

A FEW WORDS ABOUT MILITARY SERVICE, THE DRAFT, AND CHRISTIANITY FROM THE HEART OF A FATHER TO HIS SON, AND THE YOUNG MEN HE LOVES.

By Don E. Haney November 5, 2000

Son and young men: One of a parents worst nightmares is the thought of losing one of your children in war. Yet many have made that sacrifice. But should Christian men be sacrificed in that way, for this world's armies and this world's wars? Given our understanding of prophecy and the coming wars and Tribulation, what is now happening in the Middle East and around the world makes the possibility of the draft being resumed, of special concern. I do not wish to see any of the Churches young men (or women) caught unawares. Young men (and women) who have grown up in God's Church; you will soon need to decide for yourselves – as adults – what you believe, and act upon it. Is this your parents religion, or do you too believe the word of God as spelled out in the Bible? Christ said: "My Kingdom is not of this world, else my servants would fight." Will you be servants of God, or of this world's governments? Are we primarily members (Citizens) of His Kingdom, or of this world? What does God's word teach concerning a disciple of Christ participating in the militaries of this world? And if you are ever called to serve, via a draft, how would you respond and what is the procedure for conscientious objectors?

A quick review of the Old Testament and one quickly sees many examples of God commanding His people to go into battle. You will see instructions for induction into the military and many examples of Israel's military conquests – at God's instruction. You will also find some of the most righteous men and women in the Bible involved in military battles – with God's blessings! Since we know God changes not (Mal.3:6, Heb.13:8), and since we in the Church of God continue to practice God's laws and believe the Old and New Testaments, why does God's Church teach and believe military service today to be wrong for Christians? Do you know?

This is an important subject to understand, and understand well, because the day will likely come when many young men (and possibly some women, as nearly happened in WWII) will face the draft and their sincerity, genuineness and religious beliefs AND PRACTICES will be called into question by a military panel of judges. A good understanding of Church doctrine regarding this matter, as well as your religious practices, could very well determine your eligibility as a CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTOR – if you are ever called before a military board of judges. So to begin with, let's go briefly into God's word for His instruction regarding war and military service to Christians today. Then we will cover some information on how the U.S. draft process works.

As was mentioned earlier, God in times past had the Kingdom of Israel – God's chosen nation – go to war at His instruction. God also made provisions for and gave instruction to His armies. Why then does God's Church teach today that we are not to go to war or participate in this world's militaries? The KEY is in Christ's own words: Jesus answered, "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 My kingdom is not from here." (John 18:36 NKJ)

Christ's Kingdom is not of this world. We are told to pray, "thy Kingdom come," but it is not here yet. Christ said He was going to prepare a place for us, and when He COMES AGAIN, there we would be with Him. (John 14:2-3) Until then, God's Kingdom remains in heaven! Luke refers to God's Kingdom as the "Kingdom of Heaven." That's because that is where it currently is. But when He returns to earth, we shall "reign with Him on earth" (Rev.5:10). To reign means to participate in a governmental capacity. Revelation 19:8,14, and Psalm 149 refers to the saints coming on white horses as the **armies of God** with Christ at His return to earth. So at that time, clearly saints will be part of the military or army of God. So why is military service today wrong for a Christian? Because the militaries today are not God's – they are not of the Kingdom of God to which we are to commit our primary allegiance!

But some will mention Peter's use of a sword. Let's see:

Matt 26:51 And suddenly, one of those who were with Jesus stretched out his hand and drew his sword, struck the servant of the high priest, and cut off his ear.

52 But Jesus said to him, "Put your sword in its place, for all who take the sword will perish by the sword.

53 "Or do you think that I cannot now pray to My Father, and He will provide Me with more than twelve legions of angels?

54 "How then could the Scriptures be fulfilled, that it must happen thus?" (NKJ)

(John's account makes it clear that it was Peter who cut off the servant of the high priest's ear with a sword)

Notice Christ's instructions regarding the use of the sword as a means of defense for His disciples. "Put your sword in its place" He said! Put it away! "He who lives by the sword, will die by the sword." Christ went on to remind Peter and the disciples that God was His source of protection, and that He could call on twelve legions of angels for protection, if need be. When Peter "drew his sword, struck the servant of the high priest, and cut off his ear," Christ healed the servant and told Peter to put the sword away. This was but one more event that had to occur, to fulfill the letter of God's prophetic word concerning the Messiah.

Even king David understood that it was not wise or godly to trust in your weapons for defense! “For I will not trust in my bow, neither shall my sword save me. But you have saved us from our enemies, and have put them to shame that hated us.” (Ps.44:6-7)

Christians are not to fight or be a part of today’s military establishments! In the mean time, we wait for God’s Kingdom and for God’s vengeance - when God will again lead His armies like He did for Moses and David.

