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## Military Service & The Christian

[Harold Smith Sermon on April 20, 2002]

Due to the present war that has been declared on terrorism by the President of the United States, as well as speculation in various publications, the question has been raised regarding what the Bible teaches concerning the depth of involvement of a Christian in the national situation or the world situation that we now find ourselves. Just how much involvement should there be? Is it right to show our support for this war on terrorism by displaying flags? Since this war is already acknowledged to be a lengthy endeavor, something that will not be completely finished within the scope of the next few months or few years even, other individuals are concerned that things may get much worse, especially if there is another terrorist event that takes place in this country. As a result, they are concerned that there may be, down the line, a re-institution of the draft. Those individuals that are most concerned are those who have teenagers and want to know how to instruct their teenagers regarding serving in the military. Is it the patriotic duty of all members of the Church to back the human government under which they live? Is military service our Christian duty and patriotic duty? Does God approve of a Christian fighting for the country in which he lives?

With ideas and questions such as these, and the foreboding future of worldwide terrorism and chaos that is all around us, it is important that we understand God's clear instructions on the topics of patriotism and military service. We need to know what God says about it, not what human reasoning may lead us to conclude.

### Defining Patriotism

Let us begin by asking: is it wrong, as a Christian, to be patriotic? The definition of patriotism is "a devoted love, support of and willingness to defend one's country"—and can be summed up by the term "national loyalty". So, can a Christian fulfill all that patriotism requires?

I grew up in the Volunteer State, Tennessee, where two years of Army Reserve Officer Training Corp (ROTC) was required during the time I attended High School. Tennessee is a patriotic state which, at one point, had one of the highest percentages of volunteers per capita of any state in the Union, hence the reason it is called the Volunteer State. I grew up feeling myself to be a patriot, studying the founding of this country. My buddies in school were patriotic. When the North Koreans captured the USS Pueblo, we were all ready to run down at 16 or 17 and join the military and go over there and teach those rotten North Koreans a lesson for fooling around with the powerful United States of America—I know something about patriotism, to the point that I was accepted to the Air Force Academy. However, that type of patriotism is not the kind of patriotism that the Bible teaches us.

What I would like to do is help us understand the kind of patriotism that God has displayed. Although God was, as we go back and read the story throughout the Old Testament, extremely devoted to His nation, loved it and supported it, God has not always fulfilled the third part of the definition of patriotism—He has not always defended the nation. Let us notice in LUK 19:41-42:

*Now as He [Jesus] drew near, He saw the city [Jerusalem] and wept over it, saying, "If you had known, even you, especially in this your day, the things that make for your peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes.*

Jesus explained one reason why that nation went the direction it did: it was hidden from their eyes, just as Paul says in 1CO 2:9 and that Isaiah was told and recorded in ISA 29:10. Luke continues in vss. 43-44:

*For the days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment around you, surround you and close you in on every side, and*

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*level you, and your children within you, to the ground; and they will not leave in you one stone upon another, because you did not know the time of your visitation."*

They were unaware that the Messiah, the Savior of the world, had come to them; it was impossible for them to know. We find that Jesus was extremely devoted to these people and He wept over them; He had tremendous devotion and love and yet He explains, though I have this love, you will find yourself conquered. God would not come to the aid of that nation that He loved. Of course, we have many examples of that going all the way back into the time of the judges. Time and again, God allowed other nations to come in and conquer His nation.

Although God will allow more destruction, yet in the future, of the physical descendants of His people, He has drawn a very firm line as to when He will not allow it to happen again, as we see in HOS 11:8-9:

*"How can I give you up, Ephraim [the Northern Kingdom]? How can I hand you over, Israel? How can I make you like Admah? How can I set you like Zeboiim [Admah and Zeboiim were the other two cities destroyed along with Sodom and Gomorrah on the plain of Jordan]? My heart churns within Me; My sympathy is stirred. I will not execute the fierceness of My anger; I will not again destroy Ephraim. For I am God, and not man, the Holy One in your midst; and I will not come with terror.*

Although God has used other nations to punish His people and overrun His land and trample His holy city, God also punishes those nations which do come up against them. God declared a war against the peoples who attacked His people because they were attempting to thwart God's purpose and showed no concern for innocent lives

