



## 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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### **History Interests That Serve the Church**

An anticipation for the imminent return of the Lord has always characterized the true Church in the past. It has not kept them from building carefully and solidly with a view to the future. Whenever we look at history interests, we are looking at them hopefully to benefit from the past with a view to the future. It is important to keep the imminent return of our Lord before us, but it is also very important to

build as though the Lord would yet tarry His coming. There have been those who felt that because it looked like the return of the Lord is at the door that somehow it made a difference in what they did. They somehow developed more of a short-sighted view. We do not want to do that while we keep looking for that return of the Lord.

A few questions in the opening that I would like to raise. *Is it*

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*important as a leader to have an active interest in history? Is that important, and if it is why is it? We would say it is important that a leader should have an interest in history. Another question we could raise on top of that is, Where have the history interests of the liberal Mennonite church gone wrong, and how can we avoid falling into the same trap that evidently they have fallen into?*

What about Matthew 23:29? It

is one that is used sometimes to dump cold water on history interests, and to mock sometimes the right kind of interest in history. In Matthew 23:29–32 Jesus in denouncing the Scribes and the Pharisees says, “Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! because ye build the tombs of the prophets, and garnish the sepulchres of the righteous, And say, If we had been in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with

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them in the blood of the prophets. Wherefore ye be witnesses unto yourselves, that ye are the children of them which killed the prophets. Fill ye up then the measure of your fathers.” We can clearly see there is the problem of misidentification. That was the problem there. The problem was not that they were literate in the history of Israel.

In fact, I think we need to look at what Stephen did in Acts 7 to understand what Jesus is saying here, because Stephen recounted in his sermon in Acts 7 the history of Israel. In his conclusion he attempted to clear up that misidentification in Acts 7:51–53. After he had recounted Israel’s history and brought them up to date to where they were he said, “Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye. Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted? and they have slain them which shewed before of the coming of the Just One; of whom ye have been now the betrayers and murderers: Who have received the law by the disposition of angels, and have not kept it.” Then, we have their reaction in verse 54. They did not like that. It was comfortable for them to talk about history, and to think about history and to

think about the glory of the righteous ones and the prophets because in their own minds that is who they were identifying with. However, Stephen was saying in essence, “You are misapplying it — misidentifying.” Therefore, Stephen was certainly not violating Jesus’ teaching in Matthew 23. Rather, he was going right to the root of the problem Jesus addressed in Matthew 23. Therefore, that cannot be used to pour cold water on the study of history. Nevertheless, it can be used to alert us to the fact that we also might do what they did.

1) *Why it is important to be literate in history, particularly Church history.* Why should we have an interest in it? A) “*We are but of yesterday,*” (Job 8:9) *ourselves.* That was said by Bildad in the book of Job. Bildad was not right in all his conclusions, but we do know that these were wise men and said some good things. Nevertheless, they made the mistake of misapplying some of the things that they said. “For enquire, I pray thee, of the former age, and prepare thyself to the search of their fathers: (For we are but of yesterday, and know nothing, because our days upon earth are a shadow:) Shall not they teach thee, and tell thee, and utter words out of their

heart” (Job 8:8–10)? He is saying that we do not live long enough to learn all we need to know and all that we should know. He said, “our days . . . are [but] a shadow.” In order for us to have what we need as equipment for the present, we need to also look at the former age and prepare ourselves to a search of the fathers. That is where we come from. That is one reason we ought to notice. “We are but of yesterday,” and we are in many ways a product of those that preceded us. We ought to remember that. People sometimes like to think that it is not the case and that they are self made, and unique in their own generation. However, a study of history helps to deal with that kind of vanity.

B) *We study history because of the value that God placed upon it.* There are a few Scriptures I would like to refer to. One very common one is 1 Corinthians 10:11, “Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come.” It is true that Biblical history is in a class by itself. However, there are some principles that apply to that which also applies to history otherwise.

Another example would be

Daniel 5:22, where Daniel in addressing Belshazzar made this statement, “And thou his son, O Belshazzar . . . though thou knewest all this.” That showed that God held him accountable for what he knew. I think we will see further that God not only holds us accountable for what we know, but for what we could know.

