

Randall Hillebrand

# TO SERVE OR NOT TO SERVE?

SHOULD CHRISTIANS SERVE IN THE MILITARY?  
A BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE



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## **TO SERVE OR NOT TO SERVE? Should Christians Serve in the Military? A Biblical Perspective**

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This book is dedicated  
to my daughter Elya Butner (former Captain)  
and my son Captain Luke Hillebrand,  
for their service in defense  
of the United States of America while  
serving in the United States Army.

Thank you for your service!



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Copyright page .....	2
Dedication page .....	3
Table of Contents .....	5
Preface .....	7
Christian Pacifism .....	9
Do not Kill! .....	18
God: The Warrior God .....	22
Reason for War .....	28
Christian Response to War .....	34
Christians Serving in the Military .....	40
Responsibility of the Church .....	54
Biblical Terminology .....	60
Concluding Remarks .....	62
About the author .....	64



## PREFACE

This book is a biblical discussion about Christians serving in the military, war, killing and what the Church's response should be. This is an important issue since some Christians believe that it is sin for any follower of Jesus to serve in the military and thus refuse to serve. If according to the Bible they can serve, and in a time of war decline to do so, they are doing a disservice to their country. More importantly, they are misrepresenting God and their testimony as followers of Jesus Christ.

For the most part, no one likes war and conflict. This should especially be true for the follower of Jesus. Yet what is to be done when confronted with conflict between nations and with the spread of evil; for example, that which took place in Europe and Asia during World War II? Does one sit passively by and allow dictators such as Adolf Hitler to conquer and murder millions, or should nations stand up against such wickedness? If a nation stands up against evil, should only non-Christians defend their nation's sovereignty and protect their fellow citizens, or should followers of Jesus be a part of this effort as well? These are some of the issues discussed.

When reading any book, your assessment and ultimate conclusions and actions are yours. Therefore, as you consider the content of this book, ask God for understanding and wisdom.



# Christian Pacifism

Pacifism is defined as a stance of nonviolence when faced with disputes such as war and aggression. Some believe this should be the only path taken by followers of Jesus when facing conflict. Did not Jesus teach in the Sermon on the Mount, blessed are the gentle, the merciful, the peacemaker and the persecuted? Did He also not say, “You have heard that it was said, ‘AN EYE FOR AN EYE, AND A TOOTH FOR A TOOTH.’ ‘But I say to you, do not resist<sup>1</sup> an evil person; but whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also” (Mat. 5:38–39)? In union with these exhortations, didn’t the Apostle Paul teach similar things in Romans 12? Did he not exhort the Romans to abhor evil and cling to what is good, to bless and not curse those who persecute you, to never pay back evil for evil, to be at peace with all men, to not take your own revenge, to give food and drink to your enemy who is hungry and thirsty? Yes, Jesus and Paul taught these things, which are very important directives for all believers.

One critical aspect of correctly understanding Scripture is interpreting it properly within its context. To achieve this, while studying a passage, one must take into account its immediate context, then its context within its chapter, within its subdivision, within its book, within its

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<sup>1</sup> The phrase “do not resist (ἀντίσταναι) an evil person” is better translated as, “Do not take action against the evil man.” In other words, do not take revenge (compare Mat. 5:38). Therefore, a believer is not to be hostile toward an evil person. A parallel verse is 1 Thessalonians 5:15, “See that no one repays another with evil for evil, but always seek after that which is good for one another and for all people.”

testament and finally within the context of the entire Bible. Therefore, let's consider the teachings of Jesus and Paul within their proper context.

The Sermon on the Mount is a message in which Jesus taught about the character and actions of true believers. In other words, what a disciple of the kingdom should be like. Jesus made it clear that the standards He was teaching were higher than what had been taught previously and observed in the lives of the scribes and Pharisees. Thus He told His audience, "For I say to you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven" (Mat. 5:20). The immediate context of Matthew 4 bears this out. There it states that as Jesus was going throughout Galilee, He was proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom. As a result, a large crowd gathered to whom He proclaimed this new, higher standard by which a kingdom disciple must live (Mat. 4:23-5:2ff).

Throughout this message, in chapters 5 and 6, Jesus used phrases such as, "You have heard... but I say to you..." and, "When you do this..., do not do as the hypocrites do..." Jesus was not only teaching standards higher than those taught by the scribes and Pharisees, but standards above those of the Old Testament Law as well. Consequently, Jesus made it clear to His audience that if they expected to enter the Kingdom of God, they would have to live a life which reflected the character of God. To make this clear Jesus told them, "Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Mat. 5:48); or in other words, you are to be mature as He is, living righteously and holy.

The Sermon on the Mount is an exposé on the character of a true kingdom disciple, on those who will enter the kingdom of God. It is not a treatise on war or whether believ-

ers should or should not serve in the military. Although some may think that a person who manifests such character qualities would never be a soldier, it is the position of this book that this paradigm is incorrect. Jesus was teaching that a kingdom disciple is a person who understands and grieves because of his helplessness, consequently seeing his need for God. He is one who is meek and humble, who desires righteousness, who shows mercy and desires and works for peace. However, though a kingdom disciple should desire peace, sadly peace is not always possible. Biblical accounts, the lives of Jesus and Paul as well as events in the world make this quite evident. Yet, when considering the words of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount, it is obvious that He was not speaking about war or whether a disciple of His should or should not be involved in war. Therefore other portions of Scripture must be considered.

In Paul's letter to the Romans, as Jesus taught in the Sermon on the Mount, Paul also instructed his readers in Chapter 12 about character qualities which a follower of Jesus should manifest. The opening two verses of this chapter bear this out where Paul wrote, "Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect." Paul began by exhorting his readers to present their bodies to God as a living and holy sacrifice, as something which is acceptable to Him. This sacrifice was not to be worldly, but instead one which was transformed into the likeness of Christ – being holy and acceptable. Like Jesus, Paul was speaking to his readers about how they were to live each day in the world

as disciples of Jesus. Having given this exhortation in verses 1 and 2, Paul gives his readers concrete instructions on how to live this kind of life in the rest of the chapter. In verses 3-8, he taught about how to express their faith in ministry, and in verses 9-21 how to express their faith in relationships. Again, as with the Sermon on the Mount, Romans 12 is not a treatise about war or whether a believer should or should not be involved in war. However one may ask, "If a disciple of Jesus is to manifest the character qualities taught by Jesus and Paul in the passages discussed, how can a person with such a godly and holy life be a soldier and fight in a war?"

Immediately following Paul's exhortation in Romans 12, he wrote these words in the opening verses of chapter 13:

- <sup>1</sup> "Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God.
- <sup>2</sup> Therefore whoever resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves.
- <sup>3</sup> For rulers are not a cause of fear for good behavior, but for evil. Do you want to have no fear of authority? Do what is good and you will have praise from the same;
- <sup>4</sup> for it is a minister of God to you for good. But if you do what is evil, be afraid; for it does not bear the sword for nothing; for it is a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath on the one who practices evil.
- <sup>5</sup> Therefore it is necessary to be in subjection, not only because of wrath, but also for conscience' sake."

Here Paul tells his readers that they are to subject themselves to their governing authorities. Why? Because all authority comes from God, for God is the One who established them. Therefore if a person resists these authorities, he is opposing the ordinances of God and thus opposing God Himself. Rulers are not to be feared; that is, for those under their authority who live righteously. If however they do evil, God has given the governing au-

thorities a sword for the purpose of bringing wrath (death) upon these perpetrators. Therefore, all are to be in subjection to those in authority.

Please note that when Paul wrote these words to the believers in Rome, they were under the authority of the evil dictator Nero, who was a godless man opposed to Christianity. Understanding this fact, and probably being reminded of it on a daily basis, the Roman believers were being told by Paul to subject themselves to Nero. How could Paul say this? He could say it because, “there is no authority except from God.” These words may have been difficult for some to accept just as they are for some today.

The question some may have at this point is, “What do these verses have to do with a discussion on war?” Although these verses do not speak about war directly, they do speak about a person’s responsibility to their government. Since governments do call their people to go to war, these verses speak to this issue. Consequently, it is clear that a country’s citizens are to be in subjection to their governing authorities. It is also clear that the sword was given by God to governments for the purpose of bringing wrath on those who practice evil.<sup>2</sup> Because believers are not supposed to practice evil, such as opposing their government, they are to obey even when called upon to go to war.

In addition, it is important to understand that evil not only comes from within a country; it can come against it from outside its borders. In other words, one nation may take up arms against another in an act of aggression,

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<sup>2</sup>Three observations about the sword from this passage are: 1) the sword is to be yielded by the government and not by vigilantes, 2) the government as a minister of God is an avenger of evil, and 3) the government can use the sword when necessary to avenge evil by means of the death penalty. In this verse vigilante justice is not taught, only justice through the system which God has ordained.

making it necessary for the nation under attack to raise up its sword in its own defense. Because this is a possibility for any nation, every country has the right as well as the responsibility to have a military for the protection of its citizens.

Peter wrote similar things as Paul did about being in subjection to governing authorities:

- <sup>13</sup> “Submit yourselves for the Lord’s sake to every human institution, whether to a king as the one in authority,
- <sup>14</sup> or to governors as sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and the praise of those who do right.
- <sup>15</sup> For such is the will of God that by doing right you may silence the ignorance of foolish men.
- <sup>16</sup> Act as free men, and do not use your freedom as a covering for evil, but use it as bondslaves of God.
- <sup>17</sup> Honor all people, love the brotherhood, fear God, honor the king.” (1 Pet. 2:13–17)

From Peter’s words it is again clear that followers of Jesus are to be in subjection to those in authority. Those who do not subject themselves will be punished. Those who subject themselves will be obeying the will of God. Through obedience, the bondslave of God who uses his freedom properly will not give others an opportunity to accuse him as a lawbreaker.

