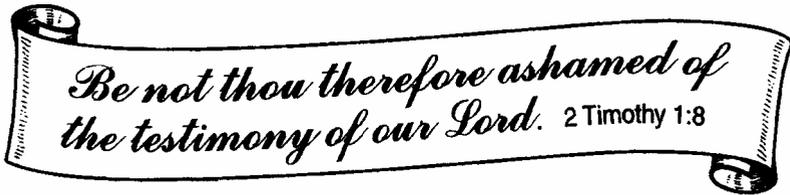


# THE EASTERN MENNONITE TESTIMONY

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THE EASTERN PENNSYLVANIA MENNONITE CHURCH  
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Because human nature is constant, history tends to be cyclic. Three thousand years ago, Solomon put it this way: "The thing that hath been, it is that which shall be; and that which is done is that which shall be done" (Ecclesiastes 1:9). History repeats itself—not exactly, of course. Issues in church life differ, but the same spirits are at work. Details differ from century to century, but the same arguments are recycled. The players are different, but it is the same old, tired conflict of vanity and worldliness versus Gospel standards.

Ninety-nine years ago, Daniel Kauffman published an article in the Gospel Herald, listing some arguments against nonconformity in dress and briefly answering them. Though the arguments are a century old, they are being recycled today.

1. *"When the heart is right, all is right."* The implication is that dress says nothing about Christian experience. The truth is that while a bad heart may hide under godly dress, a godly heart will reject ungodly dress.
2. *"Dress so as to satisfy the conscience."* This advice is good—if the conscience is properly instructed. But the final standard on any issue is not conscience, but the Word of God.
3. *"Dress so as to attract the least possible attention to yourself."* If this means that our dress should make people think of God instead of ourselves, we agree. But if it means that our dress should conform to society it directly contradicts the word of Scripture: "Be not conformed to this world."
4. *"Use good taste in dressing"* Yes, if "good taste" means that which pleases born-again, Bible-obeying Christians. No, if it means that we should follow worldly fashions.
5. *"God wants to see His people dressed beautifully."* This is true, but we must let God tell us what it means to be dressed beautifully.
6. *"The Bible teaches nonconformity, but is practically silent on uniformity."* The Bible teaches nonconformity directly, while it teaches uniformity by inference. In modern times with factory-made clothes, the influence of fashion, and general affluence, the church has found sometimes too late, that when uniformity is lost, nonconformity soon follows.

7. *"It is not profitable to spend so much time on little things."* If it is true that dress is only one small part of Christian discipleship, it is also true that disobedience to the will of God is never a little thing. But if dress is such a little thing, why does it receive so much attention in the world? And why do people find nonconformity so difficult?

Four generations have passed since Daniel Kauffman listed these seven arguments, and every one of those generations has recycled the same arguments. Nor were they new in 1913. Moving back a few generations, the Protestant revivalist leader, Charles Finney, countered similar arguments: that it does not matter how one dresses if his heart is right, that plain dress will distract men from the truth and be an obstacle to men becoming Christians, that dress is too small a thing to take up a minister's time in the pulpit, and that some are proud of their plain dress. Others feared that if they dressed plain they would be called fanatics.

Going back several more generations, we find John Wesley, founder of the Methodist Church, warning against unsound arguments on the dress question. These are also being recycled today: (1) the argument that those who take seriously the Scripture teaching on dress are *"running into extremes"*, - (2) the anti-law argument, which *"when any Christian practice is enforced, comes in with the cuckoo's note, 'The law, the law!'"*

When he wrote these words, Wesley believed the Methodists could preserve plain, Scriptural dress without the aid of uniform standards. At the end of his life, however, he lamented, *"I am distressed. I know not what to do. I see what I might have done once ... (and I now see it would have been far better,) ... I might have said, 'This is our manner of dress, which we know is both Scriptural and rational. If you join us, you are to dress as we do; but you need not join us unless you please.' But, alas! The time is now past; and what I can do now, I cannot tell. "*

Human nature being what it is, we may expect such arguments to be around as long as any church requires nonconformity in dress. Ministers, fathers, mothers—let us be ready with sound Scriptural answers to the questions that come. And reading a little church history would not be amiss. For if arguments can be recycled, so can answers.

—MSB



## "HONOUR THE KING"

The democracies in which many of us live are not ruled by a supreme ruler or monarch. The "king" we are commanded to honor may be any of the civil authorities over us from the President to the lowest level municipal official. This honor is not a cringing fear or useless flattery but respect of and deference to a person in authority.

Before we can properly honor human authority, we must fear God. Note the Scriptural context. "Honour all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honour the king" (1 Peter 2:17). By God's grace we can sincerely love the brotherhood, consistently honor all men, and also honor our civil rulers. This requires more than a casual commitment.

