

# May A Christian Be A Soldier?

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That depends upon what our Lord Jesus Christ has said on the point. The Law of Moses allowed of war; the priests were to encourage the people to fight. God, the God of Israel, would be on their side. Num. 10:9; Deut. 20

But “the Law made nothing perfect.” The Son of God has come “full of grace and truth.” And the Father in His presence takes no notice of Moses or Elijah, but “*This is my beloved Son: HEAR HIM*”: Mark 9:7. “The Law was given by Moses; but *grace* and truth came by *Jesus Christ*”: John 1:17.

What then does our Lord say on the subject?

He reviews in the Sermon on the Mount much of the Law, and sets up a new and higher standard. The Law generally taught as its principle—righteousness, or strict justice. Man was to render to God His dues; and then he might exact what was due to himself from his neighbor and fellow-man. If injured, he was to seek and obtain redress. “If men strive. . . and if mischief follow, then thou shalt give life for life; eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, burning for burning, wound for wound, stripe for stripe.” Exod. 21:22-25.

This rule Jesus expressly repeals. The Christian is not to resist the evil man; but to be patient under injury, whether that be inflicted on our person, or on our property; by an individual, or by the oppression of a government. Matt. 10:38-41. We are to forgive without limit the evil world in the midst of which we are set; that god may also without limit forgive us. Matt. 6:12-14. As the Law taught JUSTICE, the Gospel teaches GRACE.

Under the Law it was permitted to hate and slay an enemy in war. Deut. 18:3-6; 25:17-19. But now Jesus commands His disciples to love enemies, to pray for persecutors, to return good for evil. And this, in order that we, His disciples may resemble our Father in heaven; who gives to the unworthy His sunshine and rain. An especial reward is set before those who would learn of Jesus; and He gives us to understand, therefore, that He will not be content with merely the loving those who love us. He calls us to a higher and more difficult lesson, capable of being carried out only by the sons of God; the *love of enemies*! “Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father, which is in heaven is perfect:” Matt. 5:43-48.

Now this is an answer to those who would distinguish between a Christian’s personal enemies, and those of his country. We are to resemble our heavenly Father; and He is not making any such distinction of countries. He is calling men of all nations to be reconciled with Himself. And the Christian is one who has left his standing as one of the nations of the world to become a member of Christ, and one of the Church, which is Christ’s body. We are no longer of the world, even as Christ was not. John

8:23; 15:19. We are pilgrims and strangers on earth, seeking a better country, even an heavenly. Heb. 11:13-16.

This one principle then, that WE ARE TO RESEMBLE GOD THE FATHER AND HIS SON JESUS CHRIST, AND TO EXHIBIT THEM TO THE WORLD seems to me to settle the question for those who are candid. Under the Law God took as His title “Jehovah, the God of *armies*.” Psa. 87:14; Amos 5:27 &c. Then war was lawful: and the courage of Jonathan, and David, and Samson, glorified Him.

But now God calls Himself “the God of *peace*.” Rom. 16:20; 1 Cor. 14:33; 2 Cor. 13:11, Phil. 4:9; 1 Thess. 5:23; 2 Thess. 3:16; Heb. 13:20. His Gospel is “the Gospel of *peace*.” Rom. 10:15; Eph. 6:13. His acting now is “*making*” and “*proclaiming peace*.” Eph. 2:15, 17; Acts 10:36. His word is the word of reconciliation. Col. 1:20; 2 Cor. 5:18, 20. How then can those who *make war* be exhibiting the character of *their Father in Heaven*”?

What says the Son of god concerning Himself? The Spirit of God came on Him “to *heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and to set at liberty the bruised*.” Luke 4:18. How then can any resemble Christ in warfare—breaking the hearts of wives and families, seizing prisoners of war, and detaining the wounded?

When His disciples would have avenged a slight on Himself, what says He? “Ye know not what spirit ye are of: for the Son of Man is *not come to destroy men’s lives, but to save them*.” Luke 9:55, 56. How contrary to the mission of the warrior!

The Holy Spirit descended on Jesus, not in a form like the eagle, but as the dove. Luke 3:22. He came as the spirit of grace and as the comforter. His fruit is “*Love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness faith, meekness*.” Gal. 5:22. Now war is the opposite of all these things. The spirit of the warrior on the battle-field is not that of God. “The wisdom which is from above is first pure, then *peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits*.” Jas. 3:17. The wisdom of war is the reverse of this.

Jesus sends us from God His Father “*grace and peace*.” Grace then and peace are what Christians are to exhibit to all men. But war and wrath are the opposite to grace and peace. Rom. 1:7. The kingdom of God is “*righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost*.” Rom. 14:17. “*Let us therefore follow after the things that make for peace, and things whereby one may edify another*.” Rom. 14:19. We are called to live in peace as our principle. 1 Cor. 7:15. We are to be “*sons of peace*.” Luke 9:6; 2 Tim. 2:22. “*FOLLOW PEACE WITH ALL MEN*.” Heb. 12:14. “He that will love life and see good days . . . let him eschew evil and do good, *let him seek peace and pursue it*.” 1 Pet. 3:11. “From whence come *wars and fightings* among you? Come they not hence, even *of your lusts, that war in your members*?” Jas. 4:1, 2.

