



The *Pulpit Exchange*

It pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe. (1 Corinthians 1:21)

So they read in the book in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading. (Nehemiah 8:8) Iron sharpeneth iron; so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend. (Proverbs 27:17)

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Biblical Uniformity

Biblical uniformity is a companion doctrine to the doctrine of nonconformity. They go hand in hand and they rise or fall together. We could also say that uniformity is an aspect of nonconformity. They are very much tied together. The meaning of the words themselves is probably almost opposite. The fact is that neither one is found in the Bible as such, but we believe that the concepts are there. There are

principles in the Word of God that we want to look at that will bear out the doctrine of uniformity and nonconformity.

Nonconformity is the fact of our separation from the world. Uniformity is our separation unto God. The basis for uniformity among us is our union with Christ. Nonconformity also speaks of our disunity with the world. Uniformity speaks of our unity with the believers, and our

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unity as believers. As each believer is in Christ, is in union with Christ, it brings us together. As we are in union with Christ, we are brought into a union and into a relationship with each other.

In John 17, Jesus spoke of the oneness of Himself and His Father. Let us notice verses 21–23 “That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe

that thou hast sent me. (22) And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one: (23) I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me.” The unity and oneness that Jesus Christ desires is not only for our oneness with Him but that would result in a oneness between us as people. In verses 14– 16, we see

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the other side of the picture. Jesus says, "I have given them thy word; and the world hath hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. (15) I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil. (16) They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world." Also, our union with Christ separates us from the world. We cannot be one with the world and one with Christ, or one with the world and one with God's people.

Nonconformity expresses our disapproval and our rejection of the world's values and interests. Our uniformity expresses our appreciation for God, for truth, for the Church. Our support and interest in the welfare of the body is expressed in uniformity. In uniformity we are united in our application of the principles of nonconformity, and many other things.

The importance of uniformity, being united, of one mind and so on, applies especially and more specifically in the local congregation. It also applies between congregations as we are together. That it the purpose of ministerial and Bible fellowship meetings. They help us to be unified, to speak the same things, and to properly face the issues we all

face — much the same issues. We discuss in bishop's meetings some issues and areas we face in somewhat of a different way. Yet, as we are united in our doctrine, zeal, our desire for the Church, for God's people, and for truth. We generally arrive at a uniform position. It is important that there is communication. There is a relating together as congregations for the sake of maintaining a uniformity that can be a blessing to us and we can help each other.

Nonconformity and uniformity, as we use the terms, are the teachings and applications of practical holiness in regard to the Christian's personal appearance and how he dresses. That is mostly how we use it. It includes vehicles and various other things. I am sure there are other areas, but these are generally thought of as we associate these with these terms and these are very practical areas of our life. It is right that we think about that. Romans 12:2 says, "And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind." I understand this Scripture speaks specifically, or has direct reference to the fashions of the world in their dress. Therefore, we do not need to apologize for addressing this issue. It is given much attention

in the world, and we do well to pay attention. The world is much concerned about dress, their appearance, and their image. It is a major concern in the world today.

Let us not forget the second part of that verse, “but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind.” It must be the work of God in our heart, or we can put on all that we want to on the outside, but it will not be satisfactory to God. God spoke to it and we need to do the same. We need to speak to all the issues of our day. In our day uniformity in relation to attire is under attack. It is not a popular teaching. One reason is because it calls for submission and laying down self. Today there is stress on self-expression and freedom. The doctrine of uniformity and of unity opposes that expression.

If uniformity is lost, nonconformity will soon be lost as well. A person who does not want to submit to godly brethren will submit to the world finally. He will submit to something. Therefore, as we said earlier they go hand in hand. That is why it concerns us when we see a seeming lack of appreciation, a lack of loyalty and a weakening of conviction on this doctrine at times among us. I fear that behind this lack of appreciation and loyalty

is a lack of love for the truth. In its place is a growing desire and love for the world or for the things of the world.

1 John 2:15 says, “Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.” We see it is important where our love is. The greatest commandment is “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength” (Mark 12:30), and so on. Does our dress and appearance express our love for God? That is a question we need to ask ourselves. Or, does it show perhaps an interest in the fashions of the world? If the church does not give clear direction on the dress issue, then the world will. It does and we can see that.

As we look about us, as we read the paper or news magazines, and so on, it is not hard to see that the world gives direction on how to dress. We need to be clear in giving direction. There is an emphasis and stress among some groups who have formed and also individuals from among plain churches on the individual conscience, personal experience, and each individual guided by the Holy Spirit. It sounds good and there is truth there.

Nevertheless, what becomes of the Bible teaching on unity and submission one to another and loyalty to the body when we leave it up to each individual to decide what the Spirit told him and how to apply what the Scriptures teach? History bears out that if the church does not give specific direction and regulates our attire that the world will and worldliness will follow.

We probably are all aware of what John Wesley said. He was a well-known Methodist evangelist, a preacher in the 1700's who believed in plain dress but not in regulation dress. Later in life he acknowledged his error and these were his words. "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." We need to think seriously about the results of failure or of carelessness in this matter. George Brunk in his writings years ago said, "Unless the distinction between the Church and the world are sharply drawn by contrasts and firmly held by discipline the Church cannot hold them."

This will require uniformity. There will need to be a standing

together. What he has said has proven true in the Mennonite church in general as it has in the Methodist and many other churches that have laid aside the separation from the world and have let each individual be his own conscience. Can we learn the lesson from history or must we repeat them? We not only have history but we also have plenty of Scripture to guide us. That is what we want to go by. It is not a "Mennonite" doctrine. It is a Bible doctrine.

1 Peter 2:9, 10 says, "But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light: (10) Which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God: which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy." I am thankful be a part of the people of God that it talks about here — the called out ones — His chosen, special people — people who belong to God. In that we see an identity. They are the people of God. They are a special people.

In the Old Testament God told Israel, "If ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for

all the earth is mine: (6) And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation” (Exodus 19:5, 6). We see again here a distinction between God’s people and other people. Leviticus 20:26 says, “And ye shall be holy unto me: for I the LORD am holy, and have severed you from other people, that ye should be mine.” We notice there He says, “I . . . have severed you.” When I think of severed, I think of something that is cut off. It is not hanging on yet. It is not attached at all. In the same manner, the Lord has severed us from other people. *God has called us out to be a separate people.*

Deuteronomy 7:6–8 says, “For thou art an holy people unto the LORD thy God: the LORD thy God hath chosen thee to be a special people unto himself, above all people that are upon the face of the earth. (7) The LORD did not set his love upon you, nor choose you, because ye were more in number than any people; for ye were the fewest of all people: (8) But because the LORD loved you.” The Lord loved Israel not because they were a large nation. God chose Israel when they were few. It was because He loved them. That is what He says here. It is a love relationship that we have with God. God calls us because He

loves us. The Bible says, “We love him, because he first loved us” (1 John 4:19).

