

## INTRODUCTION:

It's amazing how the clarity of your youth can become a quagmire as you grow older and more self-reflective. "Facts" and "truths" that once seemed to be normal and appropriate human intuition crumble away and become vestiges of overturned indoctrination and socialization. Living in the ruins of many an overturned "truth" leaves one wondering not only about the past that led to such a ruinous visage, but also leaves one questioning which structures left standing will be in ruins tomorrow. Which structures are fortresses of truth for the ages, and which are brittly constructed facades?

At some point in your childhood you found out for the first time in your life that the earth is round - a fact that accosted all of your intuition and senses - and a fact which may have been a hard one to accept. Yet for as contrary to your senses as this new fact may have seemed, you trusted it because you trusted the source, perhaps a teacher or a parent. You may not have understood how it all works, but you knew this new, contrary fact as deeply as you knew anything. Learning and trusting are in many ways much easier to do when you are younger. While this is wonderful for all of the truths a child needs to learn, it also means children are able to quickly learn untruths with the same speed and level of certainty. If those untruths are repeated and seen with enough frequency, and if those untruths are told to and modeled for a child long enough, by those in authority, these untruths become entrenched into adulthood and are very difficult to overturn. It is easier for a child to change his or her belief about the roundness of their whole world in an instant - a fact that defies everything their innate and external senses tell them - than it is for we adults to change our view about one aspect of our world that is far less intuitive or sensual.

God has given me the blessing of being deeply self-reflective, though for those with whom I come in contact, it is often a curse. My reflection means I come across as a contrarian. I always question "why?" I want to understand the foundation for believing as I do. God has blessed me doubly by giving me a wife who is even more self-reflective than I am, and who is all too happy to hold me accountable and not let me get away with any rationalizing of bad decisions or positions. These are the very blessings that have kept me a Christian, changed my view to align with Reformed Theology, convicted me to reinstitute the Sabbath in my life, and the list could go much longer and cover even deeper issues than some of the aforementioned ones. And now, it is these blessings that God has given me which leads me to sift through what is for many Americans an extremely intuitive truth which, when discussed, creates a far more visceral reaction than just about anything else. Americans are very patriotic, but this patriotism sometimes

approaches and even embraces nationalism. So the mere mention of the word I want to discuss, "pacifism," is likely to elicit a strong negative emotions in most readers.

Until about two years ago, I had never even given pacifism a passing thought. The idea seemed so counterintuitive that I thought there was no good reason to invest any time in it. But two years ago, certain events began to give me pause about the broad community in which I had lived my whole life. I believed my community (conservative Evangelical Christians) were right about a lot of things, but I had begun to observe what I believed to be blind spots and pitfalls in that community at large. I began to question some of the "truths" that were taught to me and modeled for me as a child. As I was doing research on the ethics of governments, voting, etc, I came across a debate about pacifism. Since I was already primed for assessing some of my core beliefs, especially as it pertained to church and state issues, I thought I'd watch the hour long video and just solidify my notions of anti-pacifism for the rest of my life, because there was no way the pacifists could win the fight. Pacifism just doesn't work in the real world.

I watched [the video](#) debate with a huge bias for the "Just War Theorists," but it didn't take all that long for me to recognize that the pacifists clearly won the debate, at least in my mind. For as much as I didn't like their position in terms of pragmatism, and for as difficult as it was for me to reconcile certain scenarios with pacifism, I thought they had the better arguments by far. I still didn't adhere to pacifism, though it wasn't because their arguments weren't far better. Rather, it was because my intuitions so strongly fought against its legitimacy.

Around this time I saw an [article by John Piper](#) come across my Facebook feed. The article dealt with guns and self-defense. While I'm not sure Piper is a complete pacifist, he advocated some pretty strong self-restraint in regard to defense in his article. He made outstanding points that I couldn't rebut. But there are always avenues one can pursue to rebut arguments, so I continued to look. I didn't yet give the victory to the pacifists. However, one aspect of the whole debate loomed over it and was an early indicator to me that my views - if not completely wrong - were at least held for the wrong reasons. The Harvard debate, Piper's article, and other material I was reading identified something that gave me the inkling that my view was wrong in some pretty significant ways - they helped me begin to see that my initial reasonings for holding anti-pacifistic beliefs were based on self-interest and socialization.

The 2016 presidential election season was a fantastic time for introspection in the

Christian community, and I was no exception. There was a lot of soul searching, and many Christians began to question assumptions and traditions they had held their whole lives. They began to test their beliefs. Many facades were stripped down, revealing socialization and indoctrination many of us had been blind to our whole lives. I had come to my own conclusion that some practices and morals I had taken on were cultural and political rather than Christian. As I unpacked the arguments for and against pacifism in particular, I began to realize that this issue was fraught with a similar mire to what was going on politically. A country whose Christians pride themselves on the perceived strict religious adherence and example of the Founding Fathers, and a country whose origin is born in violent rebellion against a government have to believe not only in self-defense, but also in the legitimacy of aggression towards a God-ordained government and the importance of legislating morality to maintain a Christian appearance. We have to justify our origins and our forebears. My Christianity was birthed in this notion that we must prevail, with "we" meaning both country and Christianity (or at least the appearance of Christianity through legislation). We must control the levers of society - especially the political lever - to stay on top. I began to see the politicization of Christianity, and that my people had been conflating patriotism and politics with godliness.

This emphasis on individual freedom, self-preservation, and church/state relations seeped very deeply into certain forms of American Christianity. When the identity of a nation and a religion are so intertwined, one becomes as fanatical about a nation's ideals as they would about their religious ideals. This is why the Christianity in which I grew up was saturated with weapons. To this day, I love guns. I own guns. I'm a pretty good shot and I enjoy shooting. I love first person shooter games. In general, I don't think any of those things are necessarily wrong. But the American ideal isn't located in simple gun ownership. It's located in power and symbolism these guns represent. They represent freedom. They represent individual choice and power. They allow us, like our forbears, to blaze our own trail and live un-oppressed. I grew up hearing (and still hear) individuals in my Christian community say that if anyone enters their home, they'll blast the intruder. I hear little remorse or reservation about taking a human life. And if the intruder is running away, these same people will tell you that you need to make sure you shoot them before they make it off your property. And make sure that if you shoot, you shoot to kill so they can't sue you. Many in my community were so pro-gun that they advocated fighting back if the government attempted to take guns. They said they would attack their own government just to keep guns - something the early Christians wouldn't even do to preserve their God and their life. Such notions of power and freedom were seared into my mind and soul so early and so often in

life, that to this day, when I think about what it would be like to kill someone who is attacking my family, I can't even force myself to feel remorse. I don't think I'd feel too bad about killing someone to protect my family. I'm not bragging at all. This is not a good thing. In fact, it's detestable and lamentable that my Christian community and my country has hindered my ability to empathize with and love my enemy. Even if killing in self-defense were legitimate, my Christian community and my country has made killing another human being into something humane, if the killing is done against a terrible enemy who seeks to do me or my loved ones true harm. Despite the fact that I have become an intellectual and theological pacifist, my extreme socialization makes me wonder how I'd act or feel if put in a position of defending the lives of my family with deadly force.

It is my intellectual position, then, that the notion of pacifism is biblical, while the notion of the preservation of one's own life (or another's life) by using the means of killing is something that is a cultural addition to Christ's teaching. To make my case, I will begin with laying out a brief biblical case for this. However, I actually don't want to spend too much time extrapolating individual verses, as this tends to be where everyone misses the point. Each side throws around one or two verses, which on their faces, begin a good case for their respective sides. But when you leave the discussion at a few handpicked verses, it's easy to make a case for just about anything. So while it is important to begin with laying a biblical framework, I believe it's also important to make a cumulative case. A cumulative case provides context and plausibility to the handful of verses from which I am going to lay the foundation of my case. A cumulative case cannot be countered by one verse which may be read in a particular way against it. It can only be destroyed by an obvious contradiction (e.g. God says explicitly that we should kill or that pacifism is wrong), by an undercutting of significant portions of the cumulative case, or by building an opposing cumulative case against it with a more plausible one.

Hopefully the introduction has shed some light on how I got here and where I'm going with this. Enjoy the discussion!

## BIBLICAL TEACHING:

Since there are a large number of passages which correspond with notions of pacifism, I am only going to deal very briefly with each passage. I understand that there may be certain passages that non-pacifists want to nuance or explore linguistically, and that is fair. However, what I think you'll find is that when you have a large amount of text to deal with, it becomes hard to explain away each one with this notion of some underlying nuance that needs to be explained into the text. It's kind of like when a person who commits a crime has no alibi, owns the murder weapon, has probable cause, just took out an insurance policy on the victim, fought with the victim the night of their death, were the last person seen with the victim, etc - such a case becomes difficult to dismiss on the amount of evidence alone. While you can try to explain away each detail, when you're back on your heels trying to explain away item after item, it doesn't look good for you. While the quality of a piece of evidence is important, there is also a weight that comes with a quantity of evidence. In fact, fifty pieces of evidence with a mediocre quality can be far more powerful than one piece of evidence that is of very high quality. When you couple the quantitative weight of the pacifistic case from the Bible with the relative lack of potential proof texts which are contrary to pacifism (only four main New Testament passages are used, to my knowledge), the weight for pacifism's case grows.

**Matthew 5 - the Sermon on the Mount - contains several of the verses most used to advocate pacifism.**

- Blessed if persecuted for my name: [Mt. 5:11](#)
- Do not resist an evil person and turn the other cheek: [Matthew 5:38-40](#)
- Love enemies: [Mt. 5:43-48](#)

The verses seem fairly straightforward, but non-pacifists argue the level of metaphor intended here. Perhaps being persecuted for Christ is different than just being persecuted or attacked. Maybe we are to relent and comply if our persecution is religious, but not if someone is trying to do us harm during a robbery. Perhaps Christ specifying that we are to turn our other cheek if slapped on the *right* cheek has some cultural significance we should know about. And maybe when Christ says we are to love our enemies, he means people who call us bad names and not people who seek to do us or others physical harm. Maybe "enemies" really just means "adversaries" or "jerks."

- Don't be overcome by evil, do not repay evil with evil: [Romans 12:17-21](#)

- Don't repay evil with evil: [I Peter 3:9](#)

Beyond the basic commands to avoid violence and love enemies, we also have Paul and Peter provide us with the idea that we are not to repay evil with evil. Many pacifists take this to mean that even if someone seeks to do harm to you, it does not mean you then have the right, as a Christian, to take on the same evil in response.