In Psalm 78 he calls them to remember what He did to the fathers, and to remember what God did for Jacob in the past. The reason that He does that is so, “That the generation to come might know them,” (Psalms 78:6) — these things about the Lord. It was also so that they could declare them to the generation that comes after them. Why? “That they might set their hope in God” (Psalm 78:7). We are in the work of preparing a people for the coming of Jesus Christ to make the people ready for the Lord. We are not in the work to make people like they were generations ago. The psalmist is saying that this is equipment, help, and indoctrination that is needed to get people ready. When people talk about, or sort of disdain history as though somehow it is irrelevant today, it is overlooking Scriptures like this that are saying we use it to get people ready for what is ahead of

them and the future.

Another evidence of God's value upon history would be what God told Joshua in Joshua 4:6, "Take you hence out of the midst of Jordan . . . twelve stones, (Joshua 4:3)" and set up a pillar so that you have that monument there so, "That this may be a sign among you, that when your children ask their fathers in time to come, saying, What mean ye by these stones?" There are a number of things that we can learn from that. i) Joshua built the monument right where it happened to make the reality of it — to drive that home. "Right here your fathers came across the river. And, furthermore these very stones came out of that river Jordan." It shows the value of places and definite happenings in making history live. It also shows God's value upon it. It was important.

C) *It is important because we are no wiser, better, or more spiritual than those who have gone before us in other generations.* Sometimes people feel a little bit like Job insinuated that Zophar felt when he said, "No doubt but ye are the people, and wisdom shall die with you" (Job 12:2). Sometimes people feel like they are (as I mentioned earlier) unique in their generation and possess the sum total of wisdom

and no one before or after them will be quite what they are. However, there is a wealth of experience there for our learning.

D) *Another reason why it is important is because of the cycles of history.* Issues cycle. There are cycles of history. Solomon said, "There is no new thing under the sun" (Ecclesiastes 1:9). There are precedents in history for probably for everything we face. There would be a lot of illustrations of this. Knowing some of those things, those other issues that were faced, helps to broaden perspective on what we are facing.

One illustration is this. Sometime back in preparing for a message on another subject I came across a sermon that J. L. Stauffer preached in 1936. It was in *The Sword and Trumpet* bound volume. Here is a quote that I would like to read from that sermon to show how we are not facing new issues. Things that we are grappling within current church life are things that have happened before. "The Mennonite Church cannot hope to abandon Gospel regulation in attire and hold Gospel regulation indefinitely in other phases of the Christian life. The Quakers have not been able to do so. The Church of the Brethren have not

succeeded. The Methodists were not able to do so. Groups who have left the Mennonite Church, denouncing formalism and emphasizing spirituality to the neglect of outward form have all demonstrated in time their failure to maintain either the real spirit of the Gospel or to consistently regulate the life of their members. Their moorings have been cut loose and their anchor does hold them as a religious group. Reject Gospel regulation and world regulation is inevitable.”

That sounds like he would have preached that in our churches, does it not. At least that is what sometimes we feel like we need and we hear it taught. That was in 1936. It is well to remember some things like that sometimes. We are not facing new things. This thing of splinters that have come off and denouncing regulation for more spirituality is not something new that we are facing today. Knowing things like this broadens our perspective on the issues at hand.

E) *It is also important that we have an interest in history because we are also making history.* We are making history and we ought to be concerned about what others will be learning from us. We ought to be concerned about what kind of light we are leaving for them.

2) *When do history interests serve the Church?* We have given a few reasons why we should be interested in history, and why it is important. There are a number of reasons I would like to give now as to some things where they serve the Church. A) *History interests serve the Church when we are fair with history.* The way we think history should have happened is not always the way it happened. Sometimes in lifting out men from the past, the tendency is to lift them out and picture them as they should have been always, not necessarily as they were. There are some people from the past where people are surprised that they would have ever had any struggles or anything like that, or that they would have ever been anything less than the ideal. We need to be fair with history. It is important to be that.