*EXO 17:8,14-16 Now Amalek came and fought with Israel in Rephidim...Then the LORD said to Moses, "Write this for a memorial in the book and recount it in the hearing of Joshua, that I will utterly blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven." And Moses built an altar and called its name, The-LORD-Is-My-Banner; for he said, "Because the LORD has sworn: the LORD will have war with Amalek from generation to generation."*

In ISA 10, Assyria, which represents Babylon the Great, will be used by God to conquer His land and city as well as punish those who claim to be His physical nation, yet who do not properly worship Him; it will be their hypocrisy that will cause God to take action against them. Notice ISA 10:5:

*"Woe to Assyria, the rod of My anger and the staff in whose hand is My indignation."*

God will use them as an instrument of discipline. Once God has finished disciplining His wayward people and finished using Babylon the Great at the close of the age to discipline the world, we read in vs. 12:

*Therefore it shall come to pass, when the LORD has performed all His work on Mount Zion and on Jerusalem [the eastern Mediterranean region], that He will say, "I will punish the fruit of the arrogant heart of the king of Assyria, and the glory of his haughty looks."*

God will come to the aid of His people. It is clear, not only from these examples, but from the whole picture of the Former Prophets division of the Old Testament, that God has an attitude of loyalty toward His people. Therefore, it is reasonable to believe that we, as Christians, should also have a certain loyalty and devotion. However, our loyalty should be predicated upon the same perspective as God's: looking at

the bigger picture of what it is all about and why nations do what they do and the scheme of God's plan, of allowing some to understand, but most not.

Having qualified the meaning of patriotism, we now know that we are not to be so devoted to a physical nation that we physically defend it.

### Supporting the Troops?

What should our attitude be toward those who do fight, toward those who do take up arms and defend the nation in which we live? There are many individuals who have sacrificed their lives for their country. Should those people be condemned by us for having done so, because they have borne arms and gone to war? It is obvious from the Bible that God respects a good soldier, since He sometimes inspired the use of examples of soldiers in scripture. Notice:

*2TI 2:3-4 You [Christians] therefore must endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. No one engaged in warfare entangles himself with the affairs of this life, that he may please him who enlisted him as a soldier.*

We read in the Old Testament of the women who sang songs praising David for killing his thousands; the Bible speaks of those who have been valiant in war.

Even though Israel did not do things God's way (they did not obey God and do all God said), He still commended various military activities and commended certain soldiers for their bravery. Jesus claimed in the New Testament that the faith of a Roman centurion was greater than any faith that He had found in all of Judea, all of the land of Israel at that time. The first Gentile to be converted and receive the Holy Spirit was a Roman centurion, by the name of Cornelius. We are told in ACT 10:2 that he was:

*a devout man and one who feared God with all his household, who gave alms generously to the people, and prayed to God always.*

We are not told what happened to the soldiers once they were converted—whether they remained in the military, or whether they sought to be discharged.

The records of the Church of God going back to the American Civil War have shown that the Church of God has taught that Christians should not bear arms, nor be involved in the taking of human life, either directly or indirectly in the military. The Church of God is on record as saying this: to take human life would be in violation of the Sixth Commandment. It is very clear from scripture: you shall not murder. This means that Christians should not voluntarily become engaged in military service.

Unfortunately, there are some members of God's Church who have lived in or currently live in countries which have forced Christians into the military; some African nations require all young men to serve—or face death or the deaths of family members. In such cases where a Christian is required to involuntarily serve, with no hope of appeal, a Christian should still refuse to bear arms, and seek a non-combatant role.

One of the basic premises we need to understand is that **Christians belong to the Kingdom of God and their primary loyalty is to that kingdom and its laws.** That is our primary loyalty. Any other loyalties we may have must be subservient to our primary loyalty!

With that in mind, remember MAT 21:43 where Jesus told the religious leaders of the Jews that the kingdom of God would be taken away from them and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits of that kingdom. That is, God would take the kingdom of God away from the Jews and would give it to another nation. That nation, as we are told in 1PE 2:9, is the Church—a holy nation, a chosen generation, a peculiar or a special people in the sight of God, composed of people from all nationalities. In ROM 10:12, we are told that in this spiritual nation of the Church, there is no difference between the Jew and the

Greek, both are treated exactly the same; nationalities are irrelevant in the Church of God since the primary nationality is the Kingdom of God. Look at GAL 3:28, where God inspired Paul to write:

*There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.*

We are one bread. We are one body. We are one nationality. We are all of the Kingdom of God.