We also obey Him because we love Him. That separates us from those who do not love Him. We will not impress God. We will not get Him to agree with us because we are uniform and do the same thing. That will not get God’s stamp of approval upon us. That is not the basis. *Uniformity is a result, rather than a basis for our fellowship and for God’s blessing upon us.*

I thought of when God called Gideon to go out. Gideon had thirty-two thousand men who came together at first. It was a large number. God said, “The people that are with thee are too many” (Judges 7:2). God saw in their hearts and said, “Whosoever is fearful and afraid, let him return and depart” (verse 3). Something was wrong. There was fear. They were not all together in this. Some were fearful, so they went home. It reduced it way down to ten thousand. God said, “The people are yet too many” (verse 4). God still saw something wrong there. Therefore, He chose another way to sort out these people. In the end there were three hundred. These three hundred did these things alike. They drank alike. God chose them. They were a

dependable three hundred. God knew that. He told Gideon what to tell these three hundred to do. They were to go out at night, hold their torches, and break their vessels. All three hundred would do it. The united effort of those three hundred won the victory.

This is the way it is today. We will not be victorious because there are many of us and if we unite ourselves together God will honour what we do. Rather, it is based on our obedience to Him and following His direction. Therefore, we are separated from those who do not love Him. We love Him. All this talk about rules, restrictions, rights, legalism — statements we hear — I believe vanish when there is love. We do not feel like we are being legalistic. We do not feel like there are rules hanging over us and that we cannot do this and that. It is very important that there be a love for God, and a love for truth. When we have that we will want to wear the kind of clothing God wants us to wear. The world does not love God. Therefore, they do not try to please God in that which they wear. It is important that we desire to please God. We want to be known as His people.

Sports teams, policemen, soldiers, and various groups of people often are identified by their

uniforms, or by their dress. There is a similarity in all of their clothes. They are identifiable, and visible. They are a distinct group and by no means are they ashamed of it. A sports team is not ashamed to have their name on their jacket, or on their back and be identified. Neither is a soldier in the army. He wants to be known for what he represents, who he defends and whom he stands for.

The ribband of blue principle. In Numbers 15:38 God told Israel, “bid them that they make them fringes in the borders of their garments throughout their generations, and that they put upon the fringe of the borders a ribband of blue.” They were to have this to remind them who they were and as an identity. We need that identity for ourselves possibly more than what we need it for others to recognize us. We need to remember who we are and that we are God’s people.

Our separation in dress can be a big benefit and help to us when we face temptations depending where we are and what arises. None of us are above the possibility of being tempted in a weak moment. At times like that our identity and our separation speak to us. We know that we stand out. We remember who we are and who we are here to represent.

2 Corinthians 6:17, 18 says, “Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, (18) And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty.” We again see a separated people identified. *In the Old Testament it was a nation. Here he says, “ye shall be my sons and daughters.” We need a closer relationship — a relationship of children — children of God.* As a natural family we should not be proud of who we are. Neither should we be ashamed of it. There is an identity in our family name. We are glad to pass that name on to our sons. As God’s family we should desire to pass on to our children a godly heritage of teaching and identity with the people of God and the Church. This is not only in outward form but it is based on a faith in God, a commitment to the Church, and to the truth that expresses itself in loyalty and identifying with the people of God.

Ephesians 5:1, 2 says “Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children; (2) And walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweetsmelling savour.”

Notice “as dear children.” We are the children of God — sons and daughters. Verses 8–11 say, “For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light: (9) (For the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness and righteousness and truth;); (10) Proving what is acceptable unto the Lord. (11) And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them.” We are called here to walk as children of light. We know that God is light. The Bible says, “In him is no darkness at all” (1 John 1:5). If we are His children then we are the children of light. Therefore, we are to walk as children of light. The Scripture says we are to prove — we could say we are to show to the world what is acceptable to the Lord. Romans 12:2 gives us that same thought. “that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.”

God is calling us to show to the world His will. He is calling us to show to the world proper conduct in lives of holiness — how to dress modestly and so on. Is it important to have a unified message? I believe it is. We do not want to confuse the world. Therefore it is important that we are unified in our testimony. Verse 11 says, “And have no fel-

lowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them.” Our life, conduct, and our dress should be a rebuke to the world. They should see in our appearance that we shun fashion and styles of our day. They should see that we believe in modesty. They should see that we are led by the Spirit of God. Along with other things that involves the clothes that we wear. What do they express?

Will it express that the Holy Spirit is guiding and leading us if we wear the clothes that the world designs? Is it possible that an ungodly world designs clothes that will meet God’s standard? I am sure it will not. 1 John 2:16 says, “For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world.” This is what guides the world — the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and pride. These things show themselves really clearly in clothes, do they not? Pride is there when there are extra things that are added on that are unnecessary, or showy, to draw attention, whether it is colour or whatever it may be. When we are transformed by the renewing of our mind, we will be motivated by an entirely different spirit than the world. The Spirit of God moves, motivates, and

guides us in all our choices and decisions — what we wear, buy, and how we relate to each other as brethren in relation to these things — what they think about what I wear, and what their thoughts are on these issues. That is how we relate to the body. That is at the bottom of this subject as well.

Philippians 2:1–5 says, “If there be therefore any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any bowels and mercies, (2) Fulfil ye my joy, that ye be likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. (3) Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. (4) Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others. (5) Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus.” Verse 1 refers to fellowship in the Spirit. *If we have fellowship, we should be like-minded.* That is what he brings out here. If you are having this fellowship of the Spirit then be like-minded. Have the same mind, and the same love. It says be, “of one accord.” It is not the Holy Spirit in one’s life that makes us think differently from others. I believe it is our humanity. Maybe too often it is carnal-

ity even. In contrast, the Holy Spirit would bring us together. There is fellowship in the Spirit. It will bring our thinking together, I believe. This does not happen automatically. We have some direction here to follow if we look at verses 3 and 4. First of all, verse 5 which we mentioned already. We need the mind of Christ. We will never come together on Bible truth applications outside of having the mind of Christ and allowing Christ to work in us. The Scripture gives us some direction here. We see humility. When there is an attitude of humility and submission we will be able to arrive at Scriptural and unified conclusions as we allow the Holy Spirit to work through each one of us. That is basic to uniformity, and in order to experience uniformity among us. It takes humility to esteem another person's opinion, or thoughts above my own. As brethren we need to respect each other's concerns. Our goals and passion for the church and truth should be the same. We need to recognize that in our brethren. Their desire for the church is also purity and holiness, the same as ours and for truth. We respect each others insights as the Holy Spirit speaks through our brethren to us.

On the day of Pentecost, when

the Holy Ghost was given it says that "they were all with one accord in one place" (Acts 2:1). The Holy Ghost can work in the church when we are of one accord, and as we are together. Let us look at Philippians 1:27. "Only let your conversation be as it becometh the gospel of Christ: that whether I come and see you, or else be absent, I may hear of your affairs, that ye stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel." Stand fast in one spirit. When we think of standing fast, we are not talking about stubbornness. It says "stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel."

Ephesians 4:3 says, "Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." If my standing fast creates friction, and does not bring peace, or to a group of us as we are together, we need to consider ourselves. We need to check what is motivating us. Are we standing fast in one spirit? Is it the Holy Spirit that is working in us? Acts 4:32 says "[they] were of one heart and of one soul." The Bible teaching throughout is unity, not diversity. Sometimes we hear the cry "There needs to be more room for other opinions. We need to be more open to other

opinions.” I do not find that thought put forth in the Scriptures. Paul said to the Corinthians “Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment” (1 Corinthians 1:10). Paul there pleads for it. He beseeches that there would be a perfect joining together in the same mind and the same judgment. We should desire to come out at the same place. As the Holy Spirit guides us we will. 1 Corinthians 12 talks about the various gifts, but emphasizes one spirit, and one body. “One God and Father of all.” Ephesians 4:6 says. When the same spirit is working in each believer, it will bring about a blending together, a uniformity, a like-mindedness and a working together.

