

# THE EASTERN MENNONITE TESTIMONY

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*Editor: [anabaptistmennonites.org](http://anabaptistmennonites.org).*

## The Courage of Caleb

The halls of history are lined with faithful examples—men and women of courage, "who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises" (Hebrews 11:33). Although Caleb is not mentioned with the heroes in Hebrews 11, he is an inspiring example of courage.

When Caleb requested, "Give me this mountain" (Joshua 14:12), he was not asking for a free handout. He was rather requesting the blessing of his brethren in claiming the promise of God. Today it is our responsibility to claim God's provisions and promises for victory.

Caleb's courage was not derived from his own physical strength or mined from his military wisdom. His aspiration was not drummed up by his own optimism or personal greed. Rather, Caleb was claiming the promise of God. He had anchored his faith in Jehovah's provision for success. His will was to do God's will; therein lies his courage. "To find God's will is the greatest discovery; to know God's will is the greatest knowledge; to do God's will is the greatest achievement!"

The promises for victory are as sure and as available today as they were in Caleb's day. "His divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness,... whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises" (2 Peter 1:3, 4). They are effective for all ages—from the aspiring Christian youth to the faithful aged saint. They encourage and direct Christians of every culture and through each situation. They are as available to Jacob's direct descendants as they were to the adopted Kenzite. All that wholly follow the Lord God of Israel can share a part in the inheritance of the promised land, both now and in the world to come. Even though Caleb claimed the promises of God, he faced difficulties in conquering his mountain. Today, we likewise face difficulties in living the Christian life. The obstacles in the path to victory are insurmountable through human wisdom. The enemies we face are stronger than ourselves. Satan flaunts the pleasures of sin and the allurements of the world as something worthwhile and enjoyable. When the dangers seem small and far away, we are tempted to make leagues with the enemy. When the enemy appears powerful and difficult, we tend to shrink from the conflict.

Caleb may not have had his strategy completely planned, and he may not have understood the magnitude of the task. Yet he was committed to God's will and trusted His grace for the future. We likewise face complexities in relating to current issues. Many are the things that we do not understand about the future. An increasingly socialistic government encroaches more and more upon our everyday lives. The technological revolution repeatedly brings new and varying challenges. And the morality of this present society continues to decline and decay.

Notwithstanding these complexities, we believe that "in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us" (Romans 8:37). God, in His boundless love for us, provides the wherewithal for victory. Regeneration is the first step to victory. "They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb" (Revelation 12:11). God gives us our strategy for attack and defense in His Word. Let us follow it wholly. Additionally, God has given us traveling companions—brethren and sisters in the church who stand with us. In these last perilous times, we need to use all the tools God has given us to be successful.

If we today have faith in God, we can claim the promises of God. And then, like Caleb, we will go forth with courage: "Give me this mountain ...: if so be the LORD will be with me, then I shall be able to drive them out" (Joshua 14:12).

Courage is not having the strength to go on;

It is going on when you do not have strength.

Courage is not going just where the light is;

It is following God through the dark valleys.

Courage is not something that comes easily;

It is motivation without inspiration.

Courage is standing with God and His people;

In the midst of opposition without feeling very courageous.



## *The Pitch of the Tent*

"And Lot . . . pitched his tent toward Sodom" (Genesis 13:12).

By his choice of a dwelling place, Lot indicated the course he was following and revealed his attitude toward the sinful society about him. Today's society has many parallels to the cities of the plain in Lot's day. We also face the danger of looking to the world and being drawn under its influence.

Those who seek the approval of the world will be ensnared by the world. When one does not view the wickedness of the world as exceedingly sinful, he has taken an early step toward ensnarement. Soon he shrinks from appearing "different." The privilege of being a living example of godliness becomes a burden to him. Many times he ignores the opportunity to give a word for the Lord since this would identify him as opposed to the world. Rather than being associated with a Scriptural brotherhood, he seeks to fit into society and its institutions. One who seeks the approval of the world may harbor resentment for a godly heritage, esteeming it as a culture or as tradition rather than a practical application of Scriptural principles.

