

It is clear that God expects all the men to be supportive of the effort in a war. It is also clear that to sit at home and not be supportive was unacceptable. To not be involved in war because of the position that we cannot kill since we are God's people is in contrast to the history of the Bible. Numbers 32:22 states that soldiers returned from war (depending on the translation) "guiltless" (KJV), "free from obligation" (NIV), or "blameless" (NKJV) before the Lord.

Clearly Scripture teaches that we must defend ourselves even if violence is necessary. Even Jesus instructed his apostles to purchase swords. Luke 22:35-36.

"And He said, 'I say to you, Peter, the rooster will not crow today until you have denied three times that you know Me.' And He said to them, 'When I sent you out without money belt and bag and sandals, you did not lack anything, did you?' They said, 'No, nothing.' And He said to them, 'But now, whoever has a money belt is to take it along, likewise also a bag, and whoever has no sword is to sell his coat and buy one.' (NASB)

There are clear circumstances that require us to bare arms and fight or at the very least be supportive of those whose task it is to do the fighting. Jesus did not need to be defended by the sword (Matt 26:51-54) because he could call down legions of angels. He did however, tell the apostles to buy swords. We must be able to defend with assurance that we are not in violation of God's will. This *can* be done with confidence as we:

- Defend our families and country
- Liberate others from oppression
- Encourage the spouses of those in battle
- Pray for leaders — specifically for our President and Saddam Hussein
- Love (*agape*) our enemies and act in their best interest

Conflict is never easy or enjoyable. Opponents do not see our efforts as being motivated by love. Yet, when the opportunity presents itself we must act. God creates the opportunities and we must be willing to act in the capacity we have been granted.

Battle lines are drawn by the desire to overcome and bring opposition under submission. Without opposition, domination of evil will prevail in the physical as well as the spiritual world.

In a spiritual context we are all equipped with the Sword (Ephesians 6:17). It is for defense of the truth. In the physical realm there are other weapons we must be wise enough to use as needed to preserve freedom and show *agape* love for others.

*"Diligence" is a privately funded publication of:
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DILIGENCE

"We want each of you to show this same diligence to the very end, in order to make your hope sure." — Hebrews 6:11

A ministry of Dennis and Sherri Owens

Volume 2

March 1, 2003

Issue 2

Christians and War

Throughout history Christians have been citizens of countries that became engaged in war. The obvious question is, "What does the Bible say about war?" The debate ensues and people are drawn to one side or another of this issue. It is tempered by the fact that many of our own membership or families are in the military. They are duty bound to defend and to war against the enemy as declared by the government. As a veteran I can assure you that the position held and expressed by Christians is vitally important and we should know what our response should be.

Did Jesus say anything about going to war? What was His position about defending ourselves? What pattern is there if any, in Scripture that will shed light on God's view of war?

Let's begin with a familiar Scripture in Luke — Luke 6:27-31. Jesus speaks:

"But I say to you who hear, love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. Whoever hits you on the cheek, offer him the other also; and whoever takes away your coat, do not withhold your shirt from him either. Give to everyone who asks of you, and whoever takes away what is yours, do not demand it back. Treat others the same way you want them to treat you." (NAS)

In this sermon Jesus is speaking to individuals — not to a nation. He is teaching how we should respond to our personal enemies. He is instructing us on how to love our enemies. In verse 31 He encourages us to *"Treat others the same way you want them to treat you."* If a nation is abusive to individuals who live within its borders or its government is acting in a morally or physically inappropriate manner, it is an act of love to point out to them how destructive they are and make every attempt to convince such a leadership of the error of their way. Consider once again verse 31. If *we* were acting in an abusive manner toward others would we not want *someone* to attempt to change that sinful behavior? Anyone who can truthfully answer "no" to that question has absolutely no desire to be pleasing to God. We must however, be aware that doing this involves conflict since neither ourselves nor the government of a nation would probably *like* being told that we (or they) are behaving in an inappropriate or abusive manner

toward others. It is love (*agape*) that motivates us to go to the abusers and try and alter their actions. Let's go on and read verse 32 now.