In His final teachings, before being crucified, Jesus emphasized that His followers were not to behave like members of the nations of this world. Refer to JOH 17:13-14:

*But now I come to You, and these things I speak in the world, that they may have My joy fulfilled in themselves. I have given them [His disciples] Your word; and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world.*

We are not to be of the world; our primary loyalty is to the Kingdom of God. We have His word, which contains His laws. Continuing on in vs. 15:

*I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one.*

That is, even though they must physically remain in this world, they can receive spiritual protection. Vs. 16:

*They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world.*

Christ's disciples do not have roots in the ideologies of this world. They do not have loyalties that supercede their primary loyalty to God's kingdom and the laws of His kingdom. Vs. 17:

*Sanctify [set them apart] them [from this world] by Your truth. Your word is truth.*

We are separated by the truth, by the word of God, because that word contains the laws of the kingdom, which is where our primary loyalty is. We must live according to this law book! Continuing in vs. 18:

*As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world.*

Also looking at JOH 18:36:

*Jesus answered [telling Pilot], "My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now [in this present age] My kingdom is not from here."*

Since the primary loyalty of a Christian is to the kingdom of God and the laws of that kingdom, becoming subject to the military places a Christian in the position of breaking the laws of God's kingdom. In order to be in the military of the United States, one must take an oath to defend the country; one cannot swear an oath of allegiance to the military without breaking the laws contained within the Bible. The laws of the Kingdom of God require loving one's neighbor, which would prohibit anyone from murdering his neighbor. In MAT 22, an individual asked Jesus to identify the great commandment of God's law. Vss. 36-40:

*"Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?" Jesus said to him, " 'You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the first and great commandment. [You must love God with all of your being.] And the second is like it: 'You shall*

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*love your neighbor as yourself.' On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets."*

The entirety of what we call the Holy Scriptures, the Old Testament, is built upon those two great commandments. If we do the first, we will also do the second.

In MAT 5, Jesus Christ goes through and expounds the terms and conditions of the New Covenant. Notice MAT 5:21-22:

*"You have heard that it was said to those of old [of the Old Covenant], 'You shall not murder,' and whoever murders will be in danger of the judgment. But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment. And whoever says to his brother, 'Raca!' shall be in danger of the council. But whoever says, 'You fool!' shall be in danger of hell fire.*

Once a person comes to the point of believing that another human being has absolutely no worth, then what is wrong with getting rid of what is worthless? You discard whatever is worthless. The spirit of murder is there. The sixth commandment is broken. The fire of hell represents the erasure of consciousness and all life. He goes on to say in vss. 38-39:

*"You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' But I tell you not to resist an evil person. But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also.*

In other words, you do not have the right under the New Covenant to take revenge. Continuing in vss. 43-45:

*"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.*

Notice that under the terms of the New Covenant He never says, "and kill or murder him." No, under the New Covenant you are not even to have a wrong thought in your heart, and if such a thought develops, it is to be obliterated. LUK 9:54-55:

*And when His disciples James and John [the sons of thunder] saw this, they said, "Lord, do You want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them, just as Elijah did?" But He turned and rebuked them, and said, "You do not know what manner of spirit you are of.*

These people would not allow Jesus into town. What did Jesus do? Vs. 56:

*For the Son of Man did not come to destroy men's lives but to save them...*

Jesus Christ represents the kingdom of God. His approach was to save life. How is it that a Christian could swear an oath of allegiance to kill another human being on behalf of his nation? If one is a Christian, it is impossible; it cannot be done.

Jesus condemned the use of an instrument of destruction against our fellow man in MAT 26. This was after Peter had taken a sword and made a valiant attempt to lop off the head of the high priest. Vss. 52-54:

*But Jesus said to him, "Put your sword in its place, for all who take the sword will perish by the sword. Or do you think that I cannot now pray to*

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*My Father, and He will provide Me with more than twelve legions of angels?  
How then could the Scriptures be fulfilled, that it must happen thus?"*

You take the sword; you will die by it—you will suffer the consequences that are in this world—being consumed by another's desire for revenge.

God clearly reveals that fighting and warfare do not have origins in the law of love. The apostle James asks in JAM 4:1-2:

*Where do wars and fights come from among you? Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members? You lust and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war. Yet you do not have because you do not ask.*

Wars, we are told, derive from wanting to take from someone else something that you covet. Saddam wanted to take Kuwait and Saudi Arabia and everything in the Persian Gulf in order to take control of all of the oil. It was not his, but he coveted it, so the Gulf War occurred. This is how it has been over time: men fight wars because someone wants something that belongs to someone else. They lust. They covet. They desire. They take.

