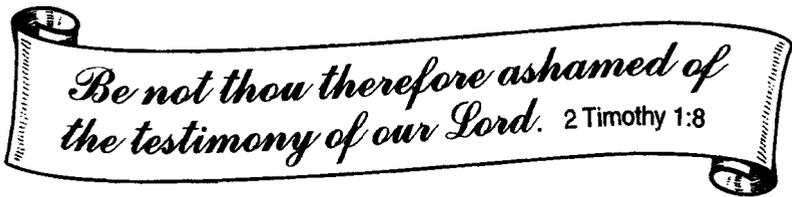


THE EASTERN MENNONITE TESTIMONY

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Many people in the world lack a sense of modesty and decency in their manner of dress. God has designed that clothing shall cover and conceal. But scant clothing does not cover and formfitting attire does not conceal. The wearing of abbreviated and formfitting clothing is not new, but "the unrestrained boldness manifest in present world practices"* continues to get bolder and bolder. How shall God's people—who are in the world but not of this world—respond to this unrestrained boldness?

We respond properly to the immodesty around us by limiting our exposure to it. We cannot afford to contaminate our minds by becoming accustomed to the indecency that prevails around us. Trips to town should be limited. Perhaps we can choose a time to do our shopping when we are less likely to encounter many other shoppers. We do well to choose a route that detours the crowds at the public parks and pools.

Even though we, like Job, have made a covenant with our eyes (Job 31:1) and do what we can to limit what our eyes see, we cannot entirely avoid seeing things unbecoming. At those times, that covenant with our eyes will cause us to turn away and avoid a prolonged look or the second look. But it will also do more than that; it will reach into our thoughts. "Why then should I think upon a maid?" (Job 31:1).

The clarion call of Gospel holiness rings to every generation: "Keep thyself pure!" But a holy outward response results from inward holiness. When the Holy Spirit rules within, we desire to make every thought captive "to the obedience of Christ." We will fill our minds with heavenly things. When confronted with the world's indecency, we will not allow our minds to wander, but will consciously and deliberately think right thoughts in accordance with God's standard of morality (Matthew 5:27, 28).

We testify against the immodest dress of the world by dressing ourselves modestly. Because "Christian propriety calls for one to be modestly dressed when in public,"* we keep our bodies covered even though the weather is warm. Our sisters' practice of wearing black hosiery and three-quarter length or longer sleeves in public life "indicates the choice of a virtuous mind."* Brethren should appear in a manner consistent with our sisters' appearance, remembering that "short-sleeved shirts are considered inappropriate for dress or casual wear."* Modest apparel speaks for God.

The silent witness of our appearance should be coupled with a ready ver-

bal testimony. When we are asked questions or given opportunity to explain, we should make it clear that our garb is not merely Mennonite dress (although we are unashamed of that identity). We must unhesitatingly point to the unchanging standards God has given in His Word. God's standard is "modest apparel, with shamefacedness and sobriety" (1 Timothy 2:9).

Even when our answers serve as a reminder or a rebuke to someone immodestly dressed, our tone should speak of spiritual interest, rather than sounding harsh and judgmental. Our lives and our witness should ring with the Gospel invitation. We desire that they too glorify our heavenly Father and join His kingdom.

If we will continue to relate honorably to a society that is increasingly unrestrained in exposing their bodies, we must instill a sense of Gospel propriety in the rising generation. Children must be taught to dress properly. They must learn personal responsibility for keeping themselves covered. They must be trained to turn their eyes away from indecent things.

In any society—and most certainly in our day—God's people will always constitute a distinct subculture. We must live sufficiently aloof and detached from the world so that the things of the world, including their patterns of immodesty, never seem commonplace to us. We need this protection; our children need this protection. But if we become accustomed to the world's ways, what will keep us from becoming assimilated into the world? Knowing that this world with all its fashions and lusts will pass away, we keep our ears tuned to the heavenly voice: "Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues" (Revelation 18:4).

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**Statement of Christian Doctrine and Rules and Discipline of the Eastern Pennsylvania Mennonite Church and Related Areas*



Ministerial Oversight in the Congregation

The phrase "ministerial oversight" is derived from Biblical terminology in 1 Peter 5:2, "taking the oversight thereof." It speaks of both responsibility and accountability. It requires a heart of love and compassion. It requires a burden for souls and a personal interest in others. A practical un-

derstanding of the narrow way is of utmost importance to be able to help others in their Christian lives.