Another little illustration of being fair with history would be the current liberal Mennonite interests in Anabaptists studies there has been a shift. Maybe some of you heard the message from Teacher’s Instruction Course from the *Shifting Views of Anabaptism*. If you did not you should hear that one. It dealt with the fact that there are some new views coming into the picture. The older view would be

fairly representative of *The Anabaptist Vision*, or the *Theology of Anabaptism* by Robert Friedman. Friedman shows the way in which the Anabaptists saw Biblical obedience as the essence of Christian life. Someone asked the question "If a person does not remember having the new birth should they be born again?" The real question is whether or not they are living the regenerated life. The Anabaptists saw that as the essence of discipleship rather than the emotion that many others put with that. It is not that there is not any emotion with that, but the fact of the regenerated life. Biblical obedience was the really important thing. There has been a shift in view of that and part of that shift has broadened out and included the offshoots like the Münsterites, Thomas Munster and David Joris and others that were not representing Biblical Anabaptism. They have pulled them into the mainstream and are saying that we have excluded them and this is not quite fair. The fifth volume of the *Mennonite Encyclopedia* touches on that. What do they do? They make the Anabaptists appear like social revolutionaries more and more, which is more comfortable for those liberals to believe and to think. They can fit

better with that. However, the fact of the matter is that they are not being fair with it. Whenever there have been movements like the Anabaptist movement there have always been those side movements and offshoots and some extremes that have been going along with it. Whenever we attempt to interpret what is right by those other extremes we can make the mistake of not being fair with it.

In the beginning of our own movement that was often done. There were some other side movements that even maybe had been influential but and people tried to lump the whole thing together as one. However, it was not one. History interests will serve the Church when we are fair with it and as far as we are able to be. I would say that at least we ought to try and be fair with it. We are influenced by what we read and what we hear and so on, but we ought to attempt that.

B) *History interests will serve the Church when we are cautious so that we do not misidentify and miss ourselves and misapply it to us.* I would say that the newer view of the Anabaptist movement would be another example of that. Another example of that might be sometime back I came across an article that was speak-

ing about some Bible study group at a certain college or university. The article then made a big thing about how that the leaders of the Anabaptist movement were university men and it was on the grounds of universities that the seed thoughts for the new movement — the Anabaptists came from. It built quite a case on that. That is a misapplication on that score. Also, they were misidentifying. It is important that we are careful that we do not do what Jesus warned the Pharisees of doing, and that is identifying with what was right in the past but being wrong in the present which is what they did. They were not putting themselves at the right place.

C) *History interests serve the Church when it alerts us to the normal course of events.* It helps us to avoid the pitfalls. What I mean by that is that there are certain things that happen in certain ways normally. As it happened before they will likely happen again. By looking at the pitfalls of others it can help us to avoid the pitfalls. I would like to read a few things from an article that was in the *Sword and Trumpet* in 1960 by Dean Brubaker. I believe this was also reprinted in the booklet that Amos Horst had compiled of *Vigilance*. The title of the article is, “Will the

Mennonite Church Learn?” He takes an overall view of the Church of the Brethren and their history and uses it as an example of what can happen. I thought a few things were very interesting and I would just like to point them out. He follows basically what they did with nonconformity in attire because he saw that as being one of the key things, or the most evident things, that were lost. Along with that went a lot of other things. As things happened in the past, they also will tend to happen today. That is my point. Here is a quote from the Brethren paper. This would have been from *The Gospel Messenger* February 13, 1909. Here is what one person wrote about nonconformity. It said, “It will not do to elevate a method into the dignity or importance of principle simply to uphold something that has become dear or sacred to us by long usage or association.” They are suggesting that using strong measures to maintain nonconformity is to elevate a method, or to hold something that is simply dear to us because it has longtime been in use. “Form of dress is one of our problems. We must solve it or exercise forbearance and charity and pray and trust and patiently wait. Like many other questions it will solve itself.” That was

said. Of course, his answer to that was, "Indeed it did." It did solve itself.

Another thing it said, "It is not surprising that it was felt that a more adequately educated ministry would enable the Word to be preached with more power and clarity and would help solve the problems in connection with nonconformity and dress, but that it would also build up the Church more rapidly both numerically and spiritually." As an answer to this they were saying, "We need better educated preachers. We need more clear preaching. We need to help people to communicate better and that will hold the line on nonconformity as well as lead toward greater spirituality. Let us do it by preaching." He continues by saying, "However, the verdict of history clearly shows that the very opposite happened. It is not the intention of this paper to establish a cause and effect and so on." Then, he says, "Within fifteen years after the establishment of a church related Bible School, nonconformity in dress for practical purposes was lost. In addition, the hoped for numerical growth simply failed to materialize."