When one desires the approval of the world, he will adjust his lifestyle to fit its patterns. The desire to "fit in" motivates the individual to follow the fashions of the world. Worldly heroes are admired. Worldly literature and worldly media become essential to keep abreast with worldly interests.

One who seeks the approval of the world accepts its distorted morality. The world has not only allowed all manner of corrupt practices but also insisted that others recognize these practices as their rights. The desire for the approval of the world restrains the Christian from convicting the world of sin.

The desire to be accepted by the world leads to unreserved admiration for worldly philosophies. The worldly philosophy of children and their upbringing is contrary to Scriptural methods and exalts the carnal nature of children. The unrestrained will of a child leads him to take his own way, rejecting the requirements of parents and law. A worldly view of marriage also undermines a stable home that transmits the faith. Psychology, education, evolution, atheism, and humanism all have their impact on society. Worldliness can also make inroads through business pursuits. The desire to be the dominant business in a given field is motivated by the desire for recognition and acceptance. With such motives, the businessman may see the world as having the answers to business success. This path leads to increased pressure to contribute to worldly social systems and to mingle

among their social interchanges.

A desire to acquire much of this world's goods will lead to a breakdown in spiritual values. "For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows" (1 Timothy 6:10). This desire is essentially selfish and is impossible to satisfy. Again, this desire may bring a strong enticement to follow worldly methods. Much of the emphasis of higher education is to have more earning power and to avoid manual labor. Those who are attached to their wealth depend on insurance to protect their assets and profits.

To seek worldly pleasures is to pitch our tent toward Sodom. Worldly pleasures are sensual, selfish, and perverted. They indicate an empty and unfulfilled life. Pleasures demand an ever-changing and increasing pursuit of more pleasure. The descent to corruption and addiction is often accompanied by suffering and disillusionment. Much of the current emphasis on sports and on celebrity figures is driven by this desire for pleasure. An eager public follows its heroes through the popular mediums of our day. The large exposure that these individuals have directs the moral tone of the nation. Pleasure seeking exposes one to the world's values, its corruptions, and its ills.

The Bible contains principles to help us maintain a proper distance between our tents and the cities of the world. A life directed by spiritual desires will assist in properly pitching the tent. From subsequent events we may conclude that Lot lacked Abram's commitment to God. Without this quality we will not be able to direct our homes safely among the pressures of daily life as we earn a livelihood. Keeping spiritual priorities is necessary in order to properly allocate time and resources. Family time is far more important than a large income or comfortable amenities. Church services and activities have far greater value than anything that could be earned in the same number of hours. The financial needs of schools, publication work, and missions have the potential for much profit in things that really do count.

Business interests should serve spiritual life. We cannot ignore the need to spend a large portion of our time providing for our material needs. However, business endeavors should be seen as subservient to the Master of all. We labor to acquire what we need and to have enough to give to those in need. At times businesses also provide employment for others. Business pressures can easily gain the upper hand, continually calling for expansion and more time and laborers. When the hours involved in business become

extended and the need for employees is hard to fill, the time may have come to regain control.

The effects that business choices have on our homes require us to seek divine direction and godly counsel. We must recognize the need for counsel from the brotherhood and should never disregard the direction of Scriptures. The size of a business venture, the debt load, the demands of schedule, and the dangers of ease and affluence each need to be considered. The desire for profit or even a desire to provide for our own should never lead us to accept detrimental business practices. If we are willing to work hard in God-honoring employment and to live frugally, God can bless our efforts and make a way for us so that we do not need to compromise our spiritual life or the good of our families.

Our business efforts should be subject to the principles of separation. Certainly television, liquor, or tobacco sales would not be appropriate for godly people. Nor should we engage in the sale of entertainment, sports, or luxury items. Business pursuits should make a useful contribution to society. Business partnerships must meet the requirement of Scripture in regard to the unequal yoke. The lines of separation that we draw in the business will have a very direct impact on the separation of our lives and homes.

The outcome of Lot's family and descendants warns us to take heed to the pitch of our tents. To believe that choices similar to Lot's will have different results today is unreasonable. May we embrace the values of faithful Abraham and accept the path of the stranger and pilgrim. "By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise: for he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God" (Hebrews 11:9, 10).

