

## IS IT A SIN TO BE IN THE MILITARY?

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Many of the Churches of God today believe that it is a sin to be in the military and they encourage their members to be conscientious objectors. This reference [Ref 1] gives the reasons for this doctrine stated by one of the Churches of God.

It is important to look at the subject of warfare from the beginning of the Bible to the end, so that we can get a complete understanding, and not just use certain scriptures that seem to support our opinion. This is doing as the Lord commanded saying, "If you continue in my word, then are you my disciples indeed and you shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free." (Jhn 8:31-32) Our goal is to understand the truth of this doctrine according to the Lord's opinion.

The first reason that Reference 1 gives for opposing warfare is that it is against the sixth commandment of God, 'Thou shalt not murder.' This commandment would seem to forbid participating in warfare. But in the Old Testament where God GAVE the sixth commandment he also made a difference between murder and military warfare. In Deuteronomy 20 God gave instructions to Israel on things to observe when they went out to fight against their enemies. And Deuteronomy 21 gives a law for the shedding of innocent blood and another law for fighting against their enemies in the same chapter showing that the Lord makes a difference between murder and warfare.

The churches answer this by saying that Israel was allowed warfare because it was a kingdom of this world with God as king. But in the New Testament Christians are now under the citizenship of the Kingdom of God which is a spiritual nation and we have new standards such as loving our enemies and loving our neighbor as our self. We find, however, that these same standards were in the Old Testament.

*Exo 23:4 If thou meet thine enemy's ox or his ass going astray, thou shalt surely bring it back to him again.*

*Lev 19:18 Thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people, but thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself: I am the Lord.*

And if so, then we need to look for a different reason as to why Israel was allowed warfare/

And yes, it is true that Christians are under the citizenship of the Kingdom of God and our first loyalty is to that kingdom.

*Phl 3:20 For our conversation (Greek politeuma G4176, a community, citizenship, is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ:*

But that does not mean we are deprived of taking advantage of our citizenship rights, privileges and responsibilities in this world such as ancient Israel did and such as the Apostle Paul did when he claimed to be a citizen of Tarsus and also claimed his right to appeal to Caesar because he was a Roman and free born.

*Act 21:39 But Paul said, I am a man which am a Jew of Tarsus, a city in Cilicia, a citizen of no mean city: and, I beseech thee, suffer me to speak unto the people.*

*Act 22:25 And as they bound him with thongs, Paul said unto the centurion that stood by, Is it lawful for you to scourge a man that is a Roman, and uncondemned?*

*Act 22:26 When the centurion heard that, he went and told the chief captain, saying, Take heed what thou doest: for this man is a Roman.*

*Act 22:27 Then the chief captain came, and said unto him, Tell me, art thou a Roman? He said, Yea.*

*Act 22:28 And the chief captain answered, With a great sum obtained I this freedom. And Paul said, But I was free born.*

In the Old Testament we find a story about how God punished Israel for refusing to fight. In Numbers 13 and 14 God commanded the Israelites to search out the land of promise. But the men who went to spy out the land brought back an evil report of saying they would not be able to take it away from the inhabitants because they were too strong. The men caused Israel to mourn greatly so that they wanted to stone Moses and make a captain to take them back to Egypt. God punished them by killing the men who brought the evil report with a plague and making the congregation that murmured wander for 40 years in the wilderness. When they heard the punishment they tried to reverse their decision and go up to fight the inhabitants of the land, but Moses warned them that the Lord was no longer among them and they would be slain before their enemies. Thus we see here that God punished Israel for lacking the faith to fight the enemies that he had told them to fight.

People use Exodus 17:8-13 to support their opinion against warfare. Here God told Israel to stand still and the Lord would fight against the Egyptians for them. It is true that at times Israel was told to stand still and the Lord would fight the battle. But it is also true that at other times they were expected to participate in the fighting with the Lord who would be with them and give them victory over their enemies. (Ex 17:8-13) Moreover, one of the promises that God gave for obedience to him was that they would chase their enemies and they would fall by the sword.

