

# THE EASTERN MENNONITE TESTIMONY

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*Editor: [anabaptistmennonites.org](http://anabaptistmennonites.org).*

God instituted the ordinances of the church for her preservation. The enemy of the church targets these symbols of Scriptural church life. They stand as sentinels against individualistic, pietistic trends. Only in the confines of structured church life can saints "keep the ordinances" (1 Corinthians 11:2).

The word keep means "to hold fast, or retain." The urgency is reinforced in the word ordinances, which is translated in other places traditions and refers to doctrine that is transmitted by a continuity of practice. Apostle Paul commended the Corinthians' faithful obedience to church-directed practices such as the headship veiling. In a world of change, God has established anchors that should never change. But many times they do gradually change to make way for human inventions. How can we "keep the ordinances"?

After the apostle Paul commended the Corinthians' faithful practice, he went on to say, "But I would have you know." A practice will not be held consistently without understanding the supporting Scriptural principles. The altar of stones by Jordan prompted the children to ask of its significance. Faithfully preserved ordinances are teaching instruments to the rising generations. Teaching will preserve the practice, and the practice gives occasion for teaching.

"Keep the ordinances, as I delivered them to you." The ordinances are preserved by carefully retaining the form of the ordinance. Many have lost the headship veiling by gradually diminishing it in size and appearance till it has vanished. Do our daughters appear like their mothers? Church leaders are responsible to arrest changes that are not scripturally driven. If the practice of the holy kiss will be kept, youth will need to observe it like their elders. Without standards that maintain reverence and simplicity, wedding practices tend to gravitate toward worldly glamour and pride.

Ordinances are also retained by preserving their doctrinal accuracy. In liturgical churches, ordinances are called sacraments. These two terms are considerably different in meaning and in practice. A sacrament is believed to sanctify the recipient. Augustine referred to a sacrament as a visible form of an invisible grace. Thus baptism was believed to save even infants, and the transubstantiation of the mass was believed to sanctify the believer. The Anabaptists rejected this as heresy and taught that outward ceremonies are only symbols of spiritual realities but cannot produce them.

Menno Simons accused the pope of making a god of the Eucharist. Communicants do not become holy by communing but are rather to examine themselves for sin before partaking of Communion. The rite of Baptism in itself does not save the soul but as an act of obedience is "the answer of a good conscience." Baptism by immersion may seem innocent in itself until we understand how it lends itself to the error of baptismal regeneration.

The sacramental concept elevated the church and its ordinances above the Word. A more subtle threat exists today that is just the opposite. Pietism denies the importance of the ordinances and elevates the individual over the Word. Pietists suggest that the ordinances are no more important to obey than other commands of Scripture. While this is true, what is the subtle deception and effect of implying that any Bible practice can be thought of as an ordinance?

Pietism down through the centuries has diminished the practice of ordinances. The modern strain of pietism prevalent today is militant against church authority and interference in the individual experience. The ordinances stand as a roadblock to their doctrine. The Scripture places every one of the seven ordinances under the administration of the church. This raises the ire of those who chafe at organized and structured church life.

Admission to the body of Christ is formalized by the rite of baptism after congregational counsel. "Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized" (Acts 10:47)? Close Communion extends the ordinance only to church members of similar faith and practice. "But them that are without God judgeth" (1 Corinthians 5:13). Feet Washing rivets the importance of submission to a brotherhood. An organized congregation of saints is implied in "Greet ye one another with a kiss of charity" (1 Peter 5:14). The church leaders will perform marriage only for those who are "in the Lord."

Daniel Kauffman wrote that ordinances "are an aid to the Church in maintaining a scriptural organization." Yes, all Scriptural commands are important, but some are crucial to the fulfillment of others. Jesus lifted up two simple commands out the Mosaic Covenant and stated, "On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets" (Matthew 22:40). In a similar way, maintaining a Scriptural practice of the ordinances provides a framework for church life where obedience to the Word can blossom.

—BAS



## The Personification of God "The Heart of God"

The heart is the central, innermost part of a person. A person's response to the situations of life reveals his heart. God also has a heart and emotions. He is sensitive to the needs of humanity, but in contrast to man, God's emotions never override His justice or judgment. We cannot totally discover the heart of God by comparing Him to man. "Thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself: but I will reprove thee" (Psalm 50:21). However, since God created us in His image, He expresses His heart in ways we can understand.

God's compassion is shown in His redemption. Not long after God made man, the sweet fellowship that God experienced with Adam and Eve was ruined by their disobedience. "But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). Although disobedience brought consequences, God was merciful and promised a Savior. He is still working to restore the fellowship between His heart and man's heart. "He hath not dealt with us after our sins; nor rewarded us according to our iniquities" (Psalm 103:10).

