

Answers To The Scriptural Arguments Used To Support Christians Involvement In The Military

April 15, 2008

1. The Soldiers that came to John the Baptist (Luke 3:14)

Luke 3:14 And the soldiers likewise demanded of him, saying, And what shall we do? And he said unto them, **Do violence to no man**, neither accuse any falsely; and be content with your wages.

Pro-military Christian Argument

John the Baptist did not tell the soldiers to abandon the military but rather told them how to be good and honest soldiers.

Therefore, it is entirely acceptable to join the military as Christian.

Answer To The Argument

John the Baptist was speaking to these soldiers as a prophet under the Old Covenant.

He was not a disciple of Jesus Christ under the New Covenant.

He did not know all the clear commands of Jesus Christ and the apostles under the New Covenant (e.g. "put away your sword," "blessed are the peacemakers," "love your enemies," "recompense no man evil for evil," and "overcome evil with good.")

The word translated as 'do violence'

is the Greek word, which means 'to shake violently,' 'to intimidate.'

It is impossible for a soldier in the military to be able to kill someone or try to kill someone without being violent and intimidating.

It is a bad argument to conclude that only because John did not address their military occupation specifically that it meant he approved of it.

Romans were idolaters and fornicators. Yet, John did not address these soldiers' idolatry or any other sin they might have been committing. This should not lead us to the conclusion that John approved of it.

There is absolutely no justification in this verse that proves Christians may join or remain in the military as a professional soldier.

2. The Roman Centurion, which had great faith (Matthew 8:5-10)

Pro-military Christian Argument

Jesus healed the Centurion's servant but said NOTHING to the Centurion about leaving the Roman army.

Therefore, it is argued that Jesus approves of Christians joining the military to fight for their country.

Answer To The Argument

Does this one incident give a Scriptural justification for all Christians to join the military?

Does this one incident support a Christian disciple's military involvement with the kingdoms of this world?

This is an argument from silence, not upon approval.

We are never told anything about the Centurion's future *after* his servant was healed.

The Centurion may have eventually left the military as he grew in his understanding of the Christian faith.

He may have gone on to be baptized, to leave the Roman army, to free his slave, and to join the Christian community as a member of the Lord's church.

The main point is that we do not know what happened to this centurion, therefore, we cannot use this incident to prove anything one way or the other.

We do know that the centurion trusted in Christ's word and he took the Lord at His word.

Matthew 8:8*The centurion answered and said, Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldest come under my roof: but speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed.*

It can be easily reasoned, that if he had heard the words which the Lord spoke to Peter, in Matthew 26:52, "*Put your sword back into its place; for all those who take up the sword shall perish by the sword.*" he would have obeyed.

When Jesus praised this man for his great faith it did not mean that Jesus approved of all of the man's works, even his sinful works or his occupation as a soldier under Caesar.

In John 4, Jesus did not specifically tell the woman at the well to stop fornicating, although, He made her aware that He knew about it. Yet, He did not command her to stop! Did Jesus approve of her fornication? No, He did not!

Jesus does not deal with every single one of our sins at one time. He gives us space to mature, grow, and repent from our sinful disobedient ways (Rev.2:21).

The purpose for this story to appear in the New Testament was not to teach that all Christians could join the military and have Jesus Christ's blessing! That is a ludicrous conclusion. The man was already in the military.

The approval which Jesus expressed is not directed toward his job as a soldier in the Roman army but toward his faith. The narrative clearly shows us that Christ did not even notice the centurion's profession.

What this incident does illustrate is that it is absolutely possible for one to be a soldier in the kingdoms of this world and come to Christ, just as it is possible to be a prostitute or a chief tax collector and come to Christ!

Whether one is a soldier, a prostitute, a tax collector, or anyone else in an occupation or a job which hinders them from following the commands of the Lord Jesus, he would be expected to eventually change his ways and forsake that job.

3. Cornelius the Roman centurion (Acts 10)

Pro-military Christian Argument

Cornelius, just as the Roman centurion in Matthew 8, was never told by the apostle Peter to leave the military.

Therefore, many conclude that Christians in the churches can serve the Lord as well as join the military and kill the enemy.

Answer To The Argument

Cornelius, without a doubt, was a saved man even before he met Peter - ?

A devout man, and one that feared God with all his house, which gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God always? (Acts 10:2).

However, he was not yet a follower or disciple of Jesus Christ nor a Christian (Acts 11:26).

He was a saved Gentile outside of covenant (Eph.2:12).

So, in this case, we have a soldier becoming a Christian ? not a Christian becoming a soldier!

We do not know anything of what Cornelius did after his baptism. Any argument drawn from silence concerning the future of his military status is complete speculation.

There is no record of any changes in his life after his baptism. Nevertheless, it is very presumptuous to conclude that he did not need to change his ways in many areas.

