

# God And Government



*"Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God." (Romans 13:1)*

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“But the Bible says ‘thou shalt not kill,’ we are told. Yes, that is the sixth commandment. The fourth commandment said: ‘Remember the sabbath day to keep it holy’—so the same God that said ‘thou shalt not kill,’ in the sixth commandment provided the death penalty for violation of the fourth commandment to keep the sabbath day! Did the sixth commandment contradict the penalty of the fourth? Not at all; somebody’s reasoning is just lame. If capital punishment is murder, and if peace officers and soldiers are murderers, then one commandment prohibited what the other required! But since both capital punishment and war, under certain conditions, were divinely required *under the same law* that said, ‘thou shalt not kill,’ it follows that there is a difference between both of those things and murder. Some people need to look up the definition of murder.”

(Foy E. Wallace, Jr., *The Christian and the Government*, 5–6)

# God And Government

## Introduction

- I. The institution of civil governments was ordained by God, and the leaders of our land are “God’s minister to you for good” (Rom 13:1–7).
  - A. Christians have often find themselves in a struggle of conscience because they live under all kinds of governments and rulers.
  - B. Some have decided that since they have been mistreated by the government, they were justified in going to war against it.
  - C. Throughout history brethren have often disagreed on the subject of how Christians should relate to the civil government.
- II. The emphasis of the New Testament is on you spending your time sharing the good news of Christ, not trying to overthrow the civil state (cf. Luke 19:10).
  - A. Christians are to be model citizens, even in trying circumstances.
  - B. Considering present world conditions and the fact that our nation is in a state of great moral decline, let us note God’s view of government and then see how we are to relate to it.

## Discussion

### I. The World In Which Our Lord Lived

- A. A world of *slavery*—there were approximately three slaves to every free man in the Roman Empire.
  1. Under the influence of Roman law, a slave was usually considered to be a person owned by another, without rights, and—like any other form of personal property—to be used and disposed of in whatever way the owner may wish.
  2. The Romans based much of their society on the exploitation of slavery.
  3. Their economic system became heavily dependent on the widespread existence of slave labor.
  4. Slaves labored in the mines and in the empire’s many farms and potteries.
  5. The state’s public works projects were largely completed and maintained by slaves.
  6. The government’s state bureaucracy also depended on educated slaves to keep the administration of the empire running.
  7. Even key institutions like the state’s mints or the distribution of the corn dole to poor Romans depended on slaves.
  8. Other educated slaves also kept the private industries going, by functioning as their accountants and clerks.
  9. Other vital services were provided by literate slaves who served as teachers, librarians, scribes, artists and entertainers—and even doctors.
  10. In the private houses of Rome, it was slaves who were the servants of their Roman masters, watching over their private lives.

11. From the man who cleaned the sewers to the emperor's scribe, slaves were an essential part of Roman society.
  12. In the latter centuries of the Roman empire slavery began gradually to decrease in importance as the rise of Christianity demanded more benevolence—and the supply of slaves began to dwindle.
- B. A world of *absolute rulers*—the very antithesis of democracy—all power was in one man's hands.
1. The Roman passion for power is infamous.
  2. After the reign of Caesar Augustus the Roman Senate would never again have any real authority—they served only to endorse the wishes of the emperor.
  3. While Augustus and his successors would treat them with a modicum of respect the real power was in the hands of the emperor.
  4. To insure his own safety, the emperor relied on his personal bodyguard—the Praetorian Guard, who, within a few decades, would wield power unforeseen even by the Emperor Augustus.
- C. A world of *high taxes* (Luke 2:1).
1. The census was used for military service and taxation.
  2. Jews, however, were exempt from Roman military service.
  3. “With the establishment of the empire, Augustus Caesar created a regular bureaucracy for conducting the census and collecting taxes (see Lk 2:1). The provinces were subjected to both a poll tax and a land tax. The revenue supported the army, the imperial household, government salaries, road maintenance and public works, as well as the dole of grain for the Roman masses.” (John H. Walton, ed., *Archaeological Study Bible*)
- D. A world of *persecution*—people were chattel for the Romans.
1. In Roman society people were treated differently based on their wealth, gender, and citizenship.
  2. Women did not get the right to vote or hold office.
  3. If you had more money, you got more voting power.
  4. This may sound unfair, but it was a big change from other civilizations where the average person had no say at all.
  5. Roman law regarded slaves as mere chattel.
  6. They were subject to the will of their masters, against which they enjoyed no protection.
  7. Punishments inflicted upon slaves were merciless.
  8. Hard labour, whippings, branding, breaking of the joints or bones, branding of the forehead with letters denoting the slave as a runaway, liar or thief and crucifixion were all punishments which were inflicted upon slaves.
  9. So too, being thrown to the wild beasts in the circuses or even being burnt alive in a cloak soaked in pitch.
- E. The solution given by Christ: “Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's” (Matt 22:15–22).
1. Christ did not come to seek social change, overthrow the government or lead a civil rights march.
  2. The problems of His day were far more severe than ours.

