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The history of conscientious objectors in the United States is a story of struggle and difficulty. This issue has tested the general religious freedom that we have enjoyed in this land. We do well to keep a record of this story before us and to remind the rising generation what we must do to maintain this status.

In the early Colonial days, Mennonites in Pennsylvania had some special consideration for military exemption. During the Revolutionary War period, the relationship of Mennonites to the new revolutionary government was somewhat strained and uneasy. Benjamin Hershey, an elderly bishop, appealed to the Pennsylvania Assembly to "heartily thank" the assembly for allowing "liberty of conscience" but declaring that "we have dedicated ourselves to serve all men in everything that can be helpful to the preservation of men's lives, but we find no freedom in ... giving assistance in any thing by which men's lives are destroyed or hurt." This appeal was respected, and they were granted release from war duty by paying a special war tax.

During the Civil War, citizens were permitted to pay a fee that would exempt them from service in the army. Those who lived in the South did not fare as well.

As the United States began preparing for involvement in World War I, the first Selective Service Act was passed in May 1917. This act granted military exemption, but the COs were required to enter military camps, where they were treated roughly by the soldiers and the camp officers.

As tensions began to build again in the 1930s before World War II, Mennonites, Quakers, and the Church of the Brethren began to work on an alternate service plan that might be acceptable to the government. In September 1940 Congress passed the Selective Training and Service Act. This act provided that persons "who by reason of religious training and belief were conscientiously opposed to all forms of military service, should "be assigned to work of national importance under civilian direction." This resulted in the formation of Civilian Public Service (CPS), a program where COs lived in camps and performed work that benefited the public welfare of the nation.

In the face of various Cold War struggles, the I-W program was initiated by selective service in 1951. Under this program, COs were permitted to

work in hospitals or farms that provided food for the government. This program made it easy for those of historic peace churches to obtain CO status. Near the end of the Vietnam conflict, the draft and registration were discontinued.

In 1980 the government again began requiring eighteen-year-old young men to register with selective service although no draft has been initiated since then. Our church group has made several contacts with selective service to discuss our concerns in the event of a draft. Our brethren were assured that selective service still sees providing alternate service for conscientious objectors as part of its function. While no specifics were given, our brethren received the impression that should a draft again be initiated, individual COs would need to answer more personally before the officials. Likely, they would be required to explain their personal convictions and answer for their civil behavior.

We should appreciate the history of the Mennonite Church in taking a stand that has given us the respect we now enjoy with selective service. However, young men should understand their responsibility if they want to identify as a CO in the event of a draft. Their future freedom from military duty may be directly related to whether their neighbors consider their behavior consistent with a claim to be a peace-loving person. Driving habits that incur a criminal record and threatening talk to those who take advantage of them may be used against them if they attempt to take a nonresistant stand before a draft board. While all of us should avoid this type of conduct because we want to please our Lord and Master, the consideration of how these things could affect our CO status is a sobering reality.

As parents and leaders we should remember that those who lost nonconformity have also lost the vision for a true nonresistant position. This is one more incentive to continue to insist that our young people embrace the same Biblical standards that we hold.

—*Brother Galen*



"Who Shall Roll Away the Stone?"

As fingers of pink stretched tenuously from the east, carefully peeling back the ebony sky, three women wound their way through silent Jerusalem streets. They had spices; they had ointment; they also had a problem.

"Who shall roll ... away the stone?" (Mark 16:3). Their devotion was centered on Jesus; they wanted to express that devotion one last time and anoint His disfigured body with the spices and ointment that they now carried. But the stone stood in their way—like an unspeaking giant—cold and unmovable. Had they not thought of this problem before? How could they have made all these plans, bought all this ointment, and not considered the stone blocking their way? After all, this was a "great stone" (Matthew 27:60)—a boulder. But they persevered, the intensity of their devotion outstripping even logic.

