

# What It Means To Be A Mennonite

**BY PAUL ERB**

*“Sanctify the Lord God in your hearts; and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear” (1 Peter 3:15).*

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*A note to the reader from the website publisher.*

Whilst the following may be written with some emphasis of application to young people within established Mennonite fellowships a number of years ago the scriptural foundations have not changed, the struggles are still the same and perhaps even more intense and therefore it is just as valid for people today and for any age and may assist those of us in Australia who are desirous to follow the Anabaptist teachings of the Mennonites.

The reader is cautioned that as in all denominations there are differences of practise and application and the Mennonite fellowships are no different.

## FOREWORD

The contents of this booklet originally appeared in the *Youth's Christian Companion* in a series of articles to strengthen young people in their expression of Christian faith through everyday living. This is the fourth printing of these articles in booklet form and is evidence of the demand for these messages as a help in giving expression to the Mennonite way of life.

Through times of war, the first and second World Wars and other conflicts, and through times of peace, the demand for exemplary Christian living has been great; for it is through the lives of the followers of the lowly Nazarene that the world becomes acquainted with a loving Saviour who has set the example of love and non-resistance.

The young people of our church today will find in these pages helpful guidance for living what they have believed and do believe to be the teachings of the New Testament. The doctrines of the simple life, separation from the world, non-resistance and non-participation in war need constant demonstration through actual living. It is only by being rooted and grounded in the word of God that such expression of Christian life can be given.

Young people will find in these pages material which will be helpful in their being able to "give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you." It is hoped that great numbers of young people will be increasingly blessed through the continued distribution of this little pamphlet prepared by one who is now editor of the Gospel Herald, and who has ministered widely to the needs of young people in the classroom and from the pulpit.

The principles apply equally to all ages of people not just youth.

C. F. YAKE.

*It means . . .*

## **1. A DEFINITE CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE**

Why are we Mennonites? How does it come that we are among the comparatively few thousand who belong to the church known by that name? Can you give a good answer to this question?

Perhaps we think it only an accident that we are Mennonites, because we happened to have Mennonite parents or found ourselves living near a Mennonite church. But can we be satisfied to let mere accident determine for us so important a thing as our religious belief? While for many of us it may be true that our birth and training account for our becoming Mennonites, we must have a better reason than that for remaining such.

It is fitting that we as young Christians ponder carefully what it means to be a Mennonite and come to some definite and satisfying conclusions. May we not say that we are true Mennonites only after we have done this? We can hardly be strong believers in anything unless we have good reason for thinking as we do. Frankly, what I mean is this: there are far too many young people who belong to the Mennonite Church and feel like apologizing for it. They have not thought through reasons for our faith, but have listened to the world's arguments against it. My dear fellow believers, until a vital experience and a serious study of God's Word and of the facts in life about us turn us from such an attitude to a feeling that the present attitude of our beloved Church is the most logical and practical position that we could hold, we shall get but little satisfaction from our fellowship and do the Church little good.

### **A REAL EXPERIENCE**

Let us notice in the first place, then, that being a Mennonite means for us a definite Christian experience. For first of all we think of our Church as being a Christian church, and to belong to it is far more than a matter of mere formal membership. To come forward in a revival service, to go through various instruction meetings, to come within the order of the Church, to be baptized, to express peace in an examination meeting, to take part in communion — all this is very good, but it means nothing to us if it is only an outward performance. Our faith has always emphasized heart experience, and we cannot be real Mennonites without thinking of this as being very, very important. Fortunately, many of us have come into the Church while quite young. But unfortunately, as we grew in mind and body, too many of us failed to “grow in grace,” and we may now find

ourselves with no more of heart religion than we had when we started; and in that case, it is likely that we have lost what little we had. One young sister of nearly twenty, now a sincere Christian, recently told me that she never knew before what a real experience was, though she had long been in the Church.