God's compassion is shown in His patience. "The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9). Think of all the grief that men have caused God. We marvel that God is still patiently working with men today. And as we look back at our own life, we are amazed at how patient God has been with us. We realize how desperately we need God's help even now.

Just as we teach and train our children with understanding, so our heavenly Father knows our potential, helps us in our walk, and does not turn away when we stumble. God gives us time and many opportunities for improvement. God would have the right to forsake us, but since God is love, He is also patient. What comfort to know that He understands and cares for us!

Our hearts are warmed when we realize that God knows all about us. "For he knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust" (Psalm 103:14). As an all-knowing, loving, heavenly Father, He is very realistic in His expectations. He never expects more of us than we can handle. This is a great comfort to us if we believe that God is in control of every detail of our life.

God's compassion is shown through His empathy. Life has many disappointments. We live in a dying world, a world of many disappointments. Jesus understood sorrow and grief. "He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief" (Isaiah 53:3). When we experience disappointments, we need to remember that God understands and invites us to rest in him. "Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls" (Matthew 11:29). Loved ones may die. Friends may be unfaithful. Financial reverses are very real. Jesus understands.

God understands grief caused by man taking his own way. "God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually" (Genesis 6:5). God was grieved at His heart. We glimpse the heart of God as Jesus wept over Jerusalem: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!" (Matthew 23:37). Jesus' grief was not for what He was suffering but for what His people were bringing upon themselves. May we never add to His grief by rejecting Him.

God understands the grief of losing a loved one. Jesus arrived at the home of His friend Lazarus four days after he had been buried. Even though He knew that He would raise Lazarus from the dead, His heart was full of compassion. "When Jesus therefore saw her weeping, and the Jews also weeping which came with her, he groaned in the spirit, and was troubled, and said, Where have ye laid him? They said unto him, Lord, come and see. Jesus wept. Then said the Jews, Behold how he loved him!" (John 11:33-36). Any one that has experienced hard situations in life knows the comfort it is to have someone nearby that understands what we are going through—sharing in the hard time. That is exactly what we have in God! "For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin" (Hebrews 4:15).

God is still looking for men and women with a heart after His own; a heart that will find joy in the things that bring Him joy, and a heart that grieves when He grieves. God's heart desires fellowship with us, not only when we are in need, but any time, just to talk.

God needs people after His heart to show the world His heart.

*Brother Kenneth*



## BETTER

Advertisers and businesses attempt to convince us that their product is better. Many claim, either in their name or in their business emphasis, that you will save more and do more by using their products.

The older and more experienced have learned to view the new, improved, and better with some skepticism. We should wisely compare before too readily accepting the advertising at face value.

However, we have a reference guide, the Bible, that can be depended upon to assure us of better things. These better things have God's stamp of approval and have been proven.

The psalmist declares that heartfelt praise to our Creator pleases Him more than the sacrifices required by the Old Testament saints. "I will praise the name of God with a song, and will magnify him with thanksgiving. This also shall please the LORD better than an ox or bullock that hath horns and hoofs" (Psalm 69:30, 31). "It is better to trust in the LORD than to put confidence in princes" (Psalm 118:8). We tend to believe another person whom we can directly see and hear more than an all-wise Creator whom we cannot see. But by the eye of faith, we know deep down in our heart that God knows what is best.

"Wisdom is better than rubies" (Proverbs 8:11). While rubies may have monetary value and are beautiful gems, they are helpless to make good choices in life. Wisdom, by contrast, is always useable, always practical, and never out-of-date. The wisdom God provides guides us through all the unknowns that challenge us. God's wisdom can save us much heartache and confusion when we depend on Him to direct our path.

"A poor man is better than a liar" (Proverbs 19:22). A poor man of integrity is respected by others, whereas a liar cannot be trusted by anyone. Dishonesty destroys relationships. But a man, although poor, may still contribute to our life in more valuable ways.

"Better is an handful with quietness, than both the hands full with travail and vexation of spirit" (Ecclesiastes 4:6). To be content with comparatively little is truly a restful experience. Too often people who have great wealth discover sooner or later that wealth does not deliver the security and happiness that it may promise. To have little and be happy brings a peace that many have yet to learn.

"Two are better than one" (Ecclesiastes 4:9). Teamwork has advantages, be it in home life, community, or brotherhood. Some people become quite independent, feeling little need for the input or help of others. Usually they

end up discovering that when adversity comes their way, the blessing of others becomes rather obvious.

"It is better to go to the house of mourning, than to go to the house of feasting: for that is the end of all men; and the living will lay it to his heart. Sorrow is better than laughter" (Ecclesiastes 7:2, 3). The effects of laughter are usually short-lived and cause us to forget the seriousness of life. Sorrow by its very nature is a better teacher, reminding us that life is short and we should live wisely.

