



What Does the Bible Teach About
Christians and the Armed Services?

**August 19, 2021 Indepth Bible Class
of the Trilacoochee church of Christ**

The Purpose Of This Lesson

- Not a discussion of the morality of war
- Not a debate designed to encourage Christ to engage or refuse to engage in warfare
- Not a discussion of politics
- This issue has been debated among professed believers since the fourth century AD in the writings of Ambrose and Augustine.

The Purpose Of This Lesson

- “The relationship between Christianity and politics is a historically complex subject and a frequent source of disagreement throughout the history of Christianity, as well as in modern politics between the Christian right and Christian left. There have been a wide variety of ways in which thinkers have conceived of the relationship between Christianity and politics, with many arguing that Christianity directly supports a particular political ideology or philosophy. Along these lines, various thinkers have argued for Christian communism, Christian socialism, Christian anarchism, Christian libertarianism, or Christian democracy. Others believe that Christians should have little interest or participation in politics or government.” *(Wikipedia)*

The Purpose Of This Lesson

- This is a spiritual and moral question that can only be answered in the word of God.
- Governments, while commissioned by God to use force, cannot be trusted to always make moral choices.
- “In the councils of government, we must guard against the acquisition of unwarranted influence, whether sought or unsought, by the military-industrial complex. The potential for the disastrous rise of misplaced power exists and will persist.” *(Dwight David Eisenhower)*

The Purpose Of This Lesson

- There are three viewpoints on this troubling question: two conflicting, extreme schools of thought and the Bible answer:
 - All war is evil, and no Christian should ever participate
 - All war engaged by my country is good, and every Christian should participate
 - What God has said about it

The Bible Appears To Offer Mixed Messages

- There are numerous passages that seem to speak of Christians as abjectly pacifistic
 - Prov. 25:21-22 - “If your enemy is hungry, give him bread to eat; And if he is thirsty, give him water to drink; 22 For so you will heap coals of fire on his head, And the LORD will reward you.”
 - Matt. 5:39 - “But I tell you not to resist an evil person. But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also.”
 - Rom. 12:17 - “Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men.”
 - Barton W. Stone of the Stone/Campbell Movement taught that compliance with civil law is equal to disobedience to God's law.

The Bible Appears To Offer Mixed Messages

- On the other hand, there are many passages that speak about war and violence that appear to show God's approval of all His people fighting in battles: David and Goliath (1Sam. 17); Israel and the conquest of Canaan, etc.
 - Campbell and others in his branch of the movement advocated for and participated in civil government in all of its functions.
- There even appears to be conflict in Jesus instructions before His crucifixion: get a sword, but don't use a sword - Lk 22:36, 38, 49-51
 - The Bible is not a political or foreign policy handbook.

There Are No Mixed Messages, Only Mixed Understandings

- Some of the instructions regarding force and violence speak of individuals using it to serve themselves and their personal interests; other passages speak of legitimate organizations using force for Divinely ordained purposes.
- It is important to examine the context to see not only what is authorized, but also who is authorized to use it.

Is The Use Of Force A Sin When Commanded By God?

- Rom. 13:1-6 - “Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God. 2 Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves. 3 For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil. Do you want to be unafraid of the authority? Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same. 4 For he is God's minister to you for good. But if you do evil, be afraid; for he does not bear the sword in vain; for he is God's minister, an avenger to execute wrath on him who practices evil. 5 Therefore you must be subject, not only because of wrath but also for conscience' sake. 6 For because of this you also pay taxes, for they are God's ministers attending continually to this very thing.”

Is The Use Of Force A Sin When Commanded By God?

- Rulers:
 - Are a terror to evil works
 - to withstand them in the exercise of their office is to resist an ordinance of God
 - they serve a Divinely ordained purpose
 - they are to use force against evil
- Do they sin when they punish or execute the persistently evil?

Is The Use Of Force A Sin When Commanded By God?

- God said regarding idolaters: that prophet or that dreamer of dreams, shall be put to death by those who witness it - Deut. 13:5, 7, 9, 17
 - Is God commanding bystander witnesses to commit sin by putting the idolater to death?
 - If it is a sin, then it is a sin God participated in by commanding it
- In the case of Achan in Joshua 7:1, 13, who had taken an “accursed thing,” God ordered the people to put him to death.
 - Did Joshua sin by leading the people in putting Achan and his household to death? (vs. 25-26)

Is The Use Of Force A Sin When Commanded By God?

- Under the Law of Moses, the sixth commandment in the King James Version says “thou shalt not kill.” However, the Hebrew word, “ratsach” is more correctly translated murder.
 - “Ratsach” (raw-tsakh') - “properly, to dash in pieces, i.e. kill (a human being), especially to murder, manslayer, murderer (Strong's - 07523).
 - Thus the commandment more accurately reads, “thou shalt not murder.”
- A Divinely ordained use of deadly violence is not murder.

Is The Use Of Force A Sin When Commanded By God?

- In each of these passages, God authorized the use of force, and it was carried out for a Divinely ordained purpose by His people as a collectivity.
- The question we must answer: Does God authorize Christians to participate in the authorized use of force for the authorized collectivity?

What Is Written?

