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MAY A CHRISTIAN EVER USE FORCE?

Douglas W. Hill

Can a Christian pick up an M16 and shoot someone? May a Christian be a pilot & drop a payload of bombs on a target that results in the death of people? May a policeman ever stop a criminal by shooting him? Let us examine God's word on this matter.

Most people are aware of the Old Testament prohibition, "Thou shalt not kill" (Ex. 20:13). Yet, many are not familiar with the fact that this is better translated as, "Thou shalt not **murder**" (Strong 07523; YLT; NKJV; etc). The point of Exodus 20:13 is a prohibition on the intentional taking of innocent human life. This becomes ever so clear when we even briefly consider the following facts:

1. God provided refuge for those who accidentally killed another (Num. 35:11). Thus, *accidental killing* is not in the same category as murder.
2. "If a thief be found breaking up, and be smitten that he die, there shall no blood be shed for him. If the sun be risen upon him, there shall be blood shed for him;" (Ex. 22:2-3). It is one thing to face a person breaking in and stop them (self-defense). It is another to hunt him down the next day and take his life (revenge / murder). *Self-defense* is not placed in the same category as murder.
3. Also, God authorized Old Testament Israel to establish & defend their nation with the use of physical force (Joshua 6; 1 Sam. 15:3; etc.).

I point these out because people often take the commandment, "Thou shalt not kill" to mean there is never any just reason to take life. But even under the Old Law where the command was given, we see that God's word makes a distinction between murder versus accidental killing, self-defense & national action. None of this authorizes intentional murder, personal

vengeance, nor indiscriminate use of national force. It just shows that there are occasions that God recognizes as justifiable.

Even before the O.T. Law, God spoke on this issue to Noah. He said, "And surely your blood, the blood of your lives, will I require; At the hand of every beast will I require it. And at the hand of man, even at the hand of every man's brother, will I require the life of man. **Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed:** For in the image of God made he man." (Gen. 9:5-6) Note that the prohibition against taking innocent life, includes the necessity of man taking the life of the guilty. The principle behind this statement is that God places such value upon mankind (we are made in His image), that anyone one who murders, forfeits their right to live. And someone must enforce this penalty - thus God authorized man to kill the murderer. Justice is permitted here, not personal vengeance nor willful murder.

Having seen all this, what does the N.T. say? We know that Christ's kingdom is spiritual & is not established, supported or defended by force (John 18:36; 2 Cor. 10:4). Does this mean a Christian cannot be a policeman, serve in the military or ever exercise self-defense? Consider this:

1. God's word says that "the higher powers" exist by His authority and "if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the **sword** in vain: for he is a minister of God, an avenger for wrath to him that doeth evil." (Rom. 13:4). God has authorized the use of the sword in this context. This is not personal vengeance (Rom. 12:18-21) nor is it wanton murder, but is the right & proper punishment of evil-doers.
2. Can a Christian serve in the government in this capacity? The Philippian Jailer had a sword (Acts 16:27). After his conversion he continued to operate as a jailer (Acts 16:35-36). Cornelius was a Centurion (Acts 10:1). In Acts 8 we read of the Ethiopian Eunuch, who after being converted "went on his way" back to Ethiopia where he had a position of some authority. Some look at these illustrations and still may struggle. Yet consider even further what John the immerser said as he addressed soldiers, "And soldiers also asked him, saying, And we, what must we do? And he said unto them, Extort from no man by violence, neither accuse any one wrongfully; and be content with your wages." (Luke 3:13) His solution was not to say, "Stop being soldiers". Rather he said, "Use your authority properly & don't abuse it." Some may ask, but wasn't John under the Old Law? Yes, but he also had a special mission! John was preparing the way for Jesus (Luke 3:4) and was preaching the gospel (Luke 16:16)!

John did not tell people to do things Christ would disapprove of!

Now, having established the distinction between murder & authorized justice, there remains the final matter of conscience. For even in things allowed by God, sometimes our conscience restricts us from personally doing what others may scripturally do in good conscience. We need to understand the difference between revealed truth & personal conviction (Rom. 14:3, 14). There are people who cannot in good conscience be in positions where they may have to take a life. When I graduated from High school, I seriously considered joining the military. I saw many benefits to the disciplined life they offered. I have also considered being a policeman. Yet one thing that kept me from both positions was my conscience. I did not want to be in a position where I would have to take a life. I understand what is permissible by God. But I had a strong conviction that I would suffer in my conscience if I did that. The Bible says that if we violate our conscience, then we sin (Rom. 14:22-23). Over time, I believe I have grown in my conscience & can better handle things than previously. That doesn't mean I want to be in a situation where this is tested, though.

