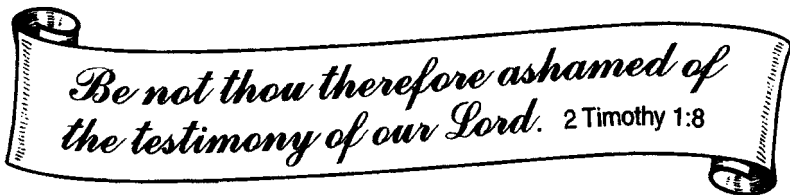


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As children of God we are bound in a common union in Jesus Christ. When we participate in the semiannual observance of Communion, we are giving testimony to this union. Only those who have truly repented and have partaken personally of the shed blood and broken body of Jesus Christ can rightly claim this fellowship with each other.

Because our union with Christ is held in common with our brethren and sisters, it cannot be separated from our connection to each other. Consequently, the Communion table is regulated. The term Close Communion refers to the associated limitations. It implies that the participants in the Communion have met certain conditions. They have submitted to the voice of the body—the brotherhood. They live in accordance with the order of the church.

But this union involves much more than a semiannual reaffirming of our standing as members of the same congregation or being fellow partakers in a Communion service. Our common union enjoins accountability and responsibilities that must be demonstrated in practical expressions and worked out in everyday life.

We are mutually accountable to each other. The group examination associated with the council service brings this accountability into focus. But between each council service, participants of this common union remain open to each other. As "iron sharpeneth iron," so brethren and sisters kindly sharpen each other spiritually through the brotherly address. Because we are jealous for both our own and our brother's spiritual wellbeing, we graciously give and receive spiritual help from one another. A mutual, "what I see, that I will tell thee" (1 Samuel 19:3) mentality prevails among them. We are not harshly critical, but with Christian charity, we address each other candidly and considerately.

Our common union is also a common union of doctrine—we are of like faith. We do not claim that our understanding of the Bible is infallible, but we accept the traditional Mennonite explanation of the Scriptural truths of faith, repentance, and salvation. In our desire to stay unified with our brethren, we will test a new insight with them rather than take an individualistic approach to our understanding of truth. None of us has a monopoly in understanding Biblical truth; we need each other.

Those who are participants in this common union in Christ are unified in practice. We "walk by the same rule" (Philippians 3:16), not only in ap-

pearance but also in speech and in conduct. We are unified in our rejection of this world and its appeals.

A minimum church standard does allow a certain amount of latitude in practice, and a certain amount of variation does not necessarily indicate a lack of unity. For example, we are not all engaged in the same occupation. But we should be unified in our accepted practices. Since we "walk by the same rule," why would a brother desire a haircut different from the traditional Mennonite tapered cut? Or why would a sister desire dress material, a hair arrangement, or a covering pattern that is inconsistent with our accepted practices?

Participants in this common union will have a mutual care for each other. One important expression of this care is a Scriptural approach to brotherhood assistance. Freewill offerings provide for the needs of the saints and bring glory to God (2 Corinthians 9:12).

This mutual care reaches beyond the offerings and the distribution by the deacons. The hearts of the saints pulse together. As members one of another, we see one another's burdens and then reach out to bear them along life's daily pathway. We will be sufficiently involved in each other's lives to be aware of needs in time of storm, sickness, or sorrow. We will be sensitive enough to perceive when a brother or sister is struggling under his load of responsibility or trouble, and we will be caring enough to do something about it.

Our common union in Christ is a spiritual garrison to each participant. Our mutual accountability to each other protects us from the imprudence of our own hearts. As we remain unified in faith, in practice, and in mutual care, the bonds of brotherhood stabilize and strengthen us.

—ism



"Whose Son Is This Youth?"

Israel had fallen into disgrace. Instead of enjoying the reality of Joshua's words, "One man of you shall chase a thousand," the opposite was true. At the defiance of a giant from the enemy camp, Israel was on the run. Not one man among the seasoned warriors of Saul had the courage to remedy this ignominious situation. Onto this scene came a youth, a mere keeper of sheep. From a human standpoint, he lacked the credentials for combat with a giant. But with simple faith and solid convictions, he wrought with God and took away the reproach of Israel.