"Brethren historians point out that from the period of 1860 to 1882 the Church of the Brethren tripled in size and that this is the

period of the most rapid growth of the church both on percentage as well as numerical. It is significant to note that this is the period when the church practiced the most radical discipline, the most complete separation from the world in all areas, had a ministry that by present day standards was theologically illiterate and had a completely free and unsupported ministry." Further, he says that after they had a supported and a trained ministry they lost it all.

There are a lot of other things here but articles like this are good to read. It is good to analyze. It is good because it gives us some insights into the normal course of events in the past and this kind of thing is available. They are here. It is a record for us. It is good for us to be aware that what we are facing today. We will face the same pitfalls. The same things will happen to us that happened to others in the past if we do the same things. The question from articles like that is, what is the answer? There are some answers that are suggested there that I think are certainly right.

D) *History interests will serve the Church when it develops an appreciation for the tried and proven in method and in application.* An appreciation for history should make us wary of the new and the different. It should help

to do that. Why? Again, there are a lot of examples where there was something new that no one ever thought of before that was planned be tried now and this would be the answer, but it was not the answer. Our study of history ought to develop an appreciation for the tried and proven in both method and in application. When it comes to application, our applications as we know them today were not arrived at because someone had some new bright idea about how we really ought to do it. Nevertheless, somehow it seems that some people throw them away with about that ease. They have a new idea "Here is a better way to do it." Our history interests ought to help us avoid that kind of thing. It should develop an appreciation for the tried and proven methods and applications.

Higher education was supposed to solve problems but it only compounded them. It was the same as with the Brethren Church, and the same was happening in the Mennonite Church. It did not develop an appreciation for the tried and proven. It usually does the opposite.

E) *History interests serve the Church when it develops a basis for, or bias for the conservative position and awareness of what it takes to maintain it.* As we look

at history we ought to be careful that we do not criticize those who have finally had the most to show for after history has had time to answer a few questions. It is important that we do not do that. This is especially true when it comes to the Old Order. We have no basis or reason to have a negative attitude toward what the Old Order groups have maintained over the years. We are not saying by that, that they have maintained it in balance. I am not making statements like that. We ought to be careful that it does not produce a negative attitude. The fact is that many of us are here today because they did maintain a few things in the past. We are glad for that and we should be thankful for that.

F) *History interests serve the Church when we benefit from the stakes they have driven in the past.* We can talk about confessions of faith, particularly the Garden City Confession of Faith and along with that the place of some of the others. Those confessions of faith were landmarks. They were stakes that were driven. We can benefit from those by as we have the right kind of appreciation for those things today yet.

G) *History interests will serve the Church when we let people be human beings.* I already men-

tioned this earlier in connection with the first point a little. It is the tendency of people to glamourize individuals. The fact is that Bible history always pictures people as they are. Even though Abraham is pictured as a man of faith and as the father of the faithful, we see a few places where there was a little faltering. Why? It is because that is the way it was. God does not “gloss over” what was in Biblical history. It is the way it was and that is the way it was given. It is also important in history since that time. We also need to let people be human beings. At one history meeting there was a discussion on the Amish division after 300 years — 1693. One of the ways that this was sometimes approached was by putting the character of Jacob Amman and Hans Reist up and trying to settle the issues by looking at the men. We cannot do that. They were human beings and they certainly did make some mistakes. We do not develop an appreciation when we go to either extreme where we make them look like they were perfect or make them look like they were not even spiritual people. Sometimes that is also done.

*Some thoughts in a practical approach to this. How do we, in our preaching, benefit from what has happened before and how*

*can we, if we are not literate in history, historical knowledge and usage? 1) Every leader should have an interest in history. It will not benefit the Church unless we have sufficient interest to become aware of some things, to do some reading, and take advantage of some material that is available. It will not happen. You might ask, “What should I read?” Certainly we ought to read some of the materials that have been published by our own publication board. One excellent one is *The Swiss Anabaptists*. It is a brief summary of their history and beliefs. We ought to be knowledgeable in areas like that. There are some others like the history of *The Principle of Nonresistance As Held By the Mennonite Church* by John Horsch which is a reprint. There are a number of these.*

Then there are a number of the Conference books like M. G. Weaver’s history of the *Mennonites of Lancaster Conference*. It blessed me to go back and re-read chapter 13 in M. G. Weaver’s book, to show the small beginnings and the development of the Conference approach in America. It is one that you should read. The first chapter is another one you should read in that book and others. There are a number of things that

are good for us. It furnishes us with illustrations. It also helps us to see that there were issues which they were facing then, and things that they were taking issue with. Chapter 13 mentions with the dealing with the luxurious house of an individual in that time, and it could not be. They took it to task. They were facing issues of their time.

