

# American Thinker

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## Christians, Pacifism and the Sword

By [James Arlandson](#)

Are Christians permitted to carry the sword (or modern weapons)? What should the Church's policy be on war and peace? Should it counsel the State to turn the other cheek? Are Christians permitted to join the police force and the military? How can they 'love their enemies' and have to kill some of them?

The Scriptural truth that answers those questions divides the world into two realms. On the one hand, we have the kingdom of Caesar, and on the other the kingdom of God. A failure to distinguish between the two will produce confusion about the New Testament's teaching on the sword and peace—confusion that is rampant throughout the Church and the larger society in this time of global conflicts that are continuing, regardless of who wins political elections

This article is the first in a series on pacifism and the sword in the New Testament. I hope it clarifies the issues and encourages all the military and law enforcement personnel who fight for freedom and security and who still take the Bible as the foundation of their lives.

### Old Testament Background

To analyze the New Testament properly, it is imperative to understand the Old Testament. The New Testament grows organically out of the older sacred text, but also transforms some main themes.

This revered ancient source teaches a theocracy, merging religion and politics. The Law of Moses was thundered from on high, shaking Mt. Sinai and echoing across the Middle East and eventually around the world. The plan was for the ancient Hebrews, the people of God, to separate from surrounding kingdoms and their pagan religions, and to worship the true and living God, following carefully prescribed laws. These laws were designed to guide them towards righteousness.

Further, God permitted ancient Israel to wage war on pagan inhabitants that were polluting a small and specific land called Canaan. (He did not command his people to wage wars of worldwide conquests.) The Israelites alternated between success and failure in cleansing the land. But this bedrock principle can be learned from these (admittedly) severe decrees: God is not opposed, in principle, to warfare, if

necessary.

However, the people were unable or unwilling to follow God's decrees, except a remnant. So God ordained a new path of following his righteousness, the gift of the Spirit. The prophet Joel predicted, as follows:

28 I will pour out my Spirit on **all** people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. 29 Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days. (Joel 2:28—29, emphasis added)

God expands the horizon to involve all peoples.

The following questions from the short Bible survey are relevant to the New Testament. Should the wars in the Old Testament be transferred forward to the ministry of Jesus and the Church? If so, how? What about to secular governments? Jesus, a Jew, lived in a theocracy, though under Roman occupation, prior to the destruction of the Temple in AD 70 by the Roman general Titus, son of the Emperor Vespasian (ruled 69—79, and Titus later ruled 79—81). Would Jesus carry on the earthly theocratic kingdom established by God in ancient Israel?

A hint of the answer, discussed shortly: if Jesus were to reestablish another religious—political theocracy in a small land, it would not succeed, for God ordained something new that relates to all peoples. Joel 2:28—29 prophesies, and Peter the lead Apostle applies the prophecy to the birth of the Church in Acts 2.

For more articles on the complex and rich interrelations between the Old and New Testaments, please see these articles:

[How Jesus Christ Fulfills the Old Testament.](#) [How Christian Benefit from the Old Testament.](#) [God's Wars and Allah's Wars](#) (scroll down to a Christian perspective)

## **Two kingdoms**

In his teachings and pronouncements, Jesus divides the kingdom of Caesar from the kingdom of God. Though the phrases 'kingdom of heaven' or 'kingdom of God' are used well over a hundred times in the Four Gospels, we look at three examples that put the kingdom in action.

First, at the beginning of Jesus' ministry, he was tempted or tested (the Greek word can be translated either way) by Satan to take all of the kingdoms of the world. Matthew 4:5—8 says:

5 The devil led him up to a high place and showed him in an instance all the kingdoms of the world. 6 And he said to him, "I will give you all their authority and splendor, for it has been given me, and I can

give it to anyone I want to. 7 So if you worship me, it will be yours." 8 Jesus answered, "It is written, 'Worship the Lord your God and serve him only.'" (Luke 4:5—7; cf. Deuteronomy. 6:13)

In divine cooperation between Jesus and the Spirit, they allowed Satan to lead Jesus up to a high place and show him all the kingdoms of this world—their glory and political authority (*exousia* in Greek means political authority; cf. Luke 4:6 and 12:11, 20:20, 23:7). In addition, kingdom at the time of Christ includes material resources, backed by a strong military. However, Jesus raises his followers' vision to a spiritual transformation of the world, one soul at a time, without robbing people by bloodshed or killing them. Then, following his example, his disciples went north, south, east, and west, transforming the world only by preaching a simple message and by praying.

Second, Jesus makes his triumphal entry into Jerusalem (Luke 19:18—44). He had predicted his own death—he was sent to die, after all (Luke 9:22, 43—45; 12:50; 13:32—33; 18:31—34). Now the hostility of the Jewish leadership heats up against him. It is in this context that the teachers of the law and the chief priests keep a close watch on him to catch him in committing treason against Rome or in breaking the law, so they could arrest him and turn him over to "the power and authority of the governor" (Luke 20:20).

Some leaders ask him whether it is lawful to pay taxes to Caesar. Apparently, they saw him as a political revolutionary who opposed Roman occupation. Would he endorse the taxation of his fellow Jews for the benefit of unclean Gentiles? He replied with famous words that are often quoted, though people may not know the exact reference and context. He speaks first in this passage.

24 "Show me a denarius. Whose portrait and inscription are on it?" 25 "Caesar's," they replied. He said to them, "Then give to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's." 26 They were unable to trap him in what he said there in public. And astonished by his answer, they became silent. (Luke 20:20—26; cf. Matthew 22:15—22; Mark 12:13—17).

In that passage, the distinction between the kingdom of Caesar and the kingdom of God is clear. If Caesar asks for taxes, then keep your focus on the kingdom of God, but pay them. Incidentally, Jesus paid his taxes (Matthew 17:24—27). He even called a tax collector to become one of his disciples (Matthew 9:9) and befriended them and other sinners (Luke 5:29—32).

Third and finally, during his arrest, he said to Pontius Pilate, a Roman authority:

My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jews. But now my kingdom is from another place. (John 18:36)

Upon this reply, Pilate exclaims that Jesus is a king. But Jesus spiritualizes the description of a king. Pontius Pilate speaks first in the following verse:

'You are a king, then!' Jesus answered: 'You are right in saying I am a king. In fact, for this reason, I was

born, and for this I came into the world to testify to the truth. Everyone who is on the side of the truth listens to me.' (John 18:37)

At the birth of Jesus, the wise men call him 'king of the Jews' (Matthew 2:2). In John 18:37 he says that the purpose of his birth—as a king—is to testify to the truth. That means his kingdom is heavenly and nonmaterial. He leads by the power of truth alone, not by worldly pomp and glory, followed by a mighty military.