Jesus said long ago, "*Ye must be born again,*" (John 3:7) and we must first of all learn that a definite change of heart is a necessity. Becoming a Christian, and in our case a Mennonite, is not just a business deal, but implies that something has really happened in the life. That something is heart conversion. It need not be, and with young people probably will not be, an exciting occurrence but it will be clear to ourselves, and finally to others, that things are not as they were before. The things we once loved we will now come to hate, and the things we once hated now we love. This is the miracle of a changed life. It comes as a free gift from God to those who are tired of sin, who confess past sin and forsake that which is present, asking God to free them from it all; who accept Jesus in faith, surrender their wills to Him, take Him as their Life, and follow Him step by step.

## HOW SALVATION COMES

It is very important to remember that it is not ours to do, but to receive what has already been done for us. We cannot save ourselves, but Christ can save us. We cannot forsake an evil habit, but the new life working in us can lift us above it. We cannot work for Him, but the Spirit which He has given can speak through us. So it is evident that we do not need to say to ourselves, "Well, I must see to it that I get a real experience of religion." All our fussing and trying will never bring it. We need only in quiet prayer and Bible study to draw near to God, and be assured that He will quickly draw very near to us. Have we done this? Read the First Epistle of John, and if your heart warms with joy as you recognize those various tests of salvation, be assured that His Spirit bears witness with yours that there is a real connection between you and God, which is all we mean by a definite Christian experience.

If all the young people of the Mennonite Church were in just that place, what a wonderful power she would have! Thank God, I believe an increasing number are getting there; for, you see, we owe it to our Church, which is judged by the world, not by her body of doctrine as it is written in books, but by the character and conduct of her members as they live "in the world." This is indeed the fundamental meaning of membership in the Mennonite Church.

*It means . . .*

## 2. A NOBLE HERITAGE

High birth has always been considered a privilege. To be the son of a king, or duke, or lord, at some times and some places has been considered rare good fortune. Oftentimes the children of a rich man have regarded themselves as far above their fellows in every way. A nobility of this kind may have its value.

But there is a nobility which most of us will consider far more desirable. It is inherited, but it is not a matter of rank or money. It rather concerns that heritage which is a matter of healthy bodies, of superior minds, of high character, and of spiritual ideals. The possession of all these things may be a matter of a single generation, but usually the young man or the young woman who has many generations of ancestors with such qualities, has a wonderful advantage in the race of life. Such is the case with most of us as young Mennonites.

### OUR ORIGIN

The Mennonites are the successors of the Anabaptists of central Europe. Persecuted because of their beliefs, and suffering from the hardships of many wars, large numbers of them emigrated to America, beginning in the latter part of the seventeenth century. They settled in south-eastern Pennsylvania, whence they have scattered all over the country. They were our fathers, the original Pennsylvania Dutch. Being human, they naturally had faults of their own, but as a people they were particularly virtuous. To these virtues, inasmuch as they have been preserved, we, their children, have fallen heir.

### OCCUPATION AND HABITS

They were farmers and outdoor artisans, though some followed other occupations (as for instance, many of the first settlers of Germantown, Pa. were weavers). Such people are healthy and strong of body. But an added reason for their vigor was the clean life which they knew. Unconsciously to themselves, perhaps, they fulfilled the conditions for healthy living. The resulting strong constitutions have become our heritage, for which we may indeed be thankful. With the strong bodies went strong minds. Christopher Dock, one of the early American schoolmasters, was a Mennonite. While for many years the Church took little interest in education as such, yet she

never lacked men of keen, judgment and intelligence. This, too, they have passed on to us, and, without boasting, many of us have been conscious that as students our inheritance has given us an advantage. The education of our children was not overlooked, for in most communities they built a schoolhouse as well as a house of worship.