*Lev 26:3 If ye walk in my statutes, and keep my commandments, and do them;*

*Lev 26:7 And ye shall chase your enemies, and they shall fall before you by the sword.*

*Lev 26:8 And five of you shall chase an hundred, and an hundred of you shall put ten thousand to flight: and your enemies shall fall before you by the sword.*

Therefore, if it were a sin against the sixth commandment to go to war, then the Lord himself would be sinning by going with Israel to fight their enemies.

Reference 1 quotes Jesus who said in John 18:36, "My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight." They quote this to show that the Lord does not want his servants to fight. But they did not complete the statement where Jesus said... "that I should not be delivered to the Jews." He was not telling his servants that they were not allowed to fight in this world, but only that they could not take the sword to save Jesus from the civil authorities because his kingdom is not of this world. We know that when his kingdom shall come to this world at the seventh trumpet, his servants will fight at the Battle of Armageddon (Rev 16) as well as in the battle at the end of the millennium against the armies of Satan (Rev 20).

In the doctrinal paper our Lord is portrayed as a man of love, peace, compassion who tells us to do no harm to our neighbor, and this is all true. But our Lord is also called a MAN OF WAR and this scripture is ignored.

*Exo 15:3 The Lord is a man of war: the Lord is his name.*

1John 2:22 says that those who deny the Lord are antichrists. And this warrior part of the Lord's character is being denied by this doctrine. It is obviously not understood how these two seemingly opposite doctrines, the one of love toward enemies, and the other as warrior can exist in the same person. But the Bible says they do.

One way to understand it is to see why wars must exist in this present world. We know that in the millennium after Christ returns there will be a reign of peace where men will learn war no more.

*Isa 2:4 And he shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people: and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.*

Yet, even the millennium is not free from wars. The great battle of Armageddon occurs in the beginning (Rev 16:13-16) with the Lord's army against the army of the Beast and when Satan is let out of his prison at the end of the millennium, there will be a great final battle with the armies of Satan surrounding Jerusalem and the saints (Rev 20:7-9). In fact the world will not be totally free from war until the New Heaven and the New Earth come. (2Pe 3:13, Rev 21:1)

The cause of war is not because we are carnal, for if that were the reason, then the Lord would be leading the example for us to follow to not get involved in fighting wars so that we could resist being carnal. But since the Lord himself fights wars, the reason for war must be that there is evil in the world that must be fought against. Here we see the reason why the Lord himself fights wars. It is for righteousness!

*Rev 19:11 And I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse; and he that sat upon him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he doth judge and make war.*

The first war in the Bible was that our Father Abraham fought with his enemies in Genesis 14 in order to rescue his nephew Lot from being taken captive. And it was said in verse 20 that God gave him victory over his enemies. His motive for sending his servants born in his house out to fight was not carnal, but righteous just as the Lord's causes are righteous. And that is the way we must look at whatever war we are faced with so that we can follow the character of our Lord. Does the war we are facing have a righteous cause behind it? I would say that David had a righteous cause when he slew Goliath. I would say that the soldiers who went out to fight the Nazi threat in WWII had a righteous cause.

Soldiers are not the only people who wear firearms. Police do also. Their job is to protect citizens from violent acts, drug dealers, robbers and all manner of evildoers. The only difference between police and soldiers is that soldiers protect us from evil that threatens the country from the outside in the realm of warfare while the police protect our neighborhoods. The New Testament tells us that God put the governments in place for the punishment of evildoers.

*1Pe 2:13 Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake: whether it be to the king, as supreme;*

*1Pe 2:14 Or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers, and for the praise of them that do well.*

How are the police and soldiers going to punish or stop evildoers without carrying firearms? We see that in this world such things are necessary as stated above because there is evil that must be fought against. Our human body is a prime example of this principle as the Lord created it with systems of antibodies whose job it is to fight off harmful bacteria, viruses and other disease carrying pathogens. Were it not for these soldiers of our bodies, we would not be able to survive in this world.

On January 27, 1973 the United States ended the draft and men were no longer compelled to become soldiers. I believe God made this happen in order to respect the churches' doctrine of opposition to warfare because he did respect in the Old Testament those who for various reasons did not want to go to war.