Although some may think that as followers of Jesus they are exempt from taking up arms, this view is in opposition to Romans 13 and 1 Peter 2. Believers are to submit themselves for the Lord’s sake to every human institution which is in authority – to kings and governors, to institutions which have been established by God. Disobedience then is opposition to God. Thus, Paul stated in Romans 13:5:

*“Therefore it is necessary to be in subjection, not only because of wrath, but also for conscience’ sake.”*

Believers should be in subjection to those in authority so that they do not experience wrath from the aforementioned, which should also be done for the sake of their conscience. Believers should want to live in peace with God, their government and themselves. One way to assure personal peace is by living obediently before God and according to their government.

Now one may ask, “What about obeying corrupt governments?” As mentioned before, Paul wrote during the time of Nero as did Peter. Even though this was the case, both of them said that believers are to obey their governing authorities. Jesus also gave a similar mandate in Matthew 23. It is noteworthy that He clearly and powerfully shows the hypocrisy of the scribes and Pharisees. They were corrupt leaders, yet Jesus began His discourse with these words:

*“Then Jesus spoke to the crowds and to His disciples, saying: ‘The scribes and the Pharisees have seated themselves in the chair of Moses; therefore all that they tell you, do and observe, but do not do according to their deeds; for they say things and do not do them.’”* (vss. 1–3)

It is interesting that Jesus told the Jews to follow the directives of these corrupt, unrighteous men. They were to be obedient to them, though not to live in an unrighteous manner like them. God takes authority very seriously – in the home, at one’s place of work, in the church and under governments. Does this mean then that believers are to obey their authorities with blind obedience? No! For Jesus said, “but do not do according to their deeds.” Therefore, when asked to do something contrary to the Word of God, believers are to take a stand for God and righteousness.

Is pacifism for Christians a biblical paradigm? The view presented in this book is that it is not. As has already been discussed, God expects obedience from His children

before their governing authorities, authorities which have been given the sword with which to deal with injustice. Sadly, we live in a world in which evil expresses itself in violence and war every day. As a result, followers of Jesus may need to pick up the sword to defend themselves and their nation. Jesus told His disciples the night He was arrested, “...(When I sent you out without money belt and bag and sandals, you did not lack anything, did you?’ They said, ‘No, nothing.’ And He said to them, ‘But now, whoever has a money belt is to take it along, likewise also a bag, and whoever has no sword is to sell his coat and buy one” (Luke 22:35-36). The fact that Jesus told His disciples to sell their coat to purchase a sword shows the importance of such a purchase. A person’s coat or cloak at that time in history was very important to him, for it was what he used to keep warm when he slept at night. This is why in the Law of Moses it is written, “If you ever take your neighbor’s cloak as a pledge, you are to return it to him before the sun sets, for that is his only covering; it is his cloak for his body. What else shall he sleep in? And it shall come about that when he cries out to Me, I will hear him, for I am gracious” (Exo. 22:26–27). When making a loan, a pledge of something valuable was taken as security for the loan. When a cloak was taken, due to its importance to the individual, it was to be returned before evening. Thus Jesus’ instruction to have a sword was a matter of great importance.

Why did Jesus tell them to purchase a sword? He knew that after His resurrection and ascension He was going to send them out into a harsh, cruel world to proclaim the good news about Him. He knew what they would all face. He knew that they would find themselves in situations where a sword would be necessary, possibly as protec-

tion against thieves, wild animals, etc. However, when persecuted for the gospel of Jesus Christ, disciples of Christ are not to use their sword in defense, but instead they are to look to God for His grace. As Peter stated in 1 Peter 2:21–23, “For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps, WHO COMMITTED NO SIN, NOR WAS ANY DECEIT FOUND IN HIS MOUTH; and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously.” When persecuted for the faith, followers of Jesus are to follow His example, uttering no threats, simply trusting in God. This is the example Jesus gave His disciples the night He was betrayed (cf. Mat. 26:52-53). Believers may be called to suffer for the gospel, for “Just as it is written, ‘FOR YOUR SAKE WE ARE BEING PUT TO DEATH ALL DAY LONG; WE WERE CONSIDERED AS SHEEP TO BE SLAUGHTERED’” (Rom. 8:36).

# Do not Kill!

Those who are opposed to war are generally opposed to the death penalty as well, using the sixth commandment of the decalogue to support their view. Historically Exodus 20:13 has been translated, “You shall not kill.” However, over the past 50 to 60 years modern translations of the Bible have translated this verse to read, “You shall not murder.” This translation is correct because it is in agreement with the rest of Scripture. Why? There are several reasons, the first being the immediate context. In the chapter following the decalogue, a clear distinction is made between killing and murder. Exodus 21:12–14 states:

<sup>12</sup> “He who strikes a man so that he dies shall surely be put to death.

<sup>13</sup> “But if he did not lie in wait for him, but God let him fall into his hand, then I will appoint you a place to which he may flee.

<sup>14</sup> “If, however, a man acts presumptuously toward his neighbor, so as to kill him craftily, you are to take him even from My altar, that he may die.”

The person who accidentally killed someone could flee to a city of refuge for protection from retribution from the family of the one he killed (cf. Num. 35:27). However, if a person murdered someone by committing a premeditated act as the result of a scheme from an improper motive, he was to be put to death. The difference is clearly evident. Thus, murder is what the sixth commandment refers to, not killing.

Another reason that the sixth commandment is speaking about murder and not killing is that God does not sin nor tempt anyone to sin (Jam. 1:13). This is important

when acknowledging that God told the Israelites to kill every man, woman and child in the land of Canaan (Deut. 20:16-18; 3:1-3). He also told them that when they waged war against people outside of Canaan, they were to kill all of the men if they did not surrender to them (Deut. 20:1,10-15). How then could God, who does not cause anyone to sin, command Israel to kill His enemies if killing is sin? He would not.

Another reason why killing is not sin is because of the death penalty. As is clear, the death penalty is to be instituted in the case of murder, a command which God gave to Noah after the flood. God said, "Whoever sheds man's blood, by man his blood shall be shed, for in the image of God He made man" (Gen. 9:6). Why was he to be put to death? Because the one who was murdered was created in the image of God and is of great value. Here again, God commanded that those who commit murder are to be put to death. In addition, the death penalty is commanded because the shedding of innocent blood pollutes the land:

<sup>31</sup> "Moreover, you shall not take ransom for the life of a murderer who is guilty of death, but he shall surely be put to death..."

<sup>33</sup> "So you shall not pollute the land in which you are; for blood pollutes the land and no expiation can be made for the land for the blood that is shed on it, except by the blood of him who shed it." (Num. 35:31\33)

Innocent blood which is shed cannot be atoned for (purged or cleansed) unless the murderer himself is killed (cf., Num. 25:13). It is only the murderer's blood that can purge the land from the filth of the innocent blood which was shed. This is why the penalty for murder is to result in the death of the murderer.

In the Old Testament God commanded killing for various acts of immorality such as:

- Murder (Exo. 21:12–14)
- Negligent homicide (Exo. 21:28-32)
- Certain sexual sins (Lev. 20:10-16; Deut. 22:20-25)
- Idolatry/spiritism (Exo. 22:18,20; Lev. 20:27; Deut. 13:6-10)
- Sacrificing children (Lev. 20:2)
- False prophecy (Deut. 13:1-5; 17:2-7)
- Blasphemy (Lev. 24:10-16)
- Kidnapping (Exo. 21:16; Deut. 24:7)
- Cursing parents (Lev. 20:9)
- Working on the Sabbath (Exo. 35:2)

It was God’s desire that sin not spread and negatively impact others, thus those who were guilty of such things were to be killed as with the murderer.

In another instance God commended Phinehas for killing others (Num. 25). This occurred when the Israelites began to bow down at the invitation of the Moabites to their gods. Zimri, an Israelite and leader of the Simeonites, brought Cozbi, a Midianite woman, to his relatives in the sight of Moses and the people of Israel. Moses wrote, “When Phinehas the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, saw it, he arose from the midst of the congregation and took a spear in his hand, and he went after the man of Israel into the tent and pierced both of them through, the man of Israel and the woman, through the body” (vs. 7). In response to this killing it is recorded, “Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, ‘Phinehas the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, has turned away My wrath from the sons of Israel in that he was jealous with My jealousy among them, so that I did not destroy the sons of Israel in My jealousy. Therefore say, ‘Behold, I give him My covenant of peace; and it shall be for him and his descendants after him, a covenant of a perpetual priesthood, because he was jealous for his God and made atonement for the sons of Israel’” (vss. 10-13). Phinehas was commended and rewarded by God for killing Zimri and Cozbi. Why? Because Phinehas:

- executed justice
- was jealous for God
- made atonement for the people

Phinehas acted righteously by killing these two people.

As a reminder of an earlier discussion, Romans 13 is a New Testament passage which also states that the death penalty is appropriate for today. God has made governments the avenger of evil by giving them the sword for this purpose.

Although killing someone is not a desirable thing to do, it is not sin when it is accidental or in obedience to a government which is avenging evil. Whereas murder is sin, killing is not.

# God:

## The Warrior God

The God of the Bible is a God of peace, but He is also a God of war. He is the Lord of Sabaoth – Jehovah-Sabaoth – the Lord of Hosts. This could also be translated as the Lord of armies, which implies that God is a God of war. He is the Lord of human armies (1 Sam. 17:45), of heavenly armies (Psa. 103:20-21) and of the celestial bodies (Deut. 4:19). He is the one who comes to the aid of those in trouble (Jam. 5:4), to those who need a stronghold to which they can flee (Psa. 46:10-11). He is the one who will bring judgment upon His enemies (Isa. 1:24) as is seen in Jeremiah 46:10. There Jeremiah wrote regarding the armies of Egypt, “For that day belongs to the Lord GOD of hosts, a day of vengeance, so as to avenge Himself on His foes; and the sword will devour and be satiated and drink its fill of their blood; for there will be a slaughter for the Lord GOD of hosts, in the land of the north by the river Euphrates.” This is the same God of whom King David said, “Blessed be the Lord, my rock, Who trains my hands for war, and my fingers for battle” (Psa. 144:1). Also it can be seen in Judges 3:1–4 that God left nations unconquered in the land of Canaan to see if Israel would obey His commandments, as well as to teach those who had not yet learned to fight how to make war. Therefore, God does not hesitate to use war as judgment upon those who are deserving, while

giving the ability and victory to those whom He chooses for this task. In the past He used Jewish kings, David being the most prominent, as well as Gentile kings such as Nebuchadnezzar (Jer. 27:6; 43:10), Cyrus (Isa. 45:1-3), and Neco (2 Chr. 35:20-24) to accomplish His will.