Who was this young man? Saul asked such a question in 1 Samuel 17:55: "Whose son is this youth?" A simple answer comes from David's own words: "I am the son of thy servant Jesse the Bethlehemite." However, the question brings more than identification to mind. In a case of youthful folly, we might ask, "Where are the parents?" We expect someone to be responsible to direct youth. The opposite could well be implied by this question. Who was worthy of tribute for a youth with such noteworthy character?

Youth are not self-made. Influence has more impact on character than any other factor. One professional said something like this to young folks beginning their careers: "You can school yourself and practice (which you need to do), but the best thing you can do is work side by side with an expert who can give you some pointers along the way." This is good advice for an occupation; moreover, the Scriptures outline this practice for spiritual growth. "Thou shalt ... talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up" (Deuteronomy 6:7). In cooperation with God, wise parents take advantage of the teachableness of children and take the leadership from infancy through youth. With their teaching and examples, they endeavor to guide each child to become a mature child of God.

But youth are not completely a product of their environment. Youth themselves choose to follow or to ignore good teaching and examples. As they relate to others, they become responsible to choose what they will copy and to whom they will listen. Even among godly examples, youth will observe weaknesses they should not copy. "Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God: whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation" (Hebrews 13:7). The choices youth make declare their faith or the lack of it.

David's choice brought him into focus. Did he want what many youth and adults of our day seem to crave—attention? No, he had simply acted upon his faith and continued to do so whether promoted or demoted as the phrase in 1 Samuel 18:14 implies: "And David behaved himself wisely in all his ways." Ironically, youth who do things solely to attract attention are simply showing their lack of outstanding character. Faithful youth, however, are noticed by peers, by the church, and by the world. In what ways should our youth cause others to take notice?

Their lives should speak of humility. David's life displayed this virtue. Godly youth readily acknowledge their own inexperience and their dependence on others who have helped them to success. Therefore, they cul-

tivate submission and reach out for godly counsel. Godly youth give due credit to the grace of God in their lives. This becomes the means by which a proper self-worth perspective may be found. "But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us" (2 Corinthians 4:7). David clearly identified the Victor in his conquest against Goliath.

Closely related is respect. David's father, Jesse, "went among men for an old man in the days of Saul." God planned that youth would have a set of counselors a generation older whose life's path lay through very similar circumstances. David's life speaks only of respect for his parents. When hiding from Saul, "David went thence to Mizpeh of Moab: and he said unto the king of Moab, Let my father and my mother, I pray thee, come forth, and be with you, till I know what God will do for me" (1 Samuel 22:3). Even though Saul had failed in obedience to God and tried to discourage him, David did seek King Saul's blessing before facing the giant. David's life shines out in respect for even a failing authority. This was born out of a respect for God, the supreme authority that ordains all earthly authority.

One cannot show respect without obedience. "And David rose up early in the morning, and left the sheep with a keeper, and took, and went, as Jesse had commanded him." Godly youth appreciate the direction from authorities who help them practice the truth. They realize God has placed them there for their own well-being. David's obedience at home issued into usefulness in life: "And who is so faithful among all thy servants as David, which is the king's son in law, and goeth at thy bidding, and is honourable in thine house?" (1 Samuel 22:14).

Obedience leads to and becomes a product of conviction. Jesse's interest in the battle and the welfare of his sons caused him to send David there. This placed David where his conviction shone out. "Who is this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should defy the armies of the living God?" Likely this reflects parental values. David had obtained a high view of God's people and a correct view of God Himself. He was not deterred by Eliab's criticism or Saul's discouragement. So youth of today must be willing to face some criticism for following the truth.

Like David, godly youth understand the cause at stake, a result of spiritual vision. This is the essence of faith—the foundation for spiritual life. Wise youth see beyond the present to the future generations who will be influenced by their choices. They conquer the small deviations that defy the position of the church of the living God, recognizing the giant behind the drive for less conservative applications. They are concerned about the de-

generative effect of generation gaps. They understand the need for victory in areas of life unnoticed by men, for God sees it all. They delight in God's Word and purposefully plan to give spiritual interests priority over material pursuits.