Thus, Jesus lifts his vision, and that of his disciples and ours, to a heavenly kingdom. He separated off an earthly and theocratic kingdom—albeit established by God in ancient Israel—from a spiritual kingdom about to be established beyond the borders of Israel to the farthest parts of the globe, wherever the gospel of the kingdom is preached. In his ministry and actions he never carried a sword or raised a militia to attack opponents, for he was preoccupied with fighting spiritual beings and diseases, and clarifying the best possible image of God in kingdom theology. But he permits the State to carry a sword—at least he does not condemn soldiers as such, as we shall see in a future article.

## **Kingdom warfare**

The Old Testament background brings us to the ministry and teaching of Jesus, but he wages spiritual warfare, not a military one. Three examples represent other passages in the New Testament.

First, one of the striking features of the four Gospels is the presence of demonic beings that attack hapless people. The Gospels take them seriously, as if they are not myths, and so does Jesus (and so should we). He waged spiritual warfare against demons, wherever he went. After the great test (Matt. 4:1—11; Luke 4:1—13), many passages describe his confrontation with them, such as Matthew 12:28 and 43; Mark 1:23—26, 5:2, 7:25, 9:25—26; Luke 4:33, 8:29 and 55, 9:42, 11:24, and 13:11. It would be most unwise if rationalists believed that these verses were ancient descriptions of mental illness.

Second, he waged spiritual warfare against sickness. This passage, representing other summaries, encapsulates in a few words the healing ministry of Jesus in Israel, four decades prior to the Roman destruction of the Temple in AD 70:

30 Great crowds came to him, bringing the lame, the blind, the crippled, the mute and many others, and laid them at his feet; and he healed them. 31 The people were amazed when they saw the mute speaking, the crippled made well, the lame walking and the blind seeing. And they praised the God of Israel. (Matt. 15:30—31)

Third and finally, he waged spiritual warfare against false ideas by teaching true ones. In the famous Sermon on the Mount he explains what the kingdom of God really is. It is the 'new thing' prophesied by Isaiah (42:9, 43:19, and 48:6). After he finished the long discourse, the people respond thus:

28 When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching, 29 because he

taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law. (Matthew 7:28—29; see 13:54 and 22:33)

These and many other passages in the Gospels demonstrate that Jesus is waging spiritual warfare, not a military one. He is about to call his Church to do the same. He raises its vision higher than conquering earthly kingdoms and regions. However, no Bible—educated Christian should ever believe that the God of the Old Testament and the New Testament are different. They are not. The same God who purified the small and specific land of Canaan through Joshua by military warfare is now purifying the whole world through Jesus (the Hebrew name is Joshua) by spiritual warfare, that is, only by preaching the gospel and only by praying, not by hitting the stubborn with swords.

## Conclusion

An objector may ask: Separating off the kingdom of God from the kingdom of Caesar is all well and good for the 'heavenly minded,' but what about us here on earth? Wars and conflicts erupt. How do we handle them? What about the verses in the New Testament that talk about the sword? Or is the New Testament so spiritual that we should retreat from the world, not to mention from conflicts?

These are excellent questions, reflecting earth—bound realities. And these questions will be answered in the next articles in the series. Suffice it say here that the inspired New Testament does not leave us without guidance. God ordains that the State—law enforcement and the military—may wield the sword. And **individual** Christians may gladly join these honorable institutions, thus becoming servants of God. But publicly and officially, they serve the State. Privately, they serve God. The Church as an institution (also distinct from the kingdom of God, which creates the Church) is 'pacifist' in its own actions and internal policies because it follows the dictates of the kingdom of God, his active rule and dynamic reign. That is, it wages only spiritual warfare. Church leaders in the name of the Church or of God should never convene a council or general assembly in order to raise an army to fight battles and to coerce heretics and opponents to conform.

Further, understanding the separate kingdoms of God and Caesar (the State) and the fact that Jesus never set out to rebuild the theocratic kingdom of Israel (Acts 1:6—7) is essential for grasping all of the verses in the New Testament about peace and the sword. Such verses will fall into place once the division of kingdoms is elaborated on. But if we merge the two realms, we will witness religious atrocities that the Church committed sometimes (not always) in its history. May we never again see the Church raise an army or militia to attack heretics and false doctrines (as the church with the army defines them)!

The mission of the Church, rather, is to save souls, teach believers, and help the needy in practical ways. That is the essence of the kingdom message. Being salt and light, the Church may also counsel the State. However, since God ordains that the State may wield the sword, the Church should not teach only pacifism to the State, or else the Church risks plunging the nation into chaos and even national harm from internal criminals and external foes. Also, teaching only pacifism contradicts Scripture, as we shall see in the next articles in the series.

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## Pacifism and the Sword in the Gospels

By [James Arlandson](#)

Did Jesus endorse and encourage violence in the four Gospels, presumably a righteous kind of violence? Did he call his original disciples to this? Did he order all of his disciples to really buy swords? Two verses may indicate that he did these things.

Matthew 10:34 reads:

34 Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth, but a sword (New International Version, NIV)

And Luke 22:36 reads:

36 [Jesus] said to [the disciples], "But now the one who has a purse must take it, and likewise a bag; and the one who has no sword must sell his cloak and buy one." (New Revised Standard Version, NRSV)

Cited in isolation, those two verses suggest that swords and violence are a possibility. It seems as if Jesus carried and wielded a sword. It seems as if all of the disciples should go out and buy one each. After the death and burial of Jesus, they would have to face the world alone without him, so they thought.

However, what happens to the apparent meaning of the two verses when they are not read in isolation, but in context? Did Jesus really wield a sword and want all of the disciples to buy one?

This article is Part Two in a series on pacifism and the sword in the New Testament.

**Matthew 10:34**

Scripture must be read in context. As the old saying goes, a text without a context may become a pretext. The context of Matthew 10:34 (in bold font) is quoted in full to explain the meaning of "sword" :

32 "Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven. 33 But whoever disowns me before men, I will disown him before my Father in heaven. 34 **Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth, but a sword.** 35 For I have come to turn

a man against his father,

a daughter against her mother,

a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law--

36 a man's enemies will be the members of his own household [Micah 7:6]

37 Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; and anyone who does not take up his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. 39 Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it."