Some may respond, “That is the God of the Old Testament. Jesus set a new, higher standard in the New Testament. We are to love our enemies.” It is true that Jesus set a higher standard which is clearly seen in the Sermon on the Mount; and yes, we are to love our enemies. However, one needs to remember that the Jesus of the New Testament has the same exact nature as the God of the Old Testament (Col. 1:15; Heb. 1:3). John wrote, “No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him” (John 1:18). John also wrote, “Jesus said to him, ‘Have I been so long with you, and yet you have not come to know Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; how can you say, “Show us the Father?”’” (John 14:9). Jesus and the Father are one. When people saw Jesus, they saw the Father. Jesus has the same character, nature and attributes as the Father, just as the Father does the Son. Understanding this, it is helpful to realize that Jesus, like His Father, are both warriors. Moses said of God the Father:

*“The Lord is a warrior; The Lord is His name”* (Exo. 15:3)

He also wrote:

*“Who is the King of glory? The Lord strong and mighty, The Lord mighty in battle.”* (Psa. 24:8)

God is a warrior! What do the Scriptures say about Jesus as a warrior? Revelation 19:11–16 says of Him:

<sup>11</sup> “And I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse, and He who sat on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and wages war.

<sup>12</sup> His eyes are a flame of fire, and on His head are many diadems; and He

- has a name written on Him which no one knows except Himself.
- <sup>13</sup> He is clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called The Word of God.”
- <sup>14</sup> And the armies which are in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, were following Him on white horses.
- <sup>15</sup> From His mouth comes a sharp sword, so that with it He may strike down the nations, and He will rule them with a rod of iron; and He treads the wine press of the fierce wrath of God, the Almighty.
- <sup>16</sup> And on His robe and on His thigh He has a name written, “KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS.”

At His first advent Jesus entered Jerusalem on a donkey, which was a sign of peace. He was offering Israel the kingdom of God which they rejected by ultimately crucifying their Messiah. A king riding a white horse meant he was coming to do battle; and when Jesus returns, He will come back to earth riding a white warhorse to wage war against the evil people of the world. Though peace was offered at His first advent, war and judgment will be the reality at His second advent.

The night Jesus stood before Pilate, when asked if He was the King of the Jews, “Jesus answered, ‘My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, then My servants would be fighting so that I would not be handed over to the Jews; but as it is, My kingdom is not of this realm’” (John 18:36). If Jesus’ kingdom at that time were of this world, He said that His servants would have fought for Him. Who were His servants that He was speaking about? His followers.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> “If the kingdom that is mine were from this world, which it is not (mark the form of the condition), then, on that Supposition, would the servants (ὀπηρεῖται, generally translated “officers”) that are mine fight, with physical force, in order that I should not be delivered up (παροδοθῶ) to the Jews. The supposition that the ὀπηρεῖται of whom our Lord spoke were “the angels” (as Bengel, Lampe, Stier, and at one time Luthardt, imagined), is distinctly repudiated by the ἐκ τοῦ κόσμου τούτου, “of this present world.” If it were the case, as it is not, then would my officers be, not a handful of disciples (whom he generally calls διάκονοι δοῦλοι), but should not be delivered up by the Roman power that is for the moment thrown over me like a shield, to the Jews, who are thirsting for my blood.” Spence-Jones, H. D. M. (Henry Donald Maurice), 1836-1917, editor. “The Pulpit Commentary.” <https://biblehub.com/commentaries/pulpit/john/18.htm> (accessed January 9, 2019).

Therefore believers would have taken up the sword on His behalf. Furthermore, when His kingdom is established on earth, the armies of heaven which will include not just the angels (Mat. 16:27; 25:31; 2 Thes. 1:6-10), but the Church as well (Rev. 19:7-8,14; 1 Thes. 3:13), will be involved in the greatest battle the world will ever see. This will take place when Christ returns to earth on horse back. His followers will follow Him into the battle of Armageddon where the armies of the world come together to battle against Jerusalem (Rev. 16:12-16; 19:7-19; Zech. 14:2-4).

God will not leave the guilty unpunished. The Assyrians were godless people to whom God sent Jonah and Nahum with warnings of coming judgment. According to Nahum 3:1, Nineveh was a “bloody city.” As one commentator points out, “Nineveh was truly a city of blood—blood spilled by her uncontrolled lust and murder. She earned this title by her ‘atrocious practice of cutting off hands and feet, ears and noses, gouging out eyes, lopping off heads, and then binding them to vines or heaping them up before city gates [and] the utter fiendishness by which captives could be impaled or flayed alive through a process in which their skin was gradually and completely removed.’”<sup>4</sup> After the preaching of Jonah, the Ninevites repented and God relented. Yet years later when Nahum proclaimed judgment against them, God made it clear that Nineveh, the capital of Assyria (which represented the entire nation in his writing), would fall (Nah. 2). Nahum 3:1 gives the reason why God was going to judge this city. The Assyrians were liars and plunderers, responsible for the deaths of multitudes whom they conquered. They were a people who dominated others for

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<sup>4</sup> Johnson, E. E. (1985). Nahum. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 1, p. 1502). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

their own gain, an evil force which God eventually overthrew by the means of the Babylonians in 612 BC. Nahum wrote, “The LORD is slow to anger and great in power, And the LORD will by no means leave the guilty unpunished...” (Nah. 1:3). Therefore, because God is a God of justice, He will bring about justice in this world, particularly during the Tribulation Period and at the judgment seat of Christ. God says of Himself, “but let him who boasts boast of this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am the LORD who exercises lovingkindness, justice and righteousness on earth; for I delight in these things,’ declares the LORD” (Jer. 9:24). God exercises justice on the earth today.

To conquer evil nations God used, and still uses, other nations to overthrow them. In the case of Assyria, He used the Babylonians. It is not any different today than in Old Testament times. As already mentioned, God not only used Israel to carry out His judgments, but Gentile nations as well. He used various nations to conquer Germany during WWI and Germany and Japan in WWII. Hitler and the Assyrian kingdom are both examples of evil aggressors who committed terrible atrocities against people. Therefore, God brought judgment upon both nations.

Our Triune God requires justice. God has judged many nations by means of war. He along with Jesus will bring justice upon the unrighteous at the end of the age through war. Therefore, God the Father and God the Son are both warriors! King Solomon wrote,<sup>1</sup> “There is an appointed time for everything. And there is a time for every event under heaven...<sup>8</sup> A time to love and a time to hate; A time for war and a time for peace” (Eccl. 3:1,8). War is a by-product of a sinful world which is controlled by the prince of the power of the air. Therefore, we live in a world

plagued by war. Wherever Satan is active, there will be evil and destruction. In the garden of Eden there was peace, that is, until Satan entered the garden. In the millennial kingdom there will be peace, that is, until Satan is loosened from the abyss at the end of 1,000 years. As a result of living in such a world there will be wars in which nations will have to defend themselves. This means that the citizens of those nations will have to take up arms in their defense. Ultimately though believers can look forward with hope as they consider these words, “Therefore the Lord GOD of hosts, The Mighty One of Israel, declares, ‘Ah, I will be relieved of My adversaries and avenge Myself on My foes’” (Isa. 1:24).

# Reason for War

Often in a conflict, often there is an aggressor who feels that the only way to solve an issue or achieve his goal is through war. The first conflict occurred not long after the fall of man in the Garden of Eden. Though this only involved two people, the result was the death of Abel at the hands of his brother Cain. This occurred after God had accepted Abel's sacrifice while rejecting Cain's. Cain became angry because of this, probably due to jealousy, and killed his brother (Gen. 4:4-8). This was the first of a multitude of conflicts throughout history.

There are many provocations for war, such as:

- Disputes (Japheth against Ammon; Jud. 11:12-13)
- Hatred of a nation (e.g., Israel)
- Selfish desire (for greatness through expansion, wealth, power)
- Political objectives (expansion, natural resources, wealth, power)
- Disagreements (civil wars; e.g., division of Israel and Judah, 1 Kings 12)
- Unfair treatment, oppression (revolutionary wars; e.g., America vs. Great Britain)
- Religious differences (Crusades)
- World domination (Hitler, ISIS, Antichrist)
- Self-preservation (WWI and II)
- Protection of nations under siege (WWI and II)
- Righteous objectives (WWI and WWII, countries joining against German and Japanese aggression)
- Rampant sin (God judging sin, Joshua; 1 Kings 11:14; Jer. 46-52)
- Satanic influence (Battle of God and Magog, Rev. 20:7-9)

Although there are many provocations for war, there is one overriding reason that it exists. Ultimately it comes down to sin, or in other words, the sinful intent of the hu-

man heart. This is why there have been skirmishes and wars throughout history.<sup>5</sup> “The Russian author Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, who was both a soldier and a political prisoner under the Stalin regime, said of the widespread effects of sin that ‘gradually it was discerned to me that the line separating good and evil passes not through states, nor between classes, nor between political parties either but right through every human heart.’”<sup>6</sup>

War and conflict are a natural consequence of living in a fallen world and should be expected. Please consider these words of Paul to the Romans:

*“If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men.”* (Rom. 12:18)

The words, “if possible,” denotes the fact that man’s heart is focused on discord and not on peace. This is fallen man’s default setting.<sup>7</sup> Hebrews 12:14 expresses the same sentiment:

*“Pursue peace with all men, and the sanctification without which no one will see the Lord.”*

Peace is something which needs to be sought after; it does not come naturally. This is true even for Christians who possess, not just the old nature, but a new nature as well. This new nature Paul wrote, “...in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth”

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<sup>5</sup> All sides involved in a conflict may not be at fault, although all could be. For example, when nations go to war with evil intent as Germany and Japan did in WWII, this resulted in nations having to defend themselves or other nations who were under siege. It is also possible that the one beginning the conflict is not at fault. In the situation where the eleven tribes of Israel went against the tribe of Benjamin, the Benjamites were not the aggressors, but they were guilty of sin which needed to be confronted (Jud. 19-20). This necessitated the eleven tribes going to war against them.