“The servant of the Lord must *not strive*(fight); *but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient, in meekness instructing those that oppose themselves*.” 2 Tim. 2:24. Israel’s warfare is set in contrast with ours. They fought with men of flesh and blood, clad in armour of the flesh. “*We wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against wicked*

spirits in heavenly places:" (marg.) Eph. 6:12. "Though we walk in the flesh, *we do not war after the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare are not carnal:*" 2 Cor. 10:3, 4. Ours is the good warfare of faith; the contrasts to the evil warfare of the flesh and of the world.

Jesus when standing before Pilate declared that His kingdom did not take its origin from the world; and therefore His servants did not fight as they would otherwise have done, on the night of his seizure. John 18:36.

But there are objections which are presented by those Christians who follow war as their profession, and by some others. Let us consider the strongest of them.

1—"Has not a Christian a duty to perform to his King and country?" This has been partially answered already. We may further reply:—

"No man can serve two masters." We are to be obedient to governors or, to the king as supreme, wherever their commands clash not with Christ's. But here the contrast is apparent. Christians cannot serve their native country in war without serving the flesh and the world; and they are then compelled to take the world's principles for their guides in war. Our spirit, if we are born of God, is not of the world. Therefore we are not to associate with its evil works. 1 Cor. 2:12; Rom. 12:12; Eph. 5:11. It is our condemnation to be "carnal and *walk as men.*" Gal. 5:22-24; 1 Cor. 3:3.

2—"What would become of us, if all were to refuse to fight?" That will never be the case, while this dispensation lasts. But our questions ought to be: 'What is our duty?' Not, 'What will be the consequences of it!' 'Duties are ours; events are God's.'

3—But what said John Baptist to soldiers? He did not by any means teach them to leave their profession.' Luke 3:14. It is true he did not. But it may be doubted whether, if John's words to them were fully carried out, any could be a soldier. "*Do violence to no man.*" Is not war the highest violence? But decide that as you will, John came only "in the way of righteousness." It was left to John's Master to teach the higher principle of grace.

4—"We have accounts of several holy men in the army; but neither Jesus nor His apostles told them to leave their occupation.'

God desires that the obedience of His people should be deep and real, the results of a conscience enlightened to see the new principles of Christ, and leading us to give up this pursuit and that, as the result of conviction. It was not in a moment, that the disciple came fully to know his Lord's mind, and its bearings on his previous life. But it does not require much intellect to perceive the contrariety of war to these texts: "*Recompense to no man evil for evil.*" Rom. 12:17. "The Lord make you to *increase and abound in LOVE one toward another, and TOWARD ALL MEN.*" 1 Thess. 3:12.

5—The last objection which I shall name is this. 'While I would not, as a converted man, enter the army; yet being converted while in the army, I am told by God to continue in my calling. "Let every man abide in the same calling wherein he was called." 1 Cor. 7:20.

A look at the context will soon decide the meaning of this for the candid. Paul is not speaking of employments capable of being changed at a man's choice, by which he gets his livelihood, but of conditions of life already decided for him. The Jew born was not to become uncircumcised; the Gentile born was not to be circumcised. The slave was to be contented in slavery, the freeman in his freedom. "Let every man wherein he is called *therein abide with God.*" 1 Cor. 7:24. Now it appears that the Christian called to the knowledge of Christ when a soldier, cannot therein abide with God. The teachings of our Lord bid him leave it, because the life of one who is bound to shed human blood is not a true manifestation of God and Christ. Mark, too, the previous words, "Ye were bought with a price: *be not ye (become not) the servants (slaves) of men.*" 1 Cor. 7:23. The soldier, as subjected to military law, is obliged to do whatever he is commanded by authority. There is no freedom for conscience to obey Christ alone. He is the slave of men. Whether it were to crucify Christ or to watch His tomb, to behead John Baptist or James the apostle, or to present arms to the host, he must do it, or take the penalty. Also no one can become a soldier without taking the oath of allegiance, and Jesus has forbidden all oaths to His disciples. "Moses, said 'Swear, but do not perjure yourselves;' but *I say to you, Do not swear at all.*" Matt. 5:33-37.

In a late newspaper conducted by Christians, an account was given of the life of an officer, a believer. It told how he, with 'another Christian officer,' was posted with artillery under his command at the battle of Waterloo. For many hours they were unengaged; but at the closing charge their guns came into play, and then crash went the cannon-balls, sweeping away whole ranks of unbelievers to perdition! Was that Christ-like? Can Jesus commend such terrible slaughter with a "Well done, good and faithful servant?" Did Jesus come to display the Father to a world of sinners? "Blessed are the peace-makers," says Jesus. Woe then to the war makers. Matt. 5:9; Luke 6:20-26.

But suppose—as was often the case in the last American war—that one Christian shoots down his brother in Christ; Would you choose to be either the slain one, cut off in the midst of the stormy feelings of battle, or the slayer of a member of Christ FOR WHOM HE GAVE HIS BLOOD?

Is not our path plainly marked out in these words of the Holy Ghost?

"Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written 'Vengeance is *mine*, I will repay' saith the Lord." The Christian forgiven by grace may not touch the sword of justice; or avenge himself, or the country in which he is a pilgrim. War says —"If the enemy have plenty of food, take it away. Sink it in waters, or burn it in the fire, or carry away for thyself.' The Lord says to us "*If thy enemy hunger, feed him.*" War says—"If he have plenty of water, cut off his supply! Keep up a continuous fire at his wells, or fill them up!" The Gospel says—"If he thirst, give him drink!"

WHICH MASTER WILL YOU OBEY: THE WORLD? OR CHRIST?