Ministerial oversight is a God-given responsibility. It is not for prestige but is rather a position of service and sacrifice. Jesus, the Chief Shepherd, "came not to be ministered unto, but to minister." Likewise, those who are called to be under-shepherds must serve their congregations in humility with self-sacrificing love.

The responsibility of ministerial oversight is a place of great accountability. God told Ezekiel that neglect in his responsibility would bring the blood of lost souls upon himself. Those who watch for souls "must give account" (Hebrews 13:17). The awareness of this truth should cause each ordained brother to labor with utmost care and zeal. One day they will stand before the Judge and answer, not only for themselves, but also for those whom God has entrusted into their care.

Effective ministerial oversight is enhanced with a plural ministry. When both the ministry and the laity respect the distinctive responsibilities of bishop, minister, and deacon, the needs of the congregation are met most effectively. When responsibilities are exercised according to the office, each of the ministry has a sphere of service that complements the labors of the others.

Ministerial oversight requires a working relationship among the leadership. Submitting to the elder (1 Peter 5:5) gives respect to age, experience, and office. To "be subject one to another" speaks of blending and working together. Failure to work together in peace and harmony sends unsettling ripples into the life of the congregation.

Ministerial oversight demands accountability within the ministerial team. They must be open among themselves as they relate to the membership. Before accepting responsibilities that take them away from the local congregational worship services, they ask the approval of their fellow ministry. As each one labors in his respective role, he needs to feel the support and encouragement of his fellow ministry. A ministerial team that works harmoniously together provides a solid example for the congregation to follow.

Humility is essential for effective ministerial oversight. Humility enables the ministerial team to blend and work together. A congregation appreciates leaders who relate to them in humility. Humility enables one to see the work as God's work and not his own. Humility makes one more concerned that God be glorified rather than that men receive honor and recognition. Humility is not a gift, but a virtue that each one must cultivate personally.

God gives "grace to the humble" (1 Peter 5:5).

Effective ministerial oversight is a work of sacrificial service, done out of a love for God and for His people. Time spent studying, attending meetings, and doing interpersonal work does lessen time available for family and occupational responsibilities. So it is important that ordained brethren prayerfully consider the responsibilities they accept outside their home congregation. They cannot afford to neglect the family or the local congregation because of other responsibilities.

Effective ministerial oversight provides a full teaching diet. When Peter said, "Feed the flock of God which is among you" (1 Peter 5:2), he was transmitting the responsibility to others that Jesus had given him when He commanded Peter to "feed my lambs" and "feed my sheep." The doctrines must be taught and practical applications made. This is accomplished through the "foolishness of preaching." Stories, illustrations, and natural and current events may illustrate a point, but the Word is the vehicle by which truth is conveyed. The apostle Paul said, "Preach the Word." Preaching the Word provides the green pastures where contented sheep lie.

Ministerial oversight requires watchfulness. The adversary seeks "whom he may devour" (1 Peter 5:8). Peer pressure, fads, and new trends can chart courses away from God and conservative living. The discouraged, the sorrowing, and the wavering need to be strengthened. Child training issues, music interests, acceptable use of technology, automobile features, Sunday observances, and financial obligations need guidance. New threats continually appear on the horizons as our adversary attempts to destroy, "if it were possible, even the elect." Faithful ministers will "blow the trumpet, and warn the people," "when [they see] the sword come."

Ministerial oversight involves praying for the people. Samuel said, "God forbid that I should sin ... in ceasing to pray for you." Faithful ministers repeatedly lift the flock to the throne of grace. They do well to follow the example of the apostle Paul: "I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you all making request with joy" (Philippians 1:3, 4).

Ministerial oversight requires listening. Individuals may be troubled, perplexed, or lonely. Listening may sometimes lift their load and brighten their outlook. When opportunities are given for individuals to share, it enables them to understand themselves better and lightens their cares. "Let every [minister] be swift to hear."

Visiting in the homes of the congregation strengthens the effectiveness of ministerial oversight. It builds a rapport with the members while giving a

window into their lives. Although much visiting takes place in conjunction with collective worship, it does not replace home visitation. In the home setting, one can observe children relating to one another and parents to their children. The relaxed atmosphere of the home setting invites the kind of sharing that public settings do not offer. Visiting in the homes provides a source of encouragement and inspiration, enhancing unity that blesses congregational life.