- [Romans 13](#) and government submit and let them bear the sword

- [I Peter 2](#) submit in your role and trust God's judgment (vs. 21)

## **ARGUMENTS FOR CHRISTIAN PACIFISM** **(2): THE BIBLICAL TEACHING**

3/2/2014

[0 COMMENTS](#)



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- [Romans 13](#) and government submit and let them bear the sword
- [I Peter 2](#) submit in your role and trust God's judgment (vs. 21)

Romans and I Peter give us wonderful insights into God's expectations for us to submit to authorities. What is particularly interesting is that the expectation is not tied at all to moral legitimacy. If a government persecutes you, if your husband isn't a Christian, or if you are human property, you are to submit (more on how that submission to unjust



authorities applies [here](#)). Paul is not at all propping up evil and saying that slavery or persecuting governments are good. Rather, he's saying that we as Christians have a different means of subverting evil, which is sacrificial love. We can afford to lay down our lives - in fact we are called to lay down our lives for the sake of Jesus Christ who laid down his life for us, even while we were enemies (or "adversaries" or "jerks" if that's how you define "enemy"). The notion of government in the Bible is probably one of the most controversial when discussing the topic of pacifism, as Romans 13 is often used as a proof text against pacifism. I highly recommend taking a deeper look at these scriptures on government in my counterrebuttal section on the issue [here](#).

Beyond our role of submission from authorities in injustice, the Romans passage here tells us God's expectations for us as citizens, which is to allow the government to bear the sword against evil. This is extremely profound on several levels. First, the Roman government around this time wasn't very favorable to Christians. So God is telling Christians to submit even to an evil government who is killing them. Second, the evil of this government grows when you consider that their rule over Israel came as a result of murderous and warmongering conquest not all that long ago (about 100 years prior to the writing of the New Testament). It would be easy for a Christian living in this region to excuse disobedience to the Roman government because the Roman government was not only evil, but was viewed as illegitimate. Yet God tells the Christian to submit even to this government that was in place. A Christian bearing a sword in Christ's Kingdom, after being explicitly told to allow the government to bear the sword against evil, and after being told to lay down his or her life and show enemy love - seems hard to intellectually accept.

- [John 18:36](#) My Kingdom is not of this world

While all the gospels are fantastic, I love the major theme of Mark in particular, which is Christ's bringing of his Kingdom. John picks up the "Kingdom" language here in chapter 18 when he records Christ as saying that his servants don't fight with swords because his kingdom is not of this world. Christ is certainly speaking about his specific situation and the fact that his servants shouldn't use violence to protect him now. But I think we also have to ask whether 1) Christ's Kingdom has ended, and 2) whether Christ's means of exerting power in his Kingdom have changed for Christians prior to his return for judgment. If Christ is seated at the right hand of God in power now (Ephesians 1), and if he is making his enemies his footstool in his Kingdom through the Spirit, the Word, and the Church, then it seems we do indeed live in the Kingdom Christ established and is now expanding through his church. If we are servants of that Kingdom, it seems his expectations for us to live as such stand.

- [Luke 22:49-51](#) Jesus won't let disciples use swords

I have saved one of the most contentious passages for last. While Jesus did indeed tell his disciples to buy swords before his arrest, he then forbade them from using those swords when the time came for his arrest. There are all sorts of conclusions we could draw. Maybe Christ, in his humanity, wanted to leave the door open for his defense when he told the disciples to buy swords. We know he prayed to the Father to take the cup from him right before his arrest. Perhaps he wanted the disciples to have swords just in case God decided to take the cup from him. We could go down all sorts of rabbit trails of possibilities.

What you need to know here, for the positive case of pacifism, is that Jesus has his disciples put their swords away and makes the familiar quote that "all who live by the sword will die by the sword." Pacifists will argue that it seems Christ is making a sweeping statement here that violence is not a solution. In the context of his "Kingdom" statement in John, it makes perfect sense that Jesus would expect his servants to avoid using a physical means of evil to prop up his Kingdom. This isn't a late interpretation of Christ's words either. In fact, Tertullian, a very famous Ante-Nicene Father, says, "Christ, in disarming Peter, disarmed every soldier." The interpretation is at least not unusual, and in my opinion, was likely the common teaching for the first several hundred years of the church as I explore in section four.

As you can see, there aren't any specific passages that declare pacifism to be true outright. But collectively, there are quite a number of passages and concepts that make violence - even against enemies - difficult to justify. As far as biblical passages used to disprove pacifism, to my knowledge there are only four major New Testament passages that are used - all of which I find extremely weak. Two of the four are so weak that when read in context, they could actually make good arguments for pacifism instead of being used against it. The passages used against pacifism are, ordered in what I believe to be the strongest to weakest are as follows: the first is when Christ overturns the money changers' tables in the temple, the second is when Christ tells the disciples to buy swords, the third is when John the Baptist seems to fail in telling repentant soldiers to leave their occupation, and the final one is where Jesus says that he came to bring a sword and not peace. I will deal with each of these in the "[Counterrebuttals](#)" section if you are interested.

## BIBLICAL EXAMPLES:

It is very important for us to look at what the Bible says about the Christian's role and their use of violence. However, looking at an ideology in the abstract can often leave us with many questions as to how that ideas is supposed to play out. But when we see people implement an ideology, it can sometimes affirm or counter our assumptions about what the the ideology actually says. For instance, if pacifists argue that a Christian loving their enemies and turning the other cheek means that they shouldn't harm another even in self-defense, then were we to find any of the apostles defending themselves from harm with violent actions, it would make us think twice about the extent of what Christ was teaching. Likewise, if we find that Christians fail to retaliate with violence, even in self-defense, then that should give us pause as to whether Christ fully meant what he said in regard to violence rather than passing his words off as hyperbole or metaphor.

There are no absolutely clear stories where all details are filled in for us in regard to pacifism. The point of the stories of the early Christians and the Apostles wasn't necessarily to teach self-defense or nonviolence. But what we do see is how early Christians naturally react to violence instituted against them by individuals, their community, and their government.

**Stephen:** In the midst of being stoned by religious enemies, Stephen prayed for the forgiveness of his attackers. While there aren't a tremendous amount of details here, I think it is safe to infer that he was not attacking his aggressors.

**Jason:** In Acts 17 we see an account of Jason being dragged by members of an angry mob. There is no indication that he used violence against them, even though they could have been dragging him to his death for all he knew.

**Paul and Silas:** Paul and Silas are not reported to have fought with those who drug them before local leaders, which following, they then submitted to a beating even though they were Roman citizens and this punishment was illegitimate. Paul would eventually submit all the way to his death in Rome.

**Jesus Christ:** We see Jesus run from the Pharisees or avoid certain interactions, but we never see him defend himself with violence or encourage others to defend him or themselves.

**The Apostles:** Most of the apostles (all except John) were put to death, and by all accounts, without reciprocating violence themselves. While some were put to death by the government for religious reasons, others were supposedly (based on

tradition) put to death by other groups of people. We don't have any direct biblical account of apostolic martyrdom, though Jesus does preverify that Peter would be martyred on a cross ([John 21:19](#)).

None of the examples above are anything for pacifists to hang their hats on. We see a lot of examples of people being killed without mention of their resistance. We see examples of Jesus or Paul running from danger, but never see anyone fight back. At best, this is an argument from silence. However, when coupled with the numerous passages which seem to, on their face, teach non-violence, it is one more piece in a cumulative case for pacifism. When you add to this that there are no passages that indicate teachings for violence or examples of violence for Christians prior to Christ's return in judgment, the pacifist's case grows stronger.

## REAL LIFE EXAMPLES:

This section deals with extra-biblical accounts of individuals who have embraced non-violence, if not as a whole lifestyle and ethic, at least as a strategy in certain parts of their life. These accounts are not proof that non-violence is right, but I think they help to paint a picture of what it looks like to embrace non-violence, why it can be important to embrace non-violence for the sake of a message, and show that non-violence doesn't mean that one is disengaged from meaningful actions and encounters in life. Sometimes it's easier to process difficult to digest information when you are able to see how a concept plays out in real life, especially when some examples are temporally closer to home.

If you want more examples than those below, [this article](#) provides a good list of not only non-violent campaigns throughout history, but successful ones. The article also deals with what non-violence may look like today in countries like Syria or Iraq.

### **Early Martyrs:**

I am not going to go into a long history of the early Christian martyrs here. There are plenty of examples and they are easy to find. What I want to point out, however, is that in most or all of the persecution examples of early Christians, you won't find Christians defending themselves - with words or with violence. I have yet to find an example of a Christian who fights back. And if I did find an example, I would next want to know if their action was accepted by the local Christian community and the early church.

As one good example, you can look at the story of [Perpetua](#). You find many of the common elements in her story that are present in the other Christian martyr stories. She boldly submits, she views her suffering as a blessing of sorts, and she doesn't fight back. She ultimately ends up grabbing a Roman's sword - not to try to turn it against him - but to help him slay her. Death and injustice is not the concern for Perpetua or the other early martyrs, but rather the souls of others and the purity of the martyr's own soul. Early Christians understood that their saviors message could easily be invalidated by the actions of his followers. They understood that a submitting to death wasn't submitting to evil, but rather submitting to their Lord and taking him at his word when he promised that he himself is just and would one day take vengeance on evil.

### **Jim Elliot:**

Jim Elliot and four other missionaries were killed by the Auca Indians in the mid-1900's. I don't think the men were ideological pacifists, though the action I am

highlighting is an example of non-violence. I like this example not only because it's modern, but because they weren't being martyred for their faith, though they were being martyred as they sought to share it. While the five men had a weapon and could have fought back when attacked by tribal warriors, they attempted to flee without injuring any aggressors because the souls of their attackers were more important to them than their lives. They feared that were they to shoot any of the aggressors, the message of the gospel they sought to bring would fall on deaf ears. If self-defense is just, these men would have been just in killing others. However, they acted with a mindset aimed at eternity rather than self-preservation.

### **Martin Luther King Jr.:**

Martin Luther King Junior advocated non-violence based on Christian principles. He lead a campaign for freedom that was non-violent and opposed groups that used violence (at least post 1955 or so). He and his fellow advocates faced beatings and persecution not for their religion, and beatings that came not only from government authorities. They endured beatings from fellow citizens and without due process. King thought that Christ-like love was the way to conduct oneself and that violence would only invalidate the message he was trying to get across.