Listen! God inspired the Apostle Paul to write:

Phil 3:20 “our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.” (NKJ) And again:

2 Cor 5:20 “Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ,…” (NKJ)

Our “citizenship” is not to be of this world. Our “citizenship” is to be in the Kingdom of God, which is currently in heaven, but will again be on earth – at the return of our King Jesus Christ!

Think about it. Paul called us “ambassadors for Christ” our King. An ambassador is one who lives in a foreign land as a representative of the government or kingdom he or she is from. Ambassadors do not go to war or participate in the politics or military establishments of the governments they reside in as guests. They’re foreigners! They represent their government, where their citizenship resides! They represent their own kingdom. If need be, they would support their own military establishment, but not the military of a foreign kingdom. Could it be more clear? No wonder, when our King returns, we will then go to war on His behalf, but not today! Today, He tells us to turn the other cheek at backhanded insults. Don’t respond in like manner. (Mt.5:39-41) We are told to be peace makers. We are told to do what-so-ever Christ our King commands us! The day will come when Christ our King will command us to fight with Him to put down the armies that fight Christ at His return (see Ps.149 & Rev.19). But not today. Today, we are to represent Him as ambassadors, foreigners, peacemakers, citizens of the Kingdom of God. Today, we are commanded NOT TO FIGHT, or be part of the military establishments of this world.

What then of the many O.T. examples of God’s servants going to war. What of King David and Moses? There’s no contradiction. Then God was establishing the Kingdom of Israel as His own special people. God’s very presence was evident among them as a nation. God’s presence was in the Tabernacle in their midst, and later in the Temple. God told them when to go out and when to come in. God acted as their Commander in Chief. This was because Israel was a type of God’s Kingdom on earth at that time. God had such a close relationship with Israel, He compared it to a covenant of marriage. But the time came when because of Israel’s persistent disobedience and spiritual harlotry, God put Israel away. God separated Himself from that marriage. (see Jeremiah 8) Israel AS A NATION was God’s Kingdom, **at that time** and God was their supreme King. Later when righteous David came along to face Goliath, how did he refer to the armies of Israel that faced the Philistines?

1 Sam 17:26 “And David spake to the men that stood by him, saying, What shall be done to the man that killeth this Philistine, and taketh away the reproach from Israel? for who is this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should defy **the armies of the living God?**”

David called the armies of God’s nation Israel, “the armies of the living God.” They were GOD’S ARMIES, GOD’S CITIZENS, of the Kingdom that God was the head of! **That is not the case today!** It’s not the difference between the Old and New covenants that made military service OK then but not today. God has not changed! It’s that it was God’s Kingdom and government then, which is not the case today! God is and always has been a peacemaker. But He will make war when necessary, and then His servants will fight. That was the case in Israel, and it will be the case at the beginning of the millennium for Spiritual Israel – but ONLY AS GOD’S CITIZENS, under God’s rule and righteous command – in a kingdom that is wholly God’s, to usher in eternal peace!

Neither I nor the Church of God disrespects the military. That is not our right or job as ambassadors for Christ. On the contrary, I truly appreciate the dedicated service many men and women in uniform have given us. My father and brother were both Navy men. Many have given their lives in pursuit of peace. For that we should be respectfully thankful. We do not judge them. Not all now have the same understanding or faith of Christ. Not all are now Christian ambassadors. It is not yet the restoration of all things. The nations of this world are not yet ready to submit to Christ as King nor do they have understanding of God’s ways. As such they do not look to God for protection the way a Christian is supposed to. Their time is coming to be called of God. So let’s not be anti-establishment or against the military. But neither is it right for us as Christians to serve in this worlds militaries! Now let’s review a bit on how the U.S. draft system has worked:

Historically when the U.S. Military Draft was reinstated, there was a selection process, based upon a lottery type system, and a classification program that would go into effect. This classification system categorized individuals ranging from 1A-available immediately for military service, to having their service deferred for hardship, to being exempt – with various other categories in between. Once an individual was found “qualified for induction” by the Selective Service System, then that individual had an opportunity to file a claim for exemption, deferment or as a Conscientious Objector.

At that time Conscientious Objector's were "required to appear before a local board to explain his beliefs." According to the Selective Service, "He may provide written documentation or include personal appearances by people he knows who can ATTEST to his claims. His written statement might explain: how he arrived at his beliefs; and the influence his beliefs have had on HOW HE LIVES his life." (emphasis mine throughout this article) The Selective then goes on to say: "The local board will decide whether to grant or deny a CO classification based on the EVIDENCE a registrant has presented." They further state: "a man's reasons for not wanting to participate in a war must not be based on politics, expediency, or self-interest." In general, the person's LIFESTYLE prior to making their claim MUST REFLECT THEIR CURRENT BELIEFS. In short, the Selective Service is saying that they intend to INVESTIGATE and look for PROOF that a man's claim as a religious conscientious objection is reflected by his conduct. If a person claims to be a religious man or women of Christ and active member of the Church of God, their life must reflect that. If it doesn't, that person may find their claim as a conscientious objector denied! Further, in order to make a claim as a conscientious objector, on religious grounds, a person must UNDERSTAND and be able to explain their beliefs before the board, and/or the National Appeal Board, if appeal becomes necessary.

