

GOD AND GOVERNMENT:
SHOULD A CHRISTIAN GO TO WAR?
September 22, 2002

INTRO: This is the last message in a series on God and government. We began at creation and saw how government is one of the earliest institutions as God gave man dominion over all He had made on earth. We saw family government develop into government over a nation. We saw Israel reject God's form of government when they desired a king like all the other nations had. We saw the time of the kings end in disaster and all government in the hands of the unsaved world at the time Christ came. Then, amazingly, we saw that Christ did nothing to change the fact that the whole political world lay in the hands of unbelievers. He left government in the hands of the unsaved and then instituted something entirely new, the Church. We saw the Church blossom and grow under Roman persecution until the Roman emperor himself claimed to become a Christian. This led us into considering the failures of the church called the Roman Catholic church.

Then, in the 1500's came the Protestant reformation. We saw the reformation church grapple with what the relationship should be between Church and state. Two views developed called activism and pacifism. We saw that some held that the church was in authority over the state. Others held that the state was in authority over the Church. Yet others, among them the Mennonites, held to the separation of Church and state. I agree with the doctrinal statement of our church and hold to the traditional Mennonite view of non-resistance. In this morning's message I want to defend that view.

3. Personal view

Much of how a person views the Christian's responsibility to government has to do with how one views the question of whether a Christian should go to war or not. I believe that the Mennonites of the early anabaptists were right when they held that a Christian is not to go to war. I do not believe it is the Christian's business to try to keep secular governments from war. I do not believe that God has intended that the Christian keep the secular world from war, nor did He intend to keep them from war. My wife pointed out an article to me in a recent Mennonite periodicle. The title of the article is, "Pacifism is Evangelism". The writer says that when we think of evangelism some images do not

immediately come to mind. Then he gives these examples, and I quote, "...chaining oneself to a house to prevent it from being bulldozed... participating in marches which hope to sway political leaders to address concerns for the poor and oppressed, being human shields, being arrested after breaking unjust laws..." Those are exactly the kind of things I believe Christians should not participate in.

God knew that war would continue until Christ returned for His Church and He did not give the Church the mandate to make peace in the secular world. He set the Church to bring the Gospel to all of lost mankind. That is our mandate. So I want to address two areas. First this question: Should a Christian go to war? Second: What about related areas such as voting, politics etc...

My answer, as I have said, is that the Christian should not be involved in war. I believe there are several areas of Biblical evidence for that view. So let us look first at several ways in which I believe the NT teaches that a person who becomes a believer in Christ is not to enter secular warfare.

a) Regarding War

1) By Christ's choice in life

In Matthew 4:8 we have the third of the three great temptations Jesus faced in the wilderness. The Devil took Jesus to a high mountain and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them. That is all the political powers. Then he said, "All these will I give You if You will fall down and worship me." The amazing implication was that all the political powers of the world belonged to the Devil, and Jesus did not argue that. Furthermore, it is implied that to gain political power one must first fall down and worship the devil.

But the Lord Jesus showed not the slightest interest in political power.

We see this again in John 6:15. Listen to Christ's opportunity, "Therefore when Jesus perceived that they were about to come and take Him by force and make Him king, He departed to a mountain by Himself." Christ showed no political ambitions.

In Luke 12:13 one came to Him and said, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me." Listen to the Bible answer: "And he said unto him, Man, who made me a judge or a divider over you?"

It is apparent from the life of Christ that His hope to help mankind did not lie in political power. This truth is further supported:

2) By Christ's spoken message

The whole sermon on the Mount might profitably be studied here. But look at two sections only. First 5:38-42 (read). Over and over this chapter says, "You have heard that it was said...but I say to you..." But in this passage we note a sharp difference between the Old and New in light of protecting personal rights.

(Read 5:43-48). How would a person go about practicing this passage in war? You see, it is a passage written for a new time.

Probably this section could be well summed up with Jesus words in Matthew 22:21, "Render therefore to Caesar what is Caesars and to God what is God's."

Furthermore, I believe that Christ indicated in a symbolical message that a Christian is not to be involved in physical warfare.