I find it interesting that most who aren't pacifists agree with King. Many non-pacifists condemn other groups who proposed the use of violence, yet the rights of the black community were being suppressed and infringed much more than the Colonial rights of Revolutionaries in 1776. Most recognize the illegitimacy of using violence during the Civil Right's era not only to overthrow the government, but to harm fellow citizens as well. It's funny that this non-violent approach seems so intuitive when talking about fellow citizens (who happen to be black) fighting for their freedom. We're all about non-violence and can see the nobility behind it when King and the black community enacts it. Yet we can't embrace non-violence in situations where we ourselves might be oppressed, or where our forbears took up arms in rebellion in order to get what they deserved. King is a great example of what non-violence looks like in action, the reasons we may embrace non-violence for the sake of others and for the sake of our message, and how other groups who preach the same message but use violence are viewed as immoral and invalidate their message.

While King's life encompassed non-violence, perhaps the best example he showed was in 1962 when he was assaulted. The story is very moving. While non-violence wasn't effective in converting the aggressor, it was effective in displaying the love of Christ and encouraging the non-violent community. Check it out [here](#).

One thing to note is that people always try to discredit pacifism via failed pacifists. It's as if all the martyrs and consistent pacifists through history mean nothing, and it's as if one person who failed at a higher, harder ethic disproves the ethic. With King, many look to his attempt to obtain a gun permit in the mid 1950's or his hiring of armed guards in the mid 50's as evidence of King's inconsistency. But that is not the whole story. King's push for non-violence arose largely after 1955. You can find a [synopsis](#) of the issue with some fantastic quotes from King, and another telling of the issue [here](#).

### **Desmond Doss:**

If you haven't seen the movie [Hacksaw Ridge](#), you should. It's a story about a pacifist who joins the war effort. While I'm sure the movie hyperbolizes some aspects of what happened, it's a powerful look at the message non-violence brings. While I enjoy a good war flick about a hero who takes on an insurmountable force, you get a much deeper, more meaningful feeling after watching a movie like Hacksaw Ridge. There is a bravery you find in non-violence that you just can't find elsewhere. It's the willingness to face evil head-on without any other weapon but faith in the cause, hope in its attainment, and love for all involved - including enemies. It's a willingness to embrace death if that's what it takes to help others see true life. That's why you'll find that many times, martyrs and non-violent advocates like King are often more brave than those willing to take up weapons. They have counted their lives as nothing for the sake of the message they bring, and for the sake of the lives of others. It's not a fending off of death with a goal of self-preservation or the preservation of that which we love. It's a recognition that he who loses his life and counts it as nothing is really the one who gains it.

If you want a free, violence free documentary instead of the Hollywood movie, you can [check it out here](#).

## EARLY CHURCH TEACHING:

Christians have nothing against the government. In fact, Christians teach that we should submit to the government. However, our primary citizenship is to Christ, and we should be unwilling to do something our government tells us to do if that means being disobedient to Christ. Enacting violence or harm to another, in aggression, self-defense, or even in the role of a government official who commanded wars or participated in them, was something with which the early church just couldn't get on board. To highlight this, I want to pull a large number of quotes and teachings from the early church.

Many of the quotes below deal specifically with soldiers. Many non-pacifists will argue that the reason soldiers were prohibited was because they had to make sacrifices during feasts and they had to bow to the gods or the emperor. There were also some vows they may have to take which a Christian couldn't do. While I'm sure that aspect played a role in the community prohibiting a Christian from being a soldier, you will notice that there are a number of quotes that give a different rationale for prohibiting one from being a soldier, namely, the potential mandate that they would use violence - even if used justly in capital punishment.

There are two main ways the early church fathers went about arguing for non-violence. The first was that violence in general was wrong. You will see many quotes that condemn all sorts of violence or positions that use violence. The second approach was to condemn any conflict of interest in regard to lordship. If you had to give pledge your loyalty to a state which contradicted Christ (through worship of the gods, violence, or other evil), that was a problem. I think the early fathers would be pretty appalled with the extent that some of our patriotism goes, verging not only on nationalism, but worship of the state. While I focus mostly on quotes in regard to violence, you will find that this other notion threads its way in very frequently.

The quotes are listed beginning with what I think to be the most powerful for pacifism. Dates are provided so you can see the chronological order of the authors as well.

Canon of Nicaea, Canon 12 325 [This is a particularly important quote since it comes from an ecumenical document - meaning the Church universal agreed to it. Non-pacifists argue that it's not a big deal that Tertullian or Origen and some others seemed pacifistic. Just because a few great minds believe it doesn't make it so. While an idea being ecumenical doesn't make it true, it helps to show that this non-violent teaching was early and agreed upon by the church universal.]



**AS MANY AS WERE CALLED BY GRACE, AND DISPLAYED THE FIRST ZEAL, HAVING CAST ASIDE THEIR MILITARY GIRDLES, BUT AFTERWARDS RETURNED, LIKE DOGS, TO THEIR OWN VOMIT, (SO THAT SOME SPENT MONEY AND BY MEANS OF GIFTS REGAINED THEIR MILITARY STATIONS); LET THESE, AFTER THEY HAVE PASSED THE SPACE OF THREE YEARS AS HEARERS, BE FOR TEN YEARS PROSTRATORS. BUT IN ALL THESE CASES IT IS NECESSARY TO EXAMINE WELL INTO THEIR PURPOSE AND WHAT THEIR REPENTANCE APPEARS TO BE LIKE. FOR AS MANY AS GIVE EVIDENCE OF THEIR CONVERSIONS BY DEEDS, AND NOT PRETENCE, WITH FEAR, AND TEARS, AND PERSEVERANCE, AND GOOD WORKS, WHEN THEY HAVE FULFILLED THEIR APPOINTED TIME AS HEARERS, MAY PROPERLY COMMUNICATE IN PRAYERS; AND AFTER THAT THE BISHOP MAY DETERMINE YET MORE FAVOURABLY CONCERNING THEM. BUT THOSE WHO TAKE [THE MATTER] WITH INDIFFERENCE, AND WHO THINK THE FORM OF [NOT] ENTERING THE CHURCH IS SUFFICIENT FOR THEIR CONVERSION, MUST FULFIL THE WHOLE TIME.**

Hippolytus 170-235

**THE PROFESSIONS AND TRADES OF THOSE WHO ARE GOING TO BE ACCEPTED INTO THE COMMUNITY MUST BE EXAMINED. THE NATURE AND TYPE OF EACH MUST BE ESTABLISHED... BROTHEL, SCULPTORS OF IDOLS, CHARIOTEER, ATHLETE, GLADIATOR...GIVE IT UP OR BE REJECTED. A MILITARY CONSTABLE MUST BE FORBIDDEN TO KILL, NEITHER MAY HE SWEAR; IF HE IS NOT WILLING TO FOLLOW THESE INSTRUCTIONS, HE MUST BE REJECTED. A PROCONSUL OR MAGISTRATE WHO WEARS THE PURPLE AND GOVERNS BY THE SWORD SHALL GIVE IT UP OR BE REJECTED. ANYONE TAKING OR ALREADY BAPTIZED WHO WANTS TO BECOME A SOLDIER SHALL BE SENT AWAY, FOR HE HAS DESPISED GOD.**

**(FROM "CHURCH ORDER IN THE APOSTOLIC TRADITION" IN THE EARLY CHRISTIANS IN THEIR OWN WORDS)**

Lactantius 250-325

**FOR WHEN GOD FORBIDS US TO KILL, HE NOT ONLY PROHIBITS US FROM OPEN VIOLENCE, WHICH IS NOT EVEN ALLOWED BY THE PUBLIC LAWS, BUT HE WARNS US AGAINST THE COMMISSION OF THOSE BEINGS WHICH ARE ESTEEMED LAWFUL AMONG**

**MEN....THEREFORE, WITH REGARD TO THIS PRECEPT OF GOD, THERE OUGHT TO BE NO EXCEPTION AT ALL, BUT THAT IT IS ALWAYS UNLAWFUL TO PUT TO DEATH A MAN, WHOM GOD WILLED TO BE A SACRED ANIMAL. (FROM "THE SACRED WRITINGS OF LACTANITUS" ANNOTATED EDITION)**

**IF ANYONE SHOULD BE SO SHAMELESS AS TO INFLICT INJURY ON A GOOD AND JUST MAN, SUCH A MAN MUST BEAR IT WITH CALMNESS AND MODERATION. HE WILL NOT TAKE UPON HIMSELF HIS REVENGE. RATHER, HE WILL RESERVE IT FOR THE JUDGMENT OF GOD. HE MUST MAINTAIN INNOCENCE AT ALL TIMES AND IN ALL PLACES. AND THIS COMMANDMENT IS NOT LIMITED TO MERELY HIS NOT [BEING THE FIRST TO] INFLICT INJURY ON ANOTHER. RATHER, HE SHOULD NOT EVEN AVENGE IT WHEN INJURY IS INFLICTED ON HIM. FOR THERE SITS ON THE JUDGMENT-SEAT A VERY GREAT AND IMPARTIAL JUDGE. (FROM "THE SACRED WRITINGS OF LACTANITUS" ANNOTATED EDITION)**

**RELIGION IS TO BE DEFENDED— NOT BY PUTTING TO DEATH— BUT BY DYING. NOT BY CRUELTY, BUT BY PATIENT ENDURANCE. NOT BY GUILT, BUT BY GOOD FAITH. FOR THE FORMER BELONGS TO EVIL, BUT THE LATTER TO THE GOOD. . . . FOR IF YOU WISH TO DEFEND RELIGION BY BLOODSHED, TORTURES, AND GUILT, IT WILL NO LONGER BE DEFENDED. RATHER, IT WILL BE POLLUTED AND PROFANED. . . . AND, THEREFORE, WHEN WE SUFFER SUCH IMPIOUS THINGS, WE DO NOT RESIST EVEN IN WORD. RATHER, WE LEAVE VENGEANCE TO GOD. WE DO NOT ACT AS THOSE PERSONS WHO WOULD HAVE IT APPEAR THAT THEY ARE DEFENDERS OF THEIR GODS, WHO RAGE WITHOUT RESTRAINT AGAINST THOSE WHO DO NOT WORSHIP THEM. WHEN PROVOKED BY INJURY, IF HE RETURNS VIOLENCE TO HIS ASSAILANT, HE IS DEFEATED. (FROM "ANTE-NICENE FATHERS," VOL. VII)**