Thus the verse cannot legitimately be used as a call to a military holy war on society. The context, rather, is family relationships. The meaning of "sword" is now clear. It indicates that following Jesus in his original Jewish society may not bring peace to a family, but may "split" it up (Micah 7:6), the precise function of a metaphorical sword. Are his disciples ready for that?

Now we can appeal to the larger textual context. The non-literal interpretation of the sword is confirmed by a parallel passage in the Gospel of Luke.

Luke 12:49-53 reads:

49 "I have come to bring fire on the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled! 50 But I have a baptism to undergo [my death], and how distressed I am until it is completed! 51 Do you think I came to bring peace on earth? No, I tell you, but division. 52 From now on there will be five in one family divided against each other, three against two and two against three. 53 They will be divided, father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law."

The proper way to interpret Scripture is to let verses clarify other verses, particularly parallel passages. And now Luke 12:49-53 confirms the non-literal interpretation of Matthew 10:34. Jesus did not endorse

physical violence against one's own family, but he warns people about possible family division.

For more information on Matthew 10:34, such as the cultural context, [click here](#).

## **Luke 22:36**

The historical context of Luke 22:36 demonstrates that for three years Jesus avoided making a public, triumphal entry in his visits to Jerusalem because he understood that when he set foot in the holy city in this way, he would fulfill his mission to die, in a death that looked like one of a common criminal, just as Isaiah the prophet had predicted hundreds of years before (Isaiah 53:12). He needed to complete his work outside of Jerusalem.

Now, however, Jesus finally enters the city famous for killing her prophets (Luke 13:33-34), a few days before his arrest, trial and crucifixion, all of which he predicted. Religious leaders were spying on him and asked him trick questions, so they could incriminate him (Luke 20:20). These insincere questions, though they were also asked before he entered the city, increased in frequency during these compacted tense days. But he answered impressively, avoiding their traps. Despite the tension, each day Jesus taught in the temple, and crowds gathered around him, so the authorities could not arrest him, for fear of the people. Judas volunteered to betray him, saying that he would report back to the authorities when no crowd was present (Luke 22:1-6).

As Passover drew near, Jesus asked some of his disciples to prepare the Seder, the Last Supper. He elevated the bread and the wine, representing his body and blood, which was broken and shed for the sins of the world in the New Covenant (Luke 22:7-20). However, during the meal, Judas slipped out to search for the authorities because he knew that it was the custom of Jesus to go to the Mount of Olives to pray (Luke 21:37), and that night would be no different.

At this point we pick up the textual context of Luke 22:36 (bold print). He is eating the Last Supper on the night he was betrayed.

Luke 22:35-38 says:

35 [Jesus] asked them [the eleven apostles], "When I sent you out without a purse, bag or sandals, did you lack anything?"

They said, "No, not a thing."

36 He said to them, "**But now the one who has a purse must take it, and likewise a bag. And the one who has no sword must sell his cloak and buy one.** 37 For I tell you, this scripture must be fulfilled in me: 'And he was numbered among the lawless'; and indeed what is written about me is being fulfilled."

38 They [the disciples] said, "See, Lord, here are two swords."

"It is enough," he replied. (NRSV)

The textual context reveals at least two truths. First, Jesus contrasts his ministry before his arrival in Jerusalem with the tense few days in Jerusalem when spies and the authorities themselves were seeking to trap him. But does the tension play a part in understanding why he told his disciples to go out and buy swords? This is answered, below. Second, he says that he would be arrested and tried as a criminal, as the prophecy in Isaiah 53:12 predicted. Does this have anything to do with swords? Do criminals carry them around? This too is explained, below. Jesus may have a deeper meaning in mind than the violent use of the swords. What is it?

The interpretation of the verses can follow either a strictly physical direction in which swords must be used, or a non-physical one in which swords must not be used, during Jesus' last hours. The surest and clearest direction is the non-literal one, but first we analyze why the literal one will not fit into Luke 22:34-38 and into the passage about the arrest in the Garden of Gethsemane (Luke 22:39-53).

### **The violent use of swords**

Jesus says to the disciples to buy swords, but when Peter shows him two, Jesus says they are enough. The first direction, the literal one, is inadequate for two reasons.

First, the obvious question is: two swords are enough for what? Are they enough for a physical fight to resist arrest? This is hardly the case because during Jesus' arrest a disciple (Peter according to John 18:10) took out his sword and cut off the ear of the servant (Malchus according to John 18:10) of the high priest. Jesus sternly tells Peter to put away his sword, "No more of this!" and then he heals the servant, restoring his ear (Luke 22:49-51). Resisting arrest cannot be the purpose of the two swords.

Second, were the two swords enough for an armed rebellion to resist the authorities and to impose the new Jesus movement in a political and military way? Jesus denounces this purpose in Luke 22:52, as the authorities were in the process of arresting him: "Am I leading a rebellion that you have come with swords and clubs?" The answer is no, as he is seized and led away (22:54).

So the physical interpretation of Luke 22:36 (the two swords were intended to be used) will not work in the larger context. Two swords are not enough to resist arrest, to pull off a revolt of some kind, or to fully protect themselves in the Garden of Gethsemane.

### **The contextual meaning of swords**

In contrast to the literal interpretation of using swords physically, the following interpretation works smoothly in context so that all the pieces of the puzzle fit together.

First, Jesus reminds the disciples of his mission for them before he arrived in Jerusalem (Luke 9:3; 10:1-17). Did they need a purse, a bag, or extra sandals? No, because people were friendlier, and their opposition to him was spread out over three years. Now, however, he is in Jerusalem, and he has undergone the compacted antagonism of religious leaders seeking to trap him with self-incriminating words. When the authorities are not present, they send their spies. The atmosphere is therefore tense, and the two swords--no more than that--represent the tension. Jesus' mission has shifted to a clear danger, and the disciples must beware. However, he certainly did not intend for his disciples to use the swords, as we just saw in the literal interpretation, above, for he is about to tell Peter to put away his sword.

Second, "For I tell you, this scripture must be fulfilled in me: 'And he was numbered among the lawless'" (Luke 22:37). By far the clearest purpose of the two swords is Jesus' reference to Isaiah's prophecy (53:12). He was destined to be falsely arrested like a criminal, falsely put on trial like a criminal, and even falsely crucified like a criminal. After all, he was hung on the cross between two thieves, which is also a fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy (Luke 23:32; 39-43).