Why has God called us to honor the king? Have not kings at times been self-motivated, politically focused, and without love or reverence for God? Does not an earthly king seek to usurp the position of God in men's lives by being a supreme judge and a giver of good? Kings have even persecuted the saints. Yet the Bible instructs us to honor the king. Why?

All mankind is under the authority of God. And for the sake of civil peace, God has delegated authority to earthly rulers. God has directed believers to submit to His earthly authority whenever compliance with that authority does not place the believer in conflict with God or His Word. "Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake" (1 Peter 2:13).

A respectful and obedient response to civil authority also leaves a positive testimony for the Gospel. "For so is the will of God, that with well doing [we] may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men" (1 Peter 2:15). Some men are looking for an occasion to speak evil of the righteous. If we show contempt for civil leaders, we give them occasion to justify their contempt of Christians. "Having your conversation honest among the Gentiles: that, whereas they speak against you as evildoers, they may by your good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation" (1 Peter 2:12).

Our response to unbelievers affects eternal souls. By respectfully answering the gruff sheriff who stops us at an inconvenient drug checkpoint, we not only affirm the order of God but also give glory to God and His heavenly kingdom.

Even Jesus submitted Himself to the God-established authority of His parents, acknowledged the validity of earthly rulers, and still honored God the Father in word and deed. If Jesus, who was God incarnate, allowed

Himself to be ruled by finite and vile man, certainly we should submit ourselves to civil authority.

Jesus performed an object lesson with a penny (Luke 20:24), which gives us insight into God's purposes. The chief priests and scribes attempted to trap Him by raising a sensitive question concerning paying tribute. Roman rule and tax were repulsive to the Jews, and they were divided as to whether it was even lawful to pay the tribute.

Jesus taught a very plain lesson by pointing out Caesar's image on the penny and commanding, "Render therefore unto Caesar the things which be Caesar's, and unto God the things which be God's" (Luke 20:25). Jesus was saying, "Honour the king with the tribute that is of the earthly kingdom, and honor God by giving those things that belong to His heavenly kingdom."

By honoring the king we avoid being identified with the rebels of society. If Jesus had scorned paying tribute, He could have been easily classed with the multitude of political rabble-rousers and insurrectionists of the day.

Jesus was particularly aware that others would judge His ministry by observing how He related to earthly authority. Failure to pay tribute would have given an opportunity for those who opposed Jesus' ministry to divert the attention of the people from the message of the Gospel and focus it upon an earthly conflict over authority.

Even while Jesus established His own kingdom with divine authority, He distanced Himself from those who sought to undermine existing earthly authority. In doing so, Jesus was teaching His disciples to pay the tribute (in honor) of the earthly king, even as He taught the concept of undivided loyalty to the kingdom of God. Honoring the king with tribute is part of the price of avoiding offense and keeping the Gospel of Jesus Christ first and foremost in our message.

This instruction is given without qualification for all of Jesus' disciples. Those who have received love and mercy without measure will "honour all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honour the king."

*Brother Marcus*



## "Be Reconciled to Thy Brother"

The age-old story of humanity reveals the perplexities and problems of human relationships. When Adam and Eve yielded to Satan's enticement, their relationship with each other, as well as their relationship with God, was damaged. Cain's conflict with Abel was a result of Adam's and Eve's tasting of the forbidden fruit.

Despite the tendency of the fallen nature to nurture hatred rather than love, Christ enjoined His disciples in the Sermon on the Mount to restore shattered relationships. "Be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift" (Matthew 5:24). With the power of the Holy Spirit and a heart of love, we can conquer the carnal tendency to hold ill will. By God's grace we can be at peace with God and our fellow men.

Jesus very effectively answered the lawyer's question of "Who is my neighbour?" with the story of the Good Samaritan. Our neighbor is anyone within our reach who needs help. Similarly, our brother is anyone to whom we relate, whether it is a parent, sibling, spouse, child, neighbor, customer, fellow church member, or anyone with whom we communicate in daily life. We need a clear relationship with "all men, especially [with] them who are of the household of faith."

We should be sensitive to the quality of our personal relationships. We subconsciously appraise the quality of our friendships as we relate to them. Are they casual or close, distant or deep? But we should be careful to avoid falsely charging a brother with ill will, since at times our assumptions are not well founded. We do well to think the best of others, and then worry less about what others think of us. Yet, we cannot ignore an evident breach in communication with our brother.

Healthy relationships are important. None of us can bear a grudge and be happy. The carnal mind may harbor smug revenge by keeping the waters of friendship troubled; but the joy of mutual fidelity, forbearance, and forgiveness is forfeited. Open, unassuming communication with others reaps present blessings and eternal dividends. A breach in brotherhood relationships hinders Christian service and will affect our standing before God. The quality of our relationships indicates the condition of our relationship with God. And our standing with God will determine our eternal destiny.