*Brother Darren*



## **The Privilege of the 4029 Exemption (Part 1)**

The IRS (Internal Revenue Service) is the government department that oversees tax collection. Their Form 4029 is titled, 'Application for Exemption From Social Security and Medicare Taxes and Waiver of Benefits.' So being "4029 Exempt" simply means that we have chosen to not participate in the Social Security (SS) system.

The SS Act was signed into law by Franklin D. Roosevelt on August 14, 1935. This act created a mandatory social insurance program designed to pay retired workers aged sixty-five or older a continuing income after retirement. Medicare and Medicaid were added in 1955. All together, these programs make payments for old age, disability, medical care, and death.

The new law mandated a payroll tax of 2 percent on the first \$3,000 in earnings. This tax was equally shared by the employer and employee. Today the rate is 12.4 percent on the first \$113,700 in earnings, plus a Medicare tax of 2.9 percent on all earnings. In 2013, the Medicare rate for those earning over \$400,000 increased by 0.9 percent of earned income and an additional tax of 3.8 percent of unearned income. Further, the Affordable Care Act (commonly known as Obamacare) adds numerous other fees and taxes for certain mandated large employers.

Initially, the act covered only employees, but that was expanded in 1955 to cover the self-employed (SE). To give perspective, a person earning \$35,000 pays a tax of \$5,355; one earning \$50,000 pays a tax of \$7,650; and one earning \$80,000 pays a tax of \$12,240. Employers pay one-half of their employees' taxes.

The system is a pay-as-you-go system—today's workers provide the funds to pay today's promised benefits. While this has worked for many years, the program is now in trouble. In 1960 there were 4.9 workers for each retiree. Today there are 2.9 workers per retiree, and the ratio is forecasted to fall. The average monthly payment received per retiree in 1940 was \$41 per month. In 2011 the average benefit for a retired worker was \$1,235 per month, or \$14,820 per year (\$29,640 for a couple).

The program is in trouble for four main reasons: people are living longer, the birth rate has declined, people are retiring earlier, and medical costs are rapidly increasing. One-fourth to one-third of the population is retired, and this is increasing. Also adding to the problem is the large increase of individuals seeking some sort of government entitlement. Over 50 percent of children now receive free school lunches, and a growing number receive food stamps or live in Section-8, government-assisted housing. Over 47 percent of Americans pay no income tax at all yet receive thousands of dollars in refundable credits and other programs. Currently, over 50 percent of Americans are on some sort of entitlement program, and approximately 65 percent of total federal outlays are entitlements. People increasingly avoid hard work and are conditioned to borrow to spend and then look to the government for help.

By now it should be obvious why we are privileged, not just because we may be exempt from such a system, but because we are allowed to practice an economic system much more Scriptural and much more effective than what this world offers.

How did it come to be that we are granted exemption from SS? The movement for SS exemption began after 1956 with the Old Order Amish. In the year 1955, SS was expanded from employee only to also include the self-employed. Since most Amish were self-employed, they were now affected by this insurance tax. At first many complied, but they soon began to question it on several grounds. Traditionally, the Amish have shunned insurance because it militates against trust in God. They also had strong belief in separation of church and state, which meant that they could not conscientiously accept money from the government, especially something viewed as welfare. They believed that, since they met the needs of their elderly without government aid in any form, they should be exempt from paying SS taxes.

Initially the government was unsympathetic. They thought that the Amish should pay the tax just like any other tax but could decline to receive the benefits if they so desire. The Amish bishops, however, would not accept that. They foresaw that, if they would pay the SS premiums, many who paid the tax would then be tempted to collect (thinking that they should get back what they paid in). This consequential temptation to collect could and would be a threat to their beliefs and way of life.

The government then proposed that the Amish pay the tax and then collect only what was paid in plus interest. This too was refused, for the Amish knew that if they began to collect, they would find no convenient place to stop. A number of Amish simply began to refuse to pay the tax. At first the IRS began to levy and take money out of bank accounts. Then these Amish closed their bank accounts. Next the IRS tried to convince the milk companies to take the unpaid SS taxes out of milk checks, but they refused. The only other alternative was to seize assets, and that is what they began to do.