<sup>6</sup> Demy, Dr. Timothy J, Commander, Chaplain Corps, U.S. Navy. “Onward Christian Soldiers? Christian Perspectives on War.” <http://www.leaderu.com/humanities/demy.html> (accessed January 16, 2019).

<sup>7</sup> Mudgett, Curtiss A. “Re: Thoughts.” Message to Randy Hillebrand. December 5, 2018. E-mail.

(Eph. 4:24). However, even though believers have a new nature, and although discord is not fitting for followers of Jesus who are to manifest the fruit of the Spirit, Paul and the writer of Hebrews found it necessary to write these words. Consequently, conflict can be expected, especially in unregenerate men. These words of Paul to the Romans gives insight into why this is true:

<sup>9</sup> “What then? Are we better than they? Not at all; for we have already charged that both Jews and Greeks are all under sin;

<sup>10</sup> as it is written, “THERE IS NONE RIGHTEOUS, NOT EVEN ONE;

<sup>11</sup> THERE IS NONE WHO UNDERSTANDS, THERE IS NONE WHO SEEKS FOR GOD;

<sup>12</sup> ALL HAVE TURNED ASIDE, TOGETHER THEY HAVE BECOME USELESS; THERE IS NONE WHO DOES GOOD, THERE IS NOT EVEN ONE.”

<sup>13</sup> “THEIR THROAT IS AN OPEN GRAVE, WITH THEIR TONGUES THEY KEEP DECEIVING,” “THE POISON OF ASPES IS UNDER THEIR LIPS”;

<sup>14</sup> “WHOSE MOUTH IS FULL OF CURSING AND BITTERNESS”;

<sup>15</sup> “THEIR FEET ARE SWIFT TO SHED BLOOD,

<sup>16</sup> DESTRUCTION AND MISERY ARE IN THEIR PATHS,

<sup>17</sup> AND THE PATH OF PEACE THEY HAVE NOT KNOWN.”

<sup>18</sup> “THERE IS NO FEAR OF GOD BEFORE THEIR EYES.” (Rom. 3:9-18)

Unregenerate man is totally depraved in his being, resulting in conflict, jealousy, anger, murder, etc. In the words of Jeremiah, “The heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick; Who can understand it?” (Jer. 17:9). Because of mankind’s fallen, sinful state, Paul wrote:

<sup>5</sup> “For those who are according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who are according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. 6 For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace,

<sup>7</sup> because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so,

<sup>8</sup> and those who are in the flesh cannot please God.” (Rom. 8:5–8)

An unbeliever does not subject himself to the law of God; in fact, he is unable to do so. While an unbeliever may keep

some of the commandments of God, he has no desire or ability to live in accordance with the whole standard of God's righteousness. Such people are prone to conflict due to their sinful hearts. Although James was writing to believers, here he gives some reasons for conflicts which are true for both believers and unbelievers:

*"What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members? You lust and do not have; so you commit murder. You are envious and cannot obtain; so you fight and quarrel. You do not have because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures." (Jam. 4:1-3)*

James makes it clear that a lustful, sinful heart which is trying to fulfill its pleasures can result in murder, strife and quarrels. This occurs on individual, national, international and global levels.<sup>8</sup> Therefore, when one understands the heart of unregenerate man, how can he think that peace without Christ is possible? It is not! Though the world desires, and to some extent is working toward world peace, this will never occur. Even during the tribulation period when the world is to unite under the Antichrist, Daniel wrote that his kingdom will be divided. The reason for this is that his kingdom will be characterized by a combination of iron and clay which cannot adhere to one another. He wrote, "And in that you saw the iron mixed with common clay, they will combine with one another in the seed of men; but they will not adhere to one another, even as iron does not combine with pottery" (Dan. 2:43). The seed of man is the reason they will not adhere. The different nations of the world will not be able to ultimately come together because the hearts of unregenerate men are wicked and selfish, untrusting and quarrelsome.

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<sup>8</sup> Mudgett, Curtiss A. "Re: Thoughts." Message to Randy Hillebrand. December 5, 2018. E-mail.

Undeniably sin is the main reason for war, however interrelated with sin and war is Satan and the part he plays in the world. In the Bible Satan is described as:

- the evil one (Mat. 13:19; John 17:15; Eph. 6:16; 2 Thes. 3:3)
- the god of this world (2 Cor. 4:4)
- the prince of the power of the air (Eph. 2:2)
- the father of unbelievers (John 8:44, Acts 13:10; 1 John 3:8,12)
- Beelzebub, the ruler of the demons (Mat. 12:24)
- a liar (John 8:44)
- a murderer (John 8:44)
- a deceiver (1 Tim. 2:14; Rev. 12:9; 20:3)
- a schemer (2 Cor. 2:11; Eph. 6:11)
- a tempter (Mat. 4:3)
- a roaring lion (1 Pet. 5:8)
- a serpent (Gen. 3:1)
- a dragon (Rev. 12:9)

Peter wrote, “Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour” (1 Pet. 5:8). Satan is a hateful being who desires to destroy lives, those of believers and unbelievers, of individuals and nations. As these descriptions of Satan indicate, he is the god of this world who is an evil liar, a murderer and tempter, a deceiver and schemer. As the father of unbelievers, he can deceive, manipulate and persuade them to do his will, to carry out his evil plans. As John wrote, “...the whole world lies in the power of the evil one” (1 John 5:19). In addition, when Paul reminded the Ephesians about their former lives before Christ, he wrote, “And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience” (Eph. 2:1–2). Satan is in control of the world system, and he works in the sons of disobedience. In his world system wars are prevalent as is seen throughout

history. In contrast, on the new earth where only the righteous will dwell for all eternity, there will never be war or conflict (Rev. 21:8,27; 22:15). Satan is the one who instigates evil, and wars are one way in which he does so.

It is interesting to note that throughout human history there have been wars both in the heavens and on the earth. In the heavens, God's angels and Satan's demons battle each other. On earth, people battle each other. When God created the earth and placed Adam and Eve in Eden, peace prevailed, that is until Satan entered the garden. In the forthcoming millennial Kingdom of Christ when Jesus will reign upon the earth, there will be peace. During this time period Satan will be bound in the abyss, yet once he is released, there will again be conflict which will quickly escalate into war. John wrote, "When the thousand years are completed, Satan will be released from his prison, and will come out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together for the war; the number of them is like the sand of the seashore" (Rev. 20:7-8). Satan will gather together many who will be born during the millennial kingdom, who will not place their trust in the reigning Christ, to wage war in an attempt to overthrow Christ's kingdom. Therefore, it appears that Satan is behind much of the unrest and war we see in the world today. This is a characteristic of his reign over the world system of which he is currently prince.

# Christian Response to War

How should followers of Jesus respond to war? An expected response might be that of dismay and sadness. Even if a war is justified and would end victoriously, the cost in human lives and its related sorrows are great. Because of this reality, praying for and seeking peace should be the response of God's children.

Although God is a warrior God, He is also a God of peace (2 Cor. 13:11). This is true for Jesus as well. God will wage war when necessary to deal with wickedness in a sinful, fallen world. He as God knows when this is necessary. Peace however is His ultimate desire. Jesus as well wants peace, being the Prince of Peace. Of Him it is written, "For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; And the government will rest on His shoulders; And His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace. There will be no end to the increase of His government or of peace, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness from then on and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will accomplish this" (Isa. 9:6-7). As the Prince of Peace, Jesus' rule during the millennial kingdom and on the new earth will be one of peace.

God's children also are to be people of peace, manifesting the peace of Christ in their hearts (Col. 3:15) and seeking

and pursuing peace with all men (Heb. 12:14) as far as it depends on them (Rom. 12:18). When faced with conflict, they are to look for peaceful solutions. This should be their goal, not only in personal situations, but on national and international levels as well. Unfortunately however this is not always possible. Thus they are to pray for peace and leaders, not only their own, but for other world leaders as well. Paul exhorted Timothy, “First of all, then, I urge that entreaties and prayers, petitions and thanksgivings, be made on behalf of all men, for kings and all who are in authority, so that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity” (1 Tim. 2:1-2). They should pray for their salvation, for God’s wisdom and direction for them and that God would enable them to find peaceful solutions to any conflicts they may be facing. This is why believers should infiltrate and make an impact throughout society, including government and military positions. In so doing, they can be involved in policy and decision making with the goal of being peacemakers.

Another response to war which a believer needs to consider is whether the war his country is fighting or will be engaged in is just or unjust. This is especially important for those who are being drafted for war or are considering enlisting. How then does one determine if a war is just or unjust? Commander Dr. Timothy J. Demy, Chaplain of the United States Navy, gave the following seven principles of a just war, including an explanation of each, in his article titled, “Onward Christian Soldiers? Christian Perspectives on War.”<sup>9</sup>

1. **Just cause** — All aggression is condemned in just war theory. Participation in the war in question must be prompted by a just

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<sup>9</sup> Demy, Dr. Timothy J, Commander, Chaplain Corps, U.S. Navy. “Onward Christian Soldiers? Christian Perspectives on War.” <http://www.leaderu.com/humanities/demy.html>. (accessed January 16, 2019).