Effective ministerial oversight is enhanced by example. A lord (1 Peter 5:3) exercises his authority and controls his subjects with force. But the ministry are called to be "ensamples to the flock." The example of the minister and his family in separation, nonresistance, simplicity, respect, and obedience will have a significant influence in the congregation. When godly example complements Biblical preaching, the congregation is blessed. Involvement in instruction class is a vital part of ministerial oversight. Even though the responsibility to teach comes by turns attendance should be regular. Taking an active interest in the youth during this important step in life helps to impress upon them the seriousness of the step they are taking.

Faithfulness in the personal life of the minister is imperative. To live in victory over sin, to express by word and action a strong trust in God, to portray peace in his heart and in his relationships, and to show by his life a love for and a commitment to the church are some of the needful expressions in his daily life. His effectiveness hinges on his relationship with Christ.

In the Apostle Paul's farewell to the Ephesian elders, he reminded them of "the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35). The life of Christ and the life of the apostle Paul portray this motto as they labored "night and day" for the spiritual needs of those they served. Ought not those whom God has called to give oversight in His church today labor in like manner?

Let those responsible for the oversight of the Lord's flock so labor, that "when the chief Shepherd shall appear, [they] shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away" (1 Peter 5:4).

Brother Wendell



Guarding Against Divorce and Remarriage

The word *guarding* suggests the presence of danger. We live in dangerous times. Among other dangers, we face the dangers of divorce. Divorce and remarriage is a spiritual and moral danger that lurks in our surroundings. This danger stands ready to invade our homes and marriages. The high number of marriages in society that end in divorce, the ease with which a divorce can be obtained, and the influence that comes from friends and relatives who are entangled in this vice all contribute to the magnitude of this danger.

God's Word is clear regarding divorce and remarriage. "For the LORD, the God of Israel, saith that he hateth putting away" (Malachi 2:16). Jesus specifically outlined God's New Testament standard for marriage in Mark 10:1-12.

The purpose of this article is not to set forth the Biblical basis for our position against divorce and remarriage, but rather to address some of the practical issues that push people to the brink of getting involved in this evil.

We guard against divorce and remarriage when we identify and overcome the marital dips that can plague a marriage. These dips occur when relationships become somewhat strained. Most marriages experience some of these dips—either by a fault of the partners or by default. These dips should be few and far between.

The principle "let not the sun go down upon your wrath" should be applied. We must climb out of the dip before sunset. Husbands are responsible to see that this takes place. To go beyond is like playing with fire. Divorce and remarriage is often the outcome of getting into these dips too often and staying there too long.

We guard against divorce and remarriage when we are realistic about what to expect from marriage. Some individuals expect marriage to put them into a utopia. Some expect marriage to eliminate a partner's bad habits and to transform the spouse into a loving, caring person. Others have the idea that satisfaction in marriage comes to us like the wedding gifts—all we need to do is unwrap them. Some anticipate that after we are married, we will be able to give undivided attention to each other.

Individuals with these unrealistic expectations ultimately wake to reality. They may then think that their disappointment and disillusionment result from their companion's shortcomings. Therefore, the grass looks greener elsewhere.

We guard against divorce and remarriage when both husband and wife have a "home key"—the key of commitment. This commitment grows out of the fact that marriage is a binding decision. When both partners have this key, they are locked into a relationship that is secure. But if commitment is lacking, small differences become major problems. This key of commitment is not found in a divorce court.

We guard against divorce and remarriage when we ponder why God gave us the directives He did. For example, why did God tell husbands to love their wives? We would think that most certainly they love them, or they would not have married them. But God foreknew that we would be tempted to borrow the worldly concept that love is primarily a romantic feeling. When we do not have such feelings, we tend to neglect to love.

This would be somewhat like praying only when one feels the need to pray. But when we do not feel like praying is when we most need prayer! Likewise, love may be most needed when we are lacking romantic feeling. Why are wives instructed to submit to their own husbands? God foreknew that they would face times when that submission is tested.

We guard against divorce when our marital development is on track. If a sixteen-year-old youth performs like a six-year-old child, we know that he has not developed normally. Each healthy marriage has at least three stages of development:

- The mutual-enjoyment stage—the unselfish giving of ourselves to each other.
- The mutual-adjustment stage—learning to complement each other and to do what is necessary to make the marriage work smoothly.
- The mutual-fulfillment stage—a strong sense of togetherness that enjoys the rewards of the previous stages.

If marital development is off track, distinct stages will also be evident:

- Selfishness and moodiness in an effort to each have his or her way.
- Competition and an ongoing battle regarding which one is in charge.
- A growing independence and a waning appreciation for each other.

When a marriage develops into a two-headed arrangement, we know that something is not right. Such marriages become very vulnerable and prone to failure.