What do you believe? Does your lifestyle TODAY reflect those beliefs? As adults, you will need to know what God's Church teaches and what you believe regarding military service by Christians. The reader may wish to review the Selective Service Website at <http://www.sss.gov> for further information concerning what happens in the event the President or Congress of the United States reenacts the draft.

We know Christ prophesied that the time of the end would be filled with wars and rumors of wars. His Church understands that the time of "Jacob's Trouble" will be riddled with wars – wars that "Jacob" would not always escape unscathed from or prevail in. Modern day Israel, and the whole world will suffer the wrath of the Great Tribulation. So we can expect the time will come when the U.S. Government will reinstate the draft. Can a true Christian prepare and protect himself from being drafted into military service, contrary to scripture? YES! PRACTICE WHAT YOU BELIEVE TODAY! Let your light shine! Those who suddenly decide to become "Christian" at the last minute, may find their Conscientious Objector claim denied by a military board. Let your life, your regular Sabbath attendance, your conduct and convictions – accompanied by a genuine understanding of your doctrinal position be known TODAY by way of your living example. Then you will also have your advocate, Jesus Christ, and your faith in Him to aid when the time comes as a faithful servant.

A few years or so ago I spoke to a Army recruiter who was giving a seminar on Conscientious Objectors or CO's as they call them. In asking him to explain the process to me he explained that the board or panel that would either accept or deny the religious CO status would seek to find proof that the man in question really practiced his religion. If a man claimed to be a believing church member of a particular church and doctrine and was therefore a CO, the panel or board may seek proof of regular attendance by asking the church to provide attendance records. Additionally, they may investigate how a man practices and lives the doctrines of the particular church or religion they claim to adhere to, and for how long. This investigation may include interviewing those in the same church, those the one claiming CO status works with, goes to school with, friends and anyone else that can either confirm or deny the claim of being a CO on religious grounds. SON AND YOUNG MEN (and possibly women in the future), if you wish to claim you are a CO in time of a draft, you need to be PRACTICING AND LIVING THAT RELIGION TODAY! Your consistent adherence to all of God's ways NOW is your proof that your CO claims are not self serving! My young friends, the Sabbath is a sign. (Ex.31:13) Do you keep it? REALLY? If so, that will be strong evidence in your favor as a CO in a time of a draft. But please let me be frank: If you claim to be a CO, and believe the doctrines of the Church of God, and yet your Sabbath and other Holy Day keeping and attendance, your tithing, forgiving, and many other outwardly visible Christian practices are lacking, you could be denied CO status – and perhaps rightly so. Let our faith be reflected by our works, James said. (see James 2) A word to the wise. Men, I would not wish to see any suffer for lack of being warned. One additional thing you can do. Selective Service Registration is the law of the land in the U.S. for all males within 30 days of turning 18. But a clear note made on the registration card that you are a Conscientious Objector, can help prove this not to be the last minute thought of a coward or man who is simply otherwise engaged at the time. Also, you may wish to study the scriptures further regarding this matter and put your beliefs regarding serving in the military in writing, have them notarized and dated. Then mail a copy of this writing to yourself and someone you trust. (I sent mine to myself and a minister/friend over 25 years ago.) When you and your friend receive your letter, file it away WITHOUT OPENING IT. Then it is postmark dated, as proof of your convictions long before any draft. But above all, LIVE GOD'S WAYS TODAY! The blessings and promises are tremendous – one of which is to be protected in the hour of trial that is coming to test the whole world – the Great Tribulation! (Rev.3:10 & Luke 21:36)

When God ordered His judges to carry out a sentence or when God ordered His armies to carry out His righteous cause in battle – that is God's prerogative. To kill under those circumstances is not murder. Remember: Vengeance is mine, saith the LORD. (Rom.13:4, Heb.10:30) God said we are to love our enemies, be forgiving, be patient awaiting the return of our King and to preach the Gospel as faithful AMBASSADORS OF CHRIST! (Eph.6:19-20) God's ways are simply the greatest. But if we want His protection and blessings, we need to be PRACTICING His way of life, as expressed through His Son and His Laws, in the way we live. If we do, our light will shine as proof of our Christianity. A governmental requirement of "practicing what we preach", to obtain a CO status, seems reasonable and scriptural. Let's do it!