The Mennonites have always been an industrious, thrifty people. Wherever they have gone they have developed every natural resource, and the very appearance of their settlements has always been an eloquent testimony to their skill and management as farmers. Because of this trait various European rulers in the early days offered them special inducements for immigration. Their enterprise accompanied them to America. Within a few days after their arrival here, work had begun on their houses. They have made Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, the "Garden spot of America," and one of its richest counties. Many communities in the western states have been built up largely by them. An instinctive economy and safe investments have made their per capita wealth far above the average. All these habits of thrift are our heritage. Some of us may be foolishly departing from them, but on the whole the force of our long training is making us safer than the average in the present days of business uncertainty. The same simple life that our fathers lived is what our history urges.

### SPIRITUAL IDEALS

Far more important, however, are the spiritual ideals which have been handed down to us. The Mennonite Church was organized in a country where religious liberty was unknown. If men believed differently from the rulers, they were usually made to suffer for it. And it was more than mere words which those early Mennonites suffered. They perished at the stake by the thousands. There is scarcely an old Mennonite family but numbers among its oldest names some of the martyrs. And we are told that they went to their death with psalms and a testimony upon their lips. That means just this to us: The blood which flows in our veins is the blood of men and women who were not afraid to stand by a principle, even unto death. They may have been thrifty farmers, but the ideals for which they lived had little to do with temporal things. They knew there were eternal realities that their persecutors never dreamed of. Daily communion with the Lord had filled their lives with interests that mere men could not drive out. They had deep-seated, everlasting convictions, and courageously lived and died for these convictions.

Is not this a wonderful heritage? The very thought that we are holding principles today for which our fathers once had to die should thrill us with a royal devotion to our faith. The test of these centuries has proved that theirs was a faith whose very truth has made it live. Shall it die with us? Will we be traitors to our own blood? Shall opposition far less than they knew, make us, the descendants of these heroes of faith, weakly forsake truth which has been preserved for us? I am convinced that we will be heroes still if necessity calls us to suffer, and that the historic challenge of our faith will not be lost upon us. May God help us to be true.

I am reminded here that, thanks to missionary effort, there are some in our Church who are not direct descendants of Mennonite forefathers. We are glad to share our heritage with them. We cannot give them our blood, but we can give them our precious faith. As they accept it, it becomes their spiritual heritage also, and the call is to them also to cherish it as the truth of God. May their number increase.

## DOCTRINE

A word more about our heritage of doctrine. The body of teaching which has been handed down to us is unique for its simplicity and scriptural foundation. They are the beliefs of many of the Anabaptists, and may in turn be traced in a general way to the Waldenses. The Waldenses claim unbroken succession back to apostolic times through various non-Catholic peoples. Whether or not they can establish their claim, we may be sure that we hold in its essentials the belief of those small bodies which kept doctrine pure through the Dark Ages by remaining free from the Catholic Church. Since the Reformation many religious movements have received their power from our faith. The Baptists, the English Puritans, the Quakers, the Dunkards, and the United Brethren may, without stretching historical facts, be considered the offspring of our faith. For, of all bodies of a similar type we have kept most purely the faith from which all sprang. There are forces at work today to corrupt our simple belief in the whole Word of God. May our Father give us grace to “earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints” (Jude 3).

*It means . . .*

### **3. A SIMPLE LIFE**

The preceding chapter has prepared us well to think about the simple life. We have been reminded that for many generations the Mennonite ancestors of most of us have been plain and simple in every phase of their lives. Shall we as Mennonites of this generation maintain such habits? Should we? Why? It is worthwhile that we carefully answer this question.

#### **WHY THE SIMPLE LIFE?**

It is good that we hold our fathers in the highest respect. But a mere respect for them is not a sufficient reason, for holding to their principles. The real question is; are those principles still for the good of ourselves and the world we live in? But really, that is no question. A glance about us is abundant proof. Everywhere the unrest of the world is reminding men of how different things used to be. We all think that a large part of the high-cost-of-living problem results from the cost of high living. The papers every day remind us that this will never settle down again until we go to work once more and live more sensibly. Don't we see that as far as we are concerned the only sane thing to do is to stand firmly by those principles of simple living which were taught us by our parents and grandparents? We owe it as a tribute to their wisdom, we owe it to the world as our contribution to the solution of its social problems, and we owe it to our own well-being in the world to do this.