When is reconciliation necessary? Jesus said that if we remember "that [our] brother hath ought against [us]," we should seek to be reconciled. On one hand we may have only surmised a conflict, and it is proven false at

inquiry. But on the other hand, we should not rely on time to heal an offense that is evident. Rather, we must take the way of reconciliation for peace with God and our brother.

What is the way of reconciliation? Apostle Paul wrote, "Herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men" (Acts 24:16). We pursue the way prayerfully because we are committed to effecting a wholesome relationship with our brother.

The way is not easy. We naturally dread confession and requesting forgiveness, but peace results. Should another seek the same of us, we are duty bound to exercise love and forgiveness. When the parties involved in an offense live in the spirit of forgiveness, both can go on with a renewed relationship, justified, without harboring bitterness for past injustices. The way of reconciliation can be summed up in five words: repentance, confession, restitution, love, and forgiveness.

What if our efforts to be reconciled fail? When we have done our best to fulfill our duty, we must let the matter rest even if mutual forgiveness is not realized. We should then relate to our brother with love and forgiveness as if reconciliation was complete. Our friendly interest, a smile, or a wave may effectively win him. "Let every one of us please his neighbour for his good to edification" (Romans 15:2).

To avoid the need for reconciliation is best. "Have salt in yourselves, and have peace one with another" (Mark 9:50). We are called to a life of holiness that reaches out to our brother in practical, daily expressions of brotherly love, fair business dealings, and concern for his physical and spiritual welfare. We must refuse to be involved in the demolition of another's reputation. "He that covereth a transgression seeketh love; but he that repeateth a matter separateth very friends" (Proverbs 17:9).

Reconciliation with our brother is sometimes necessary and is commendable. To keep relationships open without the need for reconciliation is better. May God grant us the grace to effect reconciliation when necessary and a greater portion of wisdom to relate to our brother in a wholesome way that prevents the need for reconciliation.

*Brother Marlin*



## *The Wellspring of Worship*

"There's not a friend like the lowly Jesus,' " the happy preschoolers trilled from their stair-step church auditorium." 'Jesus knows all about our struggles, / He will guide till the day is done.' "

The enthusiastic chorus echoed in the kitchen, where Mother toiled over supper preparations. Sweet calmness settled into her weary mind as the words sung with childish faith rang in her ears. "Thank You, God," Mother whispered. "You sent that message at a moment I so badly needed it."

A wellspring is "a source of continual supply." Much like an artesian well, the atmosphere of Christian homes inspires reverence for God from the cradle to the grave. Even the pressures of home life give opportunity for a soul that is brimming with worship to overflow. How can we develop such a fountain within our families?

Pattern a child by parental example. The parent who recognizes that true worship springs from a heart in tune with God will begin the day with personal worship. A heart devoid of peace with God, with the brotherhood, or even with its own family members can hardly stimulate a spirit of worship in others. A faithful father also stays informed about the personal devotions of other Christians under his roof. He spends time praying and fasting for the spiritual success of his family. When living within God's will matters to parents, it begins to matter to children, too. Parents set the stage for what their children will worship.

Live at a worshipful pace. Overbooked schedules compete with the demands of worship. Stop to smell the roses, to watch the hummingbird, and to muse at the perfect rainbow, using every opportunity to point younger minds to the Creator. Heartfelt worship also produces meaningful, unhurried prayers understood even by children. It disciplines the mind to memorize Scripture and song. Worship must be a way of life. For God's satisfaction and your blessing, live at a worshipful pace.

Feed an appreciative atmosphere. Sing as you work. What does more to boost home morale than a cheery song? Enumerate the day's blessings as you visit around the supper table. Praise God for special answers to prayer and incidents of miraculous protection. God-conscious families see His good hand at work in everyday life.

Make worship meaningful. Though worship is a natural response from a heart overflowing with love for God, worthwhile family worship will require practice and determination. A scheduled, inspirational event involv-

ing everyone is a father's responsibility. Sing lustily. Read expressively. Pray fervently. Ask practical questions to help children glean something from the Bible passage. Incorporate a Bible story. Show children by walk and talk the mercy and patience of God, coupled with His unbending requirement of complete obedience.

Worship is more than a twenty-minute family affair of singing, Bible reading, and prayer. Worship is a condition of the soul. Is the wellspring of worship producing to its fullest potential?

*Brother Harold*



### *PRAYER POINT*

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

Pray for the Christian Schoolteachers' Instruction Course  
and for the new, as well as the seasoned, teachers who will attend.

Pray for those who have experienced the loss of loved ones recently through accident and afflictions.

Pray that each of us would have a compassion for the lost and point them to Jesus,  
our Savior and Lord.

Thank God for health and strength, and the privilege to work and labor "with [our]  
hands the thing which is good, that [we] may have to give to him that needeth."