May this brief glimpse of the Scripture's better things stir our interest for more of the better treasures of God.

*Brother Dennis*



## Minutes of the Conferring Fellowship Meeting Held at the Ashland Bible School April 11, 2013

Brother James, moderator for the morning session, opened with a welcome to the group, after which Brother Lowell led us in singing "Glory to God on High" and "Jesus, Where'er Thy People Meet."

Brother Anthony led us in devotions, reading from 1 Chronicles 17:16-25. David surrendered his desire to build the temple and let God be in charge of the project. David responded with humility, not questioning or reasoning with God, recognizing himself as a servant, unworthy of all God had done. We also should focus on what God has done, not on what we do for Him. We are good building material when we see ourselves as only servants and cultivate a love for God and the church.

We sang together "Come, Gracious Spirit, Heavenly Dove," after which Brother Noah brought the first message of the day, titled "In the Presence of God for Us," taken from Hebrews 9:24. He used a number of Scriptures to show how our Lord is observing the needs of His people today, and is presently speaking to us through the Spirit, the Word, and the church. Christ stands as the Mediator between God and man and helps us to benefit from the divine resources that heaven offers us.

We were challenged to respond to our Savior's work ...

1. By drawing near to Him with true hearts (Hebrews 10:22).
  2. By allowing Christ to be glorified in us (John 17:10).
  3. By honoring His desire for oneness and unity in the church.
  4. By appreciating the faithful of the past and communicating the faith to rising generations.
  5. by finding joy and fulfillment in serving the Lord.
  6. By continuing to be sanctified through the truth.
  7. By anticipating the glory of His presence in heaven.
- We then sang two verses of "Jesus Pleads for Me."

The second message was brought by Brother Laverne: Article V of the Schleithem Confession of Faith (Shepherds in the Church). The shepherds are the ministry of the church and perhaps the bishops are especially in focus. He noted five main points from this article:

1. The rule of Paul in qualifying the shepherd. He must be completely consecrated to the will and work of God (2 Timothy 2:20, 21).
2. The responsibility of the shepherd. This involves prayer, studying the Word, exhorting, teaching, admonishing, administering the ordinances, and generally maintaining good health in the body of Christ.
3. The respect of the shepherd. Mutual esteem between the sheep and the shepherd is important. Material support is an opportunity for the membership to show their respect.
4. The reprimanding of the shepherd. Leaders are vulnerable to special attacks of the enemy. Needs in the life of the shepherd should be addressed in a credible manner (1 Timothy 5:19).
5. The replacement of the shepherd. The sheep need a shepherd. We should make sure that leadership roles are adequately filled.

At the close of the message, we sang one verse of "O Thou Who Makest Souls to Shine."

Brother Galen shared a message on Anabaptist-Mennonite Identity in the Twenty-first Century. He developed the message in a number of areas.

#### I. The concept of identity

In Acts 4:13, 23, and Ezra 5:10, 11, the people knew who they were, where they came from, and where they were going or what their purpose in life was.

#### II. The burden of identity

- A. This identity connects us to God.

B. This vision is passed on to the next generation.

III. The history of the Anabaptist-Mennonite identity:

The essence of the Mennonite faith is the emphasis on discipleship, voluntary church membership, the relationship between salvation and Bible obedience, and practical separation from the world.

IV Our own identity in Anabaptist-Mennonite identity:

Two molding influences of our group are Lancaster Conference and Old Order backgrounds. Some of the hallmarks of this influence are conference-type church structure, evangelical witness and strong teaching program, strong emphasis on nonconformity, and cautious use of technology.

V Maintaining the Anabaptist-Mennonite identity

A. Appreciate church structure, including a broader church relationship.

B. Keep a respect and precedent for tradition.

C. Continue to emphasize nonconformity for everyday wear.

D. Make careful decisions about technology.

After singing "O Royal Bride, Give Heed,"

Brother Noah led in closing prayer.

The moderator for the afternoon session, Brother James called on Brother Joel to lead in two opening songs. We sang "Jesus, from Whom All Blessings Flow" and "Children of the Heavenly King."

Brother Boyd led us in a devotional meditation, reading from 2 Kings 6:8-17. We may feel like the servant who said, "Alas, my master! how shall we do?" How were his fears put to rest? His eyes were opened to see horses and chariots of fire around Elisha. He found out it was best to stay close to Elisha. God's provision for us comes through our brethren.

After prayer, Brother Melvin gave the secretary's report.

Brother Bruce shared the first message of the afternoon on the subject "Cast Out the Bondwoman and Her Son."