Living by faith requires courage. "Let no man's heart fail because of him; thy servant will go and fight with this Philistine." David arose to a task no one else had the courage to do. The victory that day proved that his confidence was realistic. Goliath had confidence too, but the object of the confidence made the difference. It is never unreasonable to trust God. Courage is needed to take God at His word when many about us have given way to rationalism.

Courage is the forerunner of rest. David's courage brought rest to Israel. God's youth today stand out in society by being at peace. Their lips and actions tell it. Those around them experience it. Their lives show the satisfaction they find in being a child of God.

Whose son is this youth? Everyone has a simple answer to this question. But more importantly, godly parents accept their responsibility to guide their children, mold their characters, and influence their choices, so that they will be readily recognized as children of the heavenly Father. Faithful youth, like David, respond rightly and make their lives a worthy example patterned after the perfect life of the Son of God.

Brother Millard



THE EPMC DISCIPLINE SUPPLEMENT

Over sixty years ago a supplement was added to the Rules and Discipline of the Lancaster Conference. This supplement, entitled "Christian Graces," embodies the vision for vibrant, supportive church members of a conservative Mennonite church. Fourteen years later, in 1968, the supplement was adopted as part of the Discipline by the Eastern Pennsylvania Mennonite Church.

History: In 1943 the Conference had greatly expanded the Rules and Discipline. This included the addition of written dress standards that had been separately issued in 1937. The practice of wearing plain clothing was being tested, which in the past had been an understood practice. Church leaders sensed spiritual indifference among their members. The Conference strug-

gled to maintain a unified and separate people as broad cultural influences affected her people.

The Lancaster Conference was experiencing many external influences in the first half of the twentieth century. The world wars increased the church's awareness of physical and spiritual needs in other continents. The broader Mennonite Church exerted a liberalizing influence through her publications, a pressure for higher education, and an interest in missions. The radio exposed members to Calvinism and Fundamentalism. Public schools increasingly promoted worldliness, including patriotism, entertainment, and evolution. Industrialism and urban life were encroaching on the agrarian lifestyle of the Plain People.

The Lancaster Conference also experienced many internal changes. The church grew geographically to include city and foreign missions, providing opportunities for service. The Conference, in spite of skepticism in the constituency, had begun its own high school in the early 1940s to protect her youth and to prepare them for service. "Mennonites were leaving the farm for the factory, the schoolroom, and the office." The church never developed widespread conviction against the radio. The ever-increasing complexity of organized church committees and activities taxed her aging leaders.

In 1954, the Lancaster Conference revised its Rules and Discipline. This revision included many additional Bible references and further explanations. But the church leaders wanted to do more than just make new rules. They sought to work not just on the defensive but also on the offensive. They wanted to encourage right living from within. To accomplish this, they approved an addition to the Rules and Discipline booklet that could be used for occasional inspiration.

When the Revision Committee for the 1954 Discipline prepared their proposed draft, they included the following comment about the new supplement in a letter to the ordained members of the Conference: "The purpose of this Supplement is to be used on some occasions to give further encouragement so that the Discipline proper does not get too lengthy." The Bishop Board agreed that it be recognized as a supplement, with the suggestion that "it be read to our congregations occasionally instead of the Eighteen Articles of Faith and the Rules and Discipline." Content

What can we learn from the supplement content? It addresses various areas of church life that merited encouragement. Can we apply the concerns of the mid twentieth century to our church life today?

Stewardship and Materialism. We live in a society that depends on the easy

credit of present pleasures at the expense of eternal life. The Christian chooses to crucify carnal pleasure, realizing that true gain is godliness with contentment. The increasing interweaving of technology with basic life duties challenges the plain lifestyle with the threat of "useless and wasteful expenditures of [time and] money."

Benevolence. We have many opportunities to share ourselves with others. Are we disposed to doing good for the needs near us? We can promote the truth by supporting our missions, publications, and schools. We need to plan our finances so we can contribute to the needs of others and help to shoulder the cause of the church.