But that is only part of the answer. What remains is more fundamental. As Mennonites we are Christians. If we are to think of the simple life as part of the Mennonite practice we must show that it is Christian. The practice of Christ and His early followers tells us much. Does the New Testament life of Christ give us the impression of elaborateness and high living? Do we not rather see a rigorous simplicity in His homelessness, His lack of anxiety over temporal matters? When He sent out His disciples to preach, He commanded the simplest of living arrangements. The early Church had all things in common, subordinating living concerns to those of preaching the Gospel. Paul tells us to live "soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world" (Titus 2:12). The reason for all this is plain. If we live according to the principles of this wicked age, all our energies are consumed, and we have no time nor interest left for the things really worthwhile. Surely, if we are Christians, we must follow our Master in the simple life. As a church, we are yet quite largely a simple people. Let us

cling to this simplicity as a priceless treasure, and seek to gain back what we have already lost.

## SIMPLICITY IN HEART

Now simplicity is first of all a matter of the heart, and it is useless to try to keep the life simple when every motive of the life tends to the opposite course. But it is just as foolish to say that only the inside matters, for the outside is an indication of the condition of the inside. A simple heart is revealed by a simple life. And may I here suggest some practical aspects which as young people we may be inclined to forget in these days? There is danger that we may give assent to the general idea of the simple standard, and in that very moment be led astray by our subtle enemy on some particular point. I believe we can help each other much by being specific on these questions, always in a spirit of charity, of course. The things that I shall mention occur to me; you will think of many others. May we each examine our life carefully.

## SOME PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS

Our Mennonite church buildings are largely of the same type. There are variations of the pattern, of course, according to the local idea of convenience and service, but always one may expect that simple style of architecture which is consistent with the humble worship of a plain people. We believe that costly buildings, and with them elaborate furnishings, are an unjustifiable expense. All this is as it should be. But I am wondering whether our Mennonite homes are consistent with our practice concerning our churches. Are our houses built for comfort and service, rather than for show? And is there a high annual furniture bill, with nothing to show for it but luxurious furnishings? Often the attic is pretty well equipped with furniture whose only fault is that the material and style are somewhat out of date. Would someone visiting our home be surprised when told that we belong to a church that teaches and professes the simple life?

Then there is our table. Certainly we are not to be misers and deprive our bodies of the needed nourishment. We have a great work to do in the world, and must be properly fed to do it. But by a simple table, I do not mean a lack of food; let there be plenty of food, but of the right kind. The question is, Does our food really nourish, or does it merely please a pampered appetite? Are our meals planned to aid in economical living, or to set a rich table? Delicacies cost money; usually the staple foods do us more good. I fear we are greatly at fault here. How few of us really make our housekeeping a matter of conscience!

Perhaps you say “These are matters for my parents not me.” But are they always? How often is it true that expensive furniture comes into the home only after our parents give in to our insistence that “the old isn’t fit to be seen.” How often, too, does mother add one more dish to the overloaded table because daughter demands it? Seldom will parents insist upon forcing these things in when children bring in the argument of conscience.

We need to be simple, too, in our clothes — not so much now the matter of pattern, of which we may hear much (but practice less), as of materials. If we are consistently simple, economy and service will be our concern at the clothing store. The dictates of fashion will seem ridiculous to us. If the cloth has a design, the real Mennonite’s choice will not call particular attention to its wearer. But conformity to Scriptural teaching will make us different from fashion models. In this, as well as in other things, we should not fail to let our lights shine. Common folk, such as we are, always select clothes which will wear well. It is a fact that the silks and other fine clothes which people are so largely buying nowadays give far less service than do the cheaper grades. Style accounts for their larger sale. Will a simple Christian manage to buy new clothes as often as possible, or as seldom as possible?