Their faith was rewarded. When they came within sight of the tomb, the stone had already been rolled away! Someone had already entered the tomb. "Who shall roll ... away the stone?" An angel from God, of course. So often we temper our devotion with all the reasonableness of reality. We stack up impossibilities as a child stacks his favorite building blocks. They seem so real to our finite minds. We admire them. We analyze them from differing angles. We talk about them. We smile knowingly and conclude, "It cannot be done."

But God still moves stones. If He made them, He can move them. Oh, that our devotion would smother doubt, and our zeal outpace the reasons why the sacrifices are too great. God has a way to move the stone, but we can discover it only by committing all our life to Him and pursuing that devotion to the end.

Why did the angel roll away the stone? Was Jesus trapped? Could He not have left the tomb with the stone in place? The angel rolled away the stone so that these three women could see an empty tomb. These women expected to see the remains of the Master. When they looked, they saw grave-clothes; but no body. A place was carved into the stone to lay a body. But the place was vacant. The fact that the body of Jesus was missing reaches down through the centuries and touches us today.

The angel rolled the stone away so that all the world could see that death was conquered. This was material proof that this sealed tomb was vacant. God understands doubts. He reassured these women that Jesus is indeed alive; He has left us a record that He lives today. Not only is our Savior alive, but He is near us. He has left that tomb and has taken His place in our hearts. Praise His Name!

Brother Delmer

The Personification of God

"The Finger of God"

What can God do with just His finger? Certainly the finger of God is stronger than all of men's arms put together! The Bible records God's finger intervening to accomplish His sovereign will, whether He is working with men, nations, or spirit powers.

The Finger of God Touches Men

"And he gave unto Moses, when he had made an end of communing with him upon mount Sinai, two tables of testimony, tables of stone, written with the finger of God" (Exodus 31:18). God's finger engraved in stone His covenant (binding agreement) with man. By nature, man slides into anarchy and chaos, but God intervenes by directing man into a covenant relationship with Him. His covenant directed His people's behavior, revealed the consequences of sin, and pronounced blessings on the obedient.

"This they said, tempting him, that they might have to accuse him. But Jesus stooped down, and with his finger wrote on the ground, as though he heard them not" (John 8:6). This glimpse of Jesus occurred when the scribes and Pharisees brought Him the adulterous woman in an effort to trap Jesus in His verdict. What did Jesus write on the ground with His finger? Did Jesus' finger prick their consciences by reminding them of their own evil motives? We do know that Jesus finally said, "He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her." This broke even the hardest of them, and they "went out one by one."

God intervenes in men's consciences. Imagine where we would be without this intervention. Suppose we felt no prick when we sinned. Suppose we would slide blindly over the brink to eternal judgment without ever having known better. But such is not God's way of dealing. He kindly intervenes. His mercy makes us feel our guilt so we can return to Him.

The Finger of God Directs Nations

Careless indulgence was the order of the day. Belshazzar ordered a sumptuous feast with plenty of wine. Irreverently, they drank from the golden vessels plundered from God's own temple and praised their false gods. "In the same hour came forth fingers of a man's hand, and wrote over against the candlestick upon the plaster of the wall of the king's palace: and the king saw the part of the hand that wrote" (Daniel 5:5). God wrote a message of judgment on the nation who ignored a God they had known.

God intervenes among nations when His glory is at stake and when men blatantly challenge His sovereignty. The men who challenged God by building the Tower of Babel were scattered. The Medo-Persian Empire

conquered the blaspheming Babylonians. The "unsinkable" Titanic lies on the ocean floor. What will God's finger bring on modern America for drifting from her moorings? Nations who persecute God's people and disregard His moral standards have ended in the rubble of history.

God also intervenes to make a way for His people. Waves of persecution have scattered saints across the globe, but God's finger has prepared nations to shelter His own. From the progress of evil men's intentions to the passage of potentially harmful laws, God's finger filters what His people face. God is also working out His plan for the future. His finger enabled the tiny state of Israel to survive against incredible odds. His finger will allow the devil to move the nations to a final showdown with Him. In it all, God's finger provides for the ultimate triumph of Himself and His people.