A book like *The Theology of the Anabaptists* by Robert Friedman is another one that we ought to know about and read. It is a little heavier reading. He writes about what was at the core of Anabaptist teaching. That is what I mentioned earlier — the practice and the belief. They believed in perpetuating and keeping alive the Scriptures not by letting the educated theologians decide the fine points. Rather, it is made practical by doing and living it — doing what Jesus said and making sure their names were written in the book of life. They lived and took it seriously. That is so important. We ought to read and know that. Reading the pamphlet — the sermon by Harold Bender on *The Anabaptist Vision*. Recently I read that again. It was at least said right — the way it should have been said. *Mennonites in Europe* is an old standby, one that has been around a long time.

There are still a lot of good illustrations there. It is quite a record of what happened to the Church in Holland, and so on. There is certainly some real inspiration there.

2) *As leaders we ought to attend history meetings, or at least benefiting from what is said there.* It is not always possible for those at least a little further away to do that. We do however have semi-annual history meetings that look at some pertinent issues like Mennonites in indentured service as well as Mennonites in World War II. It is keeping some things alive and keeping us aware. We ought to try to do that.

3) *We benefit from history by using illustrations from history in our teaching, in our preaching.* We do not preach and teach history. Someone thought that we ought to make studying history our nineteenth article of faith. They were saying it in mockery. No, of course not. We teach the Scriptures. Nevertheless, there is a lot of wealth of illustration we can use from history that are far more valuable than the things that happened last week. They are far more valuable, and it can also help to make our people more literate when it comes to history. These illustrations come when we fill them. It is not that

we now have a sermon, I need an illustration and we go digging for it. You might dig a while since there are a lot of things written. Rather, the more we know and the more literate we are in that, the more those things will come to mind that apply.

I would like to say this along with that. Sometimes illustrations are given, but they are not placed in history. Historical illustrations become valuable as they are attached to dates and places. History always is more value with that. We cannot teach history logically without attaching it to definite times and places. God did that over and again in Israel's history. When they came out of Egypt, He established that month that they came out as the beginning of months to them. That beginning of months marked that time annually that this is now that time they were brought out of Egypt. The month of Abib was to be the beginning of months. I mentioned the place by Jordan was definite place. "Now here is where it happened." It is not some vague thing that happened in the foggy past. Rather, it happened "here, right here." God wanted them to "drive it home."

The greatest event in history up to that time in Luke 1 and 2 was marked by a whole list of

things. Read all the ways he marks this down as being a definite time. "Now in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judaea, and Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip tetrarch of Ituraea and of the region of Trachonitis, and Lysanias the tetrarch of Abilene, Annas and Caiaphas being the high priests" (Luke 3:1, 2). That was all to "zero- in" on the point when John the Baptist began his ministry which marked the beginning of the preaching of the Gospel. That was all used there. There was a time in history when it happened. It was not some foggy, distant time. There was something to that. It is important to attach that rather than make a lot of vague references to history. We ought to make it real and give it credence by making sure that it is understood that it did not happen "once upon a time," but that it happened at a definite time. Seeing those things helps to put things together. It helps to show relationships when we use dates and that is important.

4) *We can utilize history by benefiting from a functioning history committee.* We do have a committee that plans the history meetings. Sometimes articles of an historical nature are suggested for use in the *Testimony*. Along

with that are some records that are kept and records of minutes. There are some things kept related to church leaders that are deceased. We have those who knew them write a little bit about them. It is not published. It is put in a file. It is kept there, keeping a record behind. Also, this committee has initiated some reprinting of materials and overseen the *Swiss Anabaptists* book and some other publications like that and some out of print materials. At the office at Ephrata we have some books that are kept there that are intended to be used for reference material at the library. There is some resource material that you cannot go and buy because they are out of print and unavailable. Every now and then they come along and sometimes those are high-priced but they are making it available and I think it is good to have that.