- The Bible frequently uses military language to illustrate the battle between good and evil, the righteous and the wicked.
 - However, this does not constitute authority to use military force in our battle against evil
 - Eph. 6:12 - “For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.”
 - 2Cor 10:3-5 - “For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh. 4 For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, 5 casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ”
- The spiritual warfare and conquest for Christ is not part of this question

What Is Written?

- The Bible does not specifically state whether or not someone should serve in the military.
 - At the same time, Christians can rest assured that being a soldier is highly respected throughout the Scriptures.
- Gen. 14 - Abraham's nephew Lot was kidnapped by Chedorlaomer, king of Elam, and his allies. Abraham rallied to Lot's aid by gathering 318 trained men of his household and defeating the Elamites.
 - Armed forces were engaged in a noble task, that of rescuing and protecting the innocent.

What Is Written?

- God authorized Israel to develop an army to accomplish His purposes of protecting Israel and expanding borders - 1Sam. 13:2, 24:2, 26:2
- David increased the army, brought in hired troops from other regions who were loyal to him (2Sam. 15:19-22) and turned over the direct leadership of his armies to Joab.
- Under David, Israel also became more aggressive in its offensive military policies, absorbing neighboring states like Ammon (2Sam. 11:1; 1Chron. 20:1-3).
- David established a system of rotating troops with twelve groups of 24,000 men serving one month of the year (1Chron. 27).
- Although Solomon's reign was peaceful, he further expanded the army, adding chariots and horsemen (1Kings 10:26).

What Is Written?

- Jesus marveled when a Roman centurion approached Him. The centurion's response to Jesus indicated his clear understanding of authority, as well as his faith in Jesus (Matt. 8:5-13). Jesus did not denounce his career.
- Several centurions mentioned in the New Testament are praised as Christians, God-fearers, or at least men of good character:
 - Centurion who confessed Christ at crucifixion - Mark 15:39
 - Centurion who was generous and kind to the Jews and acknowledged Jesus' power and authority - Luke 7:2
 - Centurion who became the first Gentile convert - Acts 10:1
 - Commander who rescued Paul from a beating - Acts 21:32
 - Centurion who did not put Paul in prison - Acts 28:16

What Is Written?

- Nowhere in the New Testament is it implied that soldiers who converted to Christ were required to leave their professions.
 - Cornelius was not instructed to resign his commission - Acts 10
 - Sergius Paulus was not commanded to resign his commission as chief city enforcer - Acts 13:7, 12
 - The Philippian jailor was not commanded to resign his commission - Acts 16:30-34

What Is Written?

- To insist that each of them resigned upon obeying the Gospel demands multiple assumptions not warranted in the text:
 - It begins with the assumption that Christians may not participate in the armed forces (unproven premise fallacy)
 - It assumes that civil government sins when it uses force (sophistry)
 - It assumes the conclusion as a proven premise (petitio principia, begging the question fallacy)

What Is Written?

- Ecc. 3:8, 11 - “A time to love, And a time to hate; A time of war, And a time of peace... 11 He has made everything beautiful in its time”
- Psalm 144:1-2 - “Blessed be the LORD my Rock, Who trains my hands for war, And my fingers for battle- 2 My lovingkindness and my fortress, My high tower and my deliverer, My shield and the One in whom I take refuge, Who subdues my people under me.”

What Is Written?

- Deut. 20:1-4 - “When you go out to battle against your enemies, and see horses and chariots and people more numerous than you, do not be afraid of them; for the LORD your God is with you, who brought you up from the land of Egypt. 2 So it shall be, when you are on the verge of battle, that the priest shall approach and speak to the people. 3 And he shall say to them, ‘Hear, O Israel: Today you are on the verge of battle with your enemies. Do not let your heart faint, do not be afraid, and do not tremble or be terrified because of them; 4 for the LORD your God is He who goes with you, to fight for you against your enemies, to save you.’”
- 1Sam. 30:8 - “So David inquired of the LORD, saying, ‘Shall I pursue this troop? Shall I overtake them?’ And He answered him, ‘Pursue, for you shall surely overtake them and without fail recover all.’”

What Is Written?

- John 19:11 - “Jesus answered, ‘You could have no power at all against Me unless it had been given you from above...’”
- John 18:36 - “Jesus answered, ‘My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here.’”

Conclusions

- God authorizes civil organizations to maintain order and to use force against those who violate peace and order
- It is not a sin for civil organizations to execute aggressors and evil persons when it becomes necessary; if it is a sin for them to do this, then God is complicit in the sin
- If it is not a sin for civil organizations to execute the evil, it is not a sin for individuals who participate in civil organizations to execute the evil doers
- If it is not a sin for individuals who participate in civil organizations to execute the evil, it is not a sin for Christians who participate in civil government to do the same

Conclusions

- Any doctrine that teaches that it is a sin for Christians to participate is based on the following:
 - A misunderstanding of the difference between authority for individuals versus the authority for civil organizations, or...
 - Assumptions about the matter that are not supported in scripture and are based on logical fallacies, or...
 - An overly tender conscience, in which case the individual must forbear service in civil government, and who must be received by brethren who do not hold this issue of conscience
- Christians are permitted, not required, to service in the armed forces of civil government in carrying out its Divinely mandated purposes