3. Christians should not be known as civil protesters—as those who criticize and demean authority.
    - a) We must speak out against sin and immorality without hesitation.
    - b) But we must honor those who have authority over us—even when we have to hold our nose to do so.
  4. “As a fact, the supreme magistrate for the Roman Christians in the year 58 was a dissolute young man, intoxicated by the discovery that he might do almost entirely as he pleased with the lives around him; by no defect however in the idea and purpose of Roman law, but by fault of the degenerate world of the day. Yet civil authority, even with a Nero at its head, was still in principle a thing divine.” (H.C.G. Moule, *The Epistle To The Romans*, 349)
- F. The relation of the Christian to civil government imposes a question, “What is civil government?”
1. In the negative, *civil* government is not *moral* government.
  2. The civil government does not legislate morality, but rather what is civil in society.
  3. The civil government is not designed to punish immorality, but rather that which is uncivil.
    - a) We owe Caesar only what is civil.
    - b) We owe God that which is moral and religious.
    - c) Civil statutes define *crime*, not sin.
    - d) Divine statutes deal with *sin*, not crime.
    - e) While it is not the function of civil government to legislate morality, but rather what is civil, they do enforce certain moral precepts—murder, perjury and theft—not as the commands of God, but as violations of civil relations.
    - f) Civil government does not enforce the commands of God, for then it would have to pass legislation on evil thoughts and lust.
  4. The history of the Holy Roman Empire, with all of her history of religious bishops and political rulers, popes and emperors, afford ample proof that the functions of religious and political administration should remain completely separate.
    - a) If the government were to adopt the gospel as the code of civil law, then it would be the duty of the courts to *forgive* every murderer or felon without respect of persons—that would destroy civil governments completely.
    - b) Likewise, if the legal and penal statutes of civil government were adopted religiously, it would destroy the blessings of the gospel!
  5. There is no greater mark of political wisdom than that which was displayed by the founding fathers of this republic.
  6. The First Amendment to the United States Constitution says, “Congress shall make no laws respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.”

## II. Government Is Ordained By God (Rom 13:1)

- A. “Here the primary emphasis is on the *authority* of governments to rule. It should not be inferred from this passage that all *rulers* are chosen by God, but rather that all *rule* is divinely ordained. Governments are set to enforce law. Since most people will not be ruled by love, they must be ruled by law. That is inevitable in an imperfect world. So God has ordained that there should be ruling authorities to keep law and order. It is probably true, in the last analysis, that any government is better than no government. Anarchy is the worst state into which human society can come. When and where there is no governmental authority, human life and property are unsafe. Where there is no strong central authority, the resulting anarchy is chaotic confusion and devastating destruction.” (Ralph Earle, *Word Meanings In The New Testament*, 204)
- B. Power belongs to God (Ps 62:11).
1. He has delegated limited authority to civil government—to resist civil authority is to resist God Himself!
  2. Government is an institution like marriage.
    - a) The institution itself is ordained by God.
    - b) Abusers do not diminish the value of the institution.
  3. “To make such submission to earthly governments seem more reasonable and necessary he informs them that all power is of God, and that civil governments are ordained of God. He who denies this fact denies the voice of inspiration. The fact that governments sometimes turn out bad, and do unjust things, does not prove Paul’s statement to be untrue. The devil sometimes controls the actions of governments, but that does not prove that all governments belong to the devil. The devil sometimes gets into churches and causes them to do evil and unjust things, but that does not prove that the devil owns and controls all churches. The design of civil government is to promote the security and the well-being of its citizens; and there would be no security of life and property, if there were no human governments.” (R.L. Whiteside, *A New Commentary On Paul’s Letter To The Saints At Rome*, 258)
- C. Sinful men have always abused God’s gifts.
1. Wicked rulers are sometimes a part of God’s plan to punish wicked nations and allow evil to run its course toward destruction.
  2. God rules in the kingdoms of men (Dan 5:21).
  3. The idea that the God of heaven sets up kings and deposes them forms a major part of the fabric of the book of Daniel (Dan 2:20–21, 37–38).
- D. David’s horror when he had occasion to kill Saul (1 Sam 24:1–7).
1. By removing the corner of Saul’s garment David was most likely making Saul’s robe, the obvious symbol of his kingship, noncompliant with God’s law of the tassels (Num 15:37–41; Deut 22:12).
  2. David recognized that he had struck a blow not just at Saul, but also at the Lord.
  3. This was more than an act against the king—it was rebellion against the Lord, who had commanded Israelites not to curse their rulers (Exod 22:28).
  4. Saul was the *anointed* of the Lord (1 Sam 24:6).
  5. Saul had been given his position by God and only God could take it from him.
- E. Governments exist to punish evil and reward good (we will discuss this in our next lesson in this series).

### III. Our Duty To The Civil Government

- A. We must be in subjection to them and their laws (Rom 13:1).
1. This is a statement of the rule of God in the affairs of this world.
  2. If God has appointed every civil ruler, every governing authority, then why should any Christian fear submitting to that which God has appointed?
  3. Caligula, Claudius, and Nero (those Roman emperors spanning the lifetime of the Roman church up until Paul's writing) had ascended to power with God's permission and by His direction—as have the rulers of today.
  4. Paul makes no distinction between good rulers and evil rulers.
  5. He makes no distinction between fair laws and unfair laws.
  6. "I am amazed that in spite of the clarity of this command, many people persist in disobeying it, not only in American society and culture but in others as well. Jesus never taught His people to storm the Bastille, revolt against the king, kill unjust rulers, march on city hall, barricade an administration building on campus, lead a sit-in at the president's office, harass leaders, or violate the law. The form of government was never an issue. It doesn't matter if it's capitalistic or socialistic, a democracy or a monarchy." (MacArthur, *The Christian And Civil Government*, 24)
  7. Christians will impact society from the inside by living quiet, peaceable lives in godliness and honesty (1 Pet 2:13-17).
    - a) When Peter told his readers to respect all human authority, he was speaking of the Roman Empire under Nero, a notoriously cruel tyrant.
    - b) Obviously he was not telling Christians to compromise their consciences.
    - c) As Peter had told the high priest years earlier, "We ought to obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29).
    - d) But in most aspects of daily life, it was possible and desirable for Christians to live according to the law of their land.
    - e) Today, some Christians live in freedom while others live under repressive governments.
    - f) All of us are commanded to cooperate with our civil rulers as far as conscience will allow.
    - g) We are to do this "for the Lord's sake"—so that His gospel and His people will be respected.
    - h) If we are to be persecuted, it should be for obeying God, not for breaking civil laws.
- B. We are to pray for those in authority (1 Tim 2:1-4).
1. Although God is all-powerful and all-knowing, He has chosen to let us help Him change the world through our prayers.
  2. How this works is a mystery to us because of our limited understanding, but it is a reality.
- C. We are not to speak evil of our leaders (Titus 3:1-2).
1. To refrain from *slander* (Gr. βλασφημέω, *blaspheme*) requires considerable grace, but does much to commend the gospel.
  2. The phrase "rulers and authorities" refers to government officials and law—but this presents a problem for us when civil leaders think they are above the law.