But to draw this out would take much space, and that is unnecessary. My readers are intelligent young people. The mind and conscience of each of us will lead us into consistent simple living if we are willing to do it. The Bible and common sense are pleading with us as a church to remain plain and simple. The devil and the world are trying to get us to leave our simplicity. “Choose you this day whom ye will serve” (Joshua 24:15).

*It means . . .*

#### **4. SEPARATION FROM THE WORLD**

The doctrine of separation from the world is characteristic of Mennonite belief. Everywhere that Mennonites are known, they are thought of as a people who are more or less “different,” who believe in making manifest the difference between the Church and the world. This has been true of us for several hundred years, and influences every phase of our thinking. Even those among us who live it least are able to explain the belief to strangers, and will usually defend it against attack. The big danger for us as young Mennonites is that we may think of this doctrine merely as a part

of our fathers' customs, and forget that it cannot be separated from the whole body of religious teaching which has been life and light to us. Let us assure ourselves once for all that if we forsake this doctrine we lose with it all that makes our existence as a church justifiable.

### MEANING OF NONCONFORMITY

If then, as a church, we say that we believe in separation from the world, what do we mean? When we are told in Romans 12:2 not to be conformed to this, world how do we understand it? "Conformed" means "formed with," or "in agreement to." It conveys the idea of being run through the same mould, over the same pattern. If we are conformed to this world, we are fashioned like it, look like it, speak like it, and act like it. But we are commanded to be not conformed. What then is our relation? Now let us notice that our separation is not from contact with the world. We cannot help touching the world, for it is all about us. It is the sphere of our life, and the only way we could be free from its contact would be to live the life of a hermit away in the forest or desert somewhere. In the ages past some people have done this, thinking this was separation from the world. But we do not think so. We feel that we should not withdraw to ourselves, with no regard for worldly men. If we should do this, how could we help others to find Christ? No, we are in the world to exercise an influence for good. Jesus said, "Ye are the light of the world." A light is seen only when there is darkness around. No, we are not separate from contact with the world, but from complicity with it. That is, we are not to be one with it. We are not to hide our light under a bushel so that men in darkness are not aware that a light is about. We hide our light when we go with the world in things of sin.

### REASONABLE TEACHING

Surely this is a reasonable teaching. Why should we become Christians at all if we do not expect to leave those things which we knew in sin? What is salvation worth if we are not saved from those things which all sinners do? What does it mean to be a Christian if it does not mean to be separated from those gods which the worldling substitutes for the true God? As well mix fire and water as the world and godliness. As well try to be in Kansas and Pennsylvania at the same time as try to be at once in Christ and in the world.

## NECESSITY OF SEPARATION

The Bible insists upon the necessity of separation. The whole history of God's people is an illustration of it. From the time that man began to sin, God has been calling His own people from among those who oppose Him. From the first He insisted that Israel, His own peculiar people, must be a separate nation. Much of the law concerned this principle of separation. It was violation of the commandment in mingling with other peoples that brought about Israel's downfall. Christ Himself is described as one who was separate from sinners (Hebrews 7:26). The Church was and is a called-out body whose work is to call sinners out of the world to Christ. Besides all this, we have much direct New Testament teaching on separation. Romans 12:2 has already been referred to. The Corinthian letters are largely composed of teachings concerning separation from evil ones. Paul reminds us in another place that we are chosen vessels "unto honor" (Romans 9:21; 2 Timothy 2:21) In Hebrews 13:13 we are exhorted to follow Jesus "without the camp, bearing his reproach." And notice the reason:

"For here have we no continuing city, but we seek one to come." Again, we are told by John, "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" (1 John 2:15). Once more he begs us to keep from idols. "Be not unequally yoked together with unbelievers" is as binding a commandment as, "Thou shalt not steal."

## PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS

But now we come to the practical application of the doctrine we all believe. Perhaps we fail worst here. We say the doctrine is good, but fail to give it full place in our lives. The real test of what we believe about separation from the world is the way we live it out, for it must affect the whole life. If we are consistent, we will be separate from the world in everything — the heart first of all, and then that which comes from the heart. Take money, for instance. The world is money-mad. Wealth is the goal of too many lives. The life which fails to accumulate a fortune is by many counted a failure. Are we like the world in this? I fear sometimes that some of us Mennonites are. Honestly now, young people, what is your greatest desire in life? I have heard people who ought to be different, hope that they could marry rich and settle down in ease. Wrong, isn't it? It certainly is world-like. We should be thrifty, but there is a grave danger that the avaricious spirit of the age will catch us on this point. There are too many other things in life that are worthwhile, to waste a whole life in a

selfish striving after bank accounts and stocks and bonds.

Then there is the dress question. In spite of all we hear about it, we are drifting, most of us. Thank God for those noble young people who have conviction and boldness enough to show us how we may really be plain in this fashion-crazy day. I wish there were some way to make more of our dear young people see the beauty of non-conformed dressing. It reveals that sweet modesty which all admire so much, and puts the emphasis of the life on things more important.

The world respects a person who dresses by principle. And, oh, how many temptations a Christian garb protects us from! Our big danger here is compromise. But to look towards evil today is to step towards it tomorrow. And then compromise makes us most ridiculous. How foolish do those people look who try to be both plain and fashionable! The true believer is pained, and the world laughs. Such a one is like the bat who would be owned by neither birds nor beasts. Dear young people, if you must be fashionable, do not drag the name of our beloved church with you into the world. Remember, to be a Mennonite means to be separate from the world.

*It means . . .*

## **5. CLOSE ADHERENCE TO GOD'S WORD**

The Mennonites from the very first have regulated their life and belief by the teachings of the Bible. The works of the early leaders, such as Menno Simons, are full of constant references to the Scriptures as the basis of every doctrinal position. A "Thus saith the Lord" has always been for our church a sufficient reason for any belief or practice; the absence of this witness has always counted against any particular man's idea. We may be thankful that this is still true. The doctrinal writings of our church books and papers are still plentifully sprinkled with Bible quotations or reference to supporting passages. Conference resolutions are always supported with a greater or less number of references. In any discussion or argument the true Mennonite falls back upon a plain Bible passage as the last word to be said. This is the final appeal. There is no question as to whether or not the Bible is right; the only question is as to what the Bible really says.

## WRONG VIEWS OF THE BIBLE

Now it is a sad fact that this is not the attitude taken by all church people today. False teachers have been busy trying to change our attitude towards the Word, and perhaps no denomination has escaped their deadly influence. Consequently there are many people who do not accept the Bible as their unailing guide. Some consider it merely a human book, a record of what men in the past have thought about religious things. They think we should study it, not as the inspired word of God, but to get such help as we may from the solution other men have found for their problems. Others recognize to a degree the divine nature of the Book, but believe that it merely gives us general principles which we may variously apply. They believe that the commandments of the Bible were for the people of that day, and are not binding upon us of a later age. According to their idea, it is the duty of the religious leader today to discover the underlying principles of the Bible and apply them as the conditions of the time and his best judgment may dictate. Still others believe, with us, that the Bible is the absolute and final authority in all matters of which it treats and that it is thus a valid guide for present-day living, a sufficient direction for time and eternity.

## THE MENNONITE VIEW

Where the Bible gives but a general principle, all applications are to be in strict accord with it; where there are specific regulations, they are considered as binding upon us as they were upon the people to whom they were first given. This we may fairly say is the position of the Mennonite Church. To be sure, there may be found here and there individual members who may take either of the other positions, but that the Church as a whole accepts the Bible as the literal Word of God to us is proved by the General Conference resolutions regarding the Bible, and by the repeated action of the various general boards.