Christian growth takes place through the teaching of Christ's commandments over a period of time.

A soldier who wants to follow Jesus must learn to love his enemies and do good to them. He must lay down his weapons.

If silence proves that Cornelius remained in the military, then we could also say that the tax collectors and the prostitutes remained in their professions since nothing is said about them leaving their occupations.

Matthew 21:31-32 *??Jesus said to them, ?I tell you the truth, **the tax collectors and the prostitutes** are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you. 32 For John came to you to show you the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but **the tax collectors and the prostitutes** did. And even after you saw this, you did not repent and believe him.*

Peter specifically referred to the gospel as *??the good news of peace by Jesus Christ?* in Acts 10:36. It is surely not without significance, that in his sermon, Peter refers to the GOOD NEWS OF PEACE.

We see how Peter clearly laid out to Cornelius the conditions and the cost of following Jesus. Therefore, Cornelius understood exactly what he would have to do in order to be in right relationship with God after his baptism. He knew he would have to lay down his sword and start seeking first the kingdom of God. Jesus plainly taught in His gospel, *? Blessed are the peacemakers, For they shall be called sons of God.?* (Mt.5:9)

4. The Two Swords (Luke 22:36-38)

Luke 22:36-38

And He said to them, "But now, let him who has a purse take it along, likewise also a bag, and let him who has no sword sell his robe and buy one. 37 "For I tell you, that this which is written must be fulfilled in Me, 'AND HE WAS NUMBERED WITH TRANSGRESSORS'; for that which refers to Me has *its* fulfillment." 38 And they said, "Lord, look, here are two swords." And He said to them, "It is enough."

Pro-military Christian Argument

Jesus told his apostles to buy a sword.

Therefore, Jesus was not against His disciples owning weapons.

If His disciple can own a weapon, then it would not be wrong for him to also join the military and kill his enemy.

Answer To The Argument

What did Jesus mean when He told His apostles to buy a sword? Was He telling them to prepare for combat?

Was the gospel going to be spread by the sword?

Was this a universal approval of all disciples of Jesus to carry a sword and join the military?

How can two swords be enough for an army?

Jesus never contradicts Himself - He is absolutely consistent in His teaching.

Matthew 26:52 *"Put your sword back into its place; for all those who take up the sword shall perish by the sword.?"*

John 18:36?

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.?"

The servants of Jesus do not fight for the kingdoms of this world under Satan!!

Their kingdom is Jesus Christ's kingdom, which shall come to the earth when He returns at the end of this age (2 Tim.4:1).

Jesus was not trying to arm His disciples so they could defend Him. He was not urging them to prepare for battle or to arm themselves for a Christian crusade against the enemy!

He gave His reason for the two swords in Luke 22:37:

Luke 22:37 *For I tell you, that this which is written must be fulfilled in Me, 'AND HE WAS NUMBERED WITH TRANSGRESSORS'; for that which refers to Me has its fulfillment."*

To accomplish this goal, and fulfill the prophecy written about Him all that they needed was TWO SWORDS!

After this prophecy was fulfilled there was no reason to carry a sword as a disciple of Jesus Christ.

This answer corresponds with reality because we do not read of Christ's disciples bearing swords anywhere in the book of Acts or the Epistles.

5. In the Old Testament, God's people went to war

Pro-military Christian Argument

The belief that Christians should participate in the military is usually based on what is written in the Old Testament. Generally, the teachings of the New Testament are ignored.

Since God approved of His people going to war and killing the enemy in the Old Testament, it is assumed He approves of it also today.

Hebrews 13:8 Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever.

Answer To The Argument

In the pages of the Old Testament there were times when God led His people to war.

The nation of Israel, under the Law of Moses was on many occasions commanded by God to fight and kill the enemy.

Sometimes that included the entire population of a city, even the women and children. This is entirely different from wars fought today under the Geneva Convention and other rules of engagement.

1 Samuel 15:3

Now go and smite Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have, and spare them not; but slay both man and woman, infant and suckling, ox and sheep, camel and ass.

God had chosen the Israelites to be His very own people. But in many ways they were just like any other nation on the earth. For example, they had distinct physical characteristics which differentiated them from other people. They spoke a distinct language and lived in a particular location. There were boundaries to their possessions. They maintained a government, with a capital city, a throne, a king, and a royal family.

Israel was a unique nation under the direct command of God. God made a covenant with this nation over all other

nations on earth. It was a theocracy under divine guidance.

When God wanted His people to fight and go to war against another nation, He spoke to them through prophets to tell them which side He was supporting.

The very fact that we do not have this kind of direct divine guidance in the Lord's churches today or over any certain nation of people today should tell us that things have changed.

Today, there is no physical nation of God upon this earth. There is no such thing as a Christian country in which God is leading by direct revelation. Instead, the house of the living God is found in local churches, which are scattered all over the nations.