The Christian Home. Today's decaying society needs the shining light of pure and contented Christian homes more than ever. Parents need to make their homes "headquarters for godly influence," preparing children to be contributors to society and pillars in the church. Do our children experience a home life with an "uplifting influence" toward God and the church? Do our dwellings develop in our children a mindset of simplicity? Our children can be positively influenced by daily, sincere examples.

Christian Service Activities. Our church provides many congregational and institutional service opportunities for those ready to contribute. We develop a mindset of service in our youth as we discover opportunities to share time and energy as a family. Our congregational life benefits from many study hours, hostess meals, and weekly church cleanings. Our classrooms depend on dedicated teachers, faithful board members, and supporting patrons. Our evangelistic and relief efforts, publications, and missions provide churchwide service activities.

Speech. The Christian's speech is clean, kind, and constructive, giving evidence of a Spirit-controlled heart. Does our speech develop faith in others, by radiating the Word of God? "So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Romans 10:17).

Devotional Life. We continue to teach that personal worship is a prerequisite to effective Christian service. Do our morning schedules give clear evidence of reserving time for God? Regular, reverent family worship can develop a proper fear of God in our children. Sufficient preparation for worship will provide a healthful diet for our congregations.

Humility. Originally titled "Pride," this concern continues the warning against pride and arrogance in relationships, found in the first printed Discipline of 1881. Today, plain groups are threatened by pietistic influences and unsubmitive members. On the other hand, we cannot afford a smug belief of having arrived at a successful church life.

Lessons

How can we benefit from this addition to our Discipline? The supplement can provide a springboard for topical studies. We can further study the influences and challenges that shaped the Mennonite Church in the mid twentieth century. We must identify with and adopt an appreciation for the conservative (cautious) way of life.

What are some of the reasons Conference failed to uphold this vision? Higher education further opened the door to progressive Mennonite influences and prepared youth to serve the church and society as professionals. The mission effort in Africa, begun with interdenominational input and little oversight, was further developed by the liberally educated. The expanding Bishop Board varied in their enforcement of the Discipline. Church leaders moved more and more from guideline enforcement to mere encouragement, teaching programs, and committee discussions. Many other influences and choices conditioned the church to discard practical applications to Bible principles. The supplement was not included in the 1968 Lancaster Conference Discipline.

As the Lancaster Conference eventually yielded to losing its standards, faithful church members valiantly kept the trust portrayed in the Supplement. Each member today faces the choice to carry on the vision of the faithful. Can we as a people be aware of underlying trends and surrounding influences that could

undermine practical obedience? Will we continue the burden of 1954 to support vibrant, conservative church life?

Brother Jason

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Nonconformity Issues

Wearing Subdued Materials

The issue of clothing has been a live issue ever since the Fall of Man. Wearing materials is an understood fact, but what are subdued materials?

We buy our materials from worldly designers and manufacturers. We rightly question how much of the wide array of clothing and fabric available is designed for practicality. In a sensually driven world, much of what is available is not acceptable to conscientious Christians.

Some individuals contend that conservative Mennonites put too much time and energy into the details of dress. They think that if we would focus on teaching the Bible principles, the practical outworking of those principles would take care of themselves. History disagrees. It has been said that John Wesley believed in plain dress, "plainer than the Quakers," but he failed to see the need for regulation of attire. He later recognized his mistake, but it was too late to correct the problem.

Biblical Principles

God's people shall wear "modest apparel, with shamefacedness and sobriety" (1 Timothy 2:9). Our lives are to be characterized by "simplicity and godly sincerity" (2 Corinthians 1:12). These Biblical principles, which help us to define subdued materials, must govern our choices. Modesty is a regard for decency. Modesty will exhibit the inward spiritual adornment of a spirit of meekness and quietness, rather than outward adornment. Dressing in a subdued manner springs from a subdued spirit.

The phrase "in like manner also" (1 Timothy 2:9) indicates that these principles apply not only to sisters' dress fabric but also to brethren's attire. Sisters will tend to dress the way the brethren want them to, and they will exemplify the spirit that is resting in the hearts of the brethren. Men also are tempted to wear things that catch the eye.

