

Weapons of a Holy Nation

Since the attacks of 9/11 upon this country, a fresh patriotic fervor has swept the nation. Even many Christians feel that God is on America's side, and they fully support this nation's military endeavors to protect this country against terrorism. This "God and Country" mind-set often suggests that even the most extreme measures are necessary to counteract terrorist activity.

Interestingly, new television programs have flooded the prime-time line up with a similar theme. These programs seem to be designed to *condition* the viewer to support harsh counter-terrorist operations by our government. Writers of popular TV programs such as "Lost," "24" and "The Unit" consistently weave into their scripts the seeming necessity for interrogation by torture and brutal covert operations.

Because of this prevalent mind-set, Christians today are certainly confronted with many perplexing questions: *Is America's war God's war? Should Christians go along with the popular way of thinking, even if it involves violence?* And...

WHAT DO THE SCRIPTURES SAY ABOUT A CHRISTIAN'S VIEW TOWARD MILITARY SERVICE?

When seeking answers to such questions as these, all matters of Christian conscience should be guided by scriptural principles, that each may "be fully persuaded in his own mind." (Romans 14:5) Thus, if considering military service, it is important for Christians to examine the following scriptural reasoning to determine whether there is a conflict between honoring God or honoring one's country.

1.) Should a Christian kill?—

Note the spirit of our Master when James and John wanted to call down fire from heaven. The Lord forbade them saying "Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of. For the Son of man is not come to destroy men's lives but to save them." (Luke 9:51-56) This attitude of Christ should also be developed in his disciples whose hearts will learn to be so full of pity for their fellow man that they would rather die than kill one single innocent person or even their enemies.

Jesus also admonished his disciples: "Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment..." (See Matthew 5:21-22)

This is a stern warning to evaluate the necessity for supporting military action against another country. Even if one could justly oppose the leader of a foreign country in a war, that country's foot soldiers might well be the victims of manipulation by their leader. Is it just to kill them?

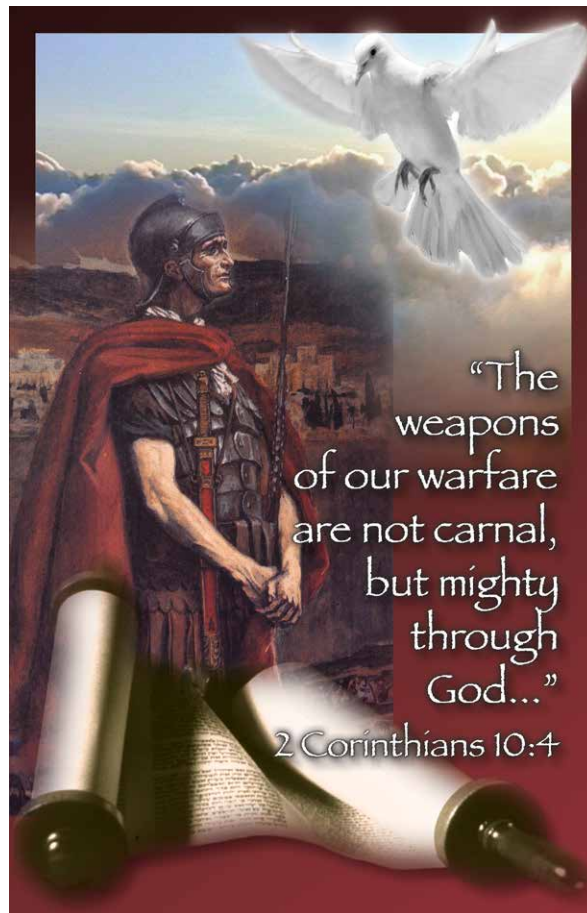
And what about the innocent

civilians killed in the cross-fire? Is their killing just?

The more a Christian develops the fruits and graces of the spirit, the more he finds violence of any kind offensive. "Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God." (Matthew 5:9) "Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord." Hebrews 12:14

2.) Should a Christian bear arms?—

"...Lord, shall we smite with the sword? And one of them smote the servant of the high priest, and cut off his right



ear. And Jesus... touched his ear, and healed him.” (Luke 22:49-51) “Then said Jesus unto him [Peter], Put up again thy sword into his place: for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword.” (Matthew 26:52)

“For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds; Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.” (2 Corinthians 10:4-5) These scriptures admonish, therefore, putting away *carnal weapons*—the use of violent force in seeking to promote the cause of Christ. The only sword which the Lord’s people are admonished to use is *the sword of the Spirit—the Word of God*. Ephesians 6:17

3.) For a Christian, is there any circumstance where God would approve of the use of force or condone killing?—

God has been dealing with the Christian Church differently than He did the Nation of Israel. Israel was under the *Law given to Moses*, and the Church is under the *Law of Love* exemplified in Christ—the *Prince of Peace*. Whereas the Jews were told to slay their enemies, Christians are told to love them and leave the affairs of the world to the world. “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you...” Matthew 5:43, 44 NAS

Yes, all should hate injustice and be out of sympathy with those who oppress the weak and helpless, but to kill the oppressors would bring vengeance into our own hands. “Recompense to no man evil for evil... as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men. Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord. Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink... Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good.” (Romans 12:17-21) The Apostle Paul’s instruction, therefore, was to conquer an enemy with kindness.