One particular situation brought this whole issue into the public eye. A certain Amish man named Valentine Byler had failed to pay four years of SS tax and owed approximately \$308. Since he had no checking account that the IRS could levy, he was summoned to appear in court. He refused and therefore was cited for contempt and brought to the Pittsburgh U.S. District Court. The judge threw out the case asking the IRS, "Don't you have anything better to do than to take a peaceful man off his farm and

drag him into court?"

Although the IRS lost the court case, they were not ready to give up. Soon afterwards, while Mr. Byler was out plowing his fields for spring planting, the IRS showed up, confiscated his three plow horses, harnesses and all, and sold them at auction. Since no Amish attended the auction, the horses brought just enough to pay the tax, the auctioneer, and return about \$37 to Mr. Byler. But the case attracted media attention, and the public, as well as members of Congress, began to learn of this situation. Public sympathy was clearly with the Amish and against the IRS. Negotiations began between the Amish and the government.

The government eventually granted an exemption, tucked away in the 1965 Medicare Bill, which did not expressly exempt the Amish from paying SS (since that would illegally respect a specific religion), but rather laid out the conditions under which a religious group may be exempt. The exemption was narrowly defined to eliminate the possibility that non-Amish-type groups would qualify. The bill also contained a provision canceling the tax accounts of some 15,000 Amish people, amounting to nearly \$250,000.

It is instructive to note that the 4029 exemption was legislatively granted, it was not constitutionally granted. The initial exemption never reached the courts, nor were the government administrators favorably disposed towards the exemption. Rather, public opinion, coupled with effective Amish lobbying efforts, overcame strong administrative objection leading to legislative enactment in 1965. But the story is not finished.

As Amish moved into more non-farm employment, the push to also exempt workers who were not self-employed began. This time however, public opinion had waned and Congress was indifferent. With no legislative action forthcoming, the issue was taken to the courts. In 1978 an Amish man, Edwin Lee, sued to stop IRS collection efforts and to receive a refund of the amount of Social Security tax he had paid for his Amish employees. Lee argued that the requirement to participate in Social Security and pay the employer tax for his Amish employees in contradiction to his sincerely held religious beliefs violated his right to the free exercise of religion guaranteed in the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. Lee won at the Federal District Court level, and the case was appealed to the Supreme Court in 1982. Here the Court accepted that the payment of taxes into Social Security and the receipt of benefits violated the Amish religion, but held that this infringement on Lee's religious liberty was essential to accommodate the overriding public interest in maintaining a viable tax sys-

tem.

Constitutional precedent was strongly against exemption from payment of Social Security taxes on religious grounds. However, while no right to exemption was found, the case did not restrict Congress's power to legislatively grant such exemptions as it chose. So the Amish went back to work. Many trips were made to Washington over the course of the issue. At one time eighty Amish representatives went in pairs and visited over four hundred congressional offices. These appeals were finally successful, and in 1988 Congress expanded the exemption to include exempt employees working for exempt employers.

While we would not use legal force, we are grateful that legal exemption has been granted. We view this provision as the mercy of God, as well as that of the government, so that we too can maintain trust in God and avoid worldly insurance and entanglements.

*Brother Randall*

"The LORD is the portion  
of mine inheritance and of my cup:  
thou maintainest my lot.  
The lines are fallen unto me in pleasant places;  
yea, I have a goodly heritage."  
Psalm 16:5-6



## Church Committee Report

### The Relief Committee

The relief work of the last year was performed on the local level without the direct involvement of the Relief Committee. We believe the most effective witness of our relief takes place when we reach out to help people in our communities.

Our brethren in Texas and Missouri gave assistance to tornado victims in the vicinity of Little Rock, Arkansas. Also the Ewing, Orchardville, and Clearview congregations assisted tornado victims near Champaign, Illinois.

We do want to keep the mission of relief work alive in our church. Some people consider conservative Mennonites to be second-class citizens because we do not serve as jurors or firemen. But relief work is one area we

can serve in all good conscience. Several years ago when the Mississippi River overflowed its banks, we presented ourselves to help with cleanup. Personnel from another relief agency declared, "We were wondering where the Mennonites are!" They had expected us, and we were glad we had not let them down.