*Deu 20:3 And shall say unto them, Hear, O Israel, ye approach this day unto battle against your enemies: let not your hearts faint, fear not, and do not tremble, neither be ye terrified because of them;*

*Deu 20:4 For the Lord your God is he that goeth with you, to fight for you against your enemies, to save you.*

*Deu 20:5 And the officers shall speak unto the people, saying, What man is there that hath built a new house, and hath not dedicated it? let him go and return to his house, lest he die in the battle, and another man dedicate it.*

*Deu 20:6 And what man is he that hath planted a vineyard, and hath not yet eaten of it? let him also go and return unto his house, lest he die in the battle, and another man eat of it.*

*Deu 20:7 And what man is there that hath betrothed a wife, and hath not taken her? let him go and return unto his house, lest he die in the battle, and another man take her.*

*Deu 20:8 And the officers shall speak further unto the people, and they shall say, What man is there that is fearful and fainthearted? let him go and return unto his house, lest his brethren's heart faint as well as his heart.*

*Deu 20:9 And it shall be, when the officers have made an end of speaking unto the people, that they shall make captains of the armies to lead the people.*

But even if a man does not wish to carry a firearm, he can still be in the military serving his country with other duties and it is no sin to do this. I saw a movie recently called Hacksaw Ridge [Ref 2] which is a true story of a World War II conscientious objector named Desmond Doss who wanted to enlist and serve his country, but was a Seventh Day Adventist and refused to carry a firearm or train on Saturdays. He suffered great hardships and persecutions at first from fellow soldiers and superiors for his beliefs, but ended up winning the case in court that he had a constitutional right to his beliefs even in the military. Later he won the congressional medal of honor from Harry S. Truman for his bravery in the Battle of Okinawa by saving 75 wounded men from the battlefield while carrying no firearm.

Concerning the subject of soldiers and warfare in the New Testament we find these examples

John the Baptist did not forbid soldiers at his baptism, but he gave them this advice:

*Luk 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.*

The meaning of the phrase, 'do violence to no man' must not be a command to not kill anyone in battle, but must have the meaning of 'police brutality' as we know it today. They were not to use their authority and ability as soldiers to do violence to people outside of necessary warfare.

Luke 7 tells the story of a centurion who sent some Jewish leaders to ask Jesus to heal his servant who was dying. The Jewish leaders spoke well of the centurion saying that he had built them a synagogue, an unusual thing for a Roman soldier to do. When Jesus came near his house the centurion told Jesus that he was not worthy for Jesus to come under his roof, "but speak the word only and my servant shall be healed." He gave the example of his authority as a centurion having soldiers under him who obeyed whatever he told them to do to show that all Jesus needed to do is speak the word and his word would be obeyed and his servant would be healed. Jesus marveled and said of him, "I have not seen such great faith, no not in Israel".

One of the arguments used against military service is that the soldier is under the authority of his superiors having to obey whatever they command him to do. They insist that Christians should not be

under such authority. Yet here, this very same authority of a superior officer giving orders to his soldiers is shown to be an example of the greatest faith in Israel.

If it were true that being under man's authority is against God, then married women would not be told to obey their husbands.

*Tit 2:4 That they may teach the young women to be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children,*

*Tit 2:5 To be discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God be not blasphemed.*

Servants would not be told to obey their masters

*Eph 6:5 Servants, be obedient to them that are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in singleness of your heart, as unto Christ;*

*And children would not be told to obey their parents.*

And children would not be told to obey their parents

*Eph 6:1 Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right.*

*Col 3:20 Children, obey your parents in all things: for this is well pleasing unto the Lord.*

Is it true that obedience to authority turns the soldier into a mindless automaton who kills just because he is told to do so? I saw another movie called *Soldier*, [Ref 3] a futuristic story about a man who was selected at birth and raised to become a highly disciplined soldier dedicated to a wholly military routine. He and his fellow soldiers were trained to be ruthless obedient killers without any moral code of conduct. And any soldiers deemed physically or mentally unworthy were executed. Survivors of the training program were turned into impassive, dedicated fighting machines with no exposure to or understanding of the outside world.