What are criminals known for carrying with them? Weapons, and to be numbered among criminals, Jesus must also have weapons. That is why he said that only two swords would be enough--to fulfill this prophecy. Also, Matthew mentions fulfilling prophecy (26:54). If Peter had kept on physically using the sword to prevent Christ's arrest, then his death would not have taken place, so prophecy would have been thwarted. That is why Jesus told him to put his sword back in its place (Matthew 26:52). And in Luke he says to Peter after he cut off an ear, "No more of this!" (22:51).

The third and final non-literal interpretation says that Jesus frequently used physical objects (seeds, lamps, vineyards, coins, lost sheep and so on) to teach non-physical, universal truths, and the same is possibly true of the two swords. This interpretation is supported by Matthew 10:34: "Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth, but a sword." As we have seen, above, in context, he does not mean a literal sword that divides the family, but a spiritual and moral one. And it is precisely Luke who clarifies Jesus' meaning of "sword" as non-literal in the two parallel passages. If Luke does this in 12:51, then why not in 22:36-38?

## **Early Christian history**

The foregoing interpretation of the non-physical use of swords does not say that the two swords did not exist (verse 38). They are not mere symbols, nor were they imaginary or invisible. Peter really did cut off the ear of the servant of the high priest with one of them (Matthew 26:50-51; Luke 22:49-51). Also, Jesus said to Peter in the Garden, "Put your sword back in its place," meaning, back in its scabbard or holder or in Peter's belt or another article of clothing. He never said to throw the sword away, off to the side at a distance. Therefore, it is entirely possible that some disciples carried them after the crucifixion and burial when they lived in hostile territory, and maybe some did after the Resurrection and Ascension.

However, later reliable tradition says that none of the apostles fought or even tried to fight their way out of fiery trials with swords, as some sort of misguided, twisted, violent martyrs. Instead, tradition says

that all of the original apostles but John were martyred as a direct result of persecution (John died from natural causes in old age). Evidently, the example of Jesus throughout his life and in the Garden of Gethsemane made an impression on them.

Though this is an argument from silence (drawing conclusions from what a text does not say), it is a significant silence of the historical records that speaks volumes. As we shall see in future articles, this silence will have the support of words.

## Summary

The events in the Garden of Gethsemane and the commands of Jesus there teach the apostles nonaggression. He said to Peter: "For all who draw the sword will die by the sword" (Matthew 26:52). Peter and the others heard those words that clarify the use of swords. Therefore, a lifestyle of the sword must not be part of the disciples' new walk with the resurrected Christ, as they preached his message of hope.

As I concluded in Part One in the series, Jesus waged kingdom or spiritual warfare. He preached the kingdom message. And the Church must follow its Lord in waging only spiritual warfare and preaching only the kingdom message. And this much is bedrock: the Church--as an institution--is never permitted to spread the gospel or to impose personal righteousness by the sword, for Christ's kingdom is not of this world (John 18:36).

So only in this sense is the Church--as the Church--a pacifist body. That is, ecclesiastical leaders do not convene a special council and general assembly to vote on raising an army or militia in order to wage war. Rather, its warfare is only spiritual and moral (Ephesians 6:10-20 and 2 Corinthians 10:4-6). Thus, the Church and the State must never be fused together.

But the Church, by its nature and purpose, is commanded to exhort, teach, guide, and counsel the government about the ways of God. The Church proclaims peace, or it may counsel a just war, depending on the circumstances. If the Church were to teach only pacifism, it would violate its own Scriptures (Romans 13:1-7). But the Church and the government are the not same.

So if the Church as an institution is not permitted to have an army and to wage war, are individual Christians permitted to join the military and law enforcement of the State, according to the New Testament? Yes, and that complex question is answered more fully in future articles in the series. For now, applying Matthew 26:52 is sufficient. "All who draw the sword will die by the sword." Clearly, that timeless truth in context refers to criminals, rebels, and revolutionaries. Whether the cause of revolutionaries is just or unjust, they (and criminals and rebels) use weapons, so they are at risk of dying by such weapons.

However, lawful soldiers and police officers also place themselves at a higher risk, more than average, law-abiding citizens do, who do not have to use weapons. This does not mean that lawful soldiers and

police officers are on the same level as criminals, rebels, or revolutionaries--far from it. But the servants of the State, working in the two God-ordained institutions of the military and law enforcement (Romans 13:1-7), must be forewarned of the danger and risk before they follow their noble careers.

This theme will be repeated throughout the series: Jesus teaches that the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Caesar are different and distinct. He did not purpose to reestablish the theocratic kingdom of Israel (Acts 1:6-7).

The Church as an institution (also distinct from the kingdom of God, which creates the Church) is "pacifist" in its own actions and internal policies because it follows the commands of the kingdom of God, his active rule and dynamic reign. The Church must wage only spiritual warfare. Thus, church leaders in the name of the Church or of God should never convene a council or general assembly in order to raise an army to fight battles and to coerce heretics and opponents to conform.

Rather, the mission of the Church, waging only spiritual warfare, is to save souls, teach believers, and help the needy in practical ways, not to bloody and kill people with swords. And it continues its true mission to this day, turning the world right side up.

For other translations of the Bible, please click [here](#).

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## Officers, Soldiers, and God

By [James Arlandson](#)

According to the New Testament, is it possible to be honored by God *and* be a weapon-carrying soldier or law enforcement officer, at the same time? Does God approve of soldiers and officers of the State? Does he condemn the military? If not, may individual Christians serve, Scripturally speaking, in law enforcement and the military?

This article, Part 3 in the series on pacifism and the sword in the New Testament, discusses lawful military and civil officers of the State. Some were soldiers who seek repentance from John the Baptist (Luke 3:7-14). Jesus meets a highly respected centurion who needed help (Matthew 8:5-13). Another centurion named Cornelius, serving in the Italian Regiment, receives a strange, divine visit (Acts 10). Finally, a sword-carrying jailer who worked for the civil government of the Roman colony of Philippi carried out his duty to imprison the Apostle Paul (Acts 16:16-40).

Here are their stories in the Greek East of the Roman Empire. The lesson for police officers and military personnel today will become obvious as we go.

