

God and Government



“Therefore submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord’s sake, whether to the king as supreme, or to governors, as to those who are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and for the praise of those who do good. For this is the will of God, that by doing good you may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men—as free, yet not using liberty as a cloak for vice, but as bondservants of God. Honor all people. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the king.” (1 Peter 2:13–17)

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God And Government (#1)

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).
- II. Christians have often find themselves in a struggle of conscience because they live under all kinds of governments and rulers.
 - A. Some have decided that since they have been mistreated by the government, they were justified in going to war against it.
 - B. Throughout history brethren have often disagreed on the subject of how Christians should relate to the civil government.
- III. The emphasis of the New Testament is on you spending your time offering people eternal salvation, not trying to alter the civil state (cf. Luke 19:10).
 - A. Christians are to be model citizens, even in trying circumstances.
 - B. Considering present world conditions, 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.
- B. A world of absolute rulers—antithesis of democracy—all power was in one man’s hands.
- C. A world of high taxes (Luke 2:1).
- D. A world of persecution—people were chattel for the Romans.
- 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.
 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*, p. 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; and Divine statutes deal with sin, not crime.
 - d) 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.
 - e) 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, saying: “Congress shall make no laws respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.”

II. Our Duty To The Civil Government

- A. We must be in subjection to them and their laws (Rom. 13:1).
 1. Paul makes no distinction between good rulers and evil rulers.
 2. He makes no distinction between fair laws and unfair laws.
 3. We will affect society from the inside by living quiet, peaceable lives in godliness and honesty (1 Pet. 2:13–17).
- B. We are to pray for those in authority (1 Tim. 2:1–4).
- C. We are not to speak evil of our leaders (Titus 3:1–2).
- D. We must pay our taxes (Rom. 13:6–7).
 1. Christ paid His taxes (Matt. 17:24–27).
 2. 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).
- E. If the government orders us to do those things prohibited by the Lord, we must “obey God rather than men” (Acts 4:13–21; 5:25–29).
- F. “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.” (John MacArthur, *The Christian And Civil Government*, p. 24).
- G. Daniel had the proper spirit of submission to government (Dan. 1:3–13).

III. 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*, p. 204).
- B. "God has spoken once, twice I have heard this: that power belongs to God" (Psa. 62:11).
1. He has delegated 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*, p. 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. 2:20–21, 37–38).
- D. David's horror when he had occasion to kill Saul (1 Sam. 24:1–7).

IV. Governments Are To Punish Evil Doers (Rom 13:2)

- A. Under the form of government ordained by God in Israel (a Theocracy), there were three methods of punishment for evil doers:
1. Restitution and/or fines (Exo. 22:1–15; Lev. 6:1–7; Num. 5:5–10).
 2. Corporeal punishment (Deut. 25:1–3; 2 Cor. 11:23–25).
 3. Capital punishment (Lev. 20:2; cf. Rom. 13:4).
 - a) "Sword" (Rom. 13:4) {Gr. μάχαιρα, machaira} "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...*" (Joseph Thayer, *A Greek-English Lexicon Of The New Testament*, p. 393).
 - b) "Sword" is also defined as "judicial punishment" (James Strong, *Greek Dictionary Of The New Testament*, p. 46).

- c) “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, p. 447).
- d) “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, p. 697).
- e) “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, p. 164).
- f) “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*, p. 288).
- g) 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. 9:6).

B. What about prison as a punishment?

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

3. The Quakers first introduced the prison system in America.
 - a) The first American prison was called the “Walnut Street Jail.”
 - b) By 1790 the law had established imprisonment as the normal way to punish criminals.
 4. There are over a million prisoners in the United States today.
 - a) We have the highest crime rate in the Western world.
 - b) Do prisons work? No.
 - c) Prisons are breeding grounds for homosexuality and brutality.
 - d) Crime schools operate within prisons.
 - e) One writer calls the American prison system “unbiblical, inhumane, ineffective, inefficient, and idiotic.”
- C. Crimes deserving punishment in the Old Testament:
1. Striking a parent (Exo. 21:15).
 2. Blasphemy (Lev. 24:14).
 3. Sabbath breaking (Ex. 31:14).
 4. Witchcraft (Exo. 22:18).
 5. Adultery (Lev. 20:10).
 6. Rape (Deut. 22:25).
 7. Kidnapping (Exo. 21:16).
 8. Incest (Lev. 20:11).
 9. Homosexuality (Lev. 20:13).
 10. Bestiality (Lev. 20:15).
- D. Old Testament principles for government:
1. The government must act without pity (Deut. 19:13, 15–21).
 2. The government must act without partiality (Deut. 13:6–10).
 3. The government must act without delay (Deut. 25:1–3).
 4. The government can become bloodguilty (Ezek. 7:20–27; 18:10–13).