We guard against divorce and remarriage when the idea of incompatibility is foreign to us. The term incompatible is used at times to supposedly sanction a separation and is used as grounds for obtaining a di-

voice. It may be true that the husband is a workaholic, and so the wife, in comparison, does not seem to get much done. Perhaps one pinches pennies while the other tends to spend. Perhaps he is calm and collected, and she tends to be nervous and flighty.

These differences do not mean that they are incompatible, but rather indicate the need to focus on complementing each other. The happiest couples are not those who have perfect spouses but those who bring the best out of each other.

We guard against divorce and remarriage when we recognize the curse of infidelity. Unfaithfulness is a most devastating thing. Infidelity is not only a major cause of divorce and remarriage but also a major cause of human suffering. The emotional devastation is dreadful. No words can describe the wretchedness that settles upon those who become involved and those who are affected by such corruption. Everyone involved loses when vows are broken, and the eternal anguish is fearful to ponder.

When we recognize the awfulness of infidelity, we will stay far removed from the things that would take us there. We will relate to the opposite gender with Christian reserve. We will guard our thoughts, and, like Job, we will diligently keep the covenant we have made with our eyes (Job 31:1)

We guard against divorce and remarriage when we maintain a high balance in our love account. Financially speaking, when folks have a substantial balance in their accounts, an unexpected expense does not make a problem. But when folks are scraping the bottom, such bills can create stress. The same thing can take place in our love bank. The Bible tells us how to keep our accounts in good shape. Study Ephesians 5 and 1 Corinthians 13. In the banking world, interest rates may be at an all-time low. In contrast, the interest rates on true love are at an all-time high! True love yields great dividends.

These practical considerations should cause us to pause, to ponder, and to guard our marriages lest we become involved in that which God hates.

Brother Donald



Wholesome Marriage Relationships (Part 1)

Understanding God's Plan

Building a successful marriage relationship resembles the building process in many ways. Strong, enduring buildings do not just happen. They take forethought, cooperation, and considerable work. They require quality materials and attention to detail. Planning a successful building project demands hours, perhaps even weeks or years. Those ideas will be documented carefully in drawings and specifications.

Like an enduring building, a good marriage requires forethought, cooperation, and considerable work. It requires materials and workmanship of the highest quality. A good marriage demands a clear plan. God, the great Architect, has designed those plans, detailed them in the Bible, and delivered them to earth for construction.

God's plan for marriage specifies ...

A solid foundation. No building will endure the stresses of time without being underpinned by a solid foundation. Neither will a marriage. A solid marital foundation includes each partner's personal commitment to the Lord. Marriage is to be "only in the Lord" (1 Corinthians 7:39). Coupled with that personal relationship must be the unwavering conviction that God's Word is currently applicable to today's marriages. God's requirements for marriage to be for one man and one woman and to be permanently binding are still clearly part of God's blueprint.

A sturdy structure. "Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it" (Ephesians 5:25). "Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as it is fit in the Lord" (Colossians 3:18). Love and respect are the posts and beams by which all God-honoring marriages are constructed. Like a building's structure, they may not be the most readily observed details, but their absence spells disaster. A marriage with the solid core of love and respect will stand securely under the crushing loads of responsibility, the rattling tremors of change, or the howling winds of adversity.

A secure enclosure. The core purpose of a building is protection. While a foundation and a structure aid that purpose, the windows, doors, siding, insulation, and roof provide the protection. Marriage, too, requires a security. It is "a garden inclosed" (Song of Solomon 4:12), separating the couple from the rest of the world. God intends that "a man [shall] leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh" (Genesis 2:24). The phrase "your love the protection," sometimes used in

marriage vows, underscores the important role that marriage plays in providing security. Only as a couple follows God's plan for a secure and exclusive relationship can the chill winds of mistrust, the driving rains of infidelity, and the blazing heat of anger and resentment be kept outside, and the warmth of love and peace reside within.

Brother Keith

“Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them,
I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock:

Matthew 7:24



If we wish to save our neighbor's soul by the help of the by Spirit and Word of our Lord, or if neighbors we see our neighbors in need or in danger, driven forth for the Word of the Lord, then we should not close our doors to them. We should receive them in our houses and share our food, aid them, and comfort and assist them in their troubles. We should risk our lives for our brethren, even if we know beforehand that it will be at the cost of our own lives. This example we have in Christ, who for our sakes did not spare himself, but willingly gave up his life, in order that we might live through him.

—Menno Simons, ca. 1541