**IN WHAT RESPECT, THEN, DOES THE WISE AND GOOD MAN DIFFER FROM THE EVIL AND FOOLISH ONE? IS IT NOT THAT HE HAS UNCONQUERABLE PATIENCE, OF WHICH THE FOOLISH ARE DESTITUTE? IS IT NOT THAT HE KNOWS HOW TO GOVERN HIMSELF AND TO MITIGATE HIS ANGER— WHICH THOSE ARE UNABLE TO CURB BECAUSE THEY ARE WITHOUT VIRTUE? . . . WHAT IF A MAN GIVES WAY TO GRIEF AND ANGER AND INDULGES THESE**

**EMOTIONS (WHICH HE SHOULD STRUGGLE AGAINST)? WHAT IF HE RUSHES WHEREVER INJUSTICE WILL CALL HIM? SUCH A MAN DOES NOT FULFILL THE DUTY OF VIRTUE. FOR HE WHO TRIES TO RETURN AN INJURY DESIRES TO IMITATE THAT VERY PERSON BY WHOM HE HAS BEEN INJURED. IN SHORT, HE WHO IMITATES A BAD MAN CANNOT BE GOOD. (FROM "A DICTIONARY OF EARLY CHRISTIAN BELIEFS; A REFERENCE GUIDE TO MORE THAN 700 TOPICS DISCUSSED BY THE EARLY CHURCH FATHERS" EDITED BY DAVID W. BERCOT)**

**WHY DO CONTESTS, FIGHTS, AND CONTENTIONS ARISE AMONG MEN? IS IT BECAUSE IMPATIENCE AGAINST INJUSTICE OFTEN EXCITES GREAT TEMPESTS? HOWEVER, IF YOU MEET INJUSTICE WITH PATIENCE, THEN NO VIRTUE CAN BE FOUND MORE TRUE. . . . IN CONTRAST, IF INJUSTICE . . . HAS MET WITH IMPATIENCE ON THE SAME LEVEL AS ITSELF, . . . IT WILL IGNITE A GREAT FIRE THAT NO STREAM CAN EXTINGUISH, BUT ONLY THE SHEDDING OF BLOOD. (FROM "A DICTIONARY OF EARLY CHRISTIAN BELIEFS; A REFERENCE GUIDE TO MORE THAN 700 TOPICS DISCUSSED BY THE EARLY CHURCH FATHERS" EDITED BY DAVID W. BERCOT)**

Tertullian 160-220

**FOR WHAT WAR SHOULD WE NOT BE FIT AND EAGER, EVEN THOUGH UNEQUAL IN NUMBERS, WE WHO ARE SO WILLING TO BE SLAUGHTERED—IF, ACCORDING TO THAT DISCIPLINE OF OURS, IT WAS NOT MORE LAWFUL TO BE SLAIN THAN TO SLAY?**

**BUT NOW INQUIRY IS MADE ABOUT THIS POINT, WHETHER A BELIEVER MAY TURN HIMSELF UNTO MILITARY SERVICE, AND WHETHER THE MILITARY MAY BE ADMITTED UNTO THE FAITH, EVEN THE RANK AND FILE, OR EACH INFERIOR GRADE, TO WHOM THERE IS NO NECESSITY FOR TAKING PART IN SACRIFICES OR CAPITAL PUNISHMENTS. THERE IS NO AGREEMENT BETWEEN THE DIVINE AND THE HUMAN SACRAMENT, THE STANDARD OF CHRIST AND THE STANDARD OF THE DEVIL, THE CAMP OF LIGHT AND THE CAMP OF DARKNESS. ONE SOUL CANNOT BE DUE TO TWO MASTERS--GOD AND CAESAR. AND YET MOSES CARRIED A ROD, AND AARON WORE A BUCKLE, AND JOHN (BAPTIST) IS GIRT WITH LEATHER AND JOSHUA THE SON OF NUN LEADS A LINE OF MARCH; AND THE PEOPLE WARRED: IF IT PLEASES YOU TO SPORT**

**WITH THE SUBJECT. BUT HOW WILL A CHRISTIAN MAN WAR, NAY, HOW WILL HE SERVE EVEN IN PEACE, WITHOUT A SWORD, WHICH THE LORD HAS TAKEN AWAY? FOR ALBEIT SOLDIERS HAD COME UNTO JOHN, AND HAD RECEIVED THE FORMULA OF THEIR RULE; ALBEIT, LIKEWISE, A CENTURION HAD BELIEVED; STILL THE LORD AFTERWARD, IN DISARMING PETER, UNBELTED EVERY SOLDIER. NO DRESS IS LAWFUL AMONG US, IF ASSIGNED TO ANY UNLAWFUL ACTION. (FROM "THEMELIOS" VOLUME 33, ISSUE 1)**

**TO BEGIN WITH THE REAL GROUND OF THE MILITARY CROWN, I THINK WE MUST FIRST INQUIRE WHETHER WARFARE IS PROPER AT ALL FOR CHRISTIANS. WHAT SENSE IS THERE IN DISCUSSING THE MERELY ACCIDENTAL, WHEN THAT ON WHICH IT RESTS IS TO BE CONDEMNED? DO WE BELIEVE IT LAWFUL FOR A HUMAN OATH TO BE SUPERADDED TO ONE DIVINE, FOR A MAN TO COME UNDER PROMISE TO ANOTHER MASTER AFTER CHRIST?... SHALL IT BE HELD LAWFUL TO MAKE AN OCCUPATION OF THE SWORD, WHEN THE LORD PROCLAIMS THAT HE WHO USES THE SWORD SHALL PERISH BY THE SWORD? AND SHALL THE SON OF PEACE TAKE PART IN THE BATTLE WHEN IT DOES NOT BECOME HIM EVEN TO SUE AT LAW?... INDEED, IF, PUTTING MY STRENGTH TO THE QUESTION, I BANISH FROM US THE MILITARY LIFE... (FROM "ANTE-NICENE FATHERS" VOL.3)**

**IF WE ARE COMMANDED, THEN, TO LOVE OUR ENEMIES, AS I HAVE REMARKED ABOVE, WHOM HAVE WE TO HATE? IF INJURED, WE ARE FORBIDDEN TO RETALIATE, LEST WE BECOME AS BAD OURSELVES: WHO CAN SUFFER INJURY AT OUR HANDS? (FROM "ANTE-NICENE FATHERS" VOL.3 PG. 45)**

**IF ONE ATTEMPT TO PROVOKE YOU BY MANUAL VIOLENCE, THE MONITION OF THE LORD IS AT HAND: "TO HIM," HE SAITH, "WHO SMITETH THEE ON THE FACE, TURN THE OTHER CHEEK LIKEWISE." LET OUTRAGEOUSNESS BE WEARIED OUT BY YOUR PATIENCE. WHATEVER THAT BLOW MAY BE, CONJOINED WITH PAIN AND CONTUMELY, IT SHALL RECEIVE A HEAVIER ONE FROM THE LORD. YOU WOUND THAT OUTRAGEOUS ONE MORE BY ENDURING: FOR HE WILL BE BEATEN BY HIM FOR WHOSE SAKE YOU ENDURE. (FROM "ANTE-NICENE FATHERS" VOL.3 PG. 45)**

**NO ONE GIVES THE NAME OF SHEEP TO THOSE WHO FALL IN BATTLE WITH ARMS IN HAND, AND WHILE REPELLING FORCE WITH FORCE, BUT ONLY TO THOSE WHO ARE SLAIN, YIELDING THEMSELVES UP IN THEIR OWN PLACE OF DUTY AND WITH PATIENCE, RATHER THAN FIGHTING IN SELF-DEFENSE. (FROM "ANTE-NICENE FATHERS" VOL.3 PG. 415)**

**CHRIST, IN DISARMING PETER, DISARMED EVERY SOLDIER. (FROM "ANTE-NICENE FATHERS" VOL.3)**

**THE CHRISTIAN DOES NOT HURT EVEN HIS ENEMY. (FROM TERTULLIAN COLLECTION BY AETERNA PRESS)**

**ONLY WITHOUT THE SWORD CAN THE CHRISTIAN WAGE WAR: THE LORD HAS ABOLISHED THE SWORD. (FROM "THE UNFINISHED CONVERSATION.")**

the "Testament of our Lord" (4th or 5th century)

**IF ANYONE BE A SOLDIER OR IN AUTHORITY, LET HIM BE TAUGHT NOT TO OPPRESS OR TO KILL OR TO ROB, OR TO BE ANGRY OR TO RAGE AND AFFLICT ANYONE. BUT LET THOSE RATIONS SUFFICE HIM WHICH ARE GIVEN TO HIM. BUT IF THEY WISH TO BE BAPTIZED IN THE LORD, LET THEM CEASE FROM MILITARY SERVICE OR FROM THE [POST OF] AUTHORITY, AND IF NOT LET THEM NOT BE RECEIVED. LET A CATECHUMEN OR A BELIEVER OF THE PEOPLE, IF HE DESIRE TO BE A SOLDIER, EITHER CEASE FROM HIS INTENTION, OR IF NOT LET HIM BE REJECTED. FOR HE HATH DESPISED GOD BY HIS THOUGHT, AND LEAVING THE THINGS OF THE SPIRIT, HE HATH PERFECTED HIMSELF IN THE FLESH AND HATH TREATED THE FAITH WITH CONTEMPT.**

Athenagoras 133-190

**WHAT MAN OF SOUND MIND, THEREFORE, WILL AFFIRM, WHILE SUCH IS OUR CHARACTER, THAT WE ARE MURDERERS? FOR WE CANNOT EAT HUMAN FLESH TILL WE HAVE KILLED SOME ONE. THE FORMER CHARGE, THEREFORE, BEING FALSE, IF ANY ONE SHOULD ASK THEM IN REGARD TO THE SECOND, WHETHER THEY HAVE SEEN WHAT THEY ASSERT, NOT ONE OF THEM WOULD BE SO BAREFACED AS TO SAY THAT HE HAD. AND YET WE HAVE SLAVES, SOME MORE AND SOME FEWER, BY WHOM WE COULD**