“If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same.” (NAS)

The position is not one of fearing conflict but rather doing good for our enemy as well as for our friends. Love (*agape*) is the required response to be able to act toward our enemies in the way that Jesus instructs. We are to actively do good, not simply be passive so we can avoid any possible hardship on ourselves.

Are we to submit to a government that's leadership proposes that we go to war? Consider what Paul says in Romans 13:1-7.

“Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God. Therefore whoever resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves. For rulers are not a cause of fear for good behavior, but for evil. Do you want to have no fear of authority? Do what is good and you will have praise from the same; for it is a minister of God to you for good. But if you do what is evil, be afraid; for it does not bear the sword for nothing; for it is a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath on the one who practices evil. Therefore it is necessary to be in subjection, not only because of wrath, but also for conscience' sake. For because of this you also pay taxes, for rulers are servants of God, devoting themselves to this very thing. Render to all what is due them: tax to whom tax is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honor to whom honor.” (NAS)

Do we pay taxes? Do we benefit from the good that is provided by our taxes and those who are elected to serve our country? Do we enjoy the freedom that is provided by our current military as well as those who have died in years past to preserve the freedom we now enjoy? The answer is yes. Not only do we enjoy this freedom, but it is a fact that the United States military (both in combat and in presence of its capability) has brought peace to many nations throughout history. There are no instances in which our country has engaged in war with the intent to occupy and *take* freedom from people. The opposite is true. We have in each instance offered food, clothing and assistance to many foreign citizens not directly involved in the war. Our country is very benevolent even to our enemies.

So then is it ever right to disobey the government? Consider Acts 5:27-29.

“When they had brought them, they stood them before the Council. The high priest questioned them, saying, “We gave you strict orders not to continue teaching in this name, and yet, you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and intend to bring this man's blood upon us. But Peter and the apostles answered, ‘We must obey God rather than men.’” (NAS)

Notice the difference between this authority and the one just described in Romans. In Romans, doing what is good brings no fear of that authority. However, when doing good causes one to fear the authority, that authority is not operating in the manner prescribed by God. The authority spoken of in Romans “...brings wrath on the one who practices evil.” We should always be ready to obey God rather than man no matter where it is if and when those two are ever in direct opposition.

One important point we must realize is that the ability we enjoy to enter many countries carrying the Gospel to its residents is a *direct* result of the willingness of others to fight for that freedom. We often pray to God for opportunities to go and teach. Can it be that His answer may sometimes be in the form of a war to gain that freedom to carry His message to otherwise Godless nations? We currently have missionaries in places that only a few years ago was not permissible. Do we believe that a country such as Iraq should enjoy the freedom to know Christ? How then, should they obtain such freedom if *someone* does not love (*agape*) enough to help them attain it?

What about personal aversion to being involved in war? What about protesting as many do today? I did not nor do I know of any soldiers who relished the idea of going into harms way in order to defend others right to be free. The task is one that requires a willingness to follow orders and do the task that is ours to do. For every soldier on the front line, many are behind the lines that support them. In a similar way for the many soldiers who are risking their lives at this time, it is our responsibility to be supportive of them in their endeavor. Does this agree with how God thinks on this subject? Consider Numbers 32:5-7 and 20-23

“‘If we have found favor in your eyes,’ they said, ‘let this land be given to your servants as our possession. Do not make us cross the Jordan.’⁶ Moses said to the Gadites and Reubenites, ‘Shall your countrymen go to war while you sit here? ⁷Why do you discourage the Israelites from going over into the land the Lord has given them?’...²⁰Then Moses said to them, ‘If you will do this — if you will arm yourselves before the Lord for battle, ²¹and if all of you will go armed over the Jordan before the Lord until he has driven his enemies out before him, ²²then when the land is subdued before the Lord, you may return and be free from your obligation to the Lord and to Israel. And this land will be your possession before the Lord. ²³But if you fail to do this, you will be sinning against the Lord; and you may be sure that your sin will find you out.’” (NIV)

continued on page 3