- cause or defensive cause. No war of unprovoked aggression can ever be justified. Only defensive war is legitimate.”
2. “**Just intention** (right intention) – The war in question must have a just intention, that is, its intent must be to secure a fair peace for all parties involved. Therefore, revenge, conquest, economic gain, and ideological supremacy are not legitimate motives for going to war. There must be a belief that ultimately greater good than harm will result from the war.”
  3. “**Last resort** – The war in question must be engaged in only as a last resort. Other means of resolution such as diplomacy and economic pressure must have been exhausted.”
  4. “**Formal declaration** – The war in question must be initiated with a formal declaration by properly constituted authorities. Only governments can declare war, not individuals, terrorist organizations, mercenaries, or militias.”
  5. “**Limited objectives** – The war in question must be characterized by limited objectives. This means that securing peace is the goal and purpose of going to war. The war must be waged in such a way that once peace is attainable, hostilities cease. Complete destruction of a nation’s political institutions or economic institutions is an improper objective.”
  6. “**Proportionate means** – Combatant forces of the opposition forces may not be subjected to greater harm than is necessary to secure victory and peace. The types of weapons and amount of force used must be limited to only what is needed to repel the aggression, deter future attacks, and secure a just peace. Therefore, total or unlimited warfare is inappropriate...”
  7. “**Noncombatant immunity** – Military forces must respect individuals and groups not participating in the conflict and must abstain from attacking them. Since only governments can declare war, only governmental forces or agents are legitimate targets. This means that prisoners of war, civilians, and casualties are immune from intentional attacks.”

A believer must determine what he will be fighting for, whether or not it is something which is right or wrong. Based upon his evaluation, he needs to decide if he will support the war effort or not and what his course of action should be.

In addition, when considering war, Christians must remember that wars are inevitable and at times necessary; they will occur and must be fought. The question then arises,

“Is there something worse than war?” For example, is unrestrained evil which is allowed to run rampant worse than going to war? Imagine for a moment what the world would be like if Adolf Hitler had attained world domination. What would life be like today if the Muslim extremist group ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and Syria) were to gain world domination? In both cases the world would be subjugated to systems where the weak, vulnerable and disabled would be mistreated and even killed, while any who oppose their ideology would face extreme punishment and/or death. Genocide of undesirable people groups would also occur. Fortunately, nations came together to fight against Hitler and today are battling ISIS, working to keep them from spreading their evil ideology and atrocities against all who are not in agreement with them, such as Christians and Jews. The spread of evil and wickedness against the innocent and vulnerable is worse than a war which could put a stop to this evil. As Edmund Burke, an Irish statesman who served as a member of Great Britain’s parliament in the House of Commons from 1766 to 1794 said, “The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing.”<sup>10</sup>

Another response to war that Christians should consider is that serving in the military is an act of love. People go to war for various reasons. Whereas some are forced, others enlist. Whereas some do so because it is a family tradition, others may do so to gain respect or to become a hero. Yet there are those who go, not because they desire to fight and kill, but because it is their duty to their nation. Such people are willing to make the ultimate sacrifice, that of giving their lives for the sake of their countrymen and their nation.

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<sup>10</sup> Wikipedia. “Edmund Burke.” [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edmund\\_Burke](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edmund_Burke) (accessed January 21, 2019).

As one follower of Jesus told me recently, “Due to the war in our country, I may be called back to the army to serve. I am afraid, but I am ready to go.” This is an act of love.

Followers of Jesus are to be known for their love – their love for each other, for unbelievers and even for their enemies. Jesus said, “This is My commandment, that you love one another, just as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:12-13). There is no greater love that a follower of Jesus can demonstrate than willingly leave the comforts of home, friends and family to protect the lives of others, people whom he does not know, people who may even be undeserving.

In addition, Christians ought to consider whether they should sit by and do nothing when their nation is at war. Is it ethical and moral to allow evil to run rampant and destroy lives when they could do something but do not? What does a lack of action say to those whom a follower of Jesus says he loves and/or to whom he speaks about his faith in Christ? Does not a lack of action erect a wall between the unbeliever and the gospel?

At times a violent response to evil is necessary, such as when a man has to stand up against intruders who threaten his family’s safety. This is a normal response, an act of love, to protect one’s family. Is it then not also a normal response for people to stand up against intruders who invade their country? For Christians, is it right and fair for them to enjoy the benefits gained from war (safety, freedom, independence, a better life, etc.) due to the sacrifice and death of unbelievers who defend their nation while they do nothing?

As much as no one wants to fight in a war or have their sons and daughters, friends and relatives do so, at times it

may be necessary. This life is full of heartache and tribulation. In the midst of it however, God has placed His children in this world to shine forth His light and to be salt, not only in places of safety, but on the battlefield as well. Living in a fallen world means that followers of Jesus will experience pain and suffering. The situations which God calls His children to are not always easy, such as being called up to go to war. However, as believers live in obedience to God, they have the opportunity to be examples to those around them of what it means to be a follower of Jesus, even in the midst of trials and heartache. Thus, they have the opportunity to show the love of Christ as they defend their nation in times of war. Therefore, believers are not to stand aloof and do nothing while reaping the benefits of the sacrifice of others. Instead they are to show the love of Christ by allowing Him to be glorified through them, even by their death if need be, as they obediently serve Him wherever He may send them. Sometimes the death of a follower of Jesus speaks louder and has a greater impact on the lives of others than all the words he may speak, for our actions speak louder than our words (cf. Jam. 2:14-26).

When followers of Jesus see the proliferation of evil in the world, they need to pray; and if they have any influence, they need to seek a peaceful solution. Yet when peace is not possible, believers must realize that in order to subdue evil they may need to take up arms when called upon by their government to do so. Doing so is an act of love for the people they will be defending.

# Christians

## Serving in the Military

When considering the discussion of Christians serving in the military, it needs to be stated that for a follower of Jesus, no matter who he is or what he does in life, it is his mandate to live in accordance with the Word of God. In other words, he is to manifest the characteristics Jesus spoke about in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5-7. He is to give his body as a living and holy sacrifice which is acceptable to God as expounded in Romans 12. He is to manifest the fruit of the Spirit and be a person of faith, hope and love. This is expected of every believer, whether at home, on the street, at work or on the battlefield.

However some may ask, “Is it possible for a Christian soldier to live a godly life, to live according to the teachings of the New Testament?” In answering this question, we will look at both biblical and extra-biblical evidence.

Hebrews 11 is a chapter devoted to a discussion about faith in which examples are given of many godly Old Testament saints, some whom participated in wars (vss. 8,23,32). Of those who were involved in war, this list includes:

- Abraham (Gen. 14:1-16, when Lot was taken; he had 318 trained men for war who were all born in his house)
- Moses (Exo. 17:8-13; Num. 21:21-25,33-35; 31:1-12, he warred against Amalek, the Amorites, Bashan and Midian)
- Gideon (Jud. 6-8)

- Barak (Jud. 4-5)
- Samson (Jud. 13-16)
- Jephthah (Jud. 11-12)
- David (1 & 2 Sam.)
- Samuel (1 Sam. 13:8-12; 15:1-3,33, he gave instructions to Saul from God to direct Israel's army. He also hacked Agag the king of the Amalekites to death with a sword. Samuel was like a chaplain to the Israeli army, praying and offering sacrifices for them.)

Hebrews 11 also says of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel and the prophets:

*“who by faith conquered kingdoms, performed acts of righteousness, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions, quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, from weakness were made strong, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight.”* (vss. 33-34)

The phrase, “shut the mouths of lions” may be a reference to Daniel. Daniel along with Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego all served in the Babylonian empire; and at least Daniel, if not the other three, also served in the Medo-Persian empire. Daniel was the second in command at times under some of the kings of these empires, therefore it is likely that he was involved in decisions which affected their military. Even if he was not, the mere fact that he served in these godless governments might be of concern in the thinking of some in the church today. In other words, how could a devoted follower of God serve in such godless governments? Isn't this outside the will of God? It is worthy to note that three times in the book of Daniel, Daniel was told he was highly esteemed by God (Dan. 9:23; 10:11,19). Also Daniel is used as an example of godliness, along with Noah and Job two times in the book of Ezekiel (Ezek. 14:14,20). Although Daniel and his three friends served under brutal kings, they were able to maintain their godliness. Even as teenagers when they first arrived in Babylon, they refused

to eat the king's choice food which could have meant their deaths (Dan. 1). Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego continued to maintain their godliness by refusing to be involved in idolatry which resulted in them being thrown alive into the fiery furnace (Dan. 3).

Joseph too is mentioned in Hebrews 11 as a man of faith. He was elevated by God to the second highest position in the kingdom of Egypt. This also was a pagan country. Since he was a man of great wisdom in Pharaoh's service, it is likely that he was also involved in military decisions. In his position God used him to save the Israelites, the Egyptians and others from surrounding nations from a terrible famine.

Before looking at examples from the New Testament, please consider Mordecai who is not mentioned in Hebrews 11. Mordecai too was a Jew blessed of God, having gained great authority by becoming the second in command of the Medo-Persian empire (Est. 9:3-4; 10:1-2). In this position Mordecai wrote with the king's full authority to impede the onslaught of the enemies of the Jews. Thus he gave them permission to band together and defend themselves, during which time they killed many of their enemies (Est. 8:8-9:19). Here again is a Jew who was blessed by God while serving in the second highest position of authority in a pagan empire, a man who used his authority to declare war against the enemies of the Jewish people.