4.) Should a Christian pledge loyalty to any other government than to God’s Kingdom?—

The Apostle Peter admonished Christians: “...now you are the people of God... I urge you as **aliens and strangers** [of the world] to abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war against the soul.” (1 Peter 2:10-11) Here, Peter is advising Christians not to fight for the many issues of justice in the affairs of this “*present evil world*,” (Galatians 1:4; 2 Timothy 2:4) In addition, Jesus established this precedent: “My kingdom is not

of this world [this present evil world] else would my servants fight.” (John 18:36) Yes, God’s children are admonished to live under the principles of His *Kingdom to come*—love and mercy—without entering into any of the causes of our fellow man. We cannot expect to correct all the injustices in this world—we must have faith that in God’s due time His justice will prevail. See Zephaniah 3:8, 9

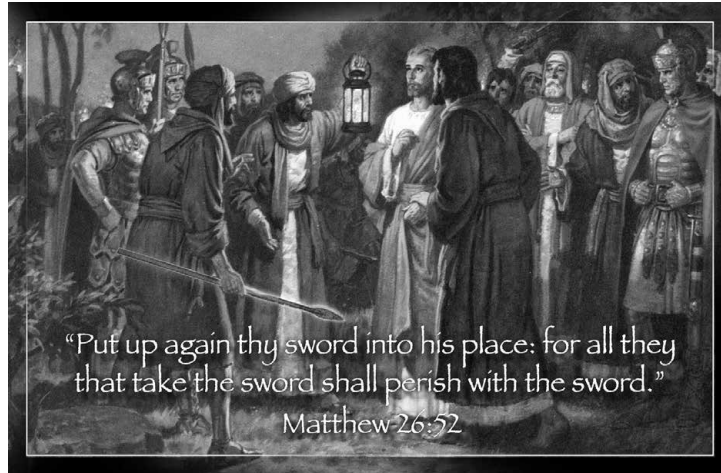
As *aliens*, we wish no ill to come upon this or any other country, and we willingly abide by its laws. Jesus and the Apostle Paul established these principles: 1. pay taxes—“Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s; and to God the things that are God’s;” and 2. pray for our rulers so that we might live in peace—“I urge that entreaties and prayers, petitions and thanksgivings, be made... for kings and all who are in authority; that we might lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty.” (Matthew 22:21; 1 Timothy 2:1-2) We are thankful for the freedoms of this blessed country, but, again, like Paul, we live as aliens, for our Kingdom is not of any earthly government, but our Kingdom is in heaven.

SOLDIERS OF THE CROSS—“A HOLY NATION”

Paul used the illustration of becoming *good soldiers*, not of this world, but of Christ. “No man [Christian] that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier.” (2 Timothy 2:4) Paul is instructing Christians that if they are *in Christ* they are not to become *entangled with the affairs of this life*.

The true Christian church scattered throughout all nations is called **a holy nation** and, again, their Kingdom is not of any government of this earth. (1 Peter 2:9) Each child of God, therefore, feels a spiritual unity with their fellow Christians no matter what country they are from. Their warfare is not against the nations of this world. Their warfare is against their real enemies—worldly influences, their own fleshly weaknesses and the devil.

Therefore, as soldiers of the cross, Christians are to put on the symbolic *armor of God*. “Wherefore take unto you the whole armor of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness; and your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take the



helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God..." (See Ephesians 6:11-17) Yes, as Christian soldiers, our battles are not with others, but with ourselves and our own fallen tendencies. "Fight the good fight of faith..." 1 Timothy 6:12

Note that, in the list of Christian armor, the only *offensive* tool is the *sword of the Spirit—the Word of God*. The disciple of Christ must use none of Satan's weapons—anger, malice, hatred, strife, evil speaking, etc. After enlisting as a *soldier of the cross*, this sword of the Spirit can only be obtained and used properly by careful Bible study.

A HISTORY OF CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTION TO MILITARY SERVICE

Today, few Christians take a stand as Conscientious Objectors to military service, but it was not always so. According to historians A. Harnack, C.J. Cadoux, and G.J. Herring, "few if any Christians served in the Roman Army during the first century and a half A.D.; and even in the third century there were Christian conscientious objectors." Harnack's conclusion is that no Christian would become a soldier after baptism at least up to the time of Marcus Aurelius, about A.D. 170. (*Militia Christi*, p. 4)

After that time, "signs of compromise became increasingly evident, but the pacifist trend continues strong right up into the fourth century." In support of this view, G.C. Macgregor (*The New Testament Basis of Pacifism*) points out that "until about the close of the third quarter of the second century the attitude of the church was quite consistently pacifist."

Jonathan Dymond (*An Inquiry into the Accordancy of War with the Principles of Christianity*) states that "During a considerable period after the death of Christ, it is certain... that his followers believed he had forbidden war, and that, in consequence of this belief, many of them refused to engage in it, whatever were the consequences, whether reproach, or imprisonment, or death. Of all the Christian writers of the second century, there is not one who does not hold it to be unlawful for a Christian to bear arms."