As these scriptures show, there is no way from God's word to justify killing, even in war. Some have used the argument that we have dual citizenship, therefore, a responsibility to defend the physical nation which provides us our citizenship on this earth. That intellectual position has a number of holes in it, the most glaring being that we are already enlisted as soldiers in our primary nation, the Kingdom of God. Remember 2TI 2:3?

*You therefore must endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.*

Paul goes on to say in vs. 4 that no one who is engaged in warfare, which we as Christians are already engaged in, should become entangled with the affairs of this life, the affairs of what goes on in the world around us. Why?

*...that he may please Him who enlisted him as a soldier.*

God expects us, being soldiers of Jesus Christ, to be engaged in the war that we have been called to fight and not get involved somewhere else; we do not have time to be soldiers for somebody else, we cannot be soldiers in two separate kingdoms. We are told in 2CO 10:3:

*For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh.*

We are on this earth in the flesh, but we do not war as Christians according to the flesh—we do not engage in war like carnal nations do. Continuing on in vss. 4-5:

*For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal [they are not M-16s or Patriot missiles or anything of the physical nature] but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself [NEB: "rears its proud head"] against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ.*

Our weapons are spiritual weapons, not physical weapons. A Christian is allowed to use only spiritual weapons for defeating the lusts and coveting which drive men to war. God expects us to use the power of spiritual weapons to win the spiritual warfare we daily face—the war that we have against the lusts of the flesh, the lusts of the eyes, and the pride of life; the war against the evil one, who is always lurking in this world ready to attack us like a lion seeking prey.

Fulfilling the expectations of the armies of men by serving in the military makes obedience to the higher laws of God's kingdom impossible; you cannot keep the higher laws of the kingdom of God and

obey man at the same time. In EXO 20:8, God gives us one of the Ten Commandments that make up the higher law of God:

*Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.*

Yet, the military expects all who are under its authority to work seven days a week, twenty-four hours a day, if necessary. The military tells its conscripts where to go, when to go, how long to stay; the military is in control, because those under its authority have sworn an oath of loyalty to do whatever the military tells them to do. Therefore, keeping the fourth commandment becomes impossible for those in the military.

God also commands in EXO 20:13:

*You shall not murder.*

Yet, the military expects all who are under its authority to be willing to kill, and if commanded to do so, to kill whoever the military designates as the enemy. The relationship in the military is clearly a master/slave relationship. Yet, God admonishes all who have surrendered to Him in 1CO 7:23 to avoid entering into that type of relationship:

*You were bought at a price [the blood of Jesus Christ]; do not become slaves of men.*

This is pretty clear: you cannot become a slave of men. Yet, if you raise your right hand and swear an oath of allegiance to defend the country in which you live, you have become a slave, going against the teaching of scripture. In MAT 26, Jesus was emphatic that inflicting harm, even for the greatest possible cause is against God's will. Vss. 52-54:

*Then Jesus said to him, "Put your sword in its place, for all who take the sword will perish by the sword. Or do you think that I cannot now pray to My Father, and He will provide me with more than twelve legions [over seventy thousand] of angels? How then could the Scriptures be fulfilled, that it must happen thus?"*

Jesus told Peter that he could not prevent Him from being taken; yet, protecting the Savior of the world would have to be the greatest good that could be done, but Jesus would not allow it.

Not only do we have Jesus' teaching against bearing arms against others, we also have the example of the New Testament Church; there is no record of any of them attempting to cause harm to others. We have an example of that in the book of Acts when Stephen was stoned to death. Do we read that Stephen reached down and picked up stones and started throwing them back? No, he did not fight back; he was put to death. Some of God's people died for their cause, but none ever killed for their cause.