## A RULE OF INTERPRETATION

Scripture must be interpreted according to its nature. Interpretation must accord with the laws of language. Figures of speech and visions, for example, must be interpreted as such. But portions of Scripture that are written in simple, didactic language must be, if one is to be true to Scripture, interpreted literally. If we try to spiritualize and interpret such passages we shall have as many interpretations as we have people. If we treat some of such passages as figurative, how may we know which part is to be taken literally? For a few would be so extreme as to say that none of

the Bible means exactly what it says. If we accept the Bible statement that Jesus lived at all upon the earth, by what rule may we cast aside the assertion of His virgin birth and resurrection? Then, too, we may observe all about us that when an individual or a church leaves the Bible as a book of authority, it is but a short road to worldliness and loss of spiritual power.

## SOME ILLUSTRATIONS

But actual illustrations will make more clear what we mean by a close adherence to the Bible. I shall mention things which most professed Christian people disregard entirely. We, with some few others, believe that God has definitely regulated in His Word our lives in these regards.

The doctrine of non-resistance is one. We believe that the Bible means just what it says in the following quotations: "Resist not evil"; "Whosoever shall smite thee on the right cheek, turn to him the other also" (Matthew 5:39); "Love your enemies" (Matthew 5:44); "If thine enemy hunger, feed him" (Romans 12:20). Some people in the last few years asked us, to lay aside our convictions on this point "just to help fight this last war." But because we believe the children of God must live by the Bible at all times, we could not do it. It is a poor kind of non-resistance which is held to only in times of peace.

Similarly we live out the command, "Swear not at all" (Matthew 5:34). The true Mennonite allows no exception, affirming where most people swear. This matter of the oath is one of our objections to the lodge, to which no Mennonite may belong. Other Scriptures, which keep us from the lodge are those concerning our fellowship and yoking with unbelievers.

No Mennonite may be divorced, and all remarriage is forbidden while a former companion lives. This position is based on many Scriptures, such as, "What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder" (Matthew 19:6; Mark 10:9) and, "Whosoever putteth away his wife and marieth another committeth adultery" (Luke 16:18). Especially in city missions, there is much pressure on this point, but we dare not yield one inch, if we would be Scriptural.

Likewise the wearing of all gold and jewelry is forbidden. On general principles we avoid conformity to the world in dress; here we have the Bible laying its fingers on particular details to guide us in applying the general teaching. Without question the commandment is binding upon us.

Mennonite sisters wear the devotional covering, especially during worship. They do so, not because it is an inherited custom, but because the Bible commands it in 1 Corinthians 11:2-16. The teaching is plain. Many expositors, not Mennonite, say that Paul is clearly speaking of a special

covering for devotional purposes. Some try to explain away the ordinance by calling it an oriental custom. We accept it literally as the command of God and find joy and power in a literal obedience.

So with the kiss of charity, or the Christian salutation. Five times we are commanded to thus greet our brethren. It is not for us to wonder whether modern custom makes the holy kiss practicable; it is for us to find the real scriptural basis of it and make it a genuine expression of holy regard.

Lastly, we may mention the ordinance of feet washing. Most churches have dropped it, but we see it plainly commanded in John 13, and are happy thus to exemplify humility of heart.

There are yet other points, but these are sufficient to show that we as a people seek to adhere as closely to the Word as God may give us might and grace. It is the duty of each of us as young Mennonites to satisfy ourselves as to the Scripturalness of these doctrines, and then to live and teach them as we may have opportunity. Let us hold fast to the Word. If we once break loose from that, there is nothing to keep our dear church from drifting on the tide of popular opinion to a hasty destruction. "To the law and to the testimony" (Isaiah 8:20).