I. Who was the bondwoman?

A. Any effort to realize God's blessings without faith

B. The covenant of Mount Sinai

C. Any searching for peace with God through efforts of the flesh

D. Any effort to revert to Old Testament methods of finding God's approval

E. Any effort that is not faith which works by love

II. Why must the bondwoman be cast out?

A. The covenant she represents genders to bondage.

- B. The son of the bondwoman persecutes the children of the free.
- C. The inheritance is for the sons of promise.
- D. It is reverting back to confidence in the flesh.
- E. Preoccupation with carnal law competes with the works of the Spirit.
- E Old Testament separation was through spatial separation, but the New Testament emphasizes spiritual separation.
- G. Spiritual separation will utilize spatial separation.

### III. How can we maintain the spiritual value of our Discipline?

- A. Understand that the Discipline is a law (1 Timothy 1:9).
- B. Never excommunicate one who is not a sinner.
- C. Keep the practices that have affected holiness.
- D. Expect people to live above law.
- E. Insist on spiritual separation.

A period of open discussion followed this message. Various comments were shared regarding the messages given. We were challenged to help our people understand where casualness and technology will take them. Also, leaders are especially vulnerable to Satan's work.

We then sang two verses of "Near the Cross."

The concluding message of the day was Showing the Meekness of Wisdom (James 3:13) by Brother Clarence.

### I. Things the ordination charge will not do

- A. Immunize us from offending others
- B. Tame our tongue
- C. Give us a working knowledge of the Word
- D. Bring wisdom

### II. Who is a wise man among us?

- A. One who shows meekness in his relationships with others.
- B. One who shows meekness in the way he carries himself
- C. One who shows personal courtesy in his walk of life.
- D. One who is willing to yield to reason.

### III. Expressions of practical meekness

- A. When we are falsely accused, we should respond as Jesus did in His trial.
  - 1. We should always give a hearing.
  - 2. We should try to remedy the situation.
- C. When the critics are wrong....
  - 1. We should not strive, but meekly instruct.

2. We should let the critics feel they have been heard.
  3. We should discuss the issue with others and appeal for support.
- D. When the family is criticized and we are charged personally....
1. We should not become defensive but, in meekness, seek for help, prayer, and forbearance.
  2. We should display the Spirit of Jesus in all our encounters and relationships.
- We were grateful to God for a day of inspiration and encouragement. Brother Clarence led us in a closing prayer.



## **Keys to a Clear Conscience (Part 6)**

### **Practicing Our Profession**

"Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven" (Matthew 7:21). What we profess to believe must be evident in our daily lives. We are the only Bible the world may read. The adage "Practice what you preach" reminds us of our sobering responsibility.

Youth and young families can demonstrate that what they believe makes a difference in everyday living. Society expects grandparents to live their profession; but when young people willingly apply Biblical principles in their lives, people take notice.

We profess to love God. We show our love by obedience. "If ye love me, keep my commandments" (John 14:15). We also show our love for God by our love for His people. We are willing to sacrifice to help our brethren. This is what makes brotherhood assistance succeed. "He that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?" (1 John 4:20).

Our speech should identify us as God's people. Idle words and profanity cannot be a part of our vocabulary. Gossiping does not glorify God or edify others. Our words should uplift and strengthen others: "Sound speech that cannot be condemned" (Titus 2:8).

We say we are nonresistant, but what do our lives reveal? When someone takes advantage of us, do we accept it quietly? Or do we delight in talking

about how unfair this was? How do we conduct ourselves on the highway? We should not think about what we would do if we could or take pleasure when the ungodly suffer. Christ is the perfect example for us to follow.

Christians are called to be separate from the world and its practices. The way we dress should identify us as the people of God. There dare not be a big difference between our Sunday and everyday appearance. The world is not ashamed to show who they are following. God's people must not be ashamed to be identified either.

God's people are strangers and pilgrims in this world. We are not here to stay. Our home is in heaven! Do our homes and businesses provide for our necessities, or do they show our love for the things of this world? We keep our properties neat and orderly, but they should not display extravagance. We are stewards of what God has entrusted to us. Our means should be shared to further the kingdom of God.

We cannot maintain a clear conscience if we do not practice the knowledge we have received. If we refuse to practice our profession, our conscience will become hardened or seared (1 Timothy 4:2). May our testimony be as Paul's, "And herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men" (Acts 24:16).

— *Brother David* (end of series)



### *PRAYER POINT*

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

Parents, like Job, should continually rise up early  
In the morning to pray with a burden for their children lest  
“my sons have sinned and cursed God in their hearts.”  
Job 1:5

Thank God for the promise that His Word shall not return  
unto Him void, but it shall accomplish that which He pleases.  
Isaiah 55:10-11

Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart  
be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, my strength and me Redeemer.  
Psalm 19:14