- D. We must pay our taxes (Rom 13:6–7).
1. Christ paid His taxes (Matt 17:24–27).
    - a) Peter answered the tax collectors in the affirmative, either based on assumption or on Jesus’ previous practice of paying the tax.
    - b) But he did not have the means to pay this tax at the moment.
    - c) The temple tax was a distinctively Jewish levy and must be distinguished from taxes to Rome.
    - d) Our Lord’s payment of this tax by supernatural means highlighted His humility.
    - e) The king did not have to pay the tax, but He sought to avoid causing offense to others.
    - f) As God’s people, we are *foreigners* on earth because our loyalty is always to our real King—Jesus.
    - g) However, we have to cooperate with the authorities and be responsible citizens.
    - h) Jesus put money into the Temple treasury—thirty pieces of silver from that very treasury were paid to Judas (Matt 26:14–16; 27:3–10).
  2. An ambassador to another country keeps the local laws in order to represent well the one who sent him.
    - a) We are Christ’s ambassadors (2 Cor 5:20).
    - b) Are you being a good ambassador for Him to this world?
- E. Does this mean that believers should obey the wicked laws of an evil government—the Nazis, the Communists, other totalitarian regimes?
1. No, because this rule does not stand by itself in Scripture—it must be set beside the rest of the Scripture when the will of the state and the will of God conflict (Acts 4:13–21; 5:25–29).
  2. The early Christians refused to offer incense to statues of the Roman emperor because such idolatry would have been disobedience to God—and they paid with their lives.

*Conclusion*

- I. God ordained the institution of civil government to restrain evil (Rom 13:3).
- II. Sometimes governments fail in their God-given task (Eccl 8:11).



# “An Eye For An Eye”

## Introduction

- I. In our last lesson we noticed that the institution of civil governments was ordained by God and the leaders of our land serve as ministers of God (Rom 13:1–7).
  - A. Wicked rulers are sometimes a part of God’s plan to punish wicked nations and allow evil to run its course toward destruction.
  - B. God still rules in the kingdoms of men (Dan 5:21).
- II. Even though our Lord lived in a world of slavery, persecution, high taxes and tyrants, He told us to, “Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s” (Matt 22:15–22).
- III. We are to pay our taxes, pray for our leaders and obey their laws—until their laws force us to “obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29).
- IV. God ordained the institution of civil government to restrain evil (Rom 13:4).
  - A. In this lesson we want to notice *how* the civil government it so punish those who practice evil (Rom 13:4).
  - B. We will begin by examining a very misunderstood phrase concerning crime and punishment...

## Discussion

### I. An Eye For An Eye

- A. What is meant by the phrase “an eye for an eye” (Lev 24:17–21).
  - I. The central theme of this section is that of commensurate punishment for a crime, what has been called *lex talionis* (Latin, “the law of equivalent retaliation”).
    - a) This principle was a guide to the Israelite judges that punishment should be fair and should fit the crime—not to exceed it.
    - b) In modern legal terms we are discussing compensatory damages.
    - c) The expression “an eye for an eye” is often used today to disparage the supposed primitive, bloodthirsty nature of Old Testament ethics.
    - d) However, this was a very considerable advance in legal history!
    - e) “Outside Israel, a person who committed homicide could receive capital punishment, as in the Laws of Ur-Namm. Alternatively, he could be forced to give up one or more persons who belonged to him (*Hittite Laws*). If a death occurred during a brawl, the penalty was a monetary fine (*Laws of Eshnunna, Laws of Hammurabi*). According to the Hittite king Telipinu, it was up to the heir of a murdered person to decide whether the murderer would die or pay.” (Roy Gane, “Leviticus.” Pages 284–338 in *Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy*, Volume 1 of Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary: Old Testament)

- f) “The second major theme of the section, the principle of *lex talionis*, establishes a just basis for deciding the penalty for specific cases. This principle is found not only in the OT, but also in the law codes of other peoples of the Ancient Middle East. Thus it was a basic statement of the principle of justice common to many peoples. It is a heritage from the Ancient Middle East that judges harm done to others to be a criminal act, an act detrimental to the welfare of society as a whole. In Israel the application of this principle does not mandate physical injury for someone who physically harms another save in the case of murder. Rather it sets the basis for determining just compensation. The laws attached to the principle eliminate any distinction between alien and native, between rich and poor, in the application of the laws given by God to Israel. Only in a few other laws does the OT make a distinction between a slave and a free person. Thus consideration of status in the Israelite community normally was not to enter into the determination of a sentence against someone who had broken the law. *Lex talionis*, however, was to be applied literally in cases of murder, for no compensation is adequate for the loss of a human life.” (John E. Hartley, *Leviticus*, Word Biblical Commentary 4)
2. This principle removed unlimited private vengeance and feuding in favor of a law limiting the penalty for any offense to strict and equivalent retribution.
    - a) Serious offenses (such as murder) were not to be punished lightly (e.g. if the offender were wealthy and influential), and minor offenses were not to be punished exorbitantly.
    - b) All members of the community were to be treated equally by the same standard of justice.
  3. Retribution was to be fair, not arbitrary (cf. Judg 1:6–7).
  4. One application of the principle is where a false witness was to suffer the exact punishment that would have been rendered to the man against whom he had made accusation (Deut 19:16–19).
  5. The principle of “an eye for an eye” was not always carried out literally (cf. Deut 25:11–12) except in the case of an offense like murder, where life must be given for a life since human beings are made in the image of God (Num 35:31).
  6. The phrase “make it good” (Lev 24:18), has the meaning of “be complete,” “make safe,” “make good” and refers to a person who has to compensate to make good a loss for which he is responsible (Exod 21:33–34, 36, 37; 22:2–4, 6, 8, 10–14).
  7. This law, when properly applied, guides the judges in assessing damages and sets a limit on the thirst for revenge.
  8. For example, if a slave loses an eye, an eye of the one responsible is not to be plucked out but rather the slave is to be given his freedom as compensation for the eye (Exod 21:26).
  9. Ancient legal codes contained many more capital offenses than in modern western jurisprudence.