3) By Christ's symbolical message

We saw in an earlier message that those who teach that a Christian should go to war use Luke 22:36-38. Just before His crucifixion Jesus commanded the disciples to buy swords. So, the reasoning goes, Jesus not only sanctioned the use of the sword, but He commanded it. Now here is a question. The disciples came and said to Jesus, "Lord, look, here are two swords." And Jesus said to them, "It is enough." Now my question is, what were two swords enough for? Were they enough to face the Sanhedrin and fight them off? Were they enough to fight Rome? Certainly they were not enough for that. But what were they enough for?

We find the answer to that question later. Jesus is in Gethsemane. When Judas had betrayed the Lord and they laid hands on Him one of the disciples said, "Shall we smite with the sword?" And before Jesus could answer Peter cut off the high priest's servant's ear. Then Jesus said, "Peter, put the sword back in its place; for all they that live by the sword shall die by the sword" (Matt. 26:52).

So what were the two swords for? They were to give a message and that message is given to us in 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.'" You see, the kingdom which Jesus introduced and into which we enter by faith does not use the sword.

4) By Christ's life message

Christ's own example is probably the most powerful message of all. They came to take Him in the Garden of

Gethsemane. When He spoke a word, the power of it drove them all backward to the ground. But He remained true to the principle of His kingdom, which He had just given the disciples and He did not defend Himself. He allowed them to tie Him up and lead Him wherever they wanted to go. He allowed them to whip Him, curse Him, spit on Him, and crucify Him. Isaiah 53:7 says this, "He was led as a sheep to the slaughter; and like a lamb silent before its shearer, so He opened not His mouth."

Jesus' personal life was a testimony and example to us regarding physical warfare.

5) By Christ's missionary message

In the OT God's missionary program was centripetal in nature. (Swirling inward like tub drain.) God could send His people out to war and not be killing fellow believers because Israel was His representative on earth. All that changed with the great commission in the NT. In Matthew 28:19, Jesus said, "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations..." God's missionary program is centrifugal in nature today and so there are believers all over the world. If every Christian in every country fought for their country, then Christian would be shooting Christian. And so, because we are members of two countries, a heavenly and an earthly, with the heavenly being scattered all over the world, therefore it is not fitting for a Christian to be involved in physical warfare.

Tony Campolo, in his book *20 Hot Potatoes* tells of when he was summoned to the draft office because of the Korean war. The Colonel became concerned when he discovered that Tony might have a hard time shooting people.

He asked why and Tony said, "Because I read the book, In His Steps." Then Tony said, "If I got into a plane and flew over an enemy village, just before I pulled the lever to release the bombs, I would have to ask, 'Jesus, if you were in my place, would you drop these bombs?'" Tony says, "The Colonel answered me gruffly, 'That's the dumbest thing I ever heard. Everybody knows that Jesus would never drop those bombs'" (pg. 163).

Well, the great commission makes it so that not only would I drop bombs on many people, but I would actually be killing my own brothers and sisters in the Lord. It is the conflict of belonging to two kingdoms that creates this problem. Therefore, those who belong to the kingdom of God ought not to enter physical warfare.

6) By church history

The message of the book of Acts, the earliest record of Church life; indicates that evangelism is our business. And the epistles; letters written to the church, clearly instruct us to be subject to the governing authorities.

The early church, up to the time of Constantine, indicates that what was begun in the life of Christ and continued in the apostolic church, was by and large maintained.

After the dark ages we have groups like the Waldenses and others. Then came the Mennonites and the Quakers and the Brethren. Although they did not all have exactly the same view on politics, they all held to pacifism.

Should a Christian go to war? Our view is that the Scriptures teach against it.

b) Regarding related matters

1) Politics

Should Christians be involved in politics? Probably the majority of Christians today live under a democratic government. This makes it possible for Christians to enter the political world. Today, more and more Mennonites are entering, and are being encouraged to enter politics.

Well, we do not have clear Biblical instruction on this and so I only give my own advice. It seems to me that to be in politics is inconsistent if I do not believe in fighting in war for my country. I personally would not be able to give myself to politics because it seems to me that if a Christian is not to bear the sword, how can he enter the government who does not bear the sword in vain (Rom. 13)? But for those who do enter politics, I say this: Only do so if you can remain true to the Lord. As soon as Biblical principles have to give way, give it up.