God gives us direction through the church on what to wear. "Let us walk by the same rule" (Philippians 3:16). A Scriptural church will give direction to the practical outworking of wearing subdued materials. A spiritual brotherhood will welcome this direction. Fathers bear responsibility in their homes. With their wives' help, they give direction on what fabrics should or should not be worn. These decisions are made within the framework of church direction.

Uniformity in practice is a blessing to the church and to the surrounding community. Uniformity gives us a sense of belonging and accountability. The regulated, uniform attire of church members helps us to leave a consistent witness to the world.

Practical Expressions

How then do we apply these Biblical principles to the materials that we wear? Following Bible principles will keep us from following worldly fashions. Contrast the haughty daughters of Zion (Isaiah 3:16) with the modestly adorned daughters of the King (1 Timothy 2:9, 10). The spirit of fashion runs strong in the choice of attire in the world today. Do we want to be fashionable and haughty, or do we desire to be humble and modest? What we wear is an expression of our heart. Certainly we desire to make choices that keep us free from worldly fashions.

Consistently choosing subdued materials will keep us from following the ever-changing worldly fashions, or—that which is often more of a threat to us—modifications of worldly practices. These changing fads may include light-colored trousers, camouflage clothing, and bright materials.

Peer pressure tends to influence our thinking. When we are choosing materials, we should be focusing on the Biblical principles and not be unduly concerned about what our peers will think. However, when peers stay well within the boundaries set by the church and the home, they encourage each other to honor God by what they wear.

Subdued materials lack intensity and are neither bright nor showy. We reject some materials because the color is too intense. Other materials are not subdued because the color of the background contrasts too much with the color of the print design. Other materials tend to be showy because the print design is too large or too sparse. In light of the connotation of the color red in the Scriptures, we refrain from wearing red materials.

Dresses of subdued material will be modest, plain, and free from trimmings. Our church Discipline states that "materials shall not be transparent and shall be of subdued modest colors."

The wearing of dark-colored trousers has been our historical practice. This subdued material fits with a separated way of life and complements a formal appearance. Thoughtfulness must also be shown in our selection of shirts and shirt fabric. We should not be choosing that which stands out as different or attractive. Consistent shirt buttons will blend with the fabric of the shirt and not be eye-catching.

A subdued people will choose an identity with their God and reject "that which is highly esteemed among men" (Luke 16:15). If we do not want to be identified with the western styles or the blue jeans culture, our choices of trousers and shirts must convey a different identity. Not only are consistent trousers made from an acceptable fabric, but they are also sewn with a full cut and an appropriate pattern. Consistent shirts will not have bold

lines and loud colors.

We choose dark trousers and consistent shirts, and we choose dress materials of subdued colors and small prints because the whole of our appearance should complement a meek and quiet spirit. Consequently, we should also consider whether belts, belt buckles, and any other articles worn are consistent with the subdued materials of our clothing. We want to avoid that which is eye-catching or designed to attract attention.

Because spiritually minded people seek to glorify God in all things, they wear subdued materials. As their conduct conforms to their consistent appearance, they leave a powerful testimony. The world observes them—and thinks of God!

Brother Glendon



Church Committee Report

The Special Education Committee

In 2004 the Eastern Pennsylvania Mennonite Church (EPMC) formed the Special Education Committee to focus on needs within our own group. The Committee is intended to address various concerns that have led to more church involvement with special needs individuals. Among these concerns is the desire to withstand humanistic pressures and promote a Scriptural philosophy of education. We appreciate the work of the Special Education Committee formed by the Mennonite Christian Brotherhood (MCB) in 1992.

As an advisory committee, the EPMC Special Education Committee works primarily through the local school board when relating to the needs of school-age children. It becomes more directly involved at the request of the school board. This committee provides helps for school boards and teachers. It serves as an avenue to review and recommend curriculum to local school boards. The Special Education Committee also serves as a resource for parents in helping children before or after school age. It recommends special education subjects and instructors for the Christian Schoolteachers' Instruction Course.

The EPMC Special Education Committee would like to help you find answers. Many books and recorded materials related to special education are available, but these need to be screened for wrong concepts. The theories and methods of the practitioners and educators we relate to need to be

evaluated. Another big challenge is to increase our knowledge of available curriculum, much of which comes from secular and nominal Christian publishers.