Let us take a brief look at some of those who have followed Jesus' instructions pertaining to the avoidance of bearing arms. From page 12 of A Objecao de Consciencia [Conscientious Objection] by Jean-Pierre Cattelain:

*During the early times of Christianity [the conflict between the civil power and the church] assumed the form of persecution on the part of the State and of **collective conscientious objection on the part of the Christians both to the bearing of arms and to the worship of the emperor.***

There is also material available, written in the second, third and fourth centuries A.D., in which individuals explain the approach that Christians had to the military. According to this first quote, there was collective conscientious objection on the part of Christians to the bearing of arms—they would not

bear arms and go to war. Jean Lasserre, in Les Chretiens et la Violence, on page 230, quoted Hippolytus (A.D. 116-235) who died a martyr under Maximin's persecution:

*If a...faithful one [someone who is a Christian] wants to become a soldier [enlist in the Roman legion], let him be disfellowshipped, because he wanted to despise God. (p. 230)*

Another quote taken from A Objecao de Consciencia was made by Lactantius (A.D. 260-340) an apologist who defended the position of the Christian church at that time:

*When God forbids killing, he does not only prohibit hold ups, which even the public laws will not permit, but also warns us against doing certain things which are lawful in the eyes of men. Thus, a faithful believer should have no permission to serve as a soldier, because his military service would be counted as unrighteousness. (p. 13-14)*

Kenneth Latourette in A History of Christianity, Vol. 1, pages 242-243 writes:

*One of the issues on which the early Christians were at variance with the Graeco-Roman world was participation in war. **For the first three centuries** [up to A.D. 300] **no Christian writing which has survived to our time condoned Christian participation in war.***

*...Hippolytus, prominent in Rome, in putting down in writing what he believed to be the apostolic tradition and so the authentic Christian teaching, maintained that when a soldier applied for admission to the Christian fellowship he must refuse to kill men even if he were commanded by his superiors to do so and must also not take an oath, and that military commanders must resign if they were to continue as (members). A...baptized person, so Hippolytus said, who sought to enlist as a soldier must be cut off from the Church.*

Hippolytus gives us a good idea of what happened to Cornelius after he was baptized and received God's Spirit: he must have resigned from the Roman army. Francis McLellan Wilcox in the book titled Seventh-Day Adventists in Time of War, on page 48, writes:

*When Constantine outwardly accepted Christianity, he did so as a converted pagan general. Later he persuaded Christians to fight in his army. From then on professed Christians were less and less conscientious; and **the more worldly the church grew, the more willing to join the government in war did she become...***

Over the years, God's people have been called before draft boards and counsels and confronted with a variety of questions about the seriousness of their beliefs. Some have been subjected to harsh treatment by some on those boards, due to the inquisitors' misinterpretations of scripture, and the compromises which some churches have made regarding military service. I would like to touch on 3 of the major questions posed by those who sat on review boards to determine whether or not one should be granted Conscientious Objector status during the U.S. draft.

**Question #1: Does not the Bible, in MAT 22:21, say to render unto Caesar [the primary government] that which is Caesar's?**

Render to Caesar whatever is Caesar's. Jesus said this referring specifically to a coin minted by Rome. Caesar wanted the taxable part of that coin back. They also use ROM 13:1-2:

*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*

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*God. Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves.*

The main crux of the question is: does not the Bible teach that a Christian should always be subject to the higher powers of government?

Even though some churches have taken positions of conscientious objection to bearing arms, they have not held firm to that position in every country. The following declaration was made during the Sixth General Assembly of Adventists in Russia. This is from the Report of the Sixth General Assembly of Seventh Day Adventists, Moscow, May 12-19, 1928:

*Based on the teachings of the Holy Scriptures...which show that the authorities are ordained of God to protect the faithful and punish the wicked...Seventh Day Adventists are required to render to Caesar that which belongs to Caesar, to God that which belongs to God. This means that they are to serve the State in the army and render all forms of service according to the established rule for all citizens.*

The next article was published in Der Adventbote, an Adventist church paper, in Germany on October 15, 1927; this was between World War I and World War II:

*There have always been Christians who have tried to extend their love for their enemies beyond the obligations that we have toward ourselves and toward others. They have gone so far as to think that any fight for truth, rights and property is sin; that it is not permitted to present a case before the judge in court; and that any defensive combat is a crime. This concept is wrong...the authorities are necessary for the protection of rights and property against evil encroachments. For this reason, the soldier goes to the battlefield, faces the enemy, and fights with him for the freedom, the rights and the property of the Fatherland. Thereby he fulfills a holy duty. For the sake of future safety, he tries to render the enemy harmless through the destruction of his forces...*

From a paper called Unser Dienst Am Volk [Our Service to the People], by Hilda Yost, head of the welfare work of the Seventh-Day Adventist movement in 1935 (NOTE: Hitler was in power at this time), writes on page 12:

*The State must watch all the time so that the nation will be fully armed to repulse every enemy beyond its borders and subdue every rebel against the laws in the country. Whoever refuses to render this service to the Fatherland acts dishonorably and severs his connection with the nation as a whole. The State must watch and protect the honor of the nation. Therefore, the State is vested with God-given authority, which is the focal point of its righteous constitution. In this way liberty and order are guaranteed, and from this arrangement every individual receives the greatest blessing.*

In Hitler's Germany it was considered a Christian's duty to bear arms.