**NOT HELP BEING SEEN; BUT EVEN OF THESE, NOT ONE HAS BEEN FOUND TO INVENT EVEN SUCH THINGS AGAINST US. FOR WHEN THEY KNOW THAT WE CANNOT ENDURE EVEN TO SEE A MAN PUT TO DEATH, THOUGH JUSTLY; WHO OF THEM CAN ACCUSE US OF MURDER OR CANNIBALISM? WHO DOES NOT RECKON AMONG THE THINGS OF GREATEST INTEREST THE CONTESTS OF GLADIATORS AND WILD BEASTS, ESPECIALLY THOSE WHICH ARE GIVEN BY YOU? BUT WE, DEEMING THAT TO SEE A MAN PUT TO DEATH IS MUCH THE SAME AS KILLING HIM, HAVE ABJURED SUCH SPECTACLES. HOW, THEN, WHEN WE DO NOT EVEN LOOK ON, LEST WE SHOULD CONTRACT GUILT AND POLLUTION, CAN WE PUT PEOPLE TO DEATH? AND WHEN WE SAY THAT THOSE WOMEN WHO USE DRUGS TO BRING ON ABORTION COMMIT MURDER, AND WILL HAVE TO GIVE AN ACCOUNT TO GOD FOR THE ABORTION, ON WHAT PRINCIPLE SHOULD WE COMMIT MURDER? FOR IT DOES NOT BELONG TO THE SAME PERSON TO REGARD THE VERY FŒTUS IN THE WOMB AS A CREATED BEING, AND THEREFORE AN OBJECT OF GOD'S CARE, AND WHEN IT HAS PASSED INTO LIFE, TO KILL IT; AND NOT TO EXPOSE AN INFANT, BECAUSE THOSE WHO EXPOSE THEM ARE CHARGEABLE WITH CHILD-MURDER, AND ON THE OTHER HAND, WHEN IT HAS BEEN REARED TO DESTROY IT. BUT WE ARE IN ALL THINGS ALWAYS ALIKE AND THE SAME, SUBMITTING OURSELVES TO REASON, AND NOT RULING OVER IT. ( FROM "ANTE-NICENE FATHERS" VOL. 2)**

Martin of Tours 315-397

**HITHERTO I HAVE SERVED YOU AS A SOLDIER; ALLOW ME NOW TO BECOME A SOLDIER TO GOD. LET THE MAN WHO IS TO SERVE YOU RECEIVE YOUR DONATIVE. I AM A SOLDIER OF CHRIST; IT IS NOT PERMISSIBLE FOR ME TO FIGHT.**

Marcellus the Centurion ???-298

**I SERVE JESUS CHRIST THE ETERNAL KING. I WILL NO LONGER SERVE YOUR EMPERORS...IT IS NOT RIGHT FOR A CHRISTIAN TO SERVE THE ARMIES OF THIS WORLD. (FROM "JESUS FOR PRESIDENT")**

Tatian of Assyria 120-180

**I DO NOT WISH TO BE A KING; I AM NOT ANXIOUS TO BE RICH; I DECLINE MILITARY COMMAND... DIE TO THE WORLD, REPUDIATING**

**THE MADNESS THAT IS IN IT. (FROM "ANTI-NICENE FATHERS" VOL. 2)**

Origen 184-253

**YOU CANNOT DEMAND MILITARY SERVICE OF CHRISTIANS ANY MORE THAN YOU CAN OF PRIESTS. WE DO NOT GO FORTH AS SOLDIERS WITH THE EMPEROR EVEN IF HE DEMANDS THIS. (FROM "AGAINST CELSUS" VIII.68,73)**

**THE MORE PIOUS A MAN IS, THE MORE EFFECTIVE HE IS IN HELPING THE EMPERORS—MORE SO THAN THE SOLDIERS WHO GO OUT INTO THE LINES AND KILL ALL THE ENEMY TROOPS THAT THEY CAN .... WE WHO BY OUR PRAYERS DESTROY ALL DAEMONS WHICH STIR UP WARS, VIOLATE OATHS, AND DISTURB THE PEACE, ARE OF MORE HELP TO THE EMPERORS THAN THOSE WHO SEEM TO BE DOING THE FIGHTING .... AND THOUGH WE DO NOT BECOME FELLOW-SOLDIERS WITH [THE EMPEROR], EVEN IF HE PRESSES FOR THIS, YET WE ARE FIGHTING FOR HIM AND COMPOSING A SPECIAL ARMY OF PIETY THROUGH OUR INTERCESSIONS TO GOD. (FROM "AGAINST CELSUS" 8.73)**

**TO THOSE WHO ASK US WHENCE WE HAVE COME OR WHOM WE HAVE FOR A LEADER, WE SAY THAT WE HAVE COME IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE COUNSELS OF JESUS TO CUT DOWN OUR WARLIKE AND ARROGANT SWORDS OF ARGUMENT INTO PLOUGHSHARES, AND WE CONVERT INTO SICKLES THE SPEARS WE FORMERLY USED IN FIGHTING. FOR WE NO LONGER TAKE 'SWORD AGAINST A NATION,' NOR DO WE LEARN 'ANY MORE TO MAKE WAR,' HAVING BECOME SONS OF PEACE FOR THE SAKE OF JESUS, WHO IS OUR LEADER, INSTEAD OF FOLLOWING THE ANCESTRAL CUSTOMS IN WHICH WE WERE STRANGERS TO THE COVENANTS. (FROM "THE RIGHT CHURCH: LIVE LIKE THE FIRST CHRISTIANS")**

**...FOR NEITHER CELSUS NOR THEY WHO THINK WITH HIM ARE ABLE TO POINT OUT ANY ACT ON THE PART OF CHRISTIANS WHICH SAVOURS OF REBELLION. AND YET, IF A REVOLT HAD LED TO THE FORMATION OF THE CHRISTIAN COMMONWEALTH, SO THAT IT DERIVED ITS EXISTENCE IN THIS WAY FROM THAT OF THE JEWS, WHO WERE PERMITTED TO TAKE UP ARMS IN DEFENSE OF**

**THE MEMBERS OF THEIR FAMILIES, AND TO SLAY THEIR ENEMIES, THE CHRISTIAN LAWGIVER WOULD NOT HAVE ALTOGETHER FORBIDDEN THE PUTTING OF MEN TO DEATH; AND YET HE NOWHERE TEACHES THAT IT IS RIGHT FOR HIS OWN DISCIPLES TO OFFER VIOLENCE TO ANY ONE, HOWEVER WICKED. (FROM "THE SACRED WRITINGS OF ORIGEN")**

Justin Martyr 100-165

**AND WHEN THE SPIRIT OF PROPHECY SPEAKS AS PREDICTING THINGS THAT ARE TO COME TO PASS, HE SPEAKS IN THIS WAY: "FOR OUT OF ZION SHALL GO FORTH THE LAW, AND THE WORD OF THE LORD FROM JERUSALEM. AND HE SHALL JUDGE AMONG THE NATIONS, AND SHALL REBUKE MANY PEOPLE; AND THEY SHALL BEAT THEIR SWORDS INTO PLOUGHSHARES, AND THEIR SPEARS INTO PRUNING-HOOKS: NATION SHALL NOT LIFT UP SWORD AGAINST NATION, NEITHER SHALL THEY LEARN WAR ANY MORE." AND THAT IT DID SO COME TO PASS, WE CAN CONVINCED YOU. FOR FROM JERUSALEM THERE WENT OUT INTO THE WORLD, MEN, TWELVE IN NUMBER, AND THESE ILLITERATE, OF NO ABILITY IN SPEAKING: BUT BY THE POWER OF GOD THEY PROCLAIMED TO EVERY RACE OF MEN THAT THEY WERE SENT BY CHRIST TO TEACH TO ALL THE WORD OF GOD; AND WE WHO FORMERLY USED TO MURDER ONE ANOTHER DO NOT ONLY NOW REFRAIN FROM MAKING WAR UPON OUR ENEMIES, BUT ALSO, THAT WE MAY NOT LIE NOR DECEIVE OUR EXAMINERS, WILLINGLY DIE CONFESSING CHRIST. FOR THAT SAYING, "THE TONGUE HAS SWORN BUT THE MIND IS UNSWORN," MIGHT BE IMITATED BY US IN THIS MATTER. BUT IF THE SOLDIERS ENROLLED BY YOU, AND WHO HAVE TAKEN THE MILITARY OATH, PREFER THEIR ALLEGIANCE TO THEIR OWN LIFE, AND PARENTS, AND COUNTRY, AND ALL KINDRED, THOUGH YOU CAN OFFER THEM NOTHING INCORRUPTIBLE, IT WERE VERILY RIDICULOUS IF WE, WHO EARNESTLY LONG FOR INCORRUPTION, SHOULD NOT ENDURE ALL THINGS, IN ORDER TO OBTAIN WHAT WE DESIRE FROM HIM WHO IS ABLE TO GRANT IT. (FROM FIRST APOLOGY 39)**

**"WE OURSELVES WERE WELL CONVERSANT WITH WAR, MURDER, AND EVERYTHING EVIL, BUT ALL OF US THROUGHOUT THE WHOLE WIDE EARTH HAVE TRADED IN OUR WEAPONS OF WAR. WE HAVE EXCHANGED OUR SWORDS FOR PLOUGHSHARES, OUR SPEARS**



**FOR FARM TOOLS. NOW WE CULTIVATE THE FEAR OF GOD, JUSTICE, KINDNESS TO MEN, FAITH, AND THE EXPECTATION OF THE FUTURE GIVEN TO US BY THE FATHER HIMSELF THROUGH THE CRUCIFIED ONE.”**

**(FROM "DIALOGUE WITH TRYPHO" 110.3.4 )**

**AND WE WHO WERE FILLED WITH WAR, AND MUTUAL SLAUGHTER, AND EVERY WICKEDNESS, HAVE EACH THROUGH THE WHOLE EARTH CHANGED OUR WARLIKE WEAPONS, – OUR SWORDS INTO PLOUGHS, AND OUR SPEARS INTO IMPLEMENTS OF TILLAGE, – AND WE CULTIVATE PIETY, RIGHTEOUSNESS, PHILANTHROPY, FAITH, AND HOPE, WHICH WE HAVE FROM THE FATHER HIMSELF THROUGH HIM WHO WAS CRUCIFIED. (FROM "DIALOGUE WITH TRYPHO" 50)**

