

YESTERDAY'S TOMORROW
Session Five
Class Leadership Instructions

Introduction Notes

A. The leaders of the Evangelical Mennonites were very concerned about their relationship with the world.

1. They were Mennonites meaning that they tended to view the world with suspicion.

a. Mennonites went to great lengths to reject the influence of the world around.

b. They dressed differently and acted differently.

c. They wanted to be free of the world and obedient to God.

2. These concerns were picked up by the Evangelical Mennonites.

a. Their first statements reflected their concern about the world.

God calls His children to live a separated life, a life of holiness in which mind is renewed and conduct changed by the Holy Spirit and which refuses the conforming pressures of this fallen world.

DRESS

Although we are convinced that our carriage in the plainest way possible can save no person, if he does not put on the garment of salvation and the coat of righteousness, through Christ, yet it is also undeniable that all unbecoming ornaments of clothing are not suitable for true Christians, and in order that every one of our fellow members may know it, be it proclaimed, that no one shall be allowed to make use of the following personal ornaments, to wit: Hoops, Women's Hats, Feathers on Bonnets, Ear and Finger Rings, Powdering of the Hair, Ribbon Bows, and Moustaches, and everything that is worn for pride and conformation to the world (General Rules - from What Mean These Stones?, p. 32).

b. Personal conduct issues were a matter of denominational meetings.

7. Because the devil and the world have always been cunning to carry on their doings to hurt the true things of God and to plunge people into temporal and eternal ruin, they appear at the this present time especially cunning and coaxing under various new names, colors and disguises - music, parades, celebrations and more of the like- which are often entered into by well meaning preachers of the Gospel to present a beautiful facade for the devil's work, to lead, if possible, even upright children of God from the narrow path of life onto the broad way to hell, therefore

Resolved: That we earnestly forbid our members to meet at such vain worldly social events, because our Lord and Master only promised to be with his children whenever

and wherever they gather in His Name. (From Verhandlungen, p. 70 - 1871)

8. The article about dress in our Doctrine of Faith and Discipline page 22, was brought up by Brother William Gehman and was discussed in great detail but in love and gentleness. The forbidden named articles start in German with: "Reisse, hats, etc.", in English: "hoops, women's hats, etc." This "women's hat" was the object of the discussion whether our sisters, and those entrusted to them by God, are permitted to wear a hat who wish to do so. Therefore

Resolved: That the sisters, and those entrusted to them by God, be permitted to wear a plain hat. We are taught, however, to be lights of the world. As disciples of Jesus we should not imitate the world in any way. May God help us not give the impression that we are somebody-- not to pretend, not to put on, but to "Condescend to men of low estate" (From Verhandlungen, p. 78 - 1873).

c. Membership in organizations of the world was a problem.

5. The following committee was elected to answer the question: Is it permitted in our denomination that a Travelling Preacher be president of a Milk Association?

Committee: Noah Detwiler, W. B. Musselman, John Knauss, M. D. Haws, Milton Kauffman: Advisory Members of this committee: Elders Menno Bowman and A. Good.

The above named Committee reported that it is not allowed for any of our preachers to be president of a Milk Association. This matter was further examined by the Conference and discussed and finally it was

Resolved: That it shall not be allowed for any of our preachers to serve as an official in any association, except in our church (From Verhandlungen, p. 208 - 1892).

B. Our view of our relationship with the world has gone through several stages.

1. The first stage which lasted until about 1900 may be identified as cautious separation.

a. Our leaders knew that the world was dangerous.

b. They sought to warn about the dangers of conforming to the world.

2. The second stage which began about 1900 and lasted until about 1960 might be identified as isolated separation.

a. The distance between the world and the Christian grew.

b. Leaders counseled Christians to withdraw from any activity that might compromise the Christian life.

i. Young people were prohibited from higher education including high school and college.

ii. Worldly amusements were clearly forbidden.

Section 12 - Conformity to the World

It shall be strictly enjoined upon members of our society that they shall not conform to the world, by participating in anything, or in any gathering, or in any game or other form of amusement, the purpose of which is merely to gratify the carnal mind or

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will of the flesh. (General Rules for Our Society, Doctrines and Disciplines of the Mennonite Brethren in Christ, 1936, page 37).

3. The third stage, beginning about 1960, may be called interactive separation.
 - a. The concern continues to be for a truly biblical lifestyle.
 - b. Uncertainty about what is right as questions rise about how to be in the world without being of the world.

Article 9 - Separation From the World.

That the Christian life is to be devoted to God's glory and eternal realities rather than the passing and dangerous pursuits of this world is the repeated burden of the Scriptures. In view of this fact, we feel compelled to caution our people against improper relationships, pursuits, and excessive indulgence in innocent amusements that may become barriers to spiritual vitality and the cause of spiritual decline.

Some amusements and relationships are positively demoralizing and furnish the first easy step to the total loss of character. We therefore look with deep concern on the great increase of potentially harmful amusements, and lift up a solemn note of warning against theatergoing, reading indecent literature, dancing, partaking in such games of chance as are frequently associated with gambling, and the indiscriminate use of television - all of which may be antagonistic to vital piety, promotive of worldliness, and especially pernicious to youth.

We encourage our people to make their conduct the subject of careful thought and prayer, to study the subject in the light of their tendencies. We adjure them to remember that the question must be not only whether their conduct will dull the spiritual life and become an unwise example, but also whether it will be a positive benefit to others.

Having been washed, sanctified, and justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of God, we have been raised up and made to sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus; therefore, we should walk in newness of life and set our affections on things above, not on things on the earth (From Standards of Life and Worship of the Bible Fellowship Church).

Question Notes

In general, discussion of lifestyle issues are controversial. Be prepared for generational conflict. Be sensitive to the presence of immature believers in your class who have not yet had time to work on lifestyle issues. Give them a chance.

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SANCTIFICATION / SEPARATION

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QUESTIONS

1. How did our statements about conduct change? How did they remain the same?
2. What were some of the issues of conduct which the Evangelical Mennonites identified as problematic? What issues of conduct create the most problems for Christians today?
3. What principles about the relationship between Christians and the world do you find in the following Scriptures?
 - John 17:15-18
 - Romans 12:2
 - 1 Corinthians 10:31
 - Colossians 3:1-2
4. What do you think ought to be the relationship between Christians and their world?
5. What advice would you give to a Christian who is concerned about the influence of the world in his or her life?