In the article "*Was tun die Adventisten in der Wohlfahrtsphlege?*", from the German Seventh-Day Adventist Welfare Report for 1939 (NOTE: By this time Hitler had conquered Austria, invaded Czechoslovakia and was moving on Poland):

*While our brothers, fathers and sons beyond the borders were engaged in the fiercest battle, hurrying from victory to victory, for the greatness and future of the Fatherland, we felt the intervention of God in the world, in the*

*events witnessed these last few weeks. In still adoration we thank God, Who, in His wise providence gave the Fuehrer to our people. In the meantime, we cannot, nay, we do not want to, stand still. This we have proved in the past, and now we are proving it again, because it is a holy decision to put the will of God into action. The pride which we as fellow Germans take in the great victories of our soldiers, is for us a new incentive to imitate them at the home front and to use our strength most conscientiously for the victory.*

Ten months prior to the Pearl Harbor attack, while the Japanese were making major incursions throughout the South Pacific, we find an article written by E.B. Rudge from Smith's Weekly, an Australian Seventh-Day Adventist publication dated January 25, 1941:

*If Australia were invaded, they [the Seventh Day Adventists] would fight to the last man in defense of their country and beliefs.*

All of the quotes we have just reviewed are from material written by members of the Seventh-Day Adventist Church—people who claim to belong to the body of Christ; Russians, Germans, and Australians, all declaring they must kill the other guy, doing so in the name of God and the name of their country. Yet this is far from the teaching of Jesus Christ and the teaching of the apostles.

*1JO 3:15-16 Whoever hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him. By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we [as Christians] also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.*

If we are to lay our lives down, we obviously should not pick up a weapon and take the life of our neighbor. What Jesus inspired John to write here is a far cry from the reasoning that was contained in the articles quoted earlier. Those individuals reasoned that Christians submit to God by submitting to the powers of the national governments under which they live. But, to do that requires ignoring, not only the major emphasis of Jesus Christ to love our enemies and do good to them, but other basic instruction that God has given us regarding how we are to react to any human command that requires action contrary to His higher laws. The higher laws are the laws of the kingdom of our primary citizenship, not the laws of the nation in which we live.

In ACT 5:29, the Jewish religious leaders [some of the higher powers at that time] came and commanded the disciples they could no longer teach in the name of Jesus Christ:

*Then Peter and the other apostles answered and said: "We ought to obey God rather than men."*

It is very clear: our primary loyalty must be to God and His instruction!

There is also the example of some of God's servants who refused to obey the instruction of a king because, in doing so, they would have been required to break the second commandment.

*DAN 3:16-18 Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego answered and said to the king, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter. If that is the case [if they were to be put to death], our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver us from your hand, O king. But if not, let it be known to you, O king, that we do not serve your gods, nor will we worship the gold image which you have set up."*

Here we have a Biblical example of being firm in the faith, of not following the commands of the physical higher power that are contrary to God's laws. We submit to the demands of the higher powers of

national governments only as long as they do not contradict the laws of God and the laws of the kingdom of God. That is where the line must be drawn.

### **Question #2: What if everyone claimed conscientious objection and refused to fight?**

This question implies that the nation would be conquered if all held to the same beliefs as the conscientious objector. U.S. Draft Board inquisitors were not the first ones to develop this line of argument. From *A History of Christianity*, by Kenneth Scott Latourette, Vol. 1, page 243:

*So clear was the opposition of early Christians to bearing arms that Celsus in his famous attack on them, declared that if all were to do as did the Christians the Empire would fall victim to the wildest and most lawless barbarians. In replying, Origen did not deny that Christians were pacifists. Indeed, he said that Christians do not fight under the Emperor 'although he require it'. Instead he argued that if all were to become Christians, the barbarians would also be Christians, and that even now, when Christians were in the minority, their love, labor, and prayers were doing more than Roman arms to preserve the realm.*

The fact is: if everyone objected to being in the military for reasons of conscience toward God, most would then trust God to fight their battles for them. They would put their lives in God's hands rather than the hands of men, which is ultimately what is required of everyone.