In the New Testament there are examples of godly men who were soldiers. Luke 7:2-10 gives an account of a centurion who had a sick slave he highly regarded and was about to die. Thus he sent for Jesus to heal him. The Jews who implored Jesus to come and help said that the centurion was well deserving as he loved Israel and had

been generous in building them a synagogue. As Jesus began to go, friends of the centurion came and told Him not to trouble Himself in finishing His journey for the centurion felt unworthy to have Jesus come to him. Instead, by faith, the man simply asked Jesus to speak the words from where He was, and his servant would be healed. The text goes on to say, “Now when Jesus heard this, He marveled at him, and turned and said to the crowd that was following Him, ‘I say to you, not even in Israel have I found such great faith’” (vs. 9). It is then recorded, “When those who had been sent returned to the house, they found the slave in good health” (vs. 10).

A centurion was a Roman soldier who was in charge of about 80 soldiers, although senior centurions commanded regiments (cohorts) which were composed of around 500.<sup>11</sup> Some even held staff positions.<sup>12</sup> To be in such a position they were battle-tested warriors who were generally chosen for their valor. They were people of skill and courage who fought alongside of their men, leading them into battle.<sup>13</sup> In Luke’s account the centurion who called for Jesus is portrayed as one who was:

- humble
- generous
- a man of faith
- a man who loved Israel

To this warrior Jesus paid a very great compliment by stating that no one else in Israel had as great a faith as him.

Another godly soldier mentioned in the New Testament is Cornelius. Cornelius too was a great man of faith.

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<sup>11</sup> Wikipedia. “Cohort (military unit).” [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cohort\\_\(military\\_unit\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cohort_(military_unit)) (accessed January 21, 2019).

<sup>12</sup> Wikipedia. “Centurion.” <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Centurion> (accessed January 21, 2019).

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

In Acts 10 it is disclosed that Cornelius was a centurion of the Italian regiment. Verse 2 says that he was, “a devout man and one who feared God with all his household, and gave many alms to the Jewish people and prayed to God continually.” Because of the type of man he was, it is recorded that, “about the ninth hour of the day he clearly saw in a vision an angel of God who had just come in and said to him, ‘Cornelius!’ And fixing his gaze on him and being much alarmed, he said, ‘What is it, Lord?’ And he said to him, ‘Your prayers and alms have ascended as a memorial before God. Now dispatch some men to Joppa and send for a man named Simon, who is also called Peter” (vss. 3-5). As a result of this meeting with Peter, Cornelius and his family were the first Gentiles to become followers of Jesus. Of Cornelius it can be observed that he was:

- a believer in God
- a man of faith
- godly
- honored by God in that God sent an angel to him
- a man of prayer to whom God listened
- generous
- a battle-tested soldier, being a centurion
- chosen by God to be the first Gentile convert

What a privilege this man was given for God to have sent an angel to him because He had chosen him for salvation.

Next, please consider a conversation John the Baptist had with some soldiers:

<sup>12</sup> “And some tax collectors also came to be baptized, and they said to him, ‘Teacher, what shall we do?’

<sup>13</sup> And he said to them, ‘Collect no more than what you have been ordered to.’

<sup>14</sup> Some soldiers were questioning him, saying, ‘And what about us, what shall we do?’ And he said to them, ‘Do not take money from anyone by force, or accuse anyone falsely, and be content with your wages.’” (Luke 3:12–14)

There is no strong indication of the level of faith these soldiers had, but they at least had enough to journey into the wilderness to see and question John. The main question is, “Why did John answer the soldiers as he did?” If being a soldier is not within the will of God, or if it is a sinful occupation, then John should have answered them, “You must leave the army and stop killing.” Why did he simply tell them to be honest instead? It appears that John answered this way because, as was already discussed, it is not wrong to be a soldier and to kill when done for the correct reason. Nonetheless, as soldiers who are believers, they are required to live godly, being honest as John exhorted them.

What about the belief of some that a chaplain who serves in the military is just as guilty of killing even though he himself kills no one. To begin this discussion, let’s consider Numbers 31:6-7. In this passage the army of Israel was sent by Moses at the command of God against Midian. God told Moses to “take full vengeance for the sons of Israel on the Midianites” (Num. 31:2). The passage then says:

<sup>6</sup> “Moses sent them, a thousand from each tribe, to the war, and Phinehas the son of Eleazar the priest, to the war with them, and the holy vessels and the trumpets for the alarm in his hand.

<sup>7</sup> So they made war against Midian, just as the LORD had commanded Moses, and they killed every male.”

In carrying out God’s command Moses sent Phinehas – a priest – out with the army. With him he took holy vessels from the temple along with the trumpets. The trumpets were used as an alarm and blown by the priest. Numbers 10:8-9 states:

<sup>8</sup> “The priestly sons of Aaron, moreover, shall blow the trumpets; and this shall be for you a perpetual statute throughout your generations.

<sup>9</sup> “When you go to war in your land against the adversary who attacks you, then you shall sound an alarm with the trumpets, that you may be remembered before the LORD your God, and be saved from your enemies.”

Phinehas was to blow the trumpet before God so that God would remember the army of Israel and save them from their enemies. It is obvious from these passages that the priests – the men of God – had a very important role in the army of Israel.

Next let's examine this issue from the perspective of the New Testament. An interesting passage found in the Sermon on the Mount says:

*"Whoever forces you to go one mile, go with him two."* (Mat. 5:41)

The Pulpit Commentary gives historical and grammatical insight into the word, "force" (ἀγγαρεύω) used in this verse:

"From the Persian. Hatch ('Essays,' p. 37) shows that while the classical usage strictly refers to the Persian system or mounted couriers (described in Herod., 8:98; Xen., 'Cyr.,' 8:6. 17), the post-classical usage refers to the later development of a system, not of postal service, but of the forced transport of military baggage. It thus indicates, not merely forced attendance, but forced carrying. Hence it is used in Matthew 27:32 and Mark 15:21 of Simon the Cyrenian, "who was pressed by the Roman soldiers who were escorting our Lord not merely to accompany them but also to carry a load." Thus here also the thought is doubtless that of being compelled to carry baggage."<sup>14</sup>

The Greek word for "force" originates from a Persian word which was later used by the Romans. Whereas in Persia this word referred to mounted riders who were forced to be involved in the Persian courier system,<sup>15</sup> under the Roman system it was used to refer to those who were forced to carry military baggage and/or equipment. A Roman soldier had the right to stop a person living in the Roman empire and require him to carry his baggage/equipment for 1,000 paces, the equivalent of a Roman mile. It is quite

<sup>14</sup> Pulpit Commentary. "Matthew 5." <https://biblehub.com/commentaries/pulpit/matthew/5.htm> (accessed December 12, 2018).

<sup>15</sup> Expositor's Greek Testament. "Matthew 5." <https://biblehub.com/commentaries/egt/matthew/5.htm> (accessed December 12, 2018).

imaginable that this would have been an undesirable task, especially for the average Jew for two reasons:

1. The Jews were subject to Rome. Roman soldiers were the symbol of Roman authority and its law enforcement. The Jews and Romans did not like one another, and the Jews especially disliked the military who did not always treat them well. Such disdain would have made this task more intolerable.
2. The Israeli climate can be very hot. Having to carry a soldier's equipment would have been very difficult in such an environment.

Being aware of these things, Jesus nonetheless told His followers not to carry the soldier's equipment one mile, but two miles instead! When considering the logic of some in the church today regarding chaplains, what Jesus told His followers to do would make them accessories to and therefore guilty of the killing done by the Roman soldiers. This is especially troubling because Roman soldiers at times killed Jews. Did Jesus view this assistance to Roman soldiers as sin? No! Remember God is not the author of sin and does not tempt any one to sin, therefore Jesus' command to obey a Roman soldier was not a precursor to sin.

Considering this point further, the Pulpit Commentary mentioned the fact that Simon of Cyrene was "forced" to carry the cross of Jesus to His crucifixion. The same Greek word is used. From the account, one might view Simon's service to Christ as an honor and praiseworthy. Yet following the same logic used to condemn the service of military chaplains, Simon would also be as guilty of the crucifixion of Jesus as those who crucified Him. In reality, such a thought is irrational.

What view did the early church hold about the issue of Christians serving in the military? There are authors on both sides of this topic, some stating that the early church was pacifistic, while others stating that it was not. What is

interesting is that both sides use the same early church fathers to prove their point. How can this be? It is because they did not write much on this subject to make their views clear. Because this is the case, they cannot be used to determine whether the early church held a pacifistic view or not. The fact that they wrote very little implies that the issue of Christians serving in the military was not a major concern in the early church.<sup>16</sup>

Historically however, Christians have been serving in the military since the beginning of the church. Cornelius is just one example. One source on this topic said:

“From the conversion of Cornelius at about AD 39 to AD 173, we have absolutely no sources referencing Christian participation in the army [this however does not mean that they did not serve, my note]. In 173, we have a story that would be easy to dismiss were it not documented by five sources. During the Marcomannic Wars, emperor Marcus Aurelius was leading a campaign along the Danube against the Quadi, erstwhile allies of Rome who had switched sides. The Quadi met the legion with a superior force and drove them to an open field away from water sources. It was a hot day, and the Quadi halted their attack to allow heat and thirst to take its toll.

Surrounded, outnumbered, out of water, growing weak from thirst and in desperate straits, what is clear from the sources is that lots of men began to pray. Soon, a thunderstorm materialized. Lightning struck the tree line where some of the Quadi had gathered, scattering many of them. Rain and hail poured from the sky. No battle could be fought in such weather, so the Quadi withdrew, which was fortunate for the Romans as they were so busy gulping down water collected in their helmets and shields that they were hardly in a position to fight.

Christian authors Tertullian and Apollinarius said that the Christians in the legion prayed and credited them with providing rain, adding that Marcus Aurelius thanked his Christian soldiers for their prayers. The event is also depicted on a column commissioned by Marcus Aurelius in Rome.