We clean mud out of basements and clear debris from kitchens, yards, and fields. Those who are helped get the feeling that there are people who care about them and their dilemma. This inspires hope to move ahead. More importantly, they should also have received a verbal and a living Gospel witness.

When we participate in relief work, we have the opportunity to get our hands dirty, working with brethren with whom we occupy the same benches at church. We often have some opportunity for fellowship with brethren from other localities. We return home with tired muscles and a warmth of heart that comes only from sharing the love of Christ with others.

And who is helped the most? It is hard to say.

*Brother Gerald* For the Relief Committee



### FAITH

The substance that puts solid rock  
Beneath our trembling feet;  
The evidence that satisfies  
Though sight be incomplete.

Intangible reality  
Enabling us to see  
Beyond the range of human view

Into eternity!

—*Sister Ada*



### **Anticipating Our Lord's Return (Part 3) Work**

"For the Son of man is as a man taking a far journey, who left his house, and gave authority to his servants, and to every man his work" (Mark 13:34). Jesus also shared two parables that illustrate the work we are to do in the world during His absence. Matthew wrote the parable of the talents

(Matthew 25:14-30), and Luke recorded the parable of the pounds (Luke 19:11-27). These parables are quite similar, yet they reveal different aspects of our work for our Lord.

Jesus gives us differing responsibilities according to our differing abilities. In the parable of the talents, the differing number of talents given (five, two, and one) indicates that some people are given more abilities and, consequently, more responsibilities than others. We may be tempted to compare ourselves with others and wish that we had fewer or more talents and responsibilities. But Jesus is looking for faithfulness in the responsibilities that we have been given. It does not matter how many responsibilities or talents we may or may not have. What matters is what we do with what we have been given. What matters is that we are working urgently—our Lord is returning!

Jesus gives each of us opportunities to serve Him. We may not have the opportunities that we wished to have, or we may not have the opportunities that others have. But we do have the opportunities that God has given us. Like the servants in the parable of the pounds, we have all been given the same thing: the opportunities of today. What we will do with these opportunities is up to us. We are called to "walk circumspectly.... redeeming the time" (Ephesians 5:15, 16). For what am I giving my time? What is important to me? If we are living expectantly, anticipating our Lord's return, we will redeem the time by making wise and sacred use of every opportunity for doing good.

Indifference and inactivity are two of our greatest threats. In both parables one man did nothing with his responsibilities and opportunities. He did not throw them away, but neither did he use them to accomplish any good for the Master. The same sad thing can happen to us. We can use our abilities to become successful in the world or to serve ourselves and fail to invest in eternity.

In both parables, the indifferent servant was condemned by his lord because "at my coming I should have received mine own." His failure to focus on his master's coming caused him to be a careless steward of his master's goods. In contrast, as servants who expect our Lord to return, we are up and doing, for the time is short.

The nobleman's parting words to his servants were "Occupy till I come" (Luke 19:13). These words call us to diligence, to faithfulness, and to work. Our faithfulness today will bring greater responsibilities and opportunities for service tomorrow. And like those servants, we will be called in to account when our Lord returns. —*Brother Robert*



### *PRAYER POINT*

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

Pray for the churches in Paraguay.

The work that began more than thirty years ago now includes four congregations. Pray that the efforts of the annual Bible school held at La Montana in August may strengthen the youth of the church.

Pray for the semiannual conferring meeting.

This gathering of the churchwide ministry provides opportunity for fellowship and encouragement. Pray that the church may maintain a unity of faith and practice across the broad geographical spread of districts and congregations.

Pray for those who are suffering in war-torn countries. The rise of violence and wars, especially in the Middle East, reminds us of the prophetic Scriptures. Let us look up, for our "redemption draweth nigh." Jesus is coming again.

Thank the Lord for the bounty of the earth. The God of harvest has visited and watered the earth, and it is full of His goodness. "The profit of the earth is for all: the king himself is served by the field" (Ecclesiastes 5:9).