Ephesians 4:16 speaks of the body being “fitly joined together.” Colossians 2:19 speaks of being “knit together.” Ephesians 2:21 refers to a “building fitly framed together.” We know a building that is put together with boards that do not fit will not be a strong building. It will be weak. There is strength in being united, and working together.

There is the encouragement, support, helping each other, and so on. Uniformity holds us together. We also know what it looks like in woodworking. If the trim work does not fit, or is simply “slapped” together, it looks bad. It does not look good. We admire a building where the carpenter was diligent in making things fit. There is beauty and attractiveness in uniformity.

Psalms 133:1 expresses that. “Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!” It is beautiful. It is beautiful in the eyes of God when His people dwell together in unity, when there is a pulling together, and when there is a desire there to express truth unitedly. We see bands sometimes. I remember when we were in the Philippines for a short time. The school children there wore uniforms. You would see a whole row of children going dressed alike. There is something nice about that. There is something orderly about that. It is beautiful. In the eyes of God that uniformity (not that God is impressed with how we dress) is an expression of unity and a oneness of heart and spirit which God desires to see. If that is what it is, it is pleasing to God. It is a blessing to us as we are united together.

I know we can apply that to extremes. If we apply these Scriptures in our various situations we will come out at the right place, if there is humility, submission, and a willingness to know the will of God and to do it.

Some specific applications on these Bible principles. Some of these things are a part of our written standards and our standards among our churches are not necessary all the same. Others of these may be the result of a mutual appreciation for practice that has been a blessing to us. Not everything is written down. A spiritual body will appreciate unity and working together where we do not need to “write everything down.” We should not need to. We appreciate the body and our brethren.

Dress shirts as brethren. In our congregation we generally wear white or light blue. We never made a standard on that but I believe that it is something that is understood among us. It is something that we appreciate. I am not saying there is never a slight variation of that, but that is what is appreciated and that is what is done in general. To suddenly introduce something distinctly different expresses a lack of consideration, a lack of appreciation for the brotherhood, a lack of respect, support, and one-

ness. As I think of that, I wonder, do we need to open a door to the striped shirts that we see? Why do we need striped shirts? What are they doing for us? Why are they so appealing I wonder? It is an area where the pressure seems to be on. While it may have started with very light stripes, as I see it, it has increased to bolder, wider, more contrasting in colours and so on. I do not like what I see in that.

At what point can we draw a line on something like this? The world is setting the pattern and it seems to me that it blends with the world and takes away from our uniformity — our uniform expression of simplicity and non-conformity as brethren. It blends with the world too much. It is not that blending and loyalty to the body.

Uniformity helps to avoid this generation gap that people talk about sometimes between the young and the old. These kinds of things often come in that way. If we are uniform, we can avoid those things happening. We should not have a double standard. Youth ought to appreciate the standard of their parents and of the church and be like-minded.

Who usually introduces these new things anyway? Is it not often the spiritually weak and the undiscerning? Therefore, we let

it go and soon others follow and finally we get used to it. After a while we follow, and finally it is fully accepted and the church has taken another step toward the world. That is how it works in other areas as well.

The plain coat has been a blessing to the church. It is an identification and a testimony of not belonging to the world. It helps us avoid the world's changing fashions as the styles of men's suits change. We should be consistent in wearing it. We see a tendency on the first really warm day in spring or in the summer, maybe the coat is left at home, and we do not see it again till fall. I do not think that is quite right. We lose conviction, especially when it is a burden for us to wear it. Where is our love for God? Where is our love for the Church? We should encourage wearing it faithfully for occasions where we dress up. Bible school is a place where this is appreciated and respected. We could encourage it in travelling.

Also, I think of the light colours that we happen to see. Are they consistent and fitting with the plain coat? Real light? Grey? It does not seem to me they are. It seems to me that it turns the plain coat into somewhat of a worldly image that we do not want. We want to repre-

sent a godly image and identity. I believe our plain coat should express our loyalty to the plain church and our desire to be identified with the people of God.

We face the issue in relation to casual wear. I suppose we hear about it so much we get tired of it, but the casual wear of our day is an expression of the casual attitude of our day — the casual spirit. That is why it becomes serious. It is sort of a let-loose, carefree, unrestricted, self-expressing attitude. How can we guard against that? How can we avoid it? We know the Bible teaches sobriety. It teaches gravity, holiness, soundness, solid sounding faith, and so on. The question might come, what should we wear for those in between occasions then? One thing I would like to say is I do not think prayer meeting is an in-between occasion. Prayer meeting is a church service where we are together.

Neither do I feel that gatherings and "get togethers" maybe to address the *Star of Hope*, or for singing, and so on ought to be taken as casual occasions. They are times of spiritual activity. I am not saying that means that every time we come together we need to wear the plain coat. It certainly would be an encouragement would it not? There would

not be anything wrong with that. However, it is the place to start wearing casual clothes — something that does not fit with our profession of simplicity and non-conformity.

When I think going shopping, visiting each other, or visiting our relatives, I do not think we need a special kind of clothing to fill that need. We have clothes we could wear. We could wear new, or nearly new, everyday type of clothing if we wear the type we should. It would serve that purpose. When they get a little older, we can wear them for work. It will not be quite as hard on us to get them dirty the first time. They have some wear. Also we can use older dress clothes maybe that are no longer good enough for the best occasions, and they would fit for that. Stewardship would be a consideration in that. These kinds of clothes will help to identify us with the right thing.

For church services and related activities we should dress up and button up. Sometimes the first places we see creeping in some of this casualness is often maybe at wedding receptions. After the wedding and once they get to the reception. Coats are laid aside, the top buttons must be opened, or maybe it is after the services. As leaders we ought

to be alert with something like this. There is a deviation. Let us talk to them about it. Many times it would stop there if we would not simply let it go. How we dress for church says something about our attitude toward God.

He is a Great God, and a high and holy God. He deserves our best. We see it as respect to dress up for important people, how much more should we do that when we come together to meet God? Someone may say, “Well, plain clothes will not save us.” Maybe it sounds like we think it does. I agree it does not. Going to church does not save us either does it? Does being baptized save us? If it does not, does it mean that we should not go to church? We know the answer. The answer is no. Likewise it is as it relates to our dress. It is not a matter of that being the way of salvation. It is a matter of obeying the principles of the Word of God. Adam and Eve tried to make clothes, but God was not satisfied. God made proper clothes for them. Similarly, there is a proper way for us as His children to be dressed.

Another thing that I feel affects our efforts at times to maintain our uniformity is the lack of regulation of the work wear for the brethren. We have clearly defined what our sisters

are to wear, but as brethren we buy our clothes mostly in the stores, and largely according to our individual judgment. The weakness of this appears especially when young boys and youth buy their own clothes. I would give a caution. They do not have the discernment, the conviction, and the stability to make right choices in clothes in most cases. We as parents should be buying their clothes and helping them to build conviction, to know what is proper and acceptable and what is not. It will eliminate some of the work for leaders. It would eliminate some of the new and objectionable things that sometimes appear among us.

Parents should also consider how they dress their younger children. Do we want to dress them in a way that we do not them to dress when they get older? How can we teach them if we do not practice it? Jeans for work wear have been discussed many times. Some have taken a clear position on that. We do ourselves a favour if we would restrict ourselves at times on those things that are questionable.