I would like to read the purpose of this committee, because it is a resource that I think we can benefit from. "The purpose of the committee shall be to plan churchwide meetings for history awareness and promotion, 2) to collect and file historical data relating to our own church groups such as the minutes of the various boards and committees,

VS unit records and other church related records and activities, 3) to collect literature related to the defence of the historic Mennonite faith. 4) In working with the publication board in giving direction to the publishing and reprinting of historical materials." Then there is a one also that says that "this committee shall not be involved in securing and preserving antiques and artifacts." It is rather to focus on materials that help in the defence of the faith. It is a resource that can be benefited from.

In conclusion, when we look at the past we ought to be concerned about the future, and what history will say about us. What is said about us is not what we wish would be said, but it will be what is. May God help us to leave a record behind and to leave practices, and church life behind us that will help the next generation to maintain the faith in their generation so that they in turn can do the same to help maintain the faith in the generation following. It is our work. We will not get it done by despising those that have helped us in the past to come to where we are. Let us be sure that we are looking at it in such a way that will help to be a guide for the future.

## Christian Simplicity: Dressing Our Children

Christian simplicity in dressing our children. As I was preparing for this message, I took up the bound volumes of *The Eastern Testimony* and I looked up the subject of dress and from the very first year of its publication in 1969 until now there have been many, many articles written on this subject of dress. The subject of dress has always been a concern of the church and today that concern continues. Hence we have this subject.

One of the reasons for the concern is because of how much the Scripture has to say about dress. It is important in Scriptures. The first issue that needed to be addressed after the fall was dress. In the book of Revelation, one of the outstanding characteristics of the Lamb's wife, the bride, was her clothing. I did not research this, but I found an article that said this subject can be found in all but five books of the Bible. It is mentioned more than fourteen hundred times. Throughout Scripture from Genesis through Revelation the Bible deals with the right and the wrong way to dress.

When I thought of Christian simplicity, I thought of simplicity. I looked it up in the dictionary though we usually think we

know what that means, and we do. It simply means, "the condition of being simple, the absence of show or pretense." We know the root word of simplicity is simple. That word means, "nothing added, without ornament, not rich or showy."

*Christian simplicity.* That simplicity is qualified and we call it Christian simplicity in our title here. There might be some who would follow the pattern of simplicity in this area of dress and still not be Christians. That we believe. They might do it for economical reasons. Usually, the showy and gaudy things are more expensive. Therefore, they might buy the simple because they are cheaper. Another reason they might do that is for serviceability. Usually the showy and the extras do not make the most practical garments to wear. Thus, some might wear, or buy cheap clothing, or simple clothing for the reason of serviceability. While these may be some of the reasons why Christians buy or use simple clothing or simple dress, the Christian has more reasons than that.

I) I would like to look at a number of principles in relation to dress. Then, II) I would like to mention the corresponding appli-

cations. Now these principles that I will mention will be principles that are for dress for all Christians, adults as well as children, but I will try to make then, the applications to the children, or to the dress of the children.

1) *Modesty*. I have a number of Scriptures for these. 1 Timothy 2:9, 10 speak to this, "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." Modesty is the thought here — modest apparel. There is a reference in Revelation which says, "the shame of thy nakedness do not appear" (Revelation 3:18). That, of course, refers to spiritual nakedness. However, the principle is also involved in our physical and it is a principle that runs throughout Scripture.

Modesty goes much deeper than the clothing we wear. There are many areas in which we must be modest. However, it does include our dress. A proper sense of modesty is born out of a recognition of our tendencies before God. Carnal man is corrupt. He is degenerate. Carnal man's ways are turned away from God. Man's tendency is to dese-

crate what God has sanctified. Adam and Eve hid from God, not from each other. Certainly modesty includes the human aspect, the human dimension, but it also respects a heavenly relationship. In Leviticus 18 and 20 there are many Scriptures. Those chapters have much to say about the sins of being unclothed in the presence of each other outside of legitimate matrimony. However, our efforts to maintain modesty among ourselves will be fruitless unless we see our responsibility and accountability in being modest before God, and the effects that immodesty will have on our relationship to Him. We are not only responsible to each other in this area. We are responsible to God. Probably much more could be said along this line.