- B. Our Lord's reference to "an eye for an eye" in the Sermon on the Mount was not a rejection of this principle (Matt 5:38-39).
  - 1. It was a correction of its misinterpretation.
  - 2. The principle of "an eye for an eye" was not to apply to *personal vengeance* but rather instructed that punishments should be appropriate to fit the crime.
  - 3. The principle was to be carried out in the *legal* sphere, not for *personal* grievances.
  - 4. The principle replaces private *revenge* with the execution of appropriate *law*.
- C. What is significant in this section is the high value of human life, which is illustrated by the fact that killing of an animal involved restitution but did not call for the death penalty (Lev 24:17-18, 21; cf. Exod 21:33-37).
  - 1. This distinction contradicts the views of modern animal rights activists who consider human beings merely a species more complex and higher up on the evolutionary scale.
  - 2. If a man killed a beast, his own beast was not killed—he had to "make it good."
  - 3. "Biblical criminal law consistently differentiates between human life and the life of animals. Restitution can be made for destruction of livestock, even if intentional." (Baruch A. Levine, *Leviticus*, The JPS Torah Commentary)
  - 4. Legal codes outside the Bible present similar remedies.
  - 5. For death of an animal or such serious injury to an ox that it is unusable, the Laws of Hammurabi stipulate replacement with an animal of comparable value.
- D. Under the form of government ordained by God in Israel (a Theocracy), there were three methods of punishment for evil doers...

## II. Three Forms Of Punishment In The Bible

- A. Restitution and/or fines (Exod 22:1-15; Lev 6:1-7; Num 5:5-10).
  - 1. These are not a collection of picky laws but are *case studies* of God's principles in action.
    - a) God was taking potential situations and showing how His laws would work in the Israelites' everyday lives.
    - b) The laws listed here do not cover every possible situation but give practical examples that make it easier to decide what God wants.
  - 2. Throughout Exodus 22 we find examples of the principle of restitution—making wrongs right—if a man stole an animal, he had to repay double the beast's fair market value.
- B. Corporeal punishment (Deut 25:1-3; 2 Cor 11:23-25).
  - 1. The Bible teaches that corporal punishment can play an important role in correcting misbehavior (Prov 20:30).
  - 2. The book of Proverbs especially encourages parents to "use the rod" of discipline judiciously in child rearing (Prov 13:24; 22:15; 23:13-14).
  - 3. Gideon beat the men of Succoth with thorns and briars for refusing to help in pursuing the Midianite kings Zebah and Zalmunna (Judg 8:16).
  - 4. God declared that David's son would be subject to a flogging should he do wrong (2 Sam 7:14).

5. The Mosaic law regulated the severity of a beating as punishment for a crime (Deut 25:1-3).
  - a) The limit of forty stripes was to prevent the guilty man from being degraded or abused, presumably anticipating his restoration to the community.
  - b) For fear of miscounting and going beyond 40, later Jews limited flogging to 39, as in the case of Paul (2 Cor 11:24).
- C. Capital punishment (Exod 21:12).
  1. Capital punishment is reserved for the *state*, not the *individual*.
    - a) There is no place for *personal revenge* in administration of this punishment (Rom 12:19).
    - b) The state has responsibility, as God's civil servant on earth, to protect its citizens and to punish those who harm them (Rom 13:4).
    - c) Capital punishment provides the state the means to apply the appropriate punishment for murder.
    - d) The state does not violate the sixth commandment ("You shall not murder," Exod 20:13) by its proper exercise of capital punishment.
      - (1) The Hebrew word *ratzach*, translated "kill" in some translations, refers to acts of murder or homicide.
      - (2) A different word, *harag*, often translated "kill," occurs more commonly in the Old Testament.
    - e) Rather than violating the sixth commandment by capital punishment, the state actually supports the commandment by executing those who murder.
    - f) Clear evidence of guilt must be provided by two or more witnesses.
    - g) One witness was not sufficient to warrant capital punishment (Num 35:30; Deut 17:6).
  2. Crimes in the Old Testament age deserving of capital punishment:
    - a) Murder {intentional homicide} (Lev 24:17; cf. Exod 21:12-14).
    - b) Striking a parent (Exod 21:15, 17).
    - c) Blasphemy (Lev 24:14-16).
    - d) Sabbath breaking (Exod 31:14).
    - e) Witchcraft (Exod 22:18).
    - f) Adultery (Lev 20:10).
    - g) Rape (Deut 22:25-27).
    - h) Kidnapping (Exod 21:16).
    - i) Incest (Lev 20:11).
    - j) Homosexuality (Lev 20:13).
    - k) Bestiality (Lev 20:15; Exod 22:19).
  3. In Romans 13:4, the apostle Paul affirmed that the government is to "bear the sword" (Gr. μάχαιρα, *machaira*).
    - a) "is used of him to whom the sword has been committed, viz., to use when a malefactor is to be punished; hence, e.g. *to have the power of life and death*, Rom. 13:4..." (Joseph Thayer, *A Greek-English Lexicon Of The New Testament*, 393).
    - b) "Sword" is also defined as "judicial punishment" (James Strong, *Greek Dictionary Of The New Testament*, 46).
    - c) "*the sword* of the executioner, Acts 12:2; Rom. 8:35; Heb. 11:37; hence... *to bear the sword, to have the power of life and death*, Rom. 13:4..." (William D. Mounce, *Mounce Concise Greek-English Dictionary of the New Testament*).