How close do we want to be to the world? How close can we afford to be? We could reduce some pressures, dangers, and losses by drawing some clear

lines for brethren. I believe that jeans fit in with the world's fashions and the world's image in a way that regular work pants do not fit in. Also, some of these heavily checkered shirts and checkered jackets, do they blend in with simplicity with nonconformity to the world? More and more we are accepting these things and they are weakening our conviction on issues that we were once important to us.

It is inconsistent for us to expect our sisters to carry separation in public while we blend in with the man on the street. How does a plain, cape-dressed sister with an adequate sized head covering and dark hose fit in with a husband who is wearing a reddish checkered shirt, maybe with a shirt tail out, denim jeans, wellington boots, and an advertized cap? How does that fit together? It seems to me you could almost wonder if they belong to the same church. It seems to me it is a double standard. How long will that work? We, as brethren need to be consistent in our applications of separation or we will eventually lose it in our sisters as well. In the past that has happened. We are to be the leaders and the examples, and we ought to pay attention to that.

There are a few other areas

that we need to pay attention to. The size of the Christian woman's veiling. We see a tendency in recent years to becoming smaller. I see it happening with more and more hair showing. When is a covering no longer a covering? We see changing designs and necklines in collars, changing sleeve designs and sweaters. Prescribed patterns by the church help to maintain separation and avoid some of these innovations and worldly fashions that come along. We will need to be discreet in what we buy and where we buy it in maintaining a separation.

In Isaiah 3:22 God condemned "changeable suits of apparel." In Isaiah 3 there is a long list of things there in relation to dress that God hated. He did not like it. One of the things it mentions is "changeable suits of apparel." Constant changes put a lot of pressure on the church toward worldliness. You may think of some other things, but how can we implement this uniformity? I am not sure I have all the answers. We believe, according to the teaching in Matthew 16 and Matthew 18, that God has given the church authority and responsibility to bind and to loose. It is right that the church establishes safe guidelines and give

direction for her people.

God has called leaders to rule and to watch for the souls of His people. We must give account to God. We see that in Hebrews 13:17, "Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account." Therefore, we have a responsibility as leaders to watch and to rule. It requires some rules and requires giving direction. Acts 20:28, 29 says, "Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood. (29) For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock." We are overseers. We are here to protect "the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood." It warns us of "grievous wolves."

We have an enemy. He is sly and knows that he cannot convince us wholesale against non-conformity. However, if he can get us to be careless in our duties as leaders or to question our applications, and our positions on the issues, he has his foot in the door. In time the Church will surrender to the world and souls will lose their way. Therefore,

we have a responsibility as leaders. 1 Peter 5:8 says, “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour.” It also says, “Whom resist stedfast in the faith” (verse 9). Peter was writing here to leaders, to elders of the Church. He is writing to us today. It requires vigilance and being awake to what is happening among us, being awake to the attitudes that sometimes express themselves and the ideas. It is a poor sign when we hear individuals make statements that are almost right, but they undermine the church’s position. They cast reflection on some supposed inconsistency or something unnecessary, crying legalism when some dress issue is addressed.

We dare not let that make us silent. We must still speak. We must be watchmen that are faithful. We have seen in the past where those kinds of individuals go, and where they are today, many of them. They often go to worldly, unScriptural church settings. At first it seems like there is a sincerity in their thinking but we need to be on guard and realize that many of them are in very worldly settings or none at all. We do well to take warning to be vigilant and alert to these influ-

ences when they are in their early stages.

May God help us to maintain an appreciation for the faith and the practice of that faith in our day that has been committed to us. I am sure there are questions that remain — how uniform we need to be. Nevertheless, we should strive for uniformity and we should strive for that between our congregations. We should respect each other’s concerns. We need to keep it so that we are comfortable to be together, and to have our youth together. The repercussions to all of this we cannot see, but our youth do get together with the travel of our day. It is not like it used to be. The effects will be a hundred times as fast as they would have been a hundred years ago, or what happens because of the going back and forth.

Too much difference between us will make for a tendency for a lot of shifting and weak and dissatisfied members changing locations for wrong reasons and in the end not receiving the encouragement and the help that they need. May God help us, and give us the wisdom that we need. May we able and be committed to knowing the will of God and to doing the will of God so that He can lead us and humbly serve Him in building the church in our

day. May the Lord bless you.

The Scriptural Church — The Place of Uniformity

We have gathered because of our interest in the Scriptural church. We thank God for the privilege we have to be part of a body that is walking with the Lord — a body that we believe has divine blessing upon it. Our subject addresses the matter of uniformity. Our minds immediately turn to the subject of dress, nonconformity in attire, and the place of distinctive attire. We do acknowledge the fact that it is important that we have uniformity in other areas as well. I think we do. The approach that we take to insurances and health care to schooling our children, their education, and the work that we do as a ministerial body to try and maintain uniformity. We certainly are beneficiaries of this approach.

It has been said that distinctive attire for the Christian has all of the advantages that the uniform provides for the railway conductor or the mail carrier. One of the most obvious benefits is the benefit of identification. We know who they are when we need them, and are able to identify them. It keeps them from being confused with other services and other responsibilities. For example, if out of the UPS courier

truck that comes to our door a policeman would jump one day you would immediately question what is wrong. You would wonder what happened to the real UPS man. However, when the UPS driver has a dark brown shirt, and dark brown trousers, you know that things are on track.

That is a little how it is with the Christian as the world sees us from day to day, and as they meet us when we are on the highway or at work. They are reminded that here are the people of God. And we are there when they need us or when they are looking for help.

I would like to consider, first of all, the authority of the Scriptures on this matter. We are primarily considering the question of uniformity as it relates to attire. It is significant that more than two-thirds of the sixty-six books of the Bible make one or more references to clothing in some form or another. There are more than 1,500 separate statements — direct statements on attire that are recorded in the Bible. Therefore, we conclude that while we do not believe that the Bible must say it more than once to be authentic, we do con-

clude that it is a very large subject — one that God saw fit to give special attention and direction to. Some of that is by example. Some of that is by direct teaching.

The fact is that man is the only creature that is created that needs artificial clothes. Every other creature that was created has a natural covering such as hair, fur or scales, something like that. Man needed to be clothed with a special garment. The Bible is also clear that this need arose when man fell. It came as a result of sin entering the world and the repeated mention, the repeated and definite instruction that is given in the Bible is evidence to us that the question of dress is one of a moral nature. It is a moral issue in the sight of God.

A few Old and New Testament references. Deuteronomy 22:5 says, “The woman shall not wear that which pertaineth unto a man, neither shall a man put on a woman’s garment: for all that do so are abomination unto the LORD thy God.” The importance is given here of a separate garb for male and female. We refer to that sometimes as sex distinction in attire. Included in this principle is the modesty principle. I think that is very self-evident.

In Numbers 15:38, 39, we have direction given to distinctive attire. There is a mark of distinction that was given to them — to God’s people in Israel to remind them of who they were, and the special calling that they had. “Speak unto the children of Israel, and bid them that they make them fringes in the borders of their garments throughout their generations, and that they put upon the fringe of the borders a ribband of blue: (39) And it shall be unto you for a fringe, that ye may look upon it, and remember all the commandments of the LORD, and do them; and that ye seek not after your own heart and your own eyes, after which ye use to go a whoring.” The reminder of who they were does fit in, and is a reminder to us of the Bible teaching on nonconformity. It also introduces the subject of uniformity. They were to do it alike. It served as a reminder to each other, not only individually but collectively. The very important part of it is that they may look upon it and remember all the commandments of the Lord and do them. Then, in Numbers 15:40, “That ye may remember, and do all my commandments, and be holy unto your God.”