**Cyprian of Carthage 200-258:**

**NONE OF US OFFERS RESISTANCE WHEN HE IS SEIZED, OR AVENGES HIMSELF FOR YOUR UNJUST VIOLENCE, ALTHOUGH OUR PEOPLE ARE NUMEROUS AND PLENTIFUL...IT IS NOT LAWFUL FOR US TO HATE, AND SO WE PLEASE GOD MORE WHEN WE RENDER NO REQUITAL FOR INJURY...WE REPAY YOUR HATRED WITH KINDNESS. ( FROM "ANTE-NICENE FATHERS" VOL. 5 PG. 462)**

**WARS ARE SCATTERED ALL OVER THE EARTH WITH THE BLOODY HORROR OF CAMPS. THE WHOLE WORLD IS WET WITH MUTUAL BLOOD. AND MURDER–WHICH IS ADMITTED TO BE A CRIME IN THE CASE OF AN INDIVIDUAL–IS CALLED A VIRTUE WHEN IT IS COMMITTED WHOLESALE. IMPUNITY IS CLAIMED FOR THE WICKED DEEDS, NOT BECAUSE THEY ARE GUILTLESS, BUT BECAUSE THE CRUELTY IS PERPETRATED ON A GRAND SCALE. (FROM "THE SACRED WRITINGS OF SAINT CYPRIAN")**

**Arnobius ???-330**

**WE, A NUMEROUS BAND OF MEN AS WE ARE, HAVE LEARNED FROM HIS TEACHING AND HIS LAWS THAT EVIL OUGHT NOT TO BE REQUITED WITH EVIL, THAT IT IS BETTER TO SUFFER WRONG THAN TO INFLICT IT, THAT WE SHOULD RATHER SHED OUR OWN BLOOD THAN STAIN OUR HANDS AND OUR CONSCIENCE WITH THAT OF ANOTHER. (FROM "ANTI-NICENE FATHERS" VOL. 6)**

**WE WOULD RATHER SHED OUR OWN BLOOD THAN STAIN OUR HANDS AND OUR CONSCIENCE WITH THAT OF ANOTHER. AS A RESULT, AN UNGRATEFUL WORLD IS NOW ENJOYING—AND FOR A LONG PERIOD HAS ENJOYED—A BENEFIT FROM CHRIST. FOR BY HIS MEANS, THE RAGE OF SAVAGE FEROCITY HAS BEEN SOFTENED AND HAS BEGUN TO WITHHOLD HOSTILE HANDS FROM THE BLOOD OF A FELLOW CREATURE. IN FACT, IF ALL MEN WITHOUT EXCEPTION...WOULD LEND AN EAR FOR A WHILE TO HIS SALUTARY AND PEACEFUL RULES,...THE WHOLE WORLD WOULD BE LIVING IN THE MOST PEACEFUL TRANQUILITY. THE WORLD WOULD HAVE TURNED THE USE OF STEEL INTO MORE PEACEFUL USES AND WOULD UNITE TOGETHER IN BLESSED HARMONY. (FROM "ANTI-NICENE FATHERS" VOL. 6)**

Archelaus 3rd to 4th century

**THOSE SOLDIERS WERE FILLED WITH WONDER AND ADMIRATION AT THE GRANDEUR OF THE MAN'S PIETY AND GENEROSITY AND WERE STRUCK WITH AMAZEMENT. THEY FELT THE FORCE OF THIS EXAMPLE OF PITY. AS A RESULT, MANY OF THEM WERE ADDED TO THE FAITH OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST AND THREW OFF THE BELT OF MILITARY SERVICE. (FROM "ANTI-NICENE FATHERS" VOL. 6)**

Theonas of Alexandria ??-300

**DO NO ONE ANY INJURY AT ANY TIME; PROVOKE NO ONE TO ANGER. IF AN INJURY IS DONE TO YOU, LOOK TO JESUS CHRIST. AND EVEN AS YOU DESIRE HIM TO FORGIVE YOUR TRANSGRESSIONS, ALSO FORGIVE OTHERS THEIRS. (FROM "ANTE-NICENE FATHERS" VOL. 6 PG. 161)**

Irenaeus 130-202

**NOR AN EYE FOR AN EYE AND A TOOTH FOR A TOOTH, FOR HIM WHO COUNTS NO MAN HIS ENEMY, BUT ALL HIS NEIGHBORS, AND THEREFORE CAN NEVER STRETCH OUT HIS HAND FOR VENGEANCE. ("PROOF OF THE APOSTOLIC PREACHING" 96)**

Ignatius of Antioch 35-107

**NOTHING IS MORE PRECIOUS THAN PEACE, BY WHICH ALL WAR, BOTH IN HEAVEN AND EARTH, IS BROUGHT TO AN END. THEREFORE HAVE NEED OF MEEKNESS, BY WHICH THE PRINCE**

**OF THIS WORLD IS BROUGHT TO NOUGHT. (FROM EPISTLE TO THE TRALLIANS 4)**

Clement of Alexandria 150-214

**FOR WE ARE NOT TO DELINEATE THE FACES OF IDOLS, WE WHO ARE PROHIBITED TO CLEAVE TO THEM; NOR A SWORD, NOR A BOW, FOLLOWING AS WE DO, PEACE. (FROM "ANTI-NICENE FATHERS" VOL. 2)**

**THE CHRISTIAN POOR ARE "AN ARMY WITHOUT WEAPONS, WITHOUT WAR, WITHOUT BLOODSHED, WITHOUT ANGER, WITHOUT DEFILEMENT.**

**ABOVE ALL CHRISTIANS ARE NOT ALLOWED TO CORRECT BY VIOLENCE SINFUL WRONGDOINGS.**

Comodianus circa 250

**DO NOT WILLINGLY USE FORCE AND DO NOT RETURN FORCE WHEN IT IS USED AGAINST YOU. (FROM "THE SACRED WRITINGS OF COMMODIANUS")**

Athanasius of Alexandria 293-373

**CHRISTIANS, INSTEAD OF ARMING THEMSELVES WITH SWORDS, EXTEND THEIR HANDS IN PRAYER. (FROM "ON THE INCARNATION OF THE WORD")**

There is a lot of debate as to the reasons early Christians didn't encourage military service and why we don't see many Christians in the Roman military. Being a part of the military involved certain pagan elements, oaths, or potentially worshipping gods or the emperor. The early church was persecuted, so perhaps a Christian soldier would be asked to kill another Christian. We could discuss all the various reasons that the early church tended to advocate against participating in the army, but we can largely agree that military service wasn't a big thing for early Christians, and was discouraged by many. Most notably, it was harshly criticized in Canon 12 at the first Council of Nicaea - an ecumenical council of the church. It wasn't until several hundred years into the church, with the rise of Augustine and his popularization of just war notions, that we find military service becoming something Christians do.

## PACIFISM APPLIED:

I don't think you can find a much better example of pacifism played out in modernity than when you look at the Amish. I remember when I was a junior in college, I heard about [a mass shooting at an Amish school in Pennsylvania](#). A lone gunman had entered the school, told all the boys and adults to leave, then tied up and shot ten little girls. The gunman killed five and severely injured the others, leaving some emotional and mental scars on others in the community.

There are different degrees of pacifism. Some pacifists think there should never be force used, some think that restraint is ok, and some think that non-lethal force (biting, kicking, etc) is ok. The Amish, in this case, did not use any force at all. Now most will look at what they did and condemn their action as inexcusable inaction. What might have happened if the adults and boys would have resisted? Perhaps nobody would have been killed. Maybe the article printed the next day on page ten would be "Amish Fight Back and Save Lives." The few who read it could have breathed a sigh of relief at the almost tragic story.

But the Amish didn't resist. Maybe, in retrospect, those who were present on that fateful day wish they would have done more - like not left that classroom, attempted to pull the gun away from the shooter, tried to restrain the shooter, etc. I don't know. But they don't wish the shooter dead. They wouldn't have sought to harm the shooter even now, knowing what he would do. But it's not fair to say that the Amish did nothing. When their enemy love and their refusal to fight ended in the death and maiming of ten little girls in their community, something amazing happened. The Amish visited the family of the shooter and gave them forgiveness before it was sought, mere hours after the shooting. The Amish attended the shooter's funeral and formed a protective wall around his family so the media could not film them. One of the girls who survived the mass shooting helped to clean the family's home while the shooter's mom was undergoing cancer treatment. The Amish built the shooter's family a sun room as a gift just months after the shooting. And the list goes on.

For anyone that says the Amish, or that pacifists in general are characterized by inaction, they are mistaken. Pacifism requires the greatest discipline and self-control and the greatest characteristics and virtues - faith, hope, love, forgiveness, generosity, etc - to all be exhibited. Pacifistic thought refuses to trade love and forgiveness now for security and the avoidance of pain. Violence towards another puts love and forgiveness to the side until the action that makes someone unlovable and unforgivable is complete. When you kill someone, you're not loving them or forgiving them in the moment. But the Amish chose to love and forgive even as

tragedy unfolded. And the newspaper headlines the next day - front page headlines - broadcast a vital message that the Amish preserved when they refused to preserve their own lives and the lives of those they hold most dear. They preserved the message of the gospel and the message of love. The world got to see that message only because the Amish exhibited enemy love. They didn't just display the love of martyrdom and loss, but the love of unimaginably disciplined action, as they reached out for restoration and reconciliation. You don't get to broadcast that message when you kill someone. The message of love and forgiveness loses its validity and power in violence.

Pacifism is so compelling because isn't just a disposition after a tragic fact. It's a value system that is embraced before tragedy. Someone could shoot a mass-shooter and still extend hospitality and love towards their enemy's family. But you don't see that very often. Why? Because a value system that says "I should kill my enemy before he kills me" is far less likely to exude love for one's enemy and their family. If your enemy doesn't deserve love and forgiveness in the moment at which they do evil against you, why would you extend love to them afterwards? But on pacifism, your enemy deserves their life, your love, and your forgiveness even when they are performing their worst deeds. When even your enemy is deserving of their life and your love, it just makes sense that your generosity and forgiveness are going to be extended to them and their family after their evil act is finished. Most pacifists will never face a time when they need to put their pacifism to the test in terms of whether or not they enact violence to counter violence. But that's not all pacifism is. Pacifism is an ideology that embraces a certain view on the value of *all* human beings, regardless of their actions. That valuing seeps into every action and every facet of life, and shines forth like it did in the Amish after the greatest tragedy of their lives.