- d) “Perhaps in allusion to the dagger worn by the Caesars, which was regarded as a symbol of the power of life and death ... in ancient and modern times, the sword has been carried before sovereigns. It betokens the power of capital punishment; and the reference to it here is among the many testimonies borne by Scripture against the attempt to abolish the infliction of the penalty of death for crime...” (Henry Alford, *Alford’s Greek Testament*, Vol. II, 447)
  - e) “The sword was carried habitually, if not by, then before higher magistrates, and symbolized the power of life and death which they had in their hands” (W. Robertson Nicoll, *The Expositor’s Greek Testament*, Vol. II, 697).
  - f) “Borne as the symbol of the magistrate’s right to inflict capital punishment... The Emperor Trajan presented to a provincial governor, on starting for his province, a dagger, with the words, ‘*For me*. If I deserve it, *in me*.’” (Marvin Vincent, *Word Studies In The New Testament*, Vol. III, 164)
  - g) “When a magistrate inflicts punishment on the guilty, it is to be regarded as the act of God taking vengeance on him; and on this principle only is it right for a judge to condemn a man to death. It is not because one man has by nature the right over the life of another, or because society has any right collectively which it has not as individuals; but because God gave life, and because He has chosen to take it away when a crime is committed, by the appointment of magistrates, and not by coming forth himself visibly to execute laws.” (Albert Barnes, *Notes On The New Testament, Romans*, 288)
4. The “Rainbow Covenant” is still in effect, for “whoever sheds man’s blood, by man his blood shall be shed; for in the image of God He made man” (Gen 9:5–6).
  5. All the bleeding hearts that oppose the death penalty have little respect for the awfulness of murder and foolishly try to tell us that such punishment will not deter crime when statistics pronouncedly say otherwise.

### III. What About Prison As A Punishment?

- A. There were no prisons in Old Testament Judaism, and there is no indication that the Israelites were to operate prisons.
  1. The Mosaic law allowed for a place of custody until the case was decided (Lev 24:11–12; Num 15:32–34).
  2. Prisons were a part of the Roman social order and found in many other pagan societies.
  3. Jeremiah is incarcerated in a home that was made into a prison—that indicates there was no official prison (Jer 37:15).
  4. Prisons are not endorsed in the Bible.
  5. Instantaneous payment of the penalty was exacted from criminals.
  6. Severe punishment such as whippings were given.
  7. Then the opportunity to make restitution was also given, which restored the man’s dignity.
- B. In the early days of America, the Puritans used corporeal punishment.
  1. Remember the pictures in your history books of people sitting in stocks with their heads, hands, and arms stuck through holes?
  2. We say, “Oh, how painful! I can’t imagine being that way for three or four days!”
  3. They used corporeal punishment because they understood it was Scriptural—for severe crimes the punishment could have been banishment or even execution.

- C. The Quakers first introduced the prison system in America in 1773.
  - 1. The first American prison was called the “Walnut Street Jail.”
  - 2. The prison was known as a *penitentiary* (from the Latin word for *remorse*).
  - 3. It was designed to provide a severe environment that left inmates much time for reflection, but it was also designed to be cleaner and safer than past prisons.
  - 4. As a penitentiary, solitary confinement was the goal—the isolation had a terrible psychological effect on inmates.
  - 5. By 1790 the law had established imprisonment as the normal way to punish criminals.
- D. Today there are about 2.2 million people imprisoned in the United States.
  - 1. The United States is 5% of the world’s population, but it has 25% of world’s prisoners.
  - 2. We have the highest crime rate in the Western world.
  - 3. Do prisons work? No.
  - 4. Prison has not been proven as a rehabilitation for behavior, as two-thirds of prisoners will reoffend.
  - 5. Prisons are breeding grounds for homosexuality and brutality.
  - 6. Crime schools operate within prisons.
  - 7. One writer calls the American prison system “unbiblical, inhumane, ineffective, inefficient, and idiotic.”

#### **IV. Old Testament Principles For Government**

- A. The government must act without pity (Deut 19:11-13).
- B. The government must act with integrity in criminal matters (Deut 19:15-21)
- C. The government must act without partiality (Deut 13:4-10).
- D. The government must act without delay (Deut 25:1-3; Eccl 8:11).
- E. The government can become bloodguilty (Ezek 7:20-27; 18:10-13).

#### *Conclusion*

- I. Civil government has both the right and duty to punish evil doers.
- II. No civil government has ever come up with a plan more equitable than God’s plan.

# Carnal Warfare And Self-Defense

## Introduction

- I. Some claim that *Christians* cannot be a part of the military or work for government—such work is only for *non-Christians*.
- II. They teach that only sinners can be in the military, work as a police officer, or hold political office, etc.
- III. After the American civil war, in 1866–67, brother David Lipscomb ran a series of articles in the *Gospel Advocate* and the *Christian Quarterly* against the right of a Christian to serve in the military, serve as a police officer, a postal worker, or even to sit on the local school board.
  - A. Later, these articles were printed in book form, under the title, *Civil Government: Its Origin, Mission, and Destiny, and the Christian's Relation To It*.
  - B. Some have said that Lipscomb made arguments which can never be answered—all this proves is that they never read the book!
- IV. What does the Bible say about our participation in civil government, and in particular carnal warfare?