### John the Baptist and soldiers

According to the New Testament, John the Baptist, coming in the spirit of Elijah, was the forerunner of Christ. John preached a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. One day, during the short life of John the Baptist—short because Herod the tetrarch beheaded him (Matthew 14:1-12 and Mark 6:14-29)—some soldiers, likely Jews serving the government in Jerusalem, traveled out to the Jordan River to see him. While they were listening, he told a large crowd that they must bring forth fruit (character and actions) worthy of repentance, not just get wet at their baptism (Luke 3:8). After different classes of people ask what fruit they must produce, the soldiers ask a pertinent question about their own careers.

14 Then some soldiers asked him, "And what should we do?" He replied, "Don't extort money and don't accuse people falsely—be content with your pay." (Luke 3:14)

It seems, then, that the soldiers were deeper than curiosity seekers. They asked about repentance. It is important to note what John says and does not say. He tells them to follow after justice. Apparently, it was common knowledge that soldiers generally used their power and authority to intimidate people.

That is what he said. But what he does not say is that they should quit the army.

The silence is significant. John never denounced them as soldiers, exactly at the moment when the fiery preacher could have done so. After all, he tells them to be content with their wages; logically, this implies that they may remain soldiers. One of the requirements of their repentance did not involve walking away from their career. They could repent of their sins *and* belong to the military. They did not have to repent for carrying weapons or belonging to the military. This also implies, historically, that they could use their weapons, if necessary.

### **Jesus and a centurion**

The following story in the ministry of Jesus is moving (to me, at least). Centurions in Israel were mostly recruited from outside Galilee, not necessarily from Rome or Italy, but they came from such regions as Lebanon and Syria. Centurions were the backbone of the army, keeping the peace and issuing executive orders. They commanded a lot of power. What happens when a centurion and Jesus meet?

Matthew 8:5-13 is long, but I encourage readers to take the time to read it.

5 When Jesus had entered Capernaum, a centurion came to him, asking for help. 6 "Lord," he said, "my servant lies at home paralyzed and in terrible suffering." 7 Jesus said to him, "I will go and heal him." 8 The centurion replied, "Lord, I do not deserve to have you come under my roof. But just say the word, and my servant will be healed. 9 For I myself am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. I tell this one, 'Go,' and he goes; and that one, 'Come,' and he comes. I say to my servant, 'Do this,' and he does it." 10 When Jesus heard this, he was astonished and said to those following him, "I tell you the truth, I have not found anyone in Israel with such great faith. 11 I say to you that many will come from the east and the west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. . . . 13 Then Jesus said to the centurion, "Go! It will be done just as you believed it would." And his servant was healed at that very hour.  
(Matthew 8:5-13; see Luke 7:1-10)

We can learn at least five truths from this inspiring episode. First, the centurion was kindhearted, for he cared for one of his servants. In the Gospel of the Luke, this episode is interrupted by a pericope (section or passage) about a synagogue ruler who needs help from Jesus, for his daughter was dying. (She "fell asleep," but Jesus resurrected her.) Yet, the centurion asking help for a servant indicates equal desperation as if he were a moral father, perhaps. He certainly was a caring head of household and commander. Also, the parallel passage in Luke says that some elders of the Jews encouraged Jesus to help the soldier, pleading, "This man deserves to have you do this, because he loves our nation and has built our synagogue" (Luke 7:4-5).

What is the timeless truth drawn from this first point? It is fitting for a soldier to be helpful to a nation that he enters. The (local) elders of the Jews praise this gentile who built their synagogue. It is possible to be godly and to serve in the military, wielding a sword.

Second, the centurion shows some humility. He tells the Lord that he is not worthy of Jesus coming under his roof. This wins the heart of Jesus, catching his attention. Such humility is doubly important for persons in command. Sometimes power corrupts good character, causing us to become arrogant (which is different from confidence, a virtue).

Third, the centurion understands the chain of command. If he tells a soldier to do something, then the soldier does it. In the same, but spiritual way, if Jesus tells the disease to depart, it will obey. The centurion recognizes that Jesus has spiritual authority that transcends time and place. Jesus does not have to be on location to heal, so the centurion wisely discerns. This is truly a remarkable insight.

Fourth, it is now important to note what Jesus says and does, and what he does not say or do. He honors the centurion's request and heals his servant. Next, he praises the centurion to high heaven for his insight, using superlative language: "I tell you the truth, I have not found anyone in Israel with such great faith" (verse 10), not as great as the gentile commander's faith. What does Jesus not say or do? He does not denounce the centurion as a military servant of Rome. He never says, "Leave the army, for it is corrupt and intrinsically evil! If you don't, I'll never heal your servant!" As a moral example and teacher, if he wanted to point out behavior and practices that harm the people doing them, then he would have done so. But he didn't.

Fifth and finally, we civilians must honor soldiers and other military personnel. If they need help in practical ways, then let's pitch in and help. Let's bring healing not only to a soldier himself or herself, but to his or her household, as well. If Jesus did this, then why should we ignore his example?

### **Peter and Cornelius, a centurion**

Doesn't a Roman centurion deserve divine censure on the face of it? After all, we're reading the New Testament that teaches nothing but "peace and love," right? Note God's assessment of the commander:

1 At Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion in what was known as the Italian Regiment. 2 He and all his family were devout and God-fearing; he gave generously to those in need and prayed to God regularly. 3 One day at about three in the afternoon he had a vision. He distinctly saw an angel of God, who came to him and said, "Cornelius!" 4 Cornelius stared at him in fear. "What is it, Lord?" he asked. The angel answered, "Your prayers and gifts to the poor have come up as a memorial offering before God. (Acts 10:1-4)

Apparently, Cornelius' godliness positively influenced his family—not an easy task since often the family can see the hypocrisy in the head of household more clearly than outsiders see it. The end of the story, one of divine coincidences, is happy. Cornelius and his family convert, are filled with the Spirit, and are baptized (verses 44-48). He is a military man *and* the first gentile convert to the Church.

The same analysis that was applied to John's counsel to soldiers and Jesus' praise of a centurion in the previous two sections fits here as well. Neither God himself nor the lead Apostle Peter tells the centurion to leave the army or give up his weapons. Further, no one knows if Cornelius ever killed an enemy, but

if he rose to the rank of centurion, then he probably served for a long time, as a career. And if he served for a long time, then he probably saw some action. If he saw some action, then he probably killed an enemy, or ordered his men to kill. Yet, it is possible to be blessed of God while serving in the military and possibly killing an enemy in battle or in law enforcement. Most important, Cornelius shows that soldiers should develop good and godly characters as they serve the State.