It is very clear that the clothing we wear contributes to the

level of obedience that we have in other areas. I think that is very true. Educators have learned that children who come to school dressed as “bums” often act like bums and those who come to school dressed like “ladies and gentlemen” act like that. That has been proven more than once. In fact, some of the public school systems have gone to uniforms for the simple reason of helping to regulate the conduct of the student body. God saw and knew that when He gave this direction. When there is a mark upon His people it would remind them of who they are. Is it not true that the clothing of the Israelites distinguished them from the idolatrous Hittites, Canaanites, the Amorites, the Moabites, the Philistines, the Edomites, all of them? It kept them separate from them and was a testimony to the then known world.

The New Testament, while a bit more general in statement, is no less concerned with the dress question. In the Gospels and in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus addressed the dress question in Matthew 6:24, and 25 where conformity to the world is forbidden. He says, “No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and

despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.” There is a distinct line of separation between God and mammon — the things that are earthly and temporal. Verse 25 says, “Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment?” Jesus is saying “Do not do like the others do. Do not do like those who are serving two masters.” If you do not, you will not worry like the unregenerate soul that is worrying about what he will eat and what he will drink, and what he will wear. There is a nonconformity to the world that does begin here.

In Romans 12:2, the reminder is given “And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.” He is saying here that nonconformity is a result of a changed mind and heart and it produces a transformed appearance. That word “be not conformed . . . be transformed,” is taken from the root Greek word meaning metamorphosis [Strong’s # 3339], which means to change. We do believe that when the heart is changed

the external — the clothing we wear is changed as well.

We recognize that the Bible addresses and teaches the various principles related to this question. The matter of modesty is also given. There are numerous Scriptures one could turn to. In 1 Timothy 2:9, 10 Paul speaks to women who profess godliness who should be attired with “modest apparel.” “In like manner also, that women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shamefacedness and sobriety; not with broided hair, or gold, or pearls, or costly array; (10) But (which becometh women professing godliness) with good works.”

Then in 1 Peter 3, we have the reminder that the principle of modesty must be defined. It would seem from this passage that the modesty question should be determined by the brethren. He says, “Likewise, ye wives, be in subjection to your own husbands,” in verse 1. Then in verses 3 and 4, “Whose adorning let it not be that outward adorning of plaiting the hair, and of wearing of gold, or of putting on of apparel; (4) But let it be the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price.” Then, he

goes on to say how the holy women of old who trusted in God adorned themselves being in subjection to their husbands.

Again, it is very important that the heads of the homes and the leaders of the church are giving direction to the dress question. When they do, I think it will produce uniformity. Philippians 2:2,3 also speaks to this question and gives us some teaching. “Fulfil ye my joy, that ye be like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. (3) Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves.” There again, unity and uniformity arises from being of the same mind and possessing the mind of Christ which he says in verse 5, “Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus.”

A few common arguments that are used or given against the doctrine of uniformity — against the matter of uniformity in attire or in dress. There are those individuals who will agree to the Bible teaching on modesty and nonconformity, but will take exception to the teaching or to the idea of uniformity. They will say that it is not taught in the New testament. The only truth that is in a statement like that is that the word *uniformity* is not

found in the New Testament. It is not that the doctrine is not taught, but rather the word is not there.

That is not a new response nor a new idea. That has been said for many years already. In fact, in 1898 a letter was written to John F. Funk by a son of a Lancaster Conference minister who wrote like this: “Some things are being agitated and causing some unkind feelings among our church members. The basis of it all is that young people do not dress enough like the older ones. They wear their caps too little. . .” He goes on to name a few . . . “Now, brother John surely the Gospel teaches simplicity and modesty, but where is uniformity in style of dress and certain methods of work? It seems to me that it would be better for our church to lose some of its individuality than to lose Christianity by quarrelling or demanding a formality of dress. The Saviour speaks of peculiar dress, but with reference to whom?”

That is, as I said, an old question, and an old argument that it is not taught. However, in answer to that statement, in answer to a letter like that, in answer to the statements that the Bible does not speak on it, I would like to read another statement, or give a quote from a

pamphlet that is entitled *Dress: A Brief Treatise*, published by the Mennonite General Conference at a time when they were still addressing the dress question. Mennonite General Conference, we know eventually became the enemy of nonconformity and separation in attire because of their homogenizing influence on the larger body of the Mennonite church. Nevertheless, in this statement, in this pamphlet, the writer says this:

“As said before, no man who obeys Gospel teaching on dress needs worry about the nightmare of “uniformity.” He finds himself outside the popular current of worldliness, in dress as well as in other things, and being in fellowship with the saints of God he naturally conforms to their customs, just as a worldling conforms to the customs of other worldlings. It is this fact that accounts for the other important fact that the great mass of human beings actually practice uniformity — either the uniform of the Church or the uniform of the world. Those who are loudest in their condemnation of Church uniformity are usually among those most careful that they are not too far out of line with the prevailing styles of the world.”

Again that is very evident when that is the cry. It is gener-

ally either to make church administration easy or to simply make room for the flesh.

Another statement that is used to de-emphasize the importance of maintaining the distinctives and the details that are involved in keeping the principle of uniformity is one like this. “In essentials unity, in nonessentials liberty, but in all things love.” In other words, we unify around the things that are important to unify around. The fundamentalists could say this where they would agree on the very basics of salvation and the very basic doctrines of the Word, then leave unapplied some of the others like the question of nonconformity and separation from the world. This statement was said to be the motto of the General Conference Mennonite church. The General Conference Mennonite church was the group that was led initially by John Oberholtzer in the Franconia area.

A statement like this simply conditions individuals to patiently tolerate those who fail to live up to the standard of the church. “In essentials unity, in nonessentials liberty, but in all things love.” Someone has said that tolerance as an independent virtue is simply another name for individualism. Individualism ultimately destroys unity, and it also

destroys any hint of uniformity. If we are given to having our own way, and given to being individualists when it comes to deciding on our attire, we will eventually destroy any hint of uniformity and we will lose unity as a group and as a brotherhood. We will also lose our evangelical mission and purpose in the world.

Those statements are being put on, or being said with “new clothing” today. They come with different forms, but they come out of the same heart. They come out of the same well. They lead to the same river and finally to the same ocean of defeat.

I have another statement from a liberal or ex-Mennonite to one of our brethren. This statement was made as a reflection against uniform and distinctive attire. “You appear like you love the method more than the Master.” He was looking in on our group and groups, and that was the comment that was made. That is nearly more than a clever cliché. Jesus addressed that kind of attitude and those kinds of people already in Matthew 23. It is not a new question. Nevertheless, we do recognize that there is a possibility to love a method more than the Master. Of the scribes and Pharisees, Jesus said in Matthew 23:5, “But all their works they do for to be seen of

men: they make broad their pharmacies, and enlarge the borders of their garments.” He had a condemnation for it.