## Discussion

### I. The “Sinner Only” Theory Of Government

- A. David Lipscomb’s basic view was that Satan is in control of all governments.
  1. Proponents of his view claim that since Satan controls all governments, then to help the government is to help Satan.
  2. However, if only a sinner can be in government then there is a double standard.
  3. If it is wrong for a *Christian* to be in the military or hold government office, then it is wrong for *everyone*—Christian or not.
  4. God has one moral law, even in such matters of marriage (“whoever” Matt 19:9).
  5. It is not a question of “Can a *Christian* be a soldier?”—the real question is, “Can *anyone* be a soldier?”
- B. The government is a minister to us “for good” (Rom 13:4).
  1. We are to do what is “good” (Gr. *agathos*) and the civil government is God’s minister to us for “good” (Gr. *agathos*).
  2. “Good” is contrary to Satan’s nature.
  3. If sin is a primary qualification for government service, then it follows that the more a man sins, the better qualified he is for public office.
  4. If sin is the primary qualification for public office, then Saddam Hussein should have been made President, members of al-Qaida should sit on Supreme Court and Osama bin Laden nominated to serve as Chief Justice!

- C. In the Old Testament, God used common men of the city to discern judicial cases.
  - 1. In the case of a rebellious son (Deut 21:18–21).
    - a) The stubborn and rebellious son in question was not a toddler who had proven naughty but a young adult who had accumulated a long track record of disobedience and willfulness.
    - b) His life had been characterized by a refusal to listen to his parents when they disciplined him.
    - c) He was now in a position to inherit their wealth and extend his unruly behavior into the community at large.
  - 2. In cases of murder (Num 35:24).
  - 3. In cases of blasphemy (Lev 24:10–16).
    - a) The Lord commanded Moses to take the accused outside the camp, then gather all who witnessed the blasphemy.
    - b) The witnesses who heard the man utter the curse were to lay their hands on his head, and the entire assembly was to stone him.
    - c) In this way the entire congregation participated in the judgment and penalty and also witnessed the consequences of committing such a sin.
    - d) The name of the Lord was to be revered and held in high esteem.
- D. Some objector comes with a “holier than thou” look and asks, “Can you picture Christ or the apostles taking a life under any circumstances?”
  - 1. I certainly can (Acts 5:1–10; 12:22–23).
  - 2. All too often people take passages that deal with the internal peaceful nature of the kingdom of heaven and apply it to civil government.

## II. New Testament Examples Of Civil Servants

- A. John’s preaching to the publicans and soldiers (Luke 3:7–14).
  - 1. Who are the *tax collectors* (publicans, KJV) (Luke 3:12)?
    - a) “The Romans farmed out the direct taxes and customs-duties to capitalists, on their payment of a certain sum *in publicum, into the public treasury*, whence they were called *publicani, publicans...* They were often chosen from the dregs of the people, and were so notorious for their extortions that they were habitually included in the same category with harlots and sinners.” (Marvin Vincent, *Word Studies In The New Testament*, Vol. I, 282–283)
    - b) Later, another publican, Zacchaeus, spoke with Jesus (Luke 19:8).
      - (1) “Salvation has come to this house” but Zacchaeus was still a government official for a pagan government (Luke 19:9–10).
      - (2) Unlike the woman taken in adultery (John 8), Zacchaeus was not told to “go and sin no more.”
  - 2. John told the soldiers to “do *violence* to no man” (Luke 3:14, KJV).
    - a) “Only here in the New Testament. Lit., *to shake violently*; hence *to agitate* or *terrify*; and so to extort money from one by terrifying him” (Vincent, *Word Studies In The New Testament*, Vol. I, 283).
    - b) “The verb is *diaseio* (only here in NT). It literally means ‘shake violently.’ In those days it was a technical, legal term, meaning ‘extort money by violence’ much like our current slang expression ‘shake down.’” (Ralph Earle, *Word Meanings In The New Testament*, 58)



- c) “The term *wages* includes rations and money. The soldiers were not to add to their receipts by pillage or extortion. Soldier’s wages were about three cents a day, so they were exposed to strong temptation. Yet John did not bid them abandon their profession, and become ascetics like himself. His teaching was practical. He allowed war as an act of government.” (J.W. McGarvey, *The Fourfold Gospel*, 77)
  - d) “He also does not forbid the soldiers (probably persons who assisted the publicans in the collection of taxes) to be soldiers, but makes the inexorable demand that they, too, should exercise neighborly love in their particular circumstances. They have to be content, he declares, with their wages, and not extort money from the people with whom they have to deal through violence, terrorization, or false accusation.” (Norval Geldenhuys, *Commentary On The Gospel Of Luke*, 139)
  - e) “Soldiers are not told to resign but to avoid the moral temptations of their profession. John does not say that working for the Roman government or serving as a soldier is in itself morally wrong, but he insists that God expects upright conduct from his people.” (Lane T. Dennis and Wayne Grudem, eds., *The ESV Study Bible*)
3. Some have tried to discount the force of these verses by saying, “That was before the church was established.”
- a) If this “reasoning” is valid, then you could never quote John.
  - b) In fact, you could never use any teaching from the four gospels as a standard of authority for conduct or worship!
- B. There were saints in “Caesar’s household” (Phil 4:22).
- 1. “Paul adds, *especially those of Caesar’s household*. This expression does not as such refer to the emperor’s blood relatives. It refers rather to all persons in the emperor’s service, whether slaves or freedmen. Such people who had been given employment in the domestic and administrative establishment of the emperor were found not only in Italy but even in the provinces.” (Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary*, 212)
  - 2. “Paul sends special greetings from the Christian brothers who are of Caesar’s household. It is important to understand this phrase rightly. It does not mean those who are of Caesar’s kith and kin. Caesar’s household was the regular phrase for what we would call the Imperial Civil Service; it had members all over the world. The palace officials, the secretaries, the people who had charge of the imperial revenues, those who were responsible for the day-to-day administration of the empire, all these were Caesar’s household.” (William Barclay, *The Letters To The Philippians, Colossians, and Thessalonians*, 87)