## Paul and a jailer

Paul was constantly persecuted just for preaching the gospel, not for committing acts of “righteous” violence. In this case he expelled a demon from a hapless girl, so he waged spiritual warfare, just as we saw Jesus do, in the first [article](#). In the Roman colony of Philippi he and his traveling companion Silas were “severely flogged” and jailed in the inner cell of prison, which was probably stinky, damp, insect- and rat-infested. Their feet fastened in stocks, they were singing hymns to God, but then an earthquake in the middle of the night loosed their bonds and opened the prison doors.

27 The jailer woke up, and when he saw the prison doors open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself because he thought the prisoners had escaped. 28 But Paul shouted, "Don't harm yourself! We are all here!" 29 The jailer called for lights, rushed in and fell trembling before Paul and Silas. 30 He then brought them out and asked, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" 31 They replied, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household." 32 Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house. 33 At that hour of the night the jailer took them and washed their wounds; then immediately he and all his family were baptized. 34 The jailer brought them into his house and set a meal before them; he was filled with joy because he had come to believe in God—he and his whole family. (Acts 16:27-34)

Paul never tells the jailer to abandon his career. In fact, the jailer is seen fulfilling his duties in an official capacity the next day (vv. 35-36). The jailer carried his sword after his conversion.

## Conclusion

As we have seen in the first two parts in the series, Jesus teaches that the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Caesar are different and distinct. Also, he did not set out to reestablish the theocratic kingdom of Israel (Acts 1:6-7). This present study confirms the distinctions. That is, all of these passages show *individual* converts in the military and law enforcement; the texts do not suggest that the Church as an institution should become militant. The stories are about *individuals* serving as lawful agents of the State, not in a Christian institution. They were qualified agents of Caesar, not amateurs, so these examples do not demonstrate that Church may assign weapons to anyone at all.

Parts of the lessons drawn from these passages are based on an argument from silence (what a text or history does not say). However, this is not a problem. Biblical narrative is compressed; that is, it does not go into intricate detail as Greco-Roman texts do, such as the histories of Thucydides and Livy. Silence in the Bible can often (but not always) be significant. Thus, the main characters, followers of God, are teachers or preachers. They are never short of words. If they had something to say about

disassociating from the military or from law enforcement, they would have said it. But they didn't.

In addition, the logic of history requires us to assume that in the Roman Empire at that time soldiers and law enforcement officers may have to kill an enemy. It is completely certain that Jesus and the New Testament authors assumed this. They lived in the Roman Empire, and Jesus predicted his own death by the authorities. In any case, surely there were other kindhearted and generous men—but not part of the military—whom God could have honored with his blessings recorded in the New Testament. Instead, God chose to help and call military men and a law enforcement officer.

Further, each of the passages speaks loudly enough. By means of positive actions, God honors each soldier or law officer with conversion or healing or wise counsel. Apparently, God did not condemn them as soldiers or as a law enforcement officer, demanding them to repent of their involvement in the (alleged) anti-God institutions (what he did not say or do). Instead, he blessed them just as they were (what he did), leaving the issue of weapons at that. Evidently remaining in the military and law enforcement, each one carried his weapons after receiving a divine blessing or conversion.

In a future article, we will see Peter (1 Peter 2:13-14, 20; 4:15) and Paul (Romans 13:1-7) say that God ordains governing authorities to keep the peace. In the Roman Empire, this entailed wielding the sword, if necessary. So why would Peter or Paul tell the centurion or the jailer to give up their careers or weapons in the Book of Acts? The Apostles were acting consistently with their theology in their epistles. So here we have more positive evidence.

Also, not every one in the military or law enforcement is blessed automatically; sometimes individuals may become corrupt. They must be prosecuted. On the other side, these soldiers and officers (studied above) showed godliness, repentance, and humility. This caught God's attention.

All of these passages, especially the last two, demonstrate that devout Christians may certainly and gladly join the military and law enforcement, without thinking twice about it, if they feel called to those two honorable institutions. If they have to use the sword on evildoers, then so be it, provided the officers and soldiers follow the law. Officially and publicly, they are servants of the State and act in that capacity, so they should have no angst about using force, if necessary and lawful.

However, as noted in the previous articles, the Church as an institution (also distinct from the kingdom of God, which creates the Church) is "pacifist" in its own actions and internal policies because it follows the commands of the kingdom and its heavenly King; his kingdom is his active rule and dynamic reign today. That is, church leaders in the name of the Church or of God should *never* convene a council or general assembly in order to raise an army to fight battles and to coerce heretics and sinners to conform.

Rather, the mission of the Church, waging only spiritual warfare, is to save souls, teach believers, and help the needy in practical ways, not to bloody opponents with swords.

Previous articles in this series:

Part [One](#): Christians, Pacifism, and the Sword

# American Thinker

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December 02, 2006

## Church and State - and the Sword

By [James Arlandson](#)

Confusion too often prevails over discussions on the relation between the Church and the State. Things get even more complicated when the sword - military and law enforcement - is brought into the debate. This article, Part Four in a series on pacifism and the sword in the New Testament, aims to answer these questions, examining passages in the Epistles.

Should the Church be a State of sorts, as it has in some parts of its history? Should the Church wield the sword in the name of God? We have already seen in previous articles that Jesus separates the kingdom of God from the kingdom of Caesar, but what are the teachings and practices of the early church? Do they hint that the New Testament Church took a slightly different path?

### Background

The Epistles were primarily written to explain pressing, practical needs, as well as to introduce new Christian theology. In the Mediterranean world, while Christians traveled, they were sometimes subjected to violence that everyone also suffered from, such as banditry (2 Corinthians 11:26). This was a pressing, practical need. But no ecclesiastical policy of carrying swords can be found in the New Testament documents. Though the motive and need existed to write such a policy, the New Testament authors do not take that opportunity.

Additionally, swords, even small ones, were expensive, so how could the fledgling Church buy them for the fast-growing number of disciples? Leaders needed to take care of the poor with food distribution (Acts 6:1-7). But is it conceivable that some prosperous recent converts to the new Jesus movement owned swords? Yes. However, the enemies of the Church would have accused it of violence if it had ever used swords regularly or as a policy.

By analogy, history says that the early Christians were (falsely) accused of cannibalism, a deliberate distortion of the Eucharist in which they *spiritually* partook of the blood and body of Christ. Why would not their enemies accuse them of putting society in danger, if many Christians carried swords and killed their persecutors, especially as a matter of ecclesiastical policy? On the contrary, Christians were sometimes persecuted and even martyred by unjust civil authorities.