Tertullianus in A.D. 210 wrote: "...concerning military service... how will he [a Christian] make war—nay, how will he serve as a soldier without the sword which the Lord has taken away? For, although soldiers had come to John and received the form of a rule, although also a centurion had believed, yet the Lord afterwards, in disarming Peter, ungirded every soldier."

According to Cadoux, abandonment of early pacifist principles began at the conversion of Constantine from paganism to Christianity. He virtually made the church an agency of the Roman state, abandoning her anti-military convictions. In A.D. 314 the Arelate Synod enacted a Canon threatening excommunication of Christians who insisted on quitting the army. To solidify this reversal of pacifist thinking, Athanasius declared that it was not only lawful but praiseworthy for Christians to kill enemies in war. Amazingly in A.D. 416, **non**-Christians were forbidden to serve in the army. St. Thomas Aquinas, in the 13th Century, specified that Christians alone might lawfully participate in a *just* [holy] war.

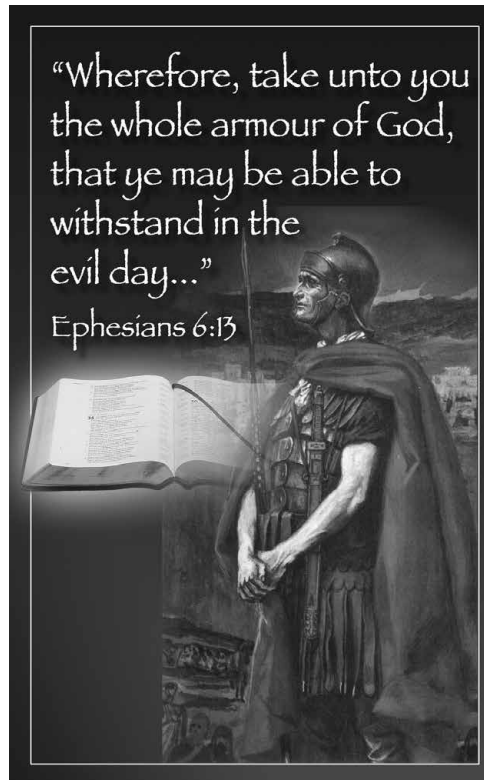
Ever since Constantine impressed his worldly and warlike influence upon the Christian church, those who have declared themselves as peace-loving, conscientious objectors have been harshly opposed for following their Christian conscience. And, opposition is to be expected from those not familiar with scriptural principles. Jesus was not understood, and "the disciple is not above his master." (Matthew 10:24) It will take strength of faith backed by earnest Bible study for the disciple of Christ to "be fully persuaded in his

own mind" on this topic—learning to contend for the truth without being contentious. Romans 14:5; Jude 3

"FOR GOD SO LOVED THE WORLD" — John 3:16

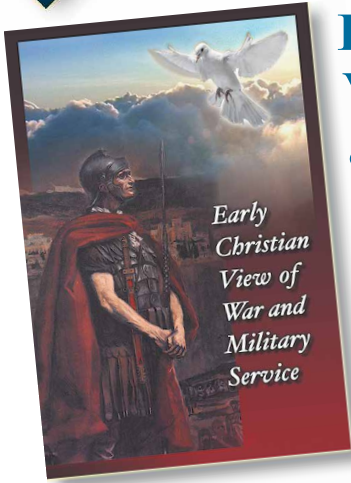
Remarkably, the words of this text are not nationalistic—not exclusionary of any one people. When John wrote this often quoted passage in John 3:16, he was not speaking of a limited group who were to be blessed. God did not give his Son's life as a sacrifice for just a few of a certain country: "For God so loved **the world**, that He gave his only begotten Son..." This promise was built upon the foundation covenant God made with the patriarch Abraham: "...in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed..." (Genesis 12:3) Thus, God shall bless **ALL** families of the earth in due time—not just those in America and not just those who support Americans.

Christians must keep in mind that the present self-serving social, financial, religious and political order of every country is to be *dissolved* to make way for the Kingdom of God. The Apostle Peter prophesied: "Seeing that **all** these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be...?" (2 Peter 3:11) The *manner* of every Christian should be one of peace, love and generosity toward *all people*.





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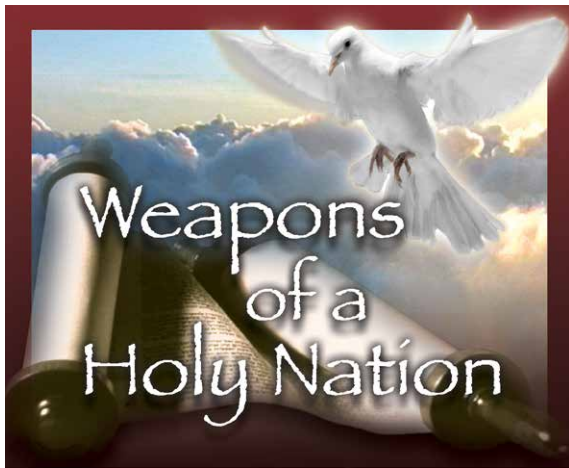
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