Likewise, most of us will never have to face the decision of whether or not we will kill another human being. Knowing that, what would embracing a notion of pacifism look like for Christians right now? It's easy to talk about ideology and the action of others, but it's much different to figure out what we'd do in particular situations or how an ideology should impact us. In my mind, at least in the States, embracing non-violence would have a significant impact on the gun debate. To be clear, I own guns. I love shooting guns. But I am very put off by the Christian Right's embracing of violent means to end confrontations.

As a case in point, I see many Christians on the right who are advocating that teachers carry guns or that we hire more security guards for schools to neutralize any threats to students. This seems like a perfectly wonderful solution, as any

perpetrator willing to harm others deserves to be shot. More guns in the hands of good guys means a better chance the shooter will be put down. Why should we feel bad? In fact, we could save a lot of taxpayer money by avoiding court costs. Guns are pretty cheap. It wouldn't be that expensive to put a few guns in the hands of teachers. But what kind of reaction is this for Christians to have? Doesn't it seem more fitting to pursue avenues that protect all life, even the life of any potential shooter? What about metal detectors? Why is it illegitimate to talk about paying for someone's healthcare (mental, in this case), but it's legitimate to talk about taxpayers paying for teachers to carry weapons and obtain training in order to kill those who go off the deep end? Why not implement safe rooms like [this](#)? Why not pursue all the non-lethal means before we consider stacking the lethal means? We say a lot when we talk about what we are willing to pay for or not pay for, and we say a lot by what means we choose to pursue as our primary focus.

But schools aren't the only consideration. What about the home. If a Christian values all life, why should they feel validated in having a weapon at the ready for an intruder? Rather than buying a gun, buying a safe, practicing at the shooting range, etc - if you're truly concerned about your safety, why not put that money towards an alarm system, a dog, a fence, a safe room, a taser, or any other number of nonlethal or nonviolent means for protection? Do you know anyone who owns a gun for self-defense in the home who has exhausted all their non-lethal options? If we truly value life, even an enemy's life, under what circumstances would we ever consider shooting another human being?

But of course, the best laid defenses can be assailed, and we also know that when we are out in public we must leave our strongholds. Evil will inevitably befall some people. But is it my job to meet violence with violence? Is it my job to ensure that evil cannot happen to me, my loved ones, or the innocent anywhere in this world? Or is it my job to submit to the means God has given us to live by in his Kingdom, and submit to his sovereignty should he allow evil to befall me? If I have exhausted all of my moral means of prevention, what more do I have to do than submit to God and trust in his provision for endurance, love, and forgiveness? If I have loved all and I have done my best to live peaceably with all, yet evil assails me, then what can I do but submit to my suffering, use the means of Christ, and lovingly endure? My job is not to defeat evil in the world, though by ministering the gospel of Christ I hope that evil in the world is subdued as men and women change allegiances from their kingdoms to the Kingdom. Rather, my job as a Christian is to see evil defeated within me - to be sanctified unto God as a holy offering - and to trust in his sovereignty as I employ the means he has given me to use to bring about his Kingdom.

Means aren't the only important thing, though. While I think Christians who embrace violence get the means of God wrong, I also think they get the ends of God wrong. We are not to use the means of violence because we seek the end of love - even the love of an enemy. I heard [Greg Boyd](#) give a fantastic example in a podcast I just listened to. Most Christians will say that the loving thing to do when an aggressor breaks into a home is to protect one's family by shooting the aggressor. But Boyd asks us to imagine that we have a son who snaps because of drugs, some psychosis, or whatever else. Now, our own son comes into our home seeking to do our families harm. What do we do? Maybe we still end up shooting him, but this situation looks a lot different. Rather than killing being the primary means we use, it shifts to the bottom of the list. And if we do end up shooting, we don't have the feeling of justified relief. We would be devastated and wrought with guilt, doubt, heartbrokenness, etc. Why? Because we loved our son. We loved the aggressor.

Boyd says that Christians have turned the idea of loving our enemies into simply loving our grouchy neighbors. When the people of Christ's time heard "enemy," they immediately thought of the Romans - the godless, bachanal, terrorist, warmongering, illegitimate, thieving, corrupt, Romans. Enemies are those who truly are our enemies. What would it look like to love that kind of enemy? Look at the early church. And what would it look like to love our enemies? It would look like viewing them as our sons and daughters, just as God viewed his enemies when they still hated him. God has made us sons and daughters, and we must do the same with everyone - even our enemies. We must love them so that in every situation, we seek their good just as much as our own good or the good of our family.

## EVALUATING THE ALTERNATIVE TO PACIFISM:

Despite Christ's words, biblical examples, early church teaching and leanings, and extrabiblical examples of pacifism, most Christians still aren't pacifists. Why? With such a weighty case for pacifism, what is it that negates all the evidence for it? I believe it is our intuition. Most just can't bring themselves to believe that restraint against evil is a good thing. And if we can bring ourselves to acknowledge that it may be a noble thing, at times, we still can't bring ourselves to believe that it's a practical thing. It may be noble to lay your life and the life of your family down for an enemy, but what good will that bring about? Isn't that just a waste of life? Pacifism is idealistic, and in the real world, idealism just doesn't work.

Before going further, I do want to say that I am not discrediting a non-pacifistic argument from intuition. I think intuition is extremely valuable and shouldn't just be tossed to the side. But I find that intuition on specific moral acts tends to be hit or miss. We are fallen creatures and our hearts love to justify actions that are in our self-interest. When dealing with non-violence, I think the intuition of most is faulty. I liken it to jumping off a 30 foot platform on the moon. Living on Earth our whole lives, were we to prepare to jump from a thirty foot platform on the moon, all of our intuition would scream to us that we will injure ourselves. But we'd find that if we jumped, we wouldn't get hurt due to the moon's significantly decreased gravitational pull. I think the same is true in the moral instance of pacifism. Our intuition screams to us that non-resistance against evil is fruitless. It's of no benefit. But that's only because we measure benefit by security, comfort, perpetuated existence, the avoidance of pain, etc. We are pulled very strongly by our self-interest. But when we shift our allegiance to Christ, our universe changes. We place all our sin, all our weight, and all our cares on him, and we are released from the strong gravitational pull of all that weighs us down. It may be intuitive to us that pacifism is impractical and will do more harm than good. But that's just because we haven't lived with a shifted allegiance long enough or deeply enough for God to prove that his yoke is easy and his burden is light, even as we bear a heavy cross. But that's why God has given us his word, the Word, and the words of the saints - the great cloud of witnesses. We see God's promises and work through suffering and evil. We see God take suffering and evil upon himself. And we have testimonies of the biblical and extrabiblical saints who testify that God uses the means of sacrifice and love. Pacifism may not be intuitive, but that's because we've lived in our self-centered world for far too long, and continue to attempt to be the center of the universe. It isn't until we fully release ourselves into the service of Christ and experience his goodness that he will prove to us through experience that



our intuitions are wrong.

As a great example of our faulty intuition, you can take a look at the early church. They seemed to look at things differently. First and foremost, pragmatism didn't seem to be their metric for judging actions. Obedience and love were their metric. If Christ said it and if Christ did it, then who am I, a servant of Christ my Lord, to put myself above obedience that follows him in like fashion? It wasn't until the mid-300's or so, a time that corresponds with Christianity becoming legal and then the state religion, that we see Christianity throw off the pacifistic notion of peace. Why might that be? I believe it is because as the numbers of Christians grew and as the state began to identify as Christian, the state recognized that armies and national defense wouldn't work too well if the populace weren't allowed to kill. If the church was to be married to the state, you had to explain away Christ's teachings and the first several hundred years of teaching on peace. When you couple this with the fact that Rome was losing its might, the bias and motives of just war formulation become more suspect. It seems a bit too coincidental that the man largely responsible for popularizing the discussion of a just war lived during a time when Rome received its first sacking in nearly 1,000 years. Augustine surely knew Christian pacifism would hamper the formation of armies, and he knew that Rome was weaker than she had been in awhile, and her enemies stronger now than they had been for quite some time. I don't think Augustine's creation of this just war notion was malicious. I think the rulers genuinely feared for their people and the preservation of the great society that had been created. The idea of a "just war" wasn't created in order for the state to assert power and conquer other countries, but to protect. That is noble. But I think it was misguided.

As one example of the gymnastics Augustine must do to defend his intuitive notion of a just war against Christ's teaching, you can look at *Contra Faustum Manichaeum* [book 22 sections 69–76](#). In this section he defends Moses's murder of an Egyptian and paints Saul as just a misaimed, overzealous individual who murdered Christians. Moses and Saul weren't evil in the sense that they sought to harm. No, they were seeking to protect something. Augustine even goes so far as to say had Moses not have killed the Egyptian, he would have been in the wrong. This seems a far cry to me from what Peter and Paul tell slaves to do in their time by submitting to their masters even if their masters were harsh. While Augustine at least thinks it was sin in the case of Saul, he argues that God was able to take overzealous or misdirected men like Saul, Peter, and Moses and aim them in the right direction. But the most disturbing aspect of Augustine's claim is that when Peter sought to protect Jesus Christ, his Lord, the only reason Peter was illegitimate in this noble act was because Christ didn't command him to protect in

that particular instance. Think about that. If it isn't only good to protect another person, as Augustine and most just war theorists say, then what would have been a more positive, knowable good than protecting the God and savior of the universe as Peter sought to do? Yet Augustine seems to contradict his earlier defense of Moses here as he says that even in this case of protecting Christ, God's command to do harm to another in judgment is the only legitimate reason for us to do harm. Peter was therefore not justified in his protection of Christ. I agree with Augustine there. The judgments commanded by God in the OT are legitimate because God chose to use Israel as an instrument of judgment at times. But for Augustine to then go on and say that there can now be a just war today, when we don't have God clearly speaking to us about who to judge and who not to judge, is just scary. Yes, the Bible gives us some generalities about what is good and what is not good, but these are the same sorts of generalities Peter had when he wrongfully (according to Augustine) chose to defend Christ. If we can't use generalities and we require God's directive, how can anyone wage war today?