Though the background to the epistles is, in part, an argument from silence (what a text or history does

not say), the silence is significant. The logic of history requires us to assume that if the early Christians had an opportunity and a motive to retaliate with violence as a matter of church policy, but the records demonstrate that they did not do this, then we can be certain that they in fact followed the path of peace and nonviolence.

## Peter

As noted in [Part Two](#), on the night Jesus was betrayed and arrested, he told the disciples to sell their cloak and buy a sword (Luke 22:36). Then the disciples showed two swords, and he said the two were enough. Part Two explains why Jesus never intended that the two swords should be used during the events in the Garden of Gethsemane where he was arrested. There his commands teach the Apostles nonaggression. He said to Peter: "For all who draw the sword will die by the sword" (Matthew 26:52). Peter and the others heard those words.

However, Jesus also said to Peter in the Garden, "Put your sword back in its place," meaning, back in its scabbard or holder or in Peter's belt or another article of clothing. He never said to throw the sword away, off to the side at a distance. So it is entirely possible that he and another disciple carried the two swords after the crucifixion and burial when they lived in hostile territory, and maybe some did after the Resurrection and Ascension.

Therefore, I would not deny that an *individual* Christian today may own a weapon to defend his home, for example. But he must obey the law and avoid vices like machismo and recklessness. Also, he owns a weapon privately. He does not officially represent the Church as an institution. In his ownership, he is a citizen of society.

It is important to understand that later reliable tradition says that none of the Apostles fought or even tried to fight their way out of fiery trials with swords, as some sort of misguided, twisted, violent martyrs. Instead, tradition says that all of the original Apostles but John were martyred as a direct result of persecution (John died from natural causes in old age). In fact, Peter was martyred in Rome. He requested that he should be hung upside down, since he was unworthy to be crucified "properly," as Jesus was-right side up. Therefore, a lifestyle of the sword was never part of the disciples' new walk with the resurrected Christ, as they preached his message of hope. Evidently, the example of Jesus throughout his life and in the Garden of Gethsemane made an impression on them.

In the previous section, it was noted that the silence of a text or of history may be significant, and the same can be applied here. The records do not show a widespread policy of violence in the Church, as Christians moved about in the Roman Empire, preaching the message of God's love. Peter used the sword only once, but this was before Pentecost when the Church was formally born (Acts 2). And Jesus rebuked him in the Garden of Gethsemane. Therefore, it would be misguided to build an entire church policy on this one action by a man in the heat of the moment.

Paul confirms this nonviolent policy with positive evidence.

## Paul

His Second Epistle to the Corinthians reports on his own trials during ministry, which led to "beatings, imprisonment, and riots." Even though he suffered much unjust violence from his persecutors, he does not lash out with swords, raising a small militia or sending an assassination hit squad. Per contra, he speaks of these weapons:

"Weapons of *righteousness* in the right hand and in the left" (2 Corinthians 6:7, emphasis added).

Physical weapons do occupy either hand. To strengthen this interpretation of hands empty of physical weapons, he also says in the same epistle:

3 For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. 4 The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. 5 We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ. (2 Corinthians 10:3-5)

In these two passages Paul seems glad to contrast divine and moral weapons with physical and worldly ones. He explicitly denies worldly weapons and explicitly affirms divine or moral ones in his ministry. Jesus set the example, and Paul followed him, or perhaps he followed the policy commonly practiced among other leaders in the church who knew Jesus. This indicates that the widespread use of swords in the Church never took root.

In Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians he repeats the notion that the Christian's weapons are not physical, but spiritual. Paul borrows from the image of the Roman soldier and explicitly says that the true sword is the Word of God (cf. Hebrews 4:12). Paul writes:

10 Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. 11 Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. 12 For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. 13 Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. 14 Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, 15 and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. 16 In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. 17 Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. (Ephesians 6:10-17)

Paul completely agrees with the kingdom message of Jesus, which involves spiritual warfare, such as fighting Satan (who is a real spirit being, contrary to the assertions of rationalistic theologians). Also, his Epistle to the Ephesians was probably an encyclical, meaning it was intended for several churches. This

confirms, again, that the use of physical weapons was not widespread in the early church, according to apostolic teaching.

## The State

Though neither Peter nor Paul endorse the sword for the Church as a policy after Pentecost (and Paul openly disconfirms its use), they teach that God endorses agents of the State, who carry the sword and who bring peace and justice to the world. Paul assumes that the military is part of *this* world system (1 Cor. 9:7, 14:8; 2 Tim. 2:4), and so does Jesus, incidentally (Matt. 22:7; Luke 11:21-22, 14:31-32, 19:27). But we now look at passages in the Epistles more carefully.

To begin with, Peter writes that civil authorities may punish those who do wrong:

13 Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every authority instituted among men: whether to the king, as the supreme authority, 14 or to governors, who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right. (1 Peter 2:13-14; cf. Paul's similar declaration in Titus 3:1-2)

15 If you suffer, it should not be as a murderer or thief or any other kind of criminal, or even as a meddler. (1 Peter 4:15)

Significantly, Peter also teaches in his epistle, near those two passages, that the State can go awry and persecute Christians, even though they may live a godly life. So the State does not receive unquestioned, unchallenged permission to do what it likes. Since the State does not receive direct revelations from God nor is it drenched in the revelations of a theocrat, this means that we can use reason to shape the State. Of course, the Church should offer its guidance, but ultimately the State does not have to listen to it. It would be wise if the State, however, recognized that it receives its ordination from God, so it should not oppress people.

Be that as it may, Paul, agreeing with Peter, writes that God establishes, in general terms, civil authorities who are God's servants and who bear the sword:

1 Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. 2 Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves. 3 For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong. Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right and he will commend you. 4 For he is God's servant to do you good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword for nothing. He is God's servant, an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer. 5 Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also because of conscience. 6 This is also why you pay taxes, for the authorities are God's servants, who give their full time to governing. (Romans 13:1-6)

All of these passages are full of truths, but five stand out for our purposes.

First, God ordains the State to impose order on the world, even by the sword. But the State must follow justice, not excessive policies that oppress religious or political freedom.

Second, the believer and unbeliever alike should submit to the governing authorities so the citizens can enjoy a peaceful life. This is especially incumbent on Christians who have to maintain their witness to the world, living a godly life.