*It means . . .*

## **6. A LIVING WITNESS**

The need of the world is greater today than ever before. The profession of Christianity is increasing, but not nearly so fast as is the population of the world. Only a third of the earth's millions today bear the name Christian, but of these less than a third are Protestants, and we must ourselves estimate how many of the Protestant church members really know Christ as an effective Saviour from sin. And so there are millions of our human brothers who, need to be told the story of the God-Man who died that our sins might be forgiven. There are also millions of professing Christians who know their religion only as man's best effort please God, who have "a form of godliness," but deny "the power thereof." These must be helped to a living experience of saving grace. The Church today is in great danger of being swallowed up by formality, worldliness, and infidelity. There is a crying need for men and women who believe the whole Bible and are willing and able to hold up its standard in the face of every obstacle and opposition of the enemy.

## THE DUTY OF MENNONITES

All this is the task that falls upon us as members of the Mennonite Church. For, to say nothing against any other denomination, the Gospel which the Mennonite Church preaches will meet these needs of the world. We preach the Cross as the only means of salvation, refusing to follow so many of the missionaries today who are robbing the Gospel message of this, its very heart. We teach that mere profession is futile unless accompanied by actual possession of experimental religion. We seek to throw the whole authority of God's Word into the battle to save the Church from worldliness and denial of the Scriptures. If our teachings of godly living and peace toward men were accepted into the heart by the masses, all the great social and economic problems of the day would be in large part solved. I say all this with a humble thankfulness that God has given us such a message. The whole conviction of my life makes me affirm that it is true.

Do you believe that we have the message which the world needs? The telling of the story awaits your acting upon that belief. We have often been told that the Church is only what the individual members make it. May it be burned upon our hearts that the Mennonite Church of the future will be determined by the attitude of us, the individual young people of the Church.

If you and I recognize our responsibility and act accordingly, multitudes may yet hear the Gospel of salvation preached. But if we depend on someone else, and fail. . . . We are all witnesses. We witness either for the religion we profess, or against it.

## HOW WE MAY WITNESS

**We may witness by our life.** The life of the Mennonite should witness, not only to the ordinary conception of Christianity, but to the particular faith of the Mennonite Church. People care little for, what we say we believe if our lives do not bear out the proof. A man who tries to pay back every injury would appear ridiculous in teaching non-resistance. A girl who caters to the fashions of the world would be sneered at should she try to argue for nonconformity. Outsiders do not study our books to find out what we are like and what we believe; they simply study us, and "Mennonite" means to them just what our lives are.

**We may witness by personal testimony.** We should, not be afraid to stand up for what we honestly believe. Many of us are at fault here. There is no reason why each one of us should not be able to "give a reason for the hope which is within us," and give it without a thought of shame. For sober thought assures us that our faith is nothing to be in the least backward

about. Many and many a time as we travel or otherwise mingle with people we have an opportunity to give a personal testimony to a whole-Bible religion. Let us not allow these chances to slip by. If we speak clearly and with conviction, we shall be surprised to find how glad people are everywhere to hear such a testimony. It may mean salvation to some, and light on perplexing questions to others. We shall find ourselves stronger in the faith for having given expression to it. And, more or less, our Church becomes better known and more able to fill its place in the world.

**We may witness by supporting missionary work.** Our mission board is constantly increasing its activities and new forms of work are being started. These, as well as the old ones, need constant support. As young people may not have much money, but let us remember that we are forming with what little we have those life habits which will make us selfish spenders or liberal givers.

As regards prayer, the petition of even a child reaches the Father's ear. This is the real test of interest and the basis of it — our prayers for the Lord's work. But most of all, we should think of going ourselves. The mission workers of the Church must come from her young people, for they most of all are free and able to consecrate a whole life to the work. There never was such a shortage of workers as there is now, we are told. Missions and charitable institutions everywhere are calling for help. However

this may be explained, may we not see such a consecration of the young people of the Church as will assure us that some of these needs will soon be filled? The witnessing of the Church, the preaching of a pure Gospel is at stake. I long for the day when every congregation will be represented on field by one or more workers who will witness to a needy world of that Gospel which saved and satisfied them at home. This is no idle dream.

If we see a need, and hold in our grasp a remedy for that need, who can measure the responsibility of the individual to witness to something so much worthwhile?

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