Our committee does not publish materials, but we assist EMP in publishing special education materials. One of these is a set of materials to help children who have trouble pronouncing certain sounds. This is revised from the work of a former teacher and is about ready to be printed. Since this is intended for a young age, the course is in the form of a memory game.

Our committee is also assisting in the writing of a special education math course. The proposed plan is to make this useful in both special education and remedial situations. Progress on this project has been very slow, but parts are being used and are available by special request for classroom use.

Our committee serves under the Mission Board. For publishing interests, we work through the Curriculum Committee of the Publication Board. Our first meeting was held on November 23, 2004. We had our thirty-seventh meeting on May 17, 2016. Pray that the Lord would help us to be more effective in serving our people.

Brother Kenneth: For the Special Education Committee



Wholesome Marriage Relationships (Part 4)

Facing Life's Disappointments

Daily weather includes the unexpected. Any wise builder realizes that the long-term endurance of a house requires forethought in its placement and attention to detail in its construction. Record snowfalls sometimes crush roofs, violent storms pack structurally damaging winds, and cloudbursts disgorge swirling floodwaters.

Life, like the weather, has its surprises, not all of which are pleasant. Disappointments have the power to crush, undermine, and sweep away an unprepared and undefended marriage. A wise couple recognizes that preparing for disappointments and persevering in them are important keys to a wholesome marriage. Enduring marriages will ...

Prepare a sound relationship in the good times. A stable couple prepares for disappointments by cultivating thankfulness for each other. A careful husband thanks his wife for the effort she puts into having clean clothes, nutritious meals, and an orderly house. A diligent wife does not take for

granted the money available for food and clothes. Instead, she expresses gratitude for her husband's labors. Such thankfulness will be a sturdy support in disappointments.

A prepared marriage reinforces itself with a positive outlook. Husband and wife should frequently remind each other that "all things work together for good to them that love God" (Romans 8:28). The petty annoyances of daily living are graciously endured. A proper response to small grievances produces the stability required for enduring the stresses of greater disappointments.

A concerned couple shores up their marriage by accepting the reality that normal life includes disappointments. Job put it well when he exclaimed to his wife, "What? shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?" (Job 2:10). Embracing that fact helps in facing disappointments successfully.

Persist under pressure. One of the important props that underpins a marriage in difficult times is an unwavering trust in God's goodness. A couple who accepts disappointments as God's appointments avoids the undermining practice of unduly blaming each other, or others, for their difficulties.

Likewise, trust in and acceptance of each other are also supports in disappointment. Trust enables a couple to expect the best from each other, keeping the floods of suspicion at bay. However, sometimes marriage partners fail. When this is the case, a loving husband or wife is willing to accept his spouse's failure without becoming angry or bitter.

Christian courtesy is another structural member a marriage needs during disappointments. Godly love is "ready to pardon, gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness" (Nehemiah 9:17). A discerning spouse is willing to support when needed, and genuinely forgive when required.

Pick up and move on. Sometimes the aftermath of a disappointment leaves emotional wreckage strewn about. Worthwhile lessons can be learned from a failure, but a godly couple does not allow themselves to become mired in a miserable past. In spite of disappointments, a godly couple presses heavenward, "toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 3:14).

"And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock" (Matthew 7:25).

—*Brother Keith*



PRAYER POINT

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

Pray for the revival meetings scheduled this fall.
Pray that the Word of God would have free course and bear fruit in the
lives of the hearers.

Pray for the unity of the church. "Behold, how good and how pleasant it
is for brethren to dwell together in unity!" (Psalm 133:1).

Pray for the new homes being established. Pray that they would be shin-
ing lights to the world and building blocks in the church.

Pray for those affected by the floods in the South (USA) or by other
natural disasters. Pray that people would recognize the sovereignty of
God, would respond to His provision of salvation, and would glorify
Him.

Thank God for the freedoms we enjoy, especially the religious freedoms:
freedom to have our schools, freedom of worship, freedom to spread the
Gospel, and military exemption.