Third, the agents of the State punish the wrongdoer and commend the good.

Historically, punishing criminals was harsh in the Roman Empire (too harsh by today's standards), but we can use reason to craft the State to follow justice. Regardless of the particulars, the timeless principle behind the history and the text says that punishment of wrongdoers is a God-ordained option.

Fourth, the words "judgment," "sword," "terror" (= "fear" in Greek), "wrath" and "punishment" are found in Romans 13:2-4. In the Old Testament, God does not shy away from executing justice on the surface of his planet, against his highest creation, humans. Thus, the so-called "God of the New Testament," so wrongly separated from the "God of the Old Testament," does not teach *only* peace and love-though that is the main message. With that said, in the New Covenant God uses primarily the State to bring about justice and judgment here on earth. Biblically, I would not completely rule out natural disasters, but I don't have enough knowledge to sort out the interaction between God's judging his world, and nature taking its course, so I remain silent about that (Job 40:3-5, 42:1-3).

The interrelationship between the Old and New Testaments is complex, and readers may go [here](#) to study this topic more thoroughly.

Fifth, if a Christian becomes a soldier or a police officer, then he *officially* and *publicly* serves the State. But his *private* faith and religion will make him a better servant because he strives to act with integrity. Ultimately, the Christian soldier or officer serves a just and loving God, so he follows and obeys justice and love (not one without the other). All of this depends on fluctuating circumstances. The soldier or officer must exercise wisdom as to when and how to apply love and justice. This is why he must stay in Christian fellowship, so he can ask for counsel from the body of believers. Fellowship is so essential that it is a matter of life and death-spiritually mainly, but also physically. He must also know the law, which provides a lot of guidance in difficult situations.

## **Public and Private**

However, it may be objected that the distinction between the public and private is too complicated. After all, the agent of the State works in a God-ordained institution and becomes a servant of God. So how can the two be separated? The reply is simple.

First, Christians are in the world, but not of it (John 17). Every one of us Christians feels the two-sided pull in our minds, between a good conscience and the Spirit on one side, and the world, the flesh, and

the devil, on the other. Servants of the State, because they wield extra power, feel the internal struggle more strongly.

Second, related to the first point, the Christian's allegiance is first to the Lord and to God's Church, and sometimes the internal tug-of-war is hard in the fallen world. For example, if a Christian serving in the State sees any corruption, he must take appropriate action, especially if the corruption hurts people. He may have to pay a price for his integrity, but he will be rewarded by God, if only with a good conscience and divine gratitude at the end of his life (but hopefully with human gratitude down here on earth also). He did the right thing, regardless of the rewards.

Third, God ordains the government as a whole institution, but that does not mean that it receives direct revelations from God. Sometimes parts or all of it can go astray (e.g. a tyranny). So only in an indirect sense or in the big picture are members of law enforcement and the military servants of God (members of other religions working in law enforcement and the military also become servants of God). But Christians should not believe that these institutions are infallible. Therefore, in a direct and more significant sense Christians are servants of the Lord in their personal walk with him.

Fourth, to blend the two spheres of private and public, Christians witnessing about the gospel while they are on duty should be done discreetly, tactfully, and wisely. Boasting of their status as God's servants or excessively sharing their faith is wrong. As the old saying goes-share your faith, and use words only if you have to. That is, actions speak louder than words. Only by their good conduct do Christians earn the right to be heard.

Thus, in private, Christians serve the Lord, as all Christians do at any job. In public, the ones who work in law enforcement and the military serve special branches of the State. And in this domain they have a higher responsibility due to more power than their fellow Christians who work at ordinary jobs. So it is best and less complicated to maintain the difference between the public and the private.

## Summary

To answer the question in the Introduction, the early church did *not* take "a slightly different path" from the kingdom message of Jesus.

Neither Peter nor Paul, the two main leaders of the early church, bloodied people with swords *after* Pentecost, the formal creation of the Church (Acts 2). It would be unwise to build an entire doctrine of violence on one action of a man in the heat of the moment, during Jesus' arrest before Pentecost. At least, this study shows that sword use does not become a church-wide policy. So the New Testament church followed the path of Jesus who proclaimed the kingdom of God. But both Apostles write that the State is ordained by God to use swords, in accordance with justice.

The following is the main idea threaded throughout the series, and the evidence brought forward in this article confirms it. Jesus separated the kingdom of God from the kingdom of Caesar. Also, he did not try to reestablish the theocratic kingdom of Israel (Acts 1:6-7). Peter and Paul follow Jesus.

This implies that the Church is not the State, and neither is the State the Church. The two must be kept

separate in their roles in society. This is the wisdom of God, because when the two institutions were fused or confused, trouble erupted sometimes (not always) in church history. Seeing itself as a State of sorts, it sometimes became arrogant and resorted to violence to stamp out enemies and nonconformists. On the other side, too often the State encroached on Church jurisdiction, interfering in appointments of leaders and even attacking the Pope, more than once in church history (e.g. the [Avignon Papacy](#) and the [sack of Rome](#) in 1527). The Church and State were not adequately separated in history

From the Age of Enlightenment to the present, the United States has learned that hard lesson of separation, and this explains why its citizens enjoy religious freedom and tolerance. The government must not impose one or any religion or denomination on the people. And the Church must not force itself on the government. However, the Church by its very nature and purpose may counsel and guide government leaders and advocate policies, but the leaders are not obligated to obey the Church. It may even peacefully protest when the government passes unjust legislation. But may we never again see a church denomination raise a militia to attack, torture, or execute dissidents and nonconformists!

Therefore, the Church as an institution (also distinct from the kingdom of God, which creates the Church) is "pacifist" only in its own actions and internal policies, because it follows the dictates of the kingdom of God, his active rule and dynamic reign. And Jesus the King waged only spiritual warfare, and the Apostles followed this path in early church history. But the Church violates its own Scriptures if it transfers this kingdom policy (only pacifism within itself) to the State. However, church leaders in the name of the Church or of God should *never* convene a council or general assembly in order to raise an army to fight battles and to coerce heretics and sinners to conform.

contact [James M. Arlandson](#).

Previous articles in this series:

Part One: [Christians, Pacifism, and the Sword](#)

Part Two: [Pacifism and the Sword in the Gospels](#)

Part Three: [Soldiers, Officers, and God](#)

The New International Version has been used throughout this article, but other translations may be read [here](#).

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