It is true that our distinctive attire, and speech does not go unnoticed by the world. Why should it? In fact, the distinctive attire and uniform appearance of a group should attract the attention of the world. The question is, “Why should we disguise our profession and don worldly attire to avoid being identified by the Master or as being one of His.” Even though we are identified with His program and by His people does not mean that we love the method more than the Master. It means that we are being Scriptural.

I will give an illustration of how this works. Sometime ago a brother in an outlying area where there are no really close Mennonites had a visitor for a day or two who was there and offered his help to him. He sent him to a local place of business to pick up a part. When he came to pay the bill, the proprietor said, “I think I know where you are from,” and he gave the name of the brother where he was staying. He asked, “How did you know?” He replied, “Well, by your appearance. I could tell that you are identified with him.” Two weeks later this same thing was

repeated when another brother was there, was sent to the same place to pick up another part. The proprietor said again, “I know where this is going,” and the individual was taken aback a bit. He asked, “How do you know?” “Well, by the clothing you wear and by your haircut.” He identified him with the Master — identified with the person whom he was helping, but he also he recognized in it the religious connotation.

We do not want to lose that kind of testimony. It is a testimony that is being left maybe more often than we realize. It was a method of actually speaking for the Master.

Another one is that if we are spiritual enough, we do not need regulated attire, we do not need regulations from the church, and we do not need her voice of authority on the question of dress. If we are spiritual enough we will be able to each decide on our own what is modest and what is not, what is separate from the world, and what is not. Those things have a nice sound to them, if each person could actually do that. A statement like that could warrant some lengthy discussion. We identify statements like that as coming out of the camp of what we know as pietistic thinking where there is an undue

emphasis on inner experience and a de-emphasis on outer expression.

That is maybe summing it up almost too shortly to be realistic. However, I think that is ultimately what it does. It does not reckon with the things that it takes to remain a plain church. That is simply how it is. When each individual is allowed to decide for himself which way he will go ultimately the direction of travel is worldward. That is the way it goes. That is the way it works.

I have a quote here from John Wesley who was the leader, and the originator of the Methodist movement. John Wesley wrote (apparently) extensively at the end of his lifetime. He wrote on the question of assurance of salvation and the matter of Calvinism, and the evil that Calvinism — he had embraced Calvinism — the teaching of John Calvin. He wrote on that in reflecting on what it did to the church, the wickedness that came into the church and her leaders. In George R. Brunk's book about Gospel Synergism — *Rightly Dividing the Scriptures*, he is quoted in there about being distressed. Here is a new one that I came across.

“I am distressed. I know not what to do. . . ‘Here I am; I and my Bible. I will not, I dare not

vary from this book, either in great or small. I have no power to dispense with one jot or tittle of what is contained therein. I am determined to be a Bible Christian, not almost but altogether. . . With regard to dress in particular, I might have been as firm (and I now see it would have been far better) as either the people called Quakers or the Moravian Brethren; 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.”

It is a sad commentary at the end of his life as he looked across his group and what type of results that thinking produced. Might we learn from examples like this of what happens when that route or avenue is taken that if we decide that if we are close enough to the Lord, we will decide right on our own.

That story has been repeated over and over again. It is not a new one. It is not a new statement. There is no group that has maintained distinctive attire that has not first of all allowed the group to decide what is consistent and then enforce that with consistent and timely church dis-

cipline. It cannot be done, and it has not been done. One very basic reason that it is that way is because the gifts of the Church were not given to one or two individuals but rather to the group — to the body. Our safety needs to rest within the context of a spiritual and Scriptural group. When we throw ourselves upon that kind of group and willingly obey, willingly heed her voice of authority, it does bring safety to us and helps us to remain a plain church.

One more argument is that “I believe in nonconformity but not in uniformity.” They would say a whole lot more if while they are saying that they would not be beginning to look like the world. No, people who say that are already beginning to bear the marks of the world itself.

The advantages of a uniform practice and what it does for us.

1) *It contributes to the establishment of sound tradition.* We are a people with a very strong traditional base. We do not apologize for that. We have a heritage that does believe in sound traditions. A people with a Biblical heritage will believe in sound traditions. Paul spoke of them, speaking particularly of the ordinances, but also he used the traditions in the context of a Scriptural of sound practice and application.

One very apparent value of this is that the need for each generation to decide what is separate or modest is not necessary when sound traditions are carried and embraced. Each generation does not need to decide whether they will keep this or not.

For example, we do not need a lot of discussions on whether or not to keep the plain coat. We do have discussions on what it will take to keep it alive, but whether the plain coat meets the need and satisfies the question of nonconformity, separation, and distinctive attire. We do not spend a lot of time debating that. We do however, look at the threats to the continued wearing of the plain coat. Some of the threats are the plain coats that hang open, not buttoned for formal wear, and in our church services. Another is leaving the shirt collars open and laying the coat off too soon in the spring and not putting it on soon enough in the fall and not wearing it when going away for functions during the week — casual wear. All of those things finally militate against it, but finally as far as the coat itself we are basically in agreement.

The same could be said of the plain cape dress, and the type of veiling that our sisters wear. It allows for groups that take this approach to focus on the new

innovations that are coming in and it makes it possible for the group to identify the things that may actually undermine the principle of nonconformity. An example is when the vests came in a number of years ago. Some of our brethren were wearing vests under their suits, and because the church prescribed them but it looked nice. It could have quickly become a fad if direction was not given that if they want to wear vests then wear a plain one. Well, that settled the question very quickly.

Sometimes writers have tried to prove that simplicity and not uniformity was the practice until the 1890's. The letter that I read, that was written to John Funk was from the 1890's. The church did respond specifically to dress questions. The Lancaster Conference responded very directly to them during that period. Sometimes writers say that there is the mark. Something happened in the church and that really, the historic Mennonite position was not to be uniform in their dress, and that this is something that was introduced in the last century.

I would like to read a little bit that I think helps us to understand that our Anabaptist heritage did have a uniform practice. For example, this comes from a piece

of literature that was written by J. Irvin Lehman entitled *Christian Attire*. He quotes from J. C. Wenger's book on *Christianity and Dress* who quotes from another writer of a book *Sources on the History of the Anabaptists*.

"(1) In the year 1617 a case is cited of a son named Christopher Reichlin who became an Anabaptist. He often wrote to his parents, trying to mislead them. "Last Candlemas Day" he came home IN ANABAPTIST CLOTHES (p. 881). (2) A certain man came from the land of Moravia in the year 1608. He was not regarded as an Anabaptist for neither his CLOTHING nor his speech were Anabaptist (p. 806). (3) In the year 1598 a certain man named Konrad Wertz was still an Anabaptist for he still WORE THEIR CLOTHING (p. 741). (4) In the year 1598, less than seventy-five years after the Swiss Brethren organized their first congregation, a certain man named Matthew Kappel was regarded by another party as an Anabaptist ON ACCOUNT OF HIS CLOTHING (p. 691)."

There was a uniformity and a distinctiveness there. "The late Dr. C. Henry Smith informs us that the Mennonites of Crefeld, Germany, included the following in their dress regulations in force

in 1760. Shoe-strings were to be worn in place of buckles; rings were strictly prohibited; and there was a prescribed form of clothing. Also, the Dutch Mennonites had in the year 1743 a coat regulation for men and a dress regulation for women.” Now, it is true that the issue of dress came on the agenda for the first time at a session of Lancaster Conference in 1893, and in repeated and successive years after that, and particularly in regards to the ordained men and their wives.