The Lord Jesus Christ's church does not participate in the politics and wars of the nations of this world.

Christians in the churches under the New Covenant are not disciples of Moses. They are disciples of Jesus Christ. The Lord's church is not a physical nation. The characteristics of this people are spiritual; its language is that of every nation, there is no specific geographical location, no boundaries to maintain, and no capital city, regal throne, king, or royal family on the earth in this present age.

Christians are pilgrims and sojourners in this world. They gather together around the commandments of Jesus Christ. There is a very important principle when it comes to applying the commands of the Bible. If there is ever an obvious conflict between Moses' or anyone else's teachings in the Old Testament and what Jesus taught in the New Testament, we should resolve the conflict by listening to Jesus alone.

Matthew 17:3,5*And, behold, there appeared unto them Moses and Elijah talking with him. 5 While he yet spake, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them: and behold a voice out of the cloud, which said, **This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him.***

Nowhere in the pages of the New Testament did Jesus commission the disciples in His church to join the military of an earthly nation. On the contrary, He commissioned His church to make disciples of all nations by baptizing them and teaching them to observe all the things He taught.

None of His disciples were ever seen involving themselves in the kingdoms of this world. There is no place at all in the New Testament documents where a Christian killed another person!

6. Jesus driving the moneychangers out of the temple

John 2:13-15

*And the Jews' passover was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem, 14 And found in the temple those that sold oxen and sheep and doves, and the changers of money sitting: 15 And when he had made a scourge of small cords, **he drove them all out of the temple**, and the sheep, and the oxen; and poured out the changers' money, and overthrew the tables;*

Pro-military Christian Argument

The pro-war scholars say that this incident proves Jesus used physical violence against both people and animals.

Therefore, violence is sometimes justified. According to them, violence in war is justified

Answer To The Argument

Nothing in this account indicates that anyone was hit or killed. A scourge of small cords is not what one would call a deadly weapon. This passage does not deal with harming another human being.

Neither Jesus nor his followers ever killed or hurt another human being. Jesus said to His disciples,

?Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves?

(Mat. 10:16).

The only Gospel that mentions a scourge or whip is

John's. The text clearly refers to his whipping animals, not humans.

Jesus used the power of His authority - not a scourge - to end selling and buying in the temple.

When the Jews were amazed at His actions, He began to teach the people.

Again, nothing is recorded in this incident about Jesus hurting or killing someone with a weapon. The whole point of His actions was to fulfill prophecy (Ps.69:9).

John 2:17 And his disciples remembered that it was written, The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up.

7. Romans 13 says we should submit to governing authorities

Romans 13:1-4

Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. 2 Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation. 3 For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same: 4 For he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil.

Pro-military Christian Argument

Some insist that the command of this passage, *"Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God"* (13:1) is sufficient to justify military service.

Since war is right for governments of this world and believers are commanded to obey civil government in those things that are right, some maintain that Christians ought be obedient to the government in this matter and thus do that which is right.

If the state calls a Christian unto military service then He should submit and obey the state!

Answer To The Argument

The doctrine of separation calls upon Christian people to separate themselves from many things of this present world that may be considered right for those in the world.

When civil governments issue the call to military service or to anything forbidden by the Lord for Christians, the law of the Lord becomes the higher law to which believers must be obedient rather than to the laws of men.

Acts 5:29 Then Peter and the other apostles answered and said, **We ought to obey God rather than men.**

Paul is simply teaching here that followers of Christ in the churches are not to break the laws of the nation in which they are living, UNLESS those laws contradict the Lord's commands in His Word, the Bible.

He is not speaking of absolute subjection but rather **relative** subjection. Paul is not exhorting believers to commit sin just because the government commands it.

The early Christians were unjustly and violently persecuted by Rome for disobeying commands to perform pagan religious rites, such as worshipping the Emperor.

Christians today should disobey their government when it orders them to arm themselves and kill others in war. By doing so we prove that our loyalty to Christ is stronger than our loyalty to our carnal, worldly government. Thus we also demonstrate that our love for our neighbor prevents us from killing him.

While God does ordain, in His sovereignty, governments to minister the sword to accomplish His plans and purposes, this is NOT to endorse His disciples to join the state and fight for the state using carnal weapons.

Many that read Romans 13:1-7 forget to read the verses before and after it. The commands written in these verses would be impossible to obey if one was a soldier in the military.

Romans 12:19-21 Dearly beloved, **avenge not yourselves**, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, **Vengeance is mine**

; I will repay, saith the Lord. 20 Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head. 21 Be not overcome of evil, but **overcome evil with good.**

Romans 13:8 Owe no man any thing, but to love one another: for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law.

To equate loyalty to any political or military agenda as required service to God makes an idol of that agenda and the nation that upholds it