I would like to think of a few practical applications of modesty as relating to our children. Clothing for our children should conceal, is one application we would make. Sometimes we see children with clothing that is too thin. One application of modesty is that our clothing should be heavy enough to conceal and made properly enough. Now even though children are not mature physically, we still teach little girls to keep their dresses down. Also, the growing girl needs to wear a cape dress soon

enough. We have a standard in our schools that fourteen is the age when girls need to wear the cape dress, but some might need it at twelve or thirteen. We ought to be sensitive to that and we ought to dress our young girls modestly. We do not wear tight or form fitting clothing on our boys like shirts or trousers. We wear them modestly.

I would like to say this in relation to our children in warm weather. It is not in keeping with Scriptural principle of modesty to have our toddlers running around our house with only a diaper on. We are talking about the principle of modesty. There is no harm in babies perspiring. God has given them a built-in cooling system, or, there are the backyard splashings which we know our children like to do at times. "Mother, can we stop? Can we play in the water? Can we splash?" They will enjoy that activity equally as much if they are properly clothed as if they are half naked.

2) *The principle of consistency.* James 1:17 says about our heavenly father, "with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning." Psalm 100:5 says, "For the LORD is good; his mercy is everlasting; and his truth endureth to all generations." His truth is there generation after

generation, over and over. His truth, His principles for life are the same. What was good for Paul and Silas, what was good for our fathers, is good enough for us. It is not only good enough for us, it is required by God.

John 8:31 says, "If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed." We are talking about consistency, keeping it, doing it over and over again, continuing again and again. What was done in the past and what God required in the past is required again today.

Deuteronomy 4:9 says, "Only take heed to thyself, and keep thy soul diligently, lest thou forget the things which thine eyes have seen, and lest they depart from thy heart all the days of thy life: but teach them thy sons, and thy sons' sons." We have a responsibility to the oncoming generations of the things that we know and what we have seen. Our elder brothers and sisters among us have seen a lot of things in relation to what happens when something else is allowed in the younger generation than what is required of the older ones. We must continue to tell one generation after the next of these things. God's standard does not change from one generation to the next. Why should ours?

The definition of the word

“consistent” (I like this definition) says, “thinking or acting today, in agreement with what you thought yesterday.” It is keeping the same principles and habits. That is what we are talking about — being consistent. Doing the same things today as what we did yesterday and last year and the year before that.

Some thoughts on the consistency of dress. We must be careful about wearing clothes on our children for every day and dress occasions, other than Sunday that is consistent with our standard for Sunday dress. I said consistent with. It is not that we need to wear the Swedish knit pants on our boys for work. That is not what I am saying. The principle of consistency should rule here. We must be very careful with the statement, “Oh well, it is only for every day.” If it is something that is worn or getting a little older, then yes, we can use that statement. However, if it is substandard, then we should not use that statement. Even though it is for everyday does not mean it is acceptable to deviate in our principle of being consistent with our principle of dress.

Maybe one place we get caught in this is “yard-saleing.” Mennonite people have been known to be frugal, but I think yard-saleing can be a breakdown

in this area. Things are cheap — 50¢, 25¢, “Oh, they could at least wear them for everyday.” We must be careful in these things, when we come along with the pleated pants, the pullover shirts, and the jackets of every colour, or jackets of many colours. One of our bishop brethren made this statement some years ago, “If the conventional shirt and trousers are worn on innocent boys today, they will not have the discernment as to what is right tomorrow.”

Some time ago, I preached a message on apostasy in an outlying area. I made that statement that “Zero apostasy is possible.” I believe it is possible, and I still believe it. However, an ordained brother came to me after the message and he discussed the message a while and then, he said, “You know, if we look at a few pictures we can soon see that we do not look like our grandparents did. For instance, your shoes, your grandfather wore high top shoes. You do not.” “Well,” I said. I was not quite sure what to say since I had not thought the thing through very well, and I was not sure what his motive was. Then, I said to him, “Are not the kind of shoes that I am wearing today doing the same thing for me that my grandfather’s high tops did for him?” I

was meaning, of course, the consistent practice and the separation. Then, he said, “Will the slip-ons be all right for your boys?” I thought quite a bit about that statement later, and I asked another ordained brother about it. He said, “What you should have told him is that, “I do not allow my boys to wear slip-on shoes.” The more I thought about that answer, the more the truth began to dawn on me. What we allow in our young people, in our children today, will be acceptable for them in the future in the minds of the children. We are talking about consistency.