In 1903 dress was mentioned in the rules and discipline for the first time. They were responding to new issues that came because of commercial cloth. During the 18th century the first steam operated weaving loom came into existence — “the steam jenny.” They produced challenges to the church that were not there before. However, on the matter of whether our heritage and traditional base provides a precedent for uniformity it is all there. It is endorsed by the Apostolic fathers. One could go back to the Ante-Nicene writings and it is there. They recognized, based on the teaching of the New Testament, that the Church has a right and responsibility to regulate attire.

2) *A uniform practice helps us*

to identify the changing trends and practices. Our statement on the Christian woman’s veiling does solve the ever-changing headwear problem. Some of the Protestant groups have tried to maintain a veiling, by prescribing the fashionable headdress, and one knows and can see where that came out. We do need to give direction to the types and the variations sometimes that creep in. A uniform practice helps us again to identify irregularities. When the practice is uniform across the church then we raise our eyebrows when a new fad or fashion appears. For instance, when the coverings begin to tilt upward and hair is left out the lower part of the covering, we immediately raise a cry of alarm. We know what happened in the past. After a while it was the barrettes that were there to gather the hair up under the covering — the ornamental barrettes. After a while the coverings became smaller and smaller.

The October 1984 *Eastern Mennonite Testimony* had an article on the back page entitled *Who is Styling Your Hair?* This paragraph is there. “A brother is expressing a wrong spirit when his sideburns extend down past the middle of the ear or when his hair is combed down over his forehead.” You with me probably

remember when that was more of a threat. Occasionally we see a little bit of that but not with the intensity that we did then. The question of styled hair and the threat did not go away, but it took on another form in our day. I suppose that an article written on the same issue in a more recent day would have raised the question of the styled look with the special emphasis on part placement — the high or the diagonal parts with the long hair on the lower side, the swept back and the styled look. Those are things that we are facing.

I began this by saying that a uniform practice helps us to identify and focus on the changing trends. Really, we do not address many brethren about having sideburns that are down almost to the bottom of the ear. That would look kind of strange in our settings. However, we do see a little bit more occasionally of the sideburns that are cut off almost above or right at the very top of the ear which is in fashion today. That is one of the values of a uniform practice. It helps us to think right. If we do not change then we know how to respond when the world changes. We would not say it is wrong to cut the sideburns short, but if we are doing it, and our brethren are doing it because the world is dictating it,

then it is wrong and we ought to respond.

3) *A uniform code also makes it practical for the church to enforce through appropriate discipline.* We do like those words. We do not like the word *enforcement*, and *dealing* and *discipline*. We would rather talk about love and compassion, forbearance and tolerance. We need some of both, but really again, unless the church does enforce, the pattern and the practice will be lost.

I have a statement from a pamphlet I referred to earlier by one of these writers in 1957. This writer says that “Other church leaders and groups discovered the teaching of separation from the world in attire but tried to establish its practice by teaching and never put it in force by church discipline.” This is referring to other groups around the Mennonite church. This was a Lancaster Conference writer. He continues, “by using this method they always lost its practice by their groups. The records of history show that it *requires both a conviction of Bible truth and a church discipline to hold Bible truth in practice effectually.*” We agree with that statement. We concur with that. Nevertheless, it does say that this has been the case from years past and is the case today.

The same writer later says this, "Our present regulations are no doubt fairly adequate, but our convictions are so weak and our implementation is so lax that the good work of conferences is partly lost." Eventually they lost it completely. That is what happened. It is a reminder to me. One of the things that gripped me is we can have the best of articles, the best of preaching and teaching, but unless it is coupled with sound administration and discipline and saying, "Here is the line. Here is where we will stop," the church will also lose its conviction and the practice will be lost. The difficult work that is associated with discipline and exercising, it is one of the reasons that many groups have refused to do it and finally have lost their way.

4) *The advantage of a testimony to the world that is consistent.* Distinctive attire has a religious connotation. It always does to the world as a people of God. I think all of us could testify the brushes we had with people identifying us with a religious group. Recently, in handing out literature in the city of Pottstown, another brother and I happened on a little sidewalk party. The participants began by saying that this certain man who was with them needed our prayers. We lis-

tened to them for a little bit and they explained the difficulty he was having and we began to move on, acknowledging that we would try to do that. They said, "Are you not going to pray for him?" Then, we stopped and we had a little prayer for the man right there on the sidewalk. Why did they ask us to pray for him? Would they have done that to someone who had no religious garb? Likely they would not have. It is an identification as the people of God and it is a testimony to the world.

My mind went to a statement that an individual made in one of our recent funerals in our group. A relative who is a part of a very liberal Mennonite church said this. After being with us through the service and observing the form and the procedures that we take he said, "You do have something that we do not, and we are Mennonites too." They identified that the Scriptural pattern and practice was something to be desired, and that they have lost it. There was a yearning inside. Again, that a consistent testimony of uniformity and uniformity in funeral practices will produce that.

5) *There is a very practical value of thrift and economy.* There is the value of being spared from "The changeable suits of

apparel” (Isaiah 3:22), and the costs associated with it. That is the agony of deciding what I shall wear and what I shall put on. There is a release from that, which comes by being uniform in our practice. It helps us to make proper decisions when we are buying clothes. We eliminate a whole lot of options in dress material all because we are separated and uniform people.

It does almost seem sometimes that the desire for thrift and economy overpowers some individuals when they find used clothing at a cheap price. They almost forget that after all, it is not only thrift and economy. Sisters remember that when you pass by your neighbours yard sale that it is not only thrift and economy, and when you dress your little children with those things.

In conclusion I would like to consider a few group applications that will help us to maintain uniformity. We ought to first of all express an appreciation for, and a sensitivity toward the standards and the applications made by our church institutions. That is one way now as a group that we can help to maintain uniformity. We did not talk a lot about the church discipline. That is there as a guideline. In our institutions — Numidia Bible school, and our Christian day schools

have, of necessity, made some applications to the principles that are in our church discipline.

For example, the shoe standards that we have for our Christian day schools, the dark colours, the non-striped and non-labeled shoes, the direction we give to athletic shoes are occasionally seen on older children which are out of school. That really is not consistent. We ought to be careful that the things that our schools, and school boards are saying also help to serve as a guide for our growing children when they are out of school. It is one way that we will help maintain a uniform practice. If those things are viewed as only necessary during school days, then after that it does not really matter we are not being fair. We are not being consistent with the application. We are not helping to support and to maintain a uniform practice.

The Numidia Bible school standards on non- striped shirts and the tone-on-tone shirts was given to help to regulate the wide variation, and the line was drawn there. We do well to stay fairly close to that. There is also the direction that is given to heels on sisters shoes. If that is followed and we are careful not to go beyond that, it is a help.

We need to work within the

perimeters that are outlined within our church discipline, even though our church discipline does not spell those things out in detail.

The principle is there. Here is an application and if we ignore all of that, it is the voice of the church also. When there is a sensitivity that is developed and maintained toward the voice of our institutions, it helps us to maintain it as a group, and as a congregation. It will work that way.

Another one is the exercise of simplicity in the way that we dress and comb our children. There are the braids which are hanging down the back which we approve of and ask people to do versus the very large single braid, and avoiding the ornamental hair fasteners on little children. We avoid smocking and lace on their dresses, the anklets and so forth. Our children should look like Mennonite children. If the way we attire our children, and the things we allow them to wear are not consistent with the rest of our standards, then it will finally militate against group uniformity and nonconformity.