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<sup>16</sup> Peoples, Dr. Andrew Glen. “Right Reason.” <http://rightreason.org/2012/did-early-christians-serve-in-the-army/> (accessed September 14, 2018).

Archaeology has shed new light on Christians in the Roman Army in the late 2nd and early 3rd centuries. A number of gravestones have been found that list a soldier's religion as well as his unit. H. Leclerq recorded 8 pre-Constantian Christian gravestones of soldiers. The earliest is a gravestone of a Christian who died in 201.

The remains of two Christian churches from the early 3rd century have been excavated by archaeologists, and both of them are linked to the Roman army. The oldest was discovered at Megiddo in Israel. On the floor there is a mosaic depicting two fish as a symbol of Jesus Christ with these inscriptions written in Greek, 'The God-loving Akeptous has offered the table to God Jesus Christ as a memorial.' 'Gaianus, also called Porphyrius, centurion, our brother, has made the pavement at his own expense as an act of liberality. Brutius carried out the work.'<sup>17</sup>

Because there is evidence that Christians served in the military since the beginning of the church, this gives further credence to the view that it was not an issue of concern for the early church.

Considering yet another perspective, would it not be beneficial to a nation and its people if Christians did serve in their country's military? Would believers not want other Christians:

- to be in positions where they could strive for peace instead of war?
- to be in control of or involved in deciding whether their country goes to war?
- to be in control of or involved in deciding about the use of weapons, especially weapons of mass destruction?
- to be in control of or involved in decisions about troops, whether they will go into battle and where?
- to be in positions where they could manifest Christ, share their faith and their Christian values to those who are making these decisions?
- to be chaplains or soldiers who could take the gospel to others who are in a very difficult and vulnerable situation?

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<sup>17</sup> Jones, Christopher. "Christians in the Roman Army: Countering the Pacifist Narrative." <https://gatesofnineveh.wordpress.com/2012/04/20/christians-in-the-roman-army-countering-the-pacifist-narrative/> (accessed September 9, 2018).

Should believers want such decisions to be made strictly by unbelievers? Knowing that Christians are serving in the military, making crucial decisions and basing their decisions upon the Word of God, should bring comfort to the church and help bring stability to a nation, especially during difficult times such as war.

Two more considerations on this topic of Christians serving in the military are: “What should believers do when given orders that are contrary to the Scriptures?” and “What should believers do when faced with serving in an unjust war?” Regarding both questions, simply stated, Christian soldiers are not to act in a manner contrary to God’s Word. In the service of their country they are to obey as ordered; however if they are ever told to do something contrary to the Bible, they are to respectfully disobey. Doing so may result in negative consequences, although standing up for righteousness could also have a positive outcome. God may deliver the soldier as He did Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego, although He is not obligated to do so. Whatever the situation, a believer must be true to his faith. When Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego refused to bow down to worship the statue of Nebuchadnezzar they said, “... ‘O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to give you an answer concerning this matter. If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the furnace of blazing fire; and He will deliver us out of your hand, O king. But even if He does not, let it be known to you, O king, that we are not going to serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up’” (Dan. 3:16-18). Retired American Lieutenant General William K. Harrison, Jr. who served in the American Army for 44 years said:

*“For a Christian to obey a command contrary to the command of God, such as to deny Christ, to murder, to steal, to make a false report, etc., is surely wrong and not to be excused.”<sup>18</sup>*

What about serving in an unjust war? Followers of Jesus must make a decision about what they will and will not do. They must decide if the war they are commanded to fight in is just or unjust. As a result of their decision, they may face negative consequences which could include such possibilities as imprisonment and/or death. Yet the believer must always stand with God and do what is right in the sight of God.

If as a result of having to disobey one suffers for the sake of righteousness, the words of Peter in 1 Peter 3:14-17 are relevant:

<sup>14</sup> “But even if you should suffer for the sake of righteousness, you are blessed. And do not fear their intimidation, and do not be troubled,

<sup>15</sup> but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence;

<sup>16</sup> and keep a good conscience so that in the thing in which you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ will be put to shame.

<sup>17</sup> For it is better, if God should will it so, that you suffer for doing what is right rather than for doing what is wrong.” (1 Pet. 3:14–17)

According to this passage, when suffering for the sake of righteousness, believers are to do so:

- knowing they are blessed
- without trepidation
- making a defense for their faith when asked
- making their defense with gentleness and reverence
- living in such a manner as to keep a good conscience
- even if it is God’s will for them

As in all areas of life, Christians may need to make difficult decisions when taking a stand for and walking with Christ. If it be in business, as a student in university, at work, at

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<sup>18</sup> Harrison, William K., Jr., Lieutenant General USA(Retd.). “May a Christian Serve in the Military?” [http://www.auburn.edu/~mitrege/ENGL2210/may\\_a\\_christian.pdf](http://www.auburn.edu/~mitrege/ENGL2210/may_a_christian.pdf) (accessed September 15, 2018).

home, while dealing with the police or government officials, etc., Christians need to do what is right despite the consequences. This is what the apostles did when they were told to stop speaking about Christ. They disobeyed the Jewish Sanhedrin. In both cases they said that they needed to obey God rather than men.

*“But Peter and John answered and said to them, ‘Whether it is right in the sight of God to give heed to you rather than to God, you be the judge; for we cannot stop speaking about what we have seen and heard.’” (Acts 4:19-20)*

Then in the second confrontation with the Sanhedrin:

*“But Peter and the apostles answered, ‘We must obey God rather than men.’” (Acts 5:29)*

In the first case Peter and John were allowed to leave without retribution. The second time however the apostles suffered a flogging which they joyfully accepted as being worthy to suffer for Christ. They then continued to obey God by proclaiming Christ and disobeying their Jewish authorities (Acts 4:19-21; Acts 5:29,33,40-42).

Is it possible for followers of Jesus to serve in their nation’s military while living godly and making an impact for the gospel? Absolutely! First, as was already discussed, soldiers in the military can live godly by manifesting Christ. Second, it is an opportunity for believers to express love for their nation and its people. Third, it is an opportunity to share Christ with the lost. Fourth, it is an opportunity to be a source of strength and stability through the power of the Holy Spirit to those whom they serve with in very difficult times. Fifth, it is an opportunity to minister to those with whom they serve. Finally, it is an opportunity to be salt and light in a very dark and difficult situation.

It is important to state that Christians are to live godly lives while serving in the military. They must manifest the

fruit of the spirit, be humble, gentle peacemakers who abhor evil and cling to what is good, bless and not curse those who persecute them, never pay back evil for evil, strive to be at peace with all men, not take their own revenge and give food and drink to their enemy who is hungry and thirsty. In the army soldiers need to see and experience those who are actual followers of Christ, who through their love and devotion to God inspire those around them to want to know their Savior Jesus Christ and their Heavenly Father. They should be examples which cause others to look to them for truth and guidance due to their evident godliness. Although serving in one's military is generally not desirable, it can however be a great opportunity to make an impact for Christ!

# Responsibility of the Church

The local church has various responsibilities regarding its members. One responsibility of the pastor in conjunction with his elders is to bring the members of his church to maturity (Eph. 4:11-16). This is vital because a mature believer will be able to stand strong in his faith and not be tossed here and there by false doctrines and the trickery of men. He will also be equipped for service, built up in his faith while growing in the knowledge of the Son of God and in unity and love. This is important for all church members so that they will be stable and know how to serve wherever they find themselves.

When church leaders work hard at building up their members in this way, they can make a difference in the world. Those who find themselves serving Christ in the military are in a unique position to make a great impact for Christ, especially those who are mature in their faith. This is particularly true when soldiers are at war because almost no other experience will cause them to think so seriously about life, death and eternity. Many of them are young and probably away from their family and friends for the first time. More than likely they are lonely, afraid, in need of friends, comfort and hope. When followers of Jesus are serving alongside of them, they have the opportunity to befriend them, speak to them about Christ, be an

example of Christ and minister to them during a time of great difficulty. What an opportune time to serve others.

Paul is a good example of a man who used his difficult circumstances for the propagation of the gospel. For a number of years Paul lived with soldiers while they guarded him, transported him, etc. Because of the opportunities Paul had to reach out to soldiers, he wrote this to the Philippians:

*"Now I want you to know, brethren, that my circumstances have turned out for the greater progress of the gospel, so that my imprisonment in the cause of Christ has become well known throughout the whole praetorian guard and to everyone else."*  
(Php. 1:12-13)

The praetorian guard was an elite group of soldiers who were a part of the Imperial Roman Army. How did one prisoner such as Paul become known throughout the whole praetorian guard and to everyone else? I believe it would be fair to say that, whoever had any contact with Paul, was confronted with the gospel and their need for Christ. This is why Paul's circumstances turned out for the greater progress of the gospel. It is not that these soldiers only knew who Paul was, they also knew about his God and Savior. Paul was actively speaking to whomever he could about Christ. One passage which suggests this is found in Paul's letter to the Colossians:

*"Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with an attitude of thanksgiving; praying at the same time for us as well, that God will open up to us a door for the word, so that we may speak forth the mystery of Christ, for which I have also been imprisoned; that I may make it clear in the way I ought to speak."* (Col. 4:2-4)

Paul asked the believers to pray that God would open up opportunities for him and his companions to speak the gospel in a clear manner. This is one of the things Paul lived for. He looked for any opportunity to share Christ. As the apostle to the Gentiles, sharing Christ with Roman soldiers would have been one of Paul's great pleasures.