I believe that politics is a very slippery road. I believe also that politics presents itself to us as a field in which Christians might exert useful godly influence on many people. I would simply caution that it usually looks far more promising than what it actually delivers. I would also say that the political road is strewn with Christian casualties. So: enter with great care if you feel you should enter.

2) Voting

I believe as long as a Christian need not become unequally yoked or under obligation in matters of faith, then voting is acceptable.

3) Jury duty

In certain cases a jury of people from the general public is chosen to decide whether the party being judged is guilty or not. The jury works with the judge on the matter but they can make their decision without giving reasons for it.

Mennonites in general have refrained from jury duty. I personally do not have any experience in this area. But let me read the EMC statement on this: "We believe regular court jury service to be incompatable with the nonresistent position. There is, however, a difference between an inquest (e.g., coroner's jury) and a regular court jury (Matt. 5:38-48; John 18:36; Rom. 12-13)."

The Canadian government may require its citizens to serve as jurors but exceptions are made for members of Mennonite churches. If you should be called to sit as juror you could tell them that you are a Mennonite and the law would allow you to refrain.

4) Use of rights

Is it OK for a Christian to use the law to maintain his rights? I have mentioned in an earlier message that Paul appealed to Caesar. When a person's rights from the government do not violate a Biblical teaching, then I believe it is acceptable. There are cases, such as in suing, where we must forego our rights. We will look at that in a moment.

I might add as well, that I do not believe it is wrong to phone the police if the need arises. However, if the case involves Christians and it could be settled by the church, then it is preferable to take the matter to the church.

5) Suing by law

What about suing? If a Christian has a dispute and it is with another Christian, the matter should go to the church, not the secular courts (1 Cor. 6:1-8). If the matter is between a believer and an unbeliever then the believer should suffer wrong rather than insist on his rights (Matt. 5:38-42).

6) Working for the government

What about working for the government, such as forestry, or wild life management and such like? I see no problem with such work as long as I in no way need to compromise my biblical standards.

Any areas in government jobs that violate the non-resistant position, such as the police force, would be understood to be out of bounds for the believer.

7) Swearing of oaths.

We believe that swearing of oaths is forbidden in Scripture (Matt. 5:33-37 and James 5:12). The Canadian government understands the Mennonite position and allows for affirmation rather than swearing by the Bible.

So those are God and government related issues that we need to come to terms with.

B. During The Tribulation

I want to extend the conclusion to these messages to briefly include what lies before us yet as regards God and government. The next time period that lies just before us is the tribulation. It is my view that the Church will be raptured before the tribulation and that this will once more be a Jewish time period. That it will be a time of war is abundantly clear from Scripture. Joel 3:10 says, "Beat your plowshares into swords, and your pruninghooks into spears..." But it seems that the same principles that held for the Church hold for the believer in the tribulation. Revelation 13:10 says, "He that leadeth into captivity shall go into captivity: he that killeth with the sword must be killed with the sword. Here is the patience and the faith of the saints."

C. During The Millennium

After the tribulation comes the millennium. During these 1000 years there will truly be Christian government. As a matter of fact, no unbelievers will rule. Isaiah 9:6 says the government will be on Christ's shoulders. Matthew 19:28 tells us that the 12 apostles will rule over the 12 tribes of Israel. Scripture tells us in Revelation 20:6 that those who have part in the first resurrection will reign with Christ in the millennium. That includes us. So it will truly be Christian government during the millennium.

D. On The New Earth

When the present heaven and earth are renewed, and God and Jesus Christ both dwell with man in the New Jerusalem, then, and only then will war finally cease to exist (Read Rev. 21:1-5).

CONCL: We are bringing to a close the series on God and Government. We have looked at the beginning of government. We saw it grow. We saw Israel look at the pagan world and say, "We want to be like them." And then God allowed them a king but we saw it end in disaster. We saw the OT time close with 400 years of silence.

And then the Messiah came and amazingly, He did not change the fact that government lay entirely in the hands of the unsaved world. But He did do something amazing. He allowed government to

put Him to death. And then He did another amazing thing. He gave instruction for believers to evangelize the world and then He ascended to heaven.