3. “The ‘household of Caesar’ could refer to anyone in the Roman civil service directly dependent on Caesar, including all his slaves and freedmen; it always indicated great prestige. It most likely refers here to the Praetorian Guard; if Paul was in Rome at this point, anyone who guarded him (Acts 28:16, 30) would naturally be exposed to his teaching. Even Caesar’s slaves wielded more power and prestige than most well-off free persons; the Praetorian Guard itself held the prestige of the Roman military’s elite, often rewarded by Caesar himself. Paul’s greeting would impress his readers: his imprisonment has indeed advanced the gospel (1:12–13).” (Craig S. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament*)
- C. “Erastus, the treasurer of the city” (Rom 16:23).
1. A “chamberlain of the city” (KJV) was a high officer in the court, or a receiver and treasurer of public money.
  2. Inscribed in a limestone pavement near the theater at Corinth is a phrase which reads in Latin: ERASTVS PRO AEDILITATE S P STRAVIT, and the translation is: “Erastus, in return for the aedileship, laid the pavement at his own expense.”
  3. “In 1929 an inscription was discovered at Corinth mentioning an Erastus who may have been the same one referred to in the New Testament. Located in a paved area northeast of the theater and dated to the mid-first century A.D., it reads, ‘Erastus in return for his aedileship laid [the pavement] at his own expense.’ An *aedile*, an elected official, was a city business manager responsible for such property as streets, public buildings and markets, as well as for the revenue gleaned from them. He was also a judge who decided most of the city’s commercial and financial litigation. In addition, an aedile was responsible for the public games taking place within a city.” (John H. Walton, ed., *Archaeological Study Bible*)
- D. The Philippian Jailer (Acts 16:25–36).
1. He obviously had a sword (Acts 16:27). Why?
  2. “This man’s first thought when he saw through the dust and darkness that the doors were ajar was that the prisoners had escaped. In this circumstance, it seemed to him that his only recourse was to take his own life. By Roman law, if a jailer lost a prisoner for whom he was responsible, even, it would seem, if by a natural disaster, he was liable to the same punishment that his prisoner should have suffered (cf. 12:19; 27:42). The jailer’s intention was probably to avoid the disgrace of a far worse death than by his own sword. One would expect him to have looked into the cells before he took this extreme course, but the shock of the earthquake may have temporarily robbed him of his senses.” (David J. Williams, *Acts: Understanding the Bible Commentary*)
  3. He was still on duty the next morning, after his conversion (Acts 16:36).

- E. Cornelius, a Roman centurion (Acts 10–11).
1. Cornelius was commander of a *century* in the Roman army, that is, he was in charge of one hundred soldiers.
    - a) His whole *regiment* (or “cohort”) was composed of soldiers from Italy, therefore they were not conscripts.
    - b) To find an occupation soldier who was liberal in his charity toward occupied peoples must have been a striking contrast to the usual practice of Roman soldiers, for there was a special hatred and contempt for each other by Jews and Romans.
  2. If military life is incompatible with the life of a Christian, Cornelius did not know it!
  3. He was a Roman soldier *and* a devout man, and God heard his prayers (Acts 10:2; 1 Pet 3:12).
  4. Cornelius needed to hear *words* in order to be saved (Acts 10:6, 22; 11:14).
  5. There were no *words* about leaving military service given by Peter!
  6. Conscientious objectors have devoted a lot of time and energy to discover a way to get Cornelius and the Philippian jailer out of their military positions, but they cannot find it—the burden of proof is on them.
- F. Paul’s use of soldiers (Acts 23:12–24).
1. After Paul’s arrest in Jerusalem, the Roman tribune learned of a plot by some Jews to kill Paul.
  2. He transferred Paul to the Roman administrative city of Caesarea during the night under heavy guard, going by way of Antipatris.
  3. The total force comprised of 470 armed soldiers (nearly half of the Jerusalem garrison) were willing to do violence to protect Paul’s life.
  4. Was Paul a “partaker of other people’s sins” (1 Tim 5:22)?
  5. It is inconceivable that it was right for Paul to ask for protection but that those who gave the protection were sinning!
  6. If you call a police officer to defend you are you asking him to sin?
  7. We often pray that we may worship “without fear of molestation”—are we praying for the military to provide for our safety?

### III. What About “Self Defense”?

- A. The Old Testament permitted taking the life of a robber (Exod 22:2–3).
1. An act of self-defense against a *thief* who broke in at night did not produce bloodguilt even if the thief died, but killing an intruder in broad daylight was not justifiable.
  2. One who entered a house by daylight fully exposes himself and the weapons he carries.
  3. Did God care less about the life of the robber back then than He does now?
- B. Paul commanded us to “provide” for our own—let us not be so carnal as to think this only means money (1 Tim 5:8).