We ought to exercise a cautious attitude toward change. We recognize that change will come. Change comes in car styles. One of our responses to those changes

is to not buy the new styles right away. Sometimes we need to eliminate certain features on cars to see whether this really is acceptable in time. The same could be said for eyeglasses. Sometimes direction is given to that. For example, our ministerial body spoke to the rouge coloured glasses that some sisters were getting, and the other coloured or tinted glasses which were intended to throw a shadow on the wearer — a certain colour on the cheeks of the wearer. The forked and bent stems could come into that category, as well as the ornamental extras and gold stemming on eyeglasses. We ought to exercise a very cautious attitude toward changes like that and be able to identify them and some of those features as belonging to the world and intended to draw attention to the wearer. When we are careful, consistent, and considerate of the voice of the brotherhood, it will help.

Another area where I think we are seem to be adjusting a little bit is in the colour of coats. Traditionally, the Mennonite groups, and the conservative Mennonite groups have maintained the dark colours of coats, especially for sisters coats. We ought to go back to a bit more of that. I realize they may be hard to buy, but I do not think that

should be the end of the discussion on the issue. We have some recovery work to do, I believe, in this area.

Another one, if I may say it, is the loss of the hat and the bonnet among us. Maybe you feel we have come a long way since that was an issue. I hope we have not. It was interesting for me to find what J. Paul Graybill wrote in his book on Nonconformity and separation *Biblical and Practical Nonconformity*. He was a bishop in the Weaverland district of the Lancaster Conference. He wrote this, "In the case of all plain churches that surrendered the bonnet, this has invariably proved to be the opening wedge for the loss of separation principles in general — dress and other kindred practices and doctrines." I have heard that before. I am not about to say that he is wrong. We ought to be very cautious in deciding that we are an exception to a statement like that.

I am not here to say that because not everyone wears a bonnet that we are on the road to apostasy and it is only a short time until we are out in Protestantism. However, I would like to say that we will help our group by helping to maintain those practices. Fathers help your daughters and fathers your sons.

Then also, we need to avoid the modifications to plain attire. There is much that could be said on that. One of the issues that arises again and again is the matter of our sisters dresses, the ruffled shoulders, the or puffy shoulders at the edges of the cape, or the cape gathers at the neck. This issue was raised recently in our conferring meeting and our district meeting discussions, including the square necks, the scalloped edges, the various collars and so forth, and the elastic bands instead of the belts. Why am I mentioning them? Am I wanting to take one wide sweep yet? No, it is this: when modifications like this happen, it eats at total conviction and breaks down the consistent uniform practice that helps us to retain the Biblical separation and nonconformity that we need to maintain.

Finally they militate against it. They do not get there. None of these things lead away from it in big leaps, but little by little. When we see them if we can bring them back we will have done our part. I would like to conclude with this verse from Philippians 2:5 again, "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus."

Scripture References

Exodus	12:30	36	Philippians		
19:5, 6	82	John	1:27	86	
Leviticus		17:14–16	2:1–5	85	
20:26	82	17:21–23	2:2, 3	97	
Numbers		Acts	2:5	97, 109	
15:38	83	2:1		Colossians	
15:38, 39	95	4:32	86	2:19	87
Deuteronomy		20:28, 29	92	1 Timothy	
7:6–8	82	Romans		2:9, 10	97
22:5	95	12:2	79, 84, 96	Hebrews	
Judges		1 Corinthians		13:17	92
7:2	82	1:10	87	1 Peter	
7:3	82	2 Corinthians		2:9, 10	81
7:4	82	6:17, 18	84	3:1	97
Psalms		Ephesians		3:3, 4	97
133:1	87	2:21	87	5:8	93
Isaiah		4:3	86	5:9	93
3:22	92, 107	4:6	87	1 John	
Matthew		4:16	87	1:5	84
6:24, 25	96	5:1, 2	84	2:15	80
23:5	99	5:8–11	84	2:16	85
Mark		5:11	84	4:19	82

From the Previous Issue:

The Resurrection

From a message by the late Paul R. Weaver

Sunday, April 15, 1990

Centerville Mennonite Church

Children's Book Reprint *continued*

The Little Woodchopper

The reader can imagine the grief of William. Now he stood a second time in his life all alone. The little cabin and the garden and field were now his, of course; but how lonely and forsaken he felt after putting the mortal remains of the dear old lady into

the place of rest in the cemetery of the village! Everywhere he missed the dear grandmother, and could not comfort himself for a long time. For several years he remained single and worked in field and garden. He had little intercourse with his neighbors

because he found very few like-minded with himself. But at last he felt too lonesome and asked the Lord if it be His will, to give him a God-fearing companion. Not long after he got acquainted with a good girl, who had not so much in earthly goods, as rather a rich treasure of love and faithfulness, and a heart devoted to the Lord.

William asked her if she would become his wife and live with him in the little cabin near the forest. She consented, and a few months afterward the young woman entered her new home. Who was happier than William? Now he was alone no more; a faithful and God-fearing wife stood now at his side to share with him the joys and sorrows of life.

“Favor is deceitful, and beauty is vain; but a woman that feareth the Lord, she shall be praised.” Proverbs 31:30.

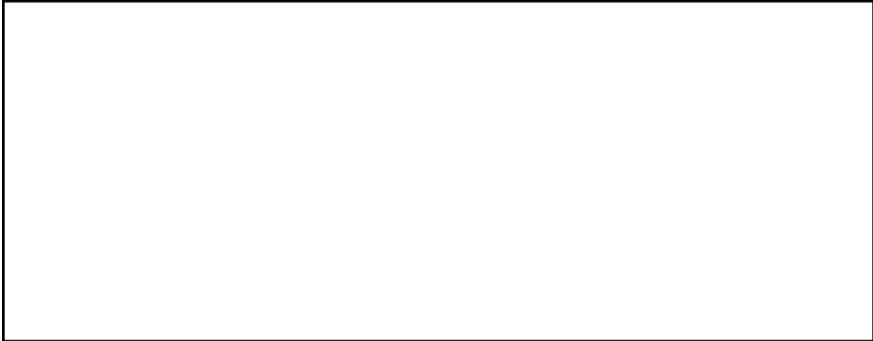
The Lord was with the young couple and blessed the labors of their hands; in the course of time He gave them several children too, whom William endeavored to train like his own grandmother had trained him; for the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.

We could close our story now, but the young readers doubtless would like to hear something

about William’s brothers, what became of them, and whether they ever repented of their wicked lives and evil deeds. Gladly we will satisfy your curiosity, so much the more as the grace of God overtook even these great sinners, and thus the many fervent prayers of their father and grandmother were answered.

“Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord; though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.” Isaiah 1:18.

We pass over a number of years, during which William and his family lived happily and in quietness in the little cabin. It is a beautiful warm Sunday afternoon. We see William, who has meanwhile become forty years of age, sitting in front of the door of his cabin; near him sits on a low stool his youngest daughter, reading a book; two boys are running around on the lawn, and the mother, holding in her arms the baby boy, is leisurely walking up and down in the warm sunshine. It is a lovely scene. The house itself looks so pretty and inviting with the bright windows and the fresh vines creeping up on its sides, that one would feel tempted to enter and stay a little. All is breathing rest and peace.



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