When he failed to defeat a new genetically engineered super soldier, he was cast out as dead onto a garbage dump planet. Here he met a colony of crash survivors who took him in and treated him like a fellow human being. He eventually learned that the true meaning and purpose of being a soldier is to use his skills to defend those who cannot defend themselves. When his unit came to destroy the helpless colony as part of a training exercise, he saved them, defeated his entire unit including the super soldier and made it possible for them to finally leave the garbage planet and find a better home.

If it were against the law of God to be a centurion, would Jesus have said to him that he exhibited the greatest faith in Israel? The centurion was one of the most unlikely people to amaze Jesus. He was a Gentile who probably had a pagan upbringing. He was a Roman, stationed in Palestine whose duty was to subject the Jews to the Emperor's rule. He was a man of war who achieved the rank of centurion by distinguishing himself above others in the brutal Roman martial arts. He was not one you'd expect to be one of the Bible's great heroes of faith. But he was.

This scripture proves that soldiers were welcome in the early church, and since this is so, we should welcome soldiers into the church today as well. Cornelius, a centurion, was the first Gentile to convert to the Christian faith.

*Act 10:1 There was a certain man in Caesarea called Cornelius, a centurion of the band called the Italian band,*

Jamieson, Fausset, Brown Commentary says he was a Roman centurion and the Italian band was a cohort of Italians, as distinguished from native soldiers, quartered at Caesarea, probably as a

bodyguard to the Roman procurator who resided there.

These scriptures tell us that there are good things we can learn from soldiers.

*2Ti 2:3 Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.*

*2Ti 2:4 No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier.*

In revelation 11 we find that the two witnesses will be preaching in the streets of Jerusalem all during the time the final Beast is in power for three and a half years. God will give them what amounts to military power to defend themselves against anyone who would hurt them by causing fire to come out of their mouths and consume their enemies (Verse 5) He will allow them to be killed by the Beast when their mission is finished just before the Lord's second coming. (Verse 7-12)

## CONCLUSION

A lady who was in the military for 12 years before she was baptized wrote to me that she believed a person in the military today would have trouble keeping the Sabbath because you are expected to be on duty 24/7. So I wrote to her that if a person wanted to serve his country and also was a Sabbath keeper, he would probably have to do the same as Desmond Doss did in WWII and fight in court for his constitutional right to keep the Sabbath in the military. I think he could win even today, but if he couldn't win, then yes, he would have to give up the military. I have had to give up a VA job because the job called for me to work on the Sabbath. Also many civilian jobs require work on the Sabbath. The main point I wanted to make with this article is that being in the military is not a sin against the sixth commandment and if a person has reconciled being in the military and keeping the Sabbath, there is no reason why he should not be welcome to come into the church. The centurion (Roman soldier) Cornelius was the first Gentile to be converted into the early church. So the Lord must have given him success in reconciling Sabbath keeping with his Roman superiors. The Lord can do the same thing for soldiers today.

What bothers me most about this doctrine against military service is that the churches who teach it sit up in their ivory tower enjoying the freedom from dictatorship and freedom of religion that the lives of soldiers have bought for them. Yet their literature condemns the sacrifice of those soldiers as worthless and the churches forbid them from getting baptized and entering the church because they are supposedly sinning by being in the military and carrying firearms. I think that the churches who teach this are portraying themselves in the role of the unjust husbandmen in Matthew 21 who refuse to give the fruits of the kingdom to those whom the Lord sends to them to receive it. They are unjustly depriving soldiers of the chance to have eternal life in the first resurrection. This is the results of this doctrine.

## REFERENCES

Ref 1 Pg1 Military Service UCG View <https://www.ucg.org/bible-study-tools/booklets/fundamental-beliefs-of-the-united-church-of-god/military-service-and-war>

Ref 2 Pg 4 Hacksaw Ridge Wikipedia [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hacksaw\\_Ridge](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hacksaw_Ridge)

Ref 3 Pg5 Soldier [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Soldier\\_\(1998\\_American\\_film\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Soldier_(1998_American_film))

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