3) *The principle of humility.* 1 Peter 3:3, 4 speaks about this, “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.” Humility — no outward adorning. It is the principle of humility. It has been said that a mother may be ever so conservative and modest, but the pride of her heart might show by the way she dresses her children.

I would ask, Are the matching barrettes and dresses, and the bright coloured bobbles and pig

tails, or for the boys the pullover vest sweaters and the brown shoes signs of humility? Or, is there a bit of pride showing, or the desire to be well thought of? Those who dress their children in Christian simplicity and out of a humble heart are also seeking approval from a different group of people. Above that, they are seeking the approval of God, and seeking to follow a plan that God can bless. We must ever ask the question, “Who is receiving the glory? Is it God or is it man?”

4) *The principle of identity.* Romans 12:2 says, “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.” 1 Peter 1:14 says, “As obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance.” A change has taken place. We are no longer clothed like the world. Our clothing identifies us. There is a Scripture in Revelation 17:4–6 where we have the picture of two women. “And the woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet colour, and decked with gold and precious stones and pearls, having a golden cup in her hand full of abominations and filthiness of her fornication: (5) And upon her forehead was a name written,

MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH. (6) And I saw the woman drunken with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus: and when I saw her, I wondered with great admiration.”

Revelation 19:7, 8, speaks of another woman. “Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready. (8) And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints.” What a contrast in apparel. Both of them spoke of the life of the individual or the groups of individuals in this case, but the word picture is a woman. The one was a sinful wicked woman, the other woman was the righteousness of the saints. What a contrast. Our clothing identifies us. Who are we serving? Not only does our clothing show those who are looking on that we are different and separate, but it also reminds us of who we are.

Numbers 15:38 speaks about the “Ribband of blue” and the “fringes in the borders of their garments.” That was to remind the people who they were and to remind them of the command-

ments of God and what He had done for them. This is another quote from a bishop brother some years ago he said, “We believe our Mennonite identity is part of a precious spiritual possession, which is directly linked to the saving of our souls.” That is why we are so concerned by young people dressing so casually while travelling, or shopping. There are some snares that are avoided in our actions and where we go, if we are dressed properly.

I have another thought on identity. Brothers and sisters, we consider ourselves to be a plain and a conservative group, with a high level of spirituality. Sometimes we hear remarks about the Old Order groups around us being “formalists” or lacking spiritual insight. I am not here to judge all that, but I do know however, that when we see an Old Order Amish child we know where he belongs. The same can be said of the “Pike,” or the “Wenger” (if you will allow me to use names). Can we say that about our children? Identity is a Scriptural principle, let us keep our children looking like little Mennonites.

5) *The principle of vision.* Maybe in a sense this is the capstone of all the previous ones we talked about. Without a vision

we will probably not keep the rest either. The Scripture says in Proverbs 29:18, “Where there is no vision, the people perish.” It also says, “Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it” (Proverbs 22:6). That includes dressing in Christian simplicity. Of Abraham it was said, “For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him” (Genesis 18:19). “After him,” does not sound like a double standard. Do we have the vision to understand that if our grandchildren and our great grandchildren will enjoy a separated church life as we know it, we will need to not only teach these things, but we will need to see that it happens? That is part of the training up. That is part of the commanding after — to see that it happens. We must insist on abiding after the church standards.

One brother said twenty-five years ago, “Current dress issues among us, are the inescapable evidence of spiritual problems

within us.” If we have a proper vision, based on Biblical conviction and a will to do, then dressing our children in Christian simplicity will not be a problem. Do we have the vision that will cost, to pay a little more, or to go a little farther, to find clothes that meet Bible principle and church standards? Maybe we need to sew more of our own clothes to maintain Christian simplicity. That is an effective way for our sisters to serve the church, when mothers teach their daughters to be good seamstresses. However, it will take, along with that, a sanctified heart or it will become a detriment to us rather than an asset.

I will close with two *Eastern Testimony* quotes. “Only by fully appreciating and carefully respecting our Mennonite heritage can we expect to keep it.” The second one, “We must continue to pay the price of being a people who are separated from the world. Herein lies our safety.” May the Lord help us.

### **Christian Woman’s Veiling**

- Evidences of Believing In the Christian Woman’s Veiling
- Let Her Be Covered
- Preserving a Consistent Practice of the Headship Veiling
- Preserving Consistent Veilings

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