Another passage which shows Paul's desire to share Christ is found in his writings to the Corinthians:

*"For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a slave to all, so that I may win more. To the Jews I became as a Jew, so that I might win Jews; to those who are under the Law, as under the Law though not being myself under the Law, so that I might win those who are under the Law; to those who are without law, as without law, though not being without the law of God but under the law of Christ, so that I might win those who are without law. To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak; I have become all things to all men, so that I may by all means save some. I do all things for the sake of the gospel, so that I may become a fellow partaker of it."* (1 Cor. 9:19–23)

Paul was like a spiritual chameleon, sharing the gospel to whomever and wherever he could so that he might win some for Christ. He clearly stated, "I do all things for the sake of the gospel." If Paul took the time to speak about Christ to whomever he could, then local churches should as well, looking for opportunities to minister to everyone, including military personnel. They could do this through things such as:

- having a special church service for soldiers to thank them for their service to their country, feed them a meal, pray for them and give them small Bibles to carry with them
- sending greeting cards, letters and/or care packages along with gospel literature to be distributed to soldiers by chaplains and/or soldiers who are Christians
- ministering to soldiers' families while they are away serving
- providing family and individual counseling for soldiers and their families when necessary
- ministering to soldiers' families in the event of their death

Also, churches have the opportunity to prepare their members to:

- become chaplains
- reach soldiers with the gospel
- visit them in the hospital or their homes
- be salt and light while serving as soldiers

These are things which can be done for the glory of God!

When I was a pastor in America, one young man in our church joined the United States Army to become a chaplain's assistant. After some time in this position he realized that he was doing more administrative work than actually ministering to and speaking to soldiers about Christ. As a result, he qualified for and joined special forces and left the chaplaincy. He did this in order to serve side-by-side with his fellow soldiers to be able to speak to them about Jesus.

My daughter who was a captain in the US Army brought Christian books and New Testaments during field training to give to the women in their tent in case she had the opportunity to do so. Some women accepted them from her, and some even asked her to pray for them. When one man was being released from his military training program because he was not able to fulfill the requirements, my daughter's commanding officer asked her to minister to this man and his wife in their time of disappointment because of her faith and testimony. She did so by baking cookies and bringing them to their home where she comforted and prayed for them.

One soldier whom I know in Eastern Europe felt he could not be a good Christian if he did not fulfill his duties to serve in his country's military. He said that it was strange for many soldiers to see him as a Christian and an officer serving in the army. Most soldiers in his country hold the view that believers do not serve in the army and do whatever they can to avoid it. It is this man's goal to build personal relationships with other soldiers so that he can eventually speak to them about Christ. While doing this he had the opportunity to share his faith and led a young man to Christ. Looking back, he realized that

he did not take advantage of the many opportunities he had to speak about Christ which he now deeply regrets. He sees his task as sowing the Word of God to prepare unbelievers for salvation.

The church today needs to understand that followers of Jesus have been called into the trenches of life to minister wherever God places them, which may include the trenches of the battlefield. The church must not be shortsighted but understand that God has called its members to be witnesses of Christ everywhere, even as soldiers in war-torn parts of the world. As soldiers, they can be salt and light in a dark place where those around them have little or no hope and may soon perish. These are opportunities the church should be preparing its members for in its service to Christ. Church leaders must also not be afraid to speak the truth about these matters to their congregation because its traditionally-held beliefs may disagree with biblical truth. It is their responsibility to teach and preach truth, not uphold tradition which is contrary to the Word of God (cf. Mat. 15:1-9).

Although church leaders may not want to send their young men and women into harm's way, they must do so by faith, realizing that the God of heaven is in control and that the safest place for them to be is in the center of His will. If only unbelievers serve in the military and have no one to speak to them about Christ, "How then will they call on Him in whom they have not believed? How will they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how will they hear without a preacher?" (Rom. 10:14). Consequently, if Christians serve in the military, they will have the opportunity to tell unbelievers about Christ. Therefore:

- If your church members are called by God to go to the frontlines

to fight for your country, then accept this as their ministry for God.

- If they die while doing this, then remember that at times God calls His children to die while ministering for Him. This was the fate of eleven of the apostles, as well as many others throughout history.
- Understand that believers are not to live by fear, but by faith.

The local church has a responsibility to serve God throughout the world. It must have an outward focus of impacting the world, not an inward focus only concerned about personal comfort, safety and its desires. Therefore, the local church must understand its responsibility to reach the lost for Christ, even if it means allowing its members to serve in their military. “For God has not given us a spirit of timidity, but of power and love and discipline” (2 Tim. 1:7).

# Biblical Terminology

Something thought-provoking in Paul's letters is his use of military terminology to describe aspects of the Christian life. Considering all the time he spent with soldiers, this is not surprising. What is also noteworthy is that he used these terms in a positive manner. One would think that if Paul was opposed to killing and war, he would not have made any reference to them; or at least if he did, it would have been in a negative manner. Since Paul used them in a positive way, this gives further credence to the fact that a nation's military is not to be viewed negatively. On the contrary, a nation's military can help foster and provide many positive things for its country such as safety, security, stability, moral behavior, national pride, comradery, skilled labor, training, education, experience, etc. These are things which are beneficial to a nation.

Paul used the following military terminology in a positive manner:

- Using a soldier as an example of one worthy of financial remuneration for his labor (1 Cor. 9:7)
- Using weapons of spiritual warfare (2 Cor. 10:3-5)
- Putting on the full armor of God (Eph. 6:10-20)
- Considering Epaphroditus a fellow soldier in ministry (Php. 2:25)
- Fighting for the faith (1 Tim. 6:12)
- Suffering hardship as a good soldier of Christ (2 Tim. 2:3)
- Being single minded like a soldier (2 Tim. 2:4)

In 2 Timothy, Paul portrayed soldiers positively alongside of athletes and farmers as faithful men (vss. 2-6). In 1 Corinthians 9, Paul used the example of a soldier

alongside of a vinedresser and shepherd as people worthy of receiving financial remuneration for their labors (vs. 7). Compiling a picture of a follower of Jesus from this list of Paul's military metaphors, a believer is to:

- be a spiritual soldier who is to serve and suffer hardship like a military soldier
- be single minded in his purpose
- have his spiritual armor in place
- use his weapons of warfare to fight spiritual battles

Clearly Christians are to be soldiers of Christ who are members of the spiritual army of the Lord of Hosts.

# Concluding Remarks

Paul said of God, “And He made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined their appointed times and the boundaries of their habitation” (Acts 17:26). God has therefore established all the nations of the world. In other words, He has determined what people group will live where, as well as the boundaries of their country. He established these for them as their own, just as He established the nations of Israel (Num. 33:53), Edom (Josh. 24:4) and Ammon (Deut. 2:19). In establishing Israel, He planned for them to have a military like the other nations around them (Num. 1). Israel used its military while wandering in the wilderness, to take possession of the land of Canaan and to defend themselves while living in the land. Having a military is a God-given right. It is necessary for nations to function, survive and defend themselves in this sinful world. As has been stated earlier, God has given the sword to governing authorities to avenge evil (Rom. 13:4), their military being one of these authorities. God used the nation of Israel, as well as Gentile nations, to avenge evil. Therefore, in a fallen world it is expected and necessary for nations to have a military to protect themselves. God also uses them to come to the aid of others to impede the spread of evil.

Followers of Jesus must play their part in this as well, although the cost may be high. Their part is to be salt and light in the midst of a dark and dying world; and that through their participation, they might be able to save

some. As salt and light, they can also use their faith and biblical values to positively influence their nation's military for good. For believers to not participate in war while enjoying the benefits of the labor and sacrifices of others is not only unfair, but wrong. Such behavior gives the unbelieving world a poor view of the church, its purpose and the gospel.

Admittedly war is a very sad and difficult aspect of this life. Even though it is a part of our life, thankfully it will end one day. As Isaiah 2:4 states, "And He will judge between the nations, and will render decisions for many peoples; and they will hammer their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not lift up sword against nation, and never again will they learn war."

As the church of the living God, let us walk by faith and not by sight in this world. Let us trust God with the lives of those in our churches who serve in our nation's military as soldiers and chaplains while supporting and encouraging them. Let's us also support, encourage and reach out to the other soldiers with the gospel who serve as well. In this way we will bring honor and glory to our Heavenly Father and lead others to Him!

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Randy was raised in a Catholic home in the United States. During childhood he began to question the existence of God, and in his early adult life considered himself an atheist. Later as a result of hearing about Christ, he began to question his beliefs. He read the New Testament and portions of the Old Testament while considering the claims made about Jesus. After understanding that Jesus was who He claimed to be, he understood that there had to be a God. It was at this time (August 18, 1982) that Randy placed his faith and trust in Jesus Christ as his Savior.

In the United States he was the interim pastor of two small churches and was involved in jail ministry, as well as evangelism to the homeless. He later served as the senior pastor of the Bark River Bible Church in Bark River, Michigan, for over eight years. He was an associate of Bible Related Ministries for 10 years (1990-2000), an organization which assists churches in need of help, provides pulpit supply to churches and helps mediate church disputes. Randy and his wife Annette minister in Eurasia and Asia, and at the time of this writing live in Kiev, Ukraine (since 2001). Besides Randy's writing ministry, he and Annette train and assist church leaders and their wives in how to have a more dynamic church. They have four adult children.

Randy's educational background includes a degree in electronic technology, a Bachelor's degree in Bible and a Master's degree in Ministry, both from Moody Bible Institute, Chicago, IL.

Randy and Annette are available to lead training seminars for groups of pastors, elders, evangelists and their wives. Randy, as a former pastor, is available to provide training in Eurasia and Asia on how to build a dynamic church. As a former pastor's wife, Annette teaches women on topics relevant to them.



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# TO SERVE OR NOT TO SERVE?

SHOULD CHRISTIANS SERVE IN THE MILITARY?  
A BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE

This book is a biblical discussion about Christians serving in the military, war, killing and what the Church's response should be. This is an important issue. For the most part, no one likes war and conflict. This should especially be true for the follower of Jesus. Yet what is to be done when confronted with conflict between nations and with the spread of evil? Does one sit passively, or should nations stand up against such wickedness? If a nation stands up against evil, should only non-Christians defend their nation's sovereignty and protect their fellow citizens, or should followers of Jesus be a part of this effort as well? These are some of the issues discussed.