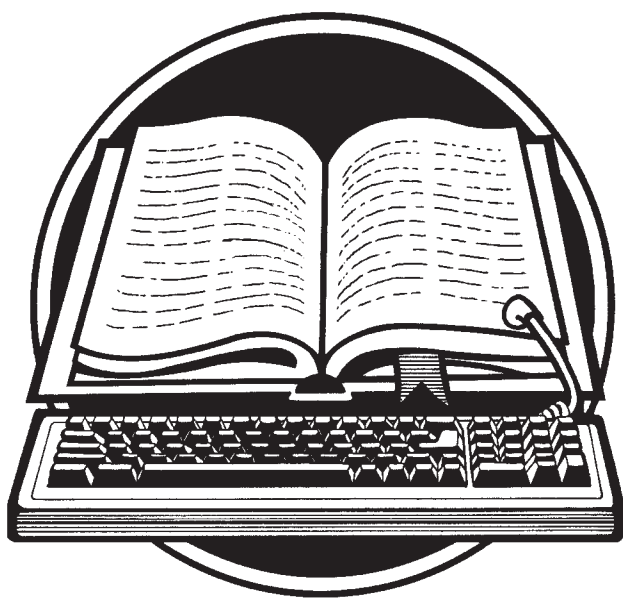
## IV. A Few Objections Considered

- A. “But the Lord tells us to love our enemies” (cf. Luke 6:27–28).
1. This passage, along with many others, has been abused by those who teach non-resistance and unreserved forgiveness for criminals.
  2. Some brethren abuse Matthew 5:40 to the point that if they owned a department store and someone stole an overcoat, they would drag them back in and force them to take a sport coat as well.
  3. I am constantly amazed when religious people tell us to “love” dictators, but they somehow forget the millions of people slain by the dictators—where is our love for those under brutal oppression?
  4. If this verse is an injunction that resistance and force are wrong in principle without exception, then the apostles missed it!
    - a) Paul struck Elymas the sorcerer blind (Acts 13:6–11).
    - b) Ananias and Sapphira were stricken dead by the Lord (Acts 5:1–10).
    - c) Herod was killed by the Lord (Acts 12:22–23).
  5. I have often heard conscientious objectors say that the military teaches you to *bate*—I have yet to find anyone in the military who has ever been taught such.
    - a) When our government invaded Afghanistan, cargo planes loaded with food were right behind the bombers!
    - b) Do you remember the pictures of the soldiers in Iraq kissing the hands of our soldiers?
    - c) *The Marine Corps Prayer*: “Almighty Father, whose command is over all and whose love never fails, make me aware of Thy presence and obedient to Thy will. Keep me true to my best self, guarding me against dishonesty in purpose in deed and helping me to live so that I can face my fellow Marines, my loved ones and Thee without shame or fear. Protect my family. Give me the will to do the work of a Marine and to accept my share of responsibilities with vigor and enthusiasm. Grant me the courage to be proficient in my daily performance. Keep me loyal and faithful to my superiors and to the duties my country and the Marine Corps have entrusted to me. Make me considerate of those committed to my leadership. Help me to wear my uniform with dignity, and let it remind me daily of the traditions which I must uphold. If I am inclined to doubt; steady my faith; if I am tempted, make me strong to resist; if I should miss the mark, give me courage to try again. Guide me with the light of truth and grant me wisdom by which I may understand the answer to my prayer. Amen” <<http://www.mcl1328.com/hymn.htm>>
- B. “The Lord told Peter to put up his sword” (cf. Matt 26:51–52).
1. The Sanhedrin dispatched a group of Jews (Luke 22:52) and Romans (John 18:3, 12, “detachment” translated from *speira*, “a Roman cohort”) to arrest our Lord.
  2. Peter pulled out a sword in an attempt to prevent the arrest of Jesus.
    - a) Yes, Peter had a sword—what did the Lord tell him to do with it?
    - b) Was he to throw it away or sheathe it?

3. Peter was not the only one of the apostles to carry a sword (Luke 22:49–51).
    - a) They had heard the Sermon on the Mount in person, but came to a far different conclusion than some of my brethren today!
    - b) Jesus knew His disciples were armed, yet He did not condemn them for it—He restrained the use of the sword here.
  4. When the Lord said, “Permit even this” it is evident that the sword would not be restrained on all occasions, but only on this one.
- C. “Paul tells us not to render vengeance” (cf. Rom 12:19).
1. This is true—I cannot seek *personal vengeance* as a vigilante.
  2. God is the only one who can render vengeance (Rom 12:19), but He has delegated this authority to the government (Rom 13:4).

#### Conclusion

- I. People generally use the term “Conscientious Objector” to refer to one whose conscience causes him to object to doing military service.
  - A. Those in the military, those who defend our liberty with their own lives, also have a conscience—they, too, are conscientious.
  - B. They are conscientious objectors to those who would turn the *Sermon on the Mount* into an international *Bill of Rights* for criminals and tyrants.
  - C. They are conscientious objectors to the theory that war is the supreme evil in the world.
  - D. They are conscientious objectors to the theory that wicked and ungodly men are the only ones qualified to rule over us.
  - E. They are conscientious objectors to the theory that God has two moral laws for men today—one for the Christian and one for the alien sinner.
  - F. They are conscientious objectors to the theory it is impossible to be a “devout man” who “fears God” while wearing your countries uniform.
  - G. They are conscientious objectors to the theory that God will not listen to the prayers of a military officer.
  - H. They are conscientious objectors to the theory that one cannot have “a good reputation among all the nation” while bearing arms.
- II. A Christian who does not know how to behave in time of war does not know how to behave in times of peace—the instructions are the same.
- III. We need to be consistent: If you elect a man to office he will take an oath to protect our constitution from all enemies, foreign and domestic—when he exercises those powers, do not condemn him.
- IV. If you believe it is sinful to be in the military then stay out of it!
  - A. Will you be consistent and withdraw yourself from those who are “living in” this “sin”?
  - B. If a soldier is a murderer for taking a life in time of war, then all soldiers are murderers, either actually or potentially.



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