The Finger of God Controls Spirit Powers

"This is the finger of God," the magicians told Pharaoh (see Exodus 8:19). How did they recognize God's finger? Stepping back for an overview, we see the children of Israel cruelly enslaved in Egypt. For over eighty years, God cultivated Moses to be His agent to deliver Israel from Egypt. By God's power Moses unleashed terrible plagues against the gods of Egypt. The magicians duplicated the first plagues but not the last ones.

The Finger of God limits the power of Satan and his forces.

A very real world exists beyond what we see. Satan and the fallen angels ruthlessly fight against God and His angels. The souls of men are the torn battlefield. Although the forces of evil far surpass our human strength, just one finger of God is more than all of Satan's power. God filters the temptations we face, limits the devil's power over us, and supplies us with stamina for daily victory. The saints, in turn, can influence the spirit world by prayer and intercession because God hears and answers prayers.

Yes, the devil has very real power, but Christians do not study deeply into the evils of the occult. Instead, they avoid superstition and "science falsely so called." They are careful not to allow Satan to bring them into bondage in the things that they allow. They employ the power of Jesus who said, "But if I with the finger of God cast out devils, no doubt the kingdom of God is come upon you" (Luke 11:20).

Truly the finger of God intervenes with decisive power and judgment. His finger is a terror to the sinner but a guide to the saint. On which side of His finger will you find yourself?

Brother Gabriel



Keys to a Clear Conscience (Part 3)

Clearing Offenses

"Woe unto the world because of offences! for it must needs be that offences come; but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh!" (Matthew 18:7).

An offense is an act that causes another to stumble or fall. It may cause others to do wrong. To understand factors that lead to offenses will help us avoid and correct them.

Many times relationships deteriorate due to misunderstandings. Something we have said or done may be misinterpreted. Imaginations build a wall of mistrust. Various incidents seem to verify a faulty conclusion. Perhaps we rarely have opportunity to talk with someone; so we conclude that something is amiss. Building the altar Ed nearly caused a civil war in Israel.

Carnality can be another cause of offenses. "We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves" (Romans 15:1). A carnal person seeks to please himself, but a strong person will be considerate of a weaker brother. If someone irritates us, we are carnal.

Many problems can be traced to the sin of pride. "Only by pride cometh contention" (Proverbs 13:10). An efficient, organized person may enjoy comparing himself to one less efficient. Promoting oneself is a sign of pride.

Offenses will happen. The important thing is to take care of them so that relationships are kept open. How will a humble person resolve offenses? Be prompt. Relationships must be clear before worship can be acceptable (Matthew 5:23, 24). The longer an offense is unresolved, the more difficult it becomes to approach. Do not wait until just before Communion. Take care of it now.

Take personal responsibility. Do not attempt to show the other person where he is wrong. Defending oneself will not bring restoration. Acknowledge your shortcomings, even if it was unintentional.

Follow Matthew 18. Speak to the other person about it alone rather than talking to others. Be ready to do all you can to restore the relationship. If he refuses, take one or two more. If it is still unresolved, tell it to the church leaders. Only by following God's pattern can a clear conscience be maintained.

Be willing to make restitution. When one is truly sorry, he will attempt to make wrongs right with God and man. Zacchaeus response illustrated this well: "If I have taken anything from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold" (Luke 19:8).

Choose to forgive. No one can keep you from forgiving. You alone must make that choice. To forget is not always possible, but the resentment must melt. Refuse to relate it to others or think of the details.

Divine love for others will maintain proper relationships. "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another" (John 13:35).

—*Brother David*



PRAYER POINT

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

**Pray that the semiannual council, preparatory,
and Communion services would strengthen the church.**

Pray for the revival meetings and the evangelists as they minister the Word.

Thank God for Jesus, who gave His life so that we can have eternal life.

Pray for the government officials as they begin another term of service.

Pray for the new homes that are being established among us.