*JER 17:5 Thus says the LORD: Cursed is the man who trusts in man and makes flesh his strength, whose heart departs from the LORD.*

God promises to help those who put their trust in Him.

*PSA 33:16-20 No king is saved by the size of his army; no warrior escapes by his great strength. A horse is a vain hope for deliverance; despite all its great strength it cannot save. But the eyes of the LORD are on those who fear Him, on those whose hope is in His unfailing love, to deliver them from death and keep them alive in famine. We wait in hope for the LORD; He is our help and our shield. (NIV)*

In God is where our trust needs to be! Looking at things physically, Goliath should have easily defeated David, but did not. The Persians should have defeated Alexander the Great, but God had already determined who would win. Moses told the children of Israel in DEU 1:30:

*The LORD your God, who goes before you [in a pillar of fire by night and a pillar of cloud by day], He will fight for you, according to all He did for you in Egypt before your eyes.*

A good example of what happens when a physical nation, which is obeying God, refuses to physically fight, deciding instead to put their trust in God is found in REV 20:7-9. While this has not yet occurred, God has already prophesied it will take place.

*Now when the thousand years have expired [the conclusion of the Millennium], Satan will be released from his prison and will go out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle, whose number is as the sand of the sea. They went up on the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city.*

This is describing an incredibly huge force coming down against the land of Israel and the people who will live there at the time. Continuing on:

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*And fire came down from God out of heaven and devoured them.*

More details can be found in EZE 38-39. God will destroy the enemies of the saints—that is what happens when every citizen of a nation is a conscientious objector!

**Question #3: The people of God engaged in wars in the past, why did God command them to fight if He could easily step in to save them?**

There is no question that God directed the armies of Israel to go to war in the Old Testament. Why did He do it that way? Initially, God brought Israel out of the greatest nation on earth at that time—with the most powerful military at that time—without the need of even one Israelite lifting a hand to put an Egyptian to death. However, being a carnal nation, it did not take them long to choose to take their protection to themselves. They did not want to trust God to protect them.

The situation of Israel going to war was similar to God's allowance of divorce and slavery. God hates divorce and slavery just as much as He hates war, yet when Israel behaved so carnally that they rejected God's desires, He gave them laws to regulate divorce and slavery, just as He gave them laws regulating going to war (DEU 20). Jesus was clear that God did not allow divorce at the beginning, but eventually allowed it among the carnally-minded.

*MAT 19:7-8 They [the religious leaders] said to Him, "Why then did Moses command to give a certificate of divorce, and to put her away?" He said to them, "Moses, because of the hardness of your hearts, permitted you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so."*

Israel had hardness of heart; they did not have God's spirit, nor did they have God's law internalized, which would have convicted them for the lack of love evidenced in their practices. God did not want Israel engaging in divorce, slavery or going to war, but because of their carnal minds God gave them laws to regulate each of these practices.

However, for a Christian, having God's spirit and His law internalized makes a difference in what God expects of them and how God deals with them. A converted mind will not entertain what God hates: divorce, enslaving other humans or going to war!

The Church of God today is God's nation, whose members have citizenship in heaven. Being the spiritual nation of God (1PE 2:5-10), we must follow His commands. He commands all Christians to love one another and do good to their enemies. If God chooses to kill or if God chooses to have others do the killing for Him, God has the power to reverse His decisions. He can have individuals put to death because He alone has the power to resurrect. No king who has ever lived has possessed the power to resurrect (other than Jesus Christ). Thus, no king, Caesar, or president has the right to command a Christian to take a human life, based upon the higher laws of the Kingdom of God under which the Christian has vowed to live.

David was a great warrior, but his liking for war, his blood lust did not please God!

*1CH 22:8 but the word of the LORD came to me, saying, 'You have shed much blood and have made great wars; you shall not build a house for My name, because you have shed much blood on the earth in My sight.'*

God is never pleased when men spill each other's blood!

Conclusion

Thankfully, one day all people will learn and do what God's true Church today already understands and practices! ISA 2:3-4 signifies a time in the not too distant future:

*Many people shall come and say, "Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us His ways, and we shall walk in His paths." For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. He shall judge between the nations, and shall rebuke many people; they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore.*