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).

God And Government (#2)

Introduction

- I. Some claim that “Christians” can not 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. Lipscomb’s basic view was that Satan is in control of all governments.
 1. Proponents claim that since Satan controls all governments, then to help the government is to help Satan.
 2. 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 (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. 13:3).
 1. “Good” is contrary to Satan’s nature.
 2. 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.
 3. If sin is the primary qualification for public office, then Saddam Hussein should be made President, members of al-Qaida should sit on Supreme Court and Osama bin Laden serve as Chief Justice!
- C. In the Old Testament, God used common men of the city to discern judicial cases (Deut. 21:18–21; Num. 35:24; Lev. 24:16).
- 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 men take passages which deal with the internal peaceful nature of the Kingdom and apply it to civil government.

II. New Testament Examples Of Civil Servants

A. John's preaching to the publicans and soldiers (Luke 3:7–16).

1. Who are the tax collectors (publicans, KJV) (Luke 3:11)?
 - 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, pp. 282–283)
 - b) Later, another publican, Zacchaeus, spoke with Jesus (Luke 19:8).
 - c) "Salvation has come to this house" but Zacchaeus was still a government official (Luke 19:9).
 - d) 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, p. 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 NT*, p. 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*, p. 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*, p. 139).
3. Some have tried to discount to 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*, p. 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*, pg. 87).

- 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. "Erastus. Different from the one mentioned in Acts xix. 22 and 2 Tim. iv. 20; for the person sending the greeting here was not, like Timothy, a traveling assistant of the apostle, but the *administrator of the city-chest*, city-chamberlain in Corinth; unless we should assume—for which, however, no necessity presents itself—that he had given up his civic position and is here designated according to his *former office*." (H.A.W. Meyer, *Meyer's Commentary On The NT*, Vol. V, p. 575).
- D. The Philippian Jailer (Acts 16:25–36).
1. He obviously had a sword (Acts 16:27). Why?
 2. 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 over 100 men.
 - a) His whole 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. He 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 jailer out of their military positions, but they can not find it—the burden of proof is on them.
- F. Paul's use of soldiers (Acts 23:12–23).
1. Was Paul a "partaker of other people's sins" (1 Tim. 5:22)?
 2. It is inconceivable that it was right for Paul to ask for protection but that those who gave the protection were sinning!
 3. If you call a police officer to defend you are you asking him to sin?
 4. We often pray that we may worship "without fear of molestation"—are we praying for the military to provide for our safety?
 5. Things worthy of death (Acts 23:29; 25:11; 25:25; 26:31).

III. What About “Self Defense”?

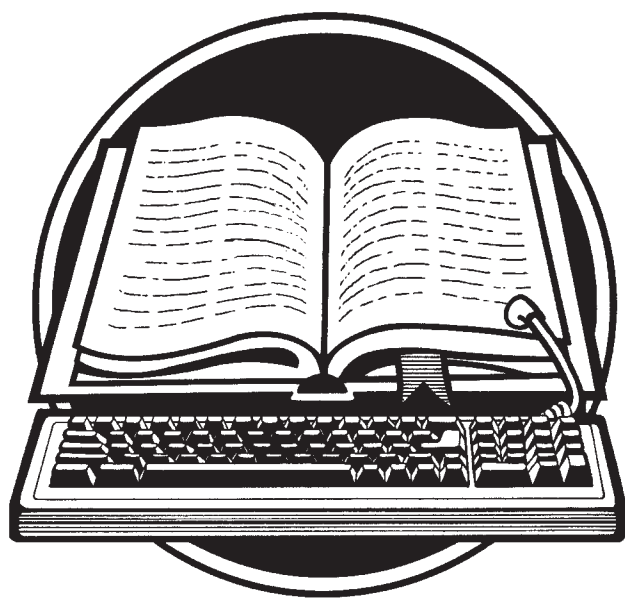
- A. The Old Testament permitted taking the life of a robber (Exo. 22:1–2).
 - 1. An act of self-defense against a *thief* who broke in at night did not produce bloodguilt even if the thief died, but killing an intruder in broad daylight was not justifiable.
 - 2. One who entered a house by daylight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

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 “hate”—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) Remember the pictures of the soldiers in Iraq kissing the hands of our soldiers?
- 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. Not only Peter, but *all* of the apostles carried swords (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 can not 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 can not 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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