So, Christians may server in the military, in the police, or even practice self-defense - if they can do so in good conscience. If your conscience bothers you, then respect that. If you are in the military, perhaps you can request non-combat duty. Understanding the Truth allows some to serve in a different capacity, so that their conscience will not be defiled. Some may still need to request a discharge because of their conscience. And some, once they see the Truth, find they no longer have a problem of conscience in this matter.

Whatever the case is with you, dear reader, remember Paul's warning to Timothy that we need to hold faith & a good conscience. If we do not, then we will make shipwreck concerning the faith (1 Tim. 1:19). May God richly bless you until a full understanding of His word, "that ye may approve the things that are excellent; that ye may be sincere and void of offence unto the day of Christ" (Phil. 1:10).

THINGS TO REMEMBER

- **Business Meeting** – Sun. July 30 @ 5pm.
- **Men’s & Ladies Classes** - Every 2nd Sun. @ 5pm.
- **Door to Door** - Every Tuesday @ 6pm.
- **Home Bible Study** – Sat., August 5 & 19.
- **Gospel Meeting** - Ron Roberts, Oct.15-20, 2006.
- **GM in Knoxville** - Doug Hill, Nov. 17-19, 2006.

- **GM** - Jeff Smith, April 15-20, 2007.
- **GM** - R. McPherson, Oct.14-19, 2007.
- **GM** - TBA April 2008.
- **GM** - Lanny Smith, Oct.12-17, 2008.

PRAY FOR

Mag Bumbalough, Thelma Cunningham, Holly Jernigan (Joyce Gardner's niece), **Mary Cox, John Ross Key** (Mary Cox's son), **Marci Miller** (Alisa Fletcher's mother), **Monie Petty, Dave Poteet, Misty Poteet, Rose Taylor, Dorris Williams, Horace Jones** (Doris William's brother), **Ruth Williams** (Betty England's niece), **Robert England, Pauline Hickey, Nanny Witaker, Dylan Roberts** (grandson of Marilyn's friend). Those in Iraq: **Jason Zelenak** (Alisa Fletcher's brother, returns home August).

AUGUST 2006 DUTIES:

	8/6/06	8/13/06	8/20/06	8/27/06
SUNDAY-MORNING				
Greeter	Ralph Sims	Michael Fletcher	Ralph Sims	Ralph Sims
Announcements	Michael Fletcher	Kevin Blankenship	Michael Fletcher	Matt Eller
Reading	Matt Eller Ps 138	Jack Stafford Ps 139	Anthony Rece Ps 140	Micah Eller Ps 141
Song Leader	David Price	Harold Frazier	Adam Featherston	Mark Welte
Opening Prayer	Mark Eller	Mark Eller	Jared Gwin	David Price
Lord's Supper Lead	Thom Steger	Anthony Rece	Mark Eller	Harold Frazier
Lord's Supper Assist	Jack Stafford	Mike Tenpenny	Jake Hale	Ben Trute
	Josh Poteet	Micah Eller	Harold Frazier	Mike Tenpenny
Closing Prayer	Chad Sims	Jake Hale	Mike Tenpenny	Josh Poteet
	Micah Eller	Matt Eller	Jerry Taylor	Jack Stafford
SUNDAY-EVENING				
Opening Prayer	Kevin Blankenship	Adam Featherston	David Price	Kevin Blankenship
Song Leader	Adam Featherston	Sam Gardner	Mark Welte	
Closing Prayer	Anthony Rece	Wesley Geer	Jack Stafford	Wesley Geer
Lord's Supper Lead	Harold Frazier	Kevin Blankenship	Sam Gardner	Thom Steger
Speaker / Invitation		Jared Gwin		Jared Gwin
Group	1	2	3	4
WEDNESDAY-EVENING				
Opening Prayer	Doug Hill	Thom Steger	Sam Gardner	Michael Fletcher
Song Leader	Mark Welte	Chad Sims	Chad Sims	Doug Hill
Closing Prayer	Sam Gardner	Josh Poteet	Anthony Rece	Jerry Taylor
Invitation	Thom Steger	Mark Welte	Doug Hill	Adam Featherston