

## BASIC BIBLE PRINCIPLES

# MILITARY SERVICE AND THE DISCIPLE OF CHRIST

### Five principles for the followers of Christ

**1 Not to resist evil.** To “Love your enemies, bless them that curse you”, that we may be children like our Father (Mt. 5:39,44,45). Strife is incompatible with service to Christ (2 Tim. 2:24). We are to “Follow peace with all men” (Heb. 12:14; Rom. 12:18), and not “render evil for evil” (1 Thess. 5:15; Rom. 12:17). Although this principle is primarily directed at personal relationships, it prevents us obeying crucial orders in the armed forces, and would result in us being very unsatisfactory soldiers for our country.

We are not to avenge ourselves—this is God’s prerogative (Rom. 12:19). Although we may not use force on behalf of ourselves or for other men and women, we are not pacifists, and when it is His will God can command that His vengeance should be taken (Ex. 23:31; Deut. 9:3,4). There is therefore a limit to His patience with the “unjust”, and a time when He will send Christ to judge the world (Mt. 5:45; Acts 17:31; 2 Thess. 1:7,8). “All His saints” will share in the honour belonging to this work (Ps. 149:9).

**2 Not to kill** (Jas. 2:11; Rom. 13:9). This command applies in the present era not merely to murder, but also to war, because Christ has left us with the further command not to use the sword: “Put up again thy sword into his place: for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword” (Mt. 26:52-54; Rev. 13:10). So Christ does not permit use of the sword until his return, even on his own behalf or the gospel’s—how much less on behalf of other men and their interests! The spiritual arms used by followers of Christ at the present time are not relevant to physical strife with flesh and blood (2 Cor. 10:3-5; Eph. 6:11-13).

**3 To be in the world, but not of it** (Jno. 17:14-18). We are “children of God”, “strangers and pilgrims”, separate from political, ecclesiastical and national organisations of men, witnessing for Christ and against them (Rom. 8:16; 2 Cor. 6:14-18; Eph. 5:11; Heb. 11:13; 1 Pet. 2:11; Rev. 12:17). Therefore we cannot join their armies or defend them (Lk. 21:20,21). The servants of Christ do not yet fight for the Kingdom of God to replace the kingdoms of this world (Jno. 18:36). However, we are looking for the removal of human kingdoms and the coming of “a better country” according to the promises, that is, a Divine political kingdom, and we may need to give our lives for the sake of this belief (Rev. 11:15; Heb. 11:14-16,37,40; 13:14). Killing fellow brothers in Christ in war for the sake of ephemeral Gentile governments is inconceivable.

**4 To put Christ first** (Lk. 14:26; Mt. 10:37). Since our allegiance is to him, we cannot blindly obey a different commanding officer (1 Cor. 6:20; 7:23). We are soldiers of Christ only, not allowing ourselves to be entangled with “the affairs of this life” (2 Tim. 2:3,4).

**5 To obey human governments only when their laws do not conflict with the laws of God:** paying, for example, our taxes on demand; recognising that existing governments are appointed by God, striving neither to keep them in being nor change them ourselves, but looking for the coming of God’s government; rendering honour as due, while acknowledging a higher authority in heaven (Acts 5:29; Rom. 13:1-7; Tit. 3:1; Dan. 4:17; 1 Pet. 2:17; Acts 17:7).

## Questions and answers

- 1 Why were the Old Testament wars of Israel right, when they conquered the land, and executed a policy of genocide?**

*Answer:* God commands whether to fight or not (2 Sam. 5:23; Jer. 21:8,9; 27:5-8). These were God's battles (1 Sam. 25:28). God fought for Israel and sought to destroy the Canaanites for their wickedness and idolatry (Deut. 7:1,2; 9:3-5; 13:15; 20:16-18).

- 2 Why have so many Christians down the centuries taken part in war?**

*Answer:* Because they left their original allegiance to Christ, stopped obeying his commands and took a political initiative in the world. Many leaders delighted in the present power and glory which resulted, rather than looking for Christ's power and glory in his Kingdom when he returns.

- 3 How is Christ "The Prince of Peace" (Isa. 9:6) if he and his angels (2 Thess. 1:7,8) are to fight the nations at his return?**

*Answer:* Christ will administer a just government. Helpers are being selected and prepared now. In order to introduce and keep peace, the self-interested and self-assertive will need to be rebuked and controlled. Any fighting will be under God's command.

- 4 Is there not such a thing as a just war?**

*Answer:* War against aggression may appear just. However, what is just from one nation's view can be unfair from another's. God is the only One Who can decide whether a war is just or not. When Christ returns from heaven he will call a halt to aggression (Isa. 2:4).

- 5 Did God help Israel when she fought in the Six-Day War?**

*Answer:* The answer to this must be, Yes. God helps His people survive because of His promises to the fathers of Israel (Zeph. 3:12,13). The Six-Day War, as also the War of Independence of 1948, was a war of survival. Although, because of her sins, God does not always help Israel, He will ensure her survival because of His given word.

- 6 Do we not have a debt to our country and those who give their lives by fighting for it?**

*Answer:* Individually we may feel a debt to those who have died for our freedom, but we only have freedom by the will of God, so our true debt and loyalty is to Him. Our 'debt' to the nation would be more than discharged by preaching the life-giving gospel.

- 7 Can a Christian engage in noncombatant service, including civil defence? Is it right to do work of 'national importance' as directed by the government or to stay within a reserved occupation?**

*Answer:* There can be no objection to obeying the directions of the government if these directions do not conflict with the commands of God; in fact, it is important that we do so (Mt. 22:21; Rom. 13:7). However, providing organised support for the armed services or national defence would be upholding "the kingdoms of this world" (Rev. 11:15). Providing for the personal needs of members of the armed forces on an occasional basis is not something to be avoided, however (Mt. 5:41).

- 8 Should a Christian work in the manufacture of military equipment used by armed forces?**

*Answer:* It is difficult to see how a follower of Christ can construct, or aid the construction of, equipment which is intended for fighting, and anyone so engaged may have a hard time persuading the authorities to accept their objection to other forms of military service. As true followers of Christ we need to maintain consistency.

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