The circumstances surrounding the formulation of what would lead to Just War Theory are interesting, and I'd challenge you to take a look at that. But that is a huge discussion that I don't want to continue here. Rather, I want to look at the main motivation for not embracing pacifism - the intuition that pacifism is just too idealistic. Pacifism is believed by most to be an impractical means, and one that couldn't be truly lived out. Stanley Hauerwas, perhaps one of the most famous modern pacifists, wrote [a fantastic article](#) where he flips the charge of "idealism" back on the just war theorists. Most claim that pacifism is unrealistic, but how realistic is the notion of a just war? Is it really any more realistic than pacifism? More importantly for the Christian, is it any more moral and obedient to Christ to engage in a "just" war? Let's take a look at the structure which must take place for a war to be just and ask some questions about how such a thing might occur.

**Just Cause:** According to most iterations of the theory, there are two just causes. A state can wage war for reasons of national defense (of themselves or an ally), and a state can wage war for humanitarian reasons.

What kind of trust do you have to have in the leadership of a nation in order to do harm for them? If they say a country has weapons of mass destruction, what evidence is required before you can commit to war?

\*What kind of virtues would the people of America have to have to sustain a just war foreign policy and Pentagon?

\*What would an American foreign policy determined by just war principles look like?

**Just Peace:** This is a newer addition to just war theory. We are working on this idea that we must be moral in our dealings after peace. We have seen the results of a conquering "peace" when WWI led to WWII, and we have seen the humanitarian crises and unstable governments wars have left behind.

If you have enough resources to wage war and stop the immediate threat, but not bring just peace following the war, should you still go to war? Is the misery of the other's post-war populace worth saving the lives of some in your nation?

**Legitimate Authority:** Christians have historically viewed the state as the entity which can wage war, though that was very muddled throughout the middle ages.

Many wars throughout history have had very murky bases for "just cause." A number of wars didn't have a clear aggressor or party at fault. Since God gives all government the right to bear the sword, should a Christian really fight in such a war on a particular side just because he's fighting for his country?

**Proportionality:** The violence you deal out must be in proportion to the violence you receive, or the potential violence your enemy has threatened. For instance, I shouldn't use mustard gas against you unless you use it on me (or I'm pretty sure you will). Obviously we have the Geneva Convention now which outlaws the use of gas, but this isn't something just war theory necessarily forbids (assuming the other requirements are met).

Was it justified for the U.S. to use nuclear weapons on Japan to save significantly more U.S. soldiers? When you consider the bombs were dropped on civilians, does that change?

**Necessity:** War must be a last resort. All other options must have been exhausted before pursuing war.

\*How would those with the patience necessary to insure that a war be a last resort be elected to office?

**Civilian Safety:** Non-combatants must be preserved.

We don't fight on battlefields anymore, so war today almost always involves a large loss of civilian life by direct fire or as collateral from losing food, shelter, etc.

Is this justified?

Blockades have been popular during war. You essentially cut off all supplies going in and out of a country. While a blockade prevents raw materials from getting used for military purposes, it almost always hurts the civilian population by keeping out food and resources they need to eat, make money, shelter, and live their lives. Are blockades justified?

\*What kind of training do those in the military have to undergo in order to be willing to take casualties rather than conduct the war unjustly?

You'd be hard pressed to name any war in history that was even close justified on all these grounds. WWII doesn't even come close to fitting this, as it began due to a failure of "Just Peace" and lack of concessions from the WWI armistice. It failed the "legitimate authority" factor in countries like France where guerilla warfare was encouraged and appreciated by the Allies even after the French government conceded its authority. It failed the proportionality test with the use of atomic weapons. It failed the "necessity" or "last resort" criteria because the war almost certainly could have been avoided if the allies of WWI would have made some concessions and sought peace with Germany rather than conquest. And it miserably failed the "Civilian Safety" factor as civilians were often indiscriminately bombed, or excuses of military targets in the vicinity were used to justify all the civilian deaths. The firebombing of Tokyo alone (which was worse than the use of the A-bomb) killed hundreds of thousands and left over a million residents homeless.

If pacifism is idealistic in that it will never overcome evil and will inevitably allow evil men and women to run the world, can we let such idealism become a reality? Perhaps not. But what is the alternative? A "just" war? An ideal where rather than letting evil run the world, we harbor and embrace evil and injustice ourselves so we can see "justice" now and we have slightly more control, ease, pleasures, and freedoms? Pacifism may be idealistic in that it won't preserve the body. But it preserves the soul. A "just" war may preserve the bodies of the innocent, but it does so at the cost of marring our souls. I have yet to hear of a just war. They just don't happen. It's an ideal. If we can live with an ideal that can't be realized and turns our hearts towards evil, why can't we embrace an ideal that can't be realized and turns our hearts towards love - even love of our enemies?

## PACIFISM QUOTES TO PONDER:

The following quotes are not intended as proofs that pacifism is true. They are, however, an undergirding of the truths already put forward. In these quotes you will find individuals who have thought deeply about their experiences with evil and love, violence and non-violence. Most on this list had to confront violence head-on. Some, like Ronald Skirth, were actually converted to pacifism because of his use of violence and his experience with it. Some, like Bonhoeffer, were pacifistic, but gave that up when facing an evil they felt they had to address with violence. And others, like MLK, held on to non-violence throughout life.

These quotes express what some great minds have contemplated and learned about non-violence. These quotes aren't just sayings by idealists, but ideas from great people, most of which endured enormous horrors. I think you'll find these quotes insightful, as they bring to life some of the ideas and implications of violence and pacifism that may seem a bit more esoteric. I hope to grow this list as I come across good quotes.

**Ronald Skirth, from "The Reluctant Tommy." Also on Episode V of Hardcore History's WWI narrative, the last 20 minutes.**

***AT 19 I FOUND MY STANDARDS OF CONDUCT OBSOLETE, MY IDEALS SHATTERED. I HAD LOST ALL FAITH IN INSTITUTIONAL RELIGION. MY CHURCH HAD AUTHORIZED ME TO BREAK THE SIXTH COMMANDMENT IN THE NAME OF PATRIOTISM. 'BLESSED ARE THE PEACEMAKERS'? NO! NOT IN 1917. BLESSED ARE THE WAR WINNERS. BLESSED ARE THE MUNITION MAKERS. TWICE BLESSED, FOR THEY LINED THEIR POCKETS AND KEPT THEIR SKINS IN TACT AT THE SAME TIME. THESE WERE THE THOUGHTS THAT I COULDN'T DISMISS FROM MY MIND DURING THOSE DREADFUL MONTHS. I WOULDN'T HAVE STUCK A LABEL ON MYSELF THEN, BUT I KNOW NOW WHAT I HAD BECOME. IT'S A WORD THAT IS DISTASTEFUL TO MANY: PACIFIST.***

***I STILL BELIEVED IN GOD, THOUGH I WAS BEING ASSAILED BY DOUBTS. I PRAYED DAILY. PRAYED THAT HE WOULD STOP THE WAR GOING ON, AND END THE MISERY IT CAUSED. SOON IT BECAME OBVIOUS THAT HE WASN'T GOING TO, FOR THE LONGER IT WENT ON THE WORSE THE HORRORS OF IT BECAME. I HAD BEEN TAUGHT 'GOD IS LOVE'. RUBBISH! I COULDN'T HELP THINKING. IF HE LOVED US, IF HE WERE OMNIPOTENT HE COULD***

**PUT A STOP TO IT TO-DAY. BUT THEN, I THOUGHT, PERHAPS HE ISN'T OMNIPOTENT.**

**EVENTUALLY I WORKED IT OUT, - AT LEAST FOR MYSELF. GOD WAS ALL RIGHT. IT WAS WE WHO WERE WRONG. WHY THE HELL SHOULD HE CARE WHAT HAPPENED TO US LOT? WE HAD BROUGHT THIS WAR EVIL INTO EXISTENCE, NOT GOD. THE REASON EVIL AND UGLINESS WERE TRIUMPHING OVER GOODNESS AND BEAUTY, WHY PITY AND COMPASSION WERE CONSIDERED WEAKNESS, AND RUTHLESSNESS AND CRUELTY REGARDED AS NOBLE, - THE REASON FOR ALL THIS WAS THE WICKEDNESS IN OURSELVES AND NOT THE INDIFFERENCE OF GOD. THAT WAS WHY THE MORE MURDERS YOU COMMITTED, THE BIGGER THE HERO YOU BECAME. THAT WAS WHAT MADE YOUR SUPERIOR OFFICER SLAP YOU ON THE BACK AND SAY, 'SPLENDID, OLD CHAP! JOLLY GOOD SHOOTING!' WHEN YOUR SHELLS HAD DESTROYED IN MINUTES THE BEAUTY WHICH CRAFTSMEN HAD TOILED LIFETIMES TO CREATE.**

**Martin Luther King Jr.**

**MY STUDY OF GANDHI CONVINCED ME THAT TRUE PACIFISM IS NOT NONRESISTANCE TO EVIL, BUT NONVIOLENT RESISTANCE TO EVIL. BETWEEN THE TWO POSITIONS, THERE IS A WORLD OF DIFFERENCE. GANDHI RESISTED EVIL WITH AS MUCH VIGOR AND POWER AS THE VIOLENT RESISTER, BUT TRUE PACIFISM IS NOT UNREALISTIC SUBMISSION TO EVIL POWER. IT IS RATHER A COURAGEOUS CONFRONTATION OF EVIL BY THE POWER OF LOVE. . . .**

**NON-VIOLENCE MEANS AVOIDING NOT ONLY EXTERNAL PHYSICAL VIOLENCE, BUT ALSO INTERNAL VIOLENCE OF SPIRIT. YOU NOT ONLY REFUSE TO SHOOT A MAN, BUT YOU REFUSE TO HATE HIM.**

**Martin Luther King Jr.**

**...HOW COULD I SERVE AS ONE OF THE LEADERS OF A NONVIOLENT MOVEMENT AND AT THE SAME TIME USE WEAPONS OF VIOLENCE FOR MY PERSONAL PROTECTION? CORETTA AND I TALKED THE MATTER OVER FOR SEVERAL DAYS AND FINALLY AGREED THAT ARMS WERE NO SOLUTION. WE DECIDED THEN TO GET RID OF THE ONE WEAPON WE OWNED. WE TRIED TO SATISFY**

**OUR FRIENDS BY HAVING FLOODLIGHTS MOUNTED AROUND THE HOUSE, AND HIRING UNARMED WATCHMEN AROUND THE CLOCK. I ALSO PROMISED THAT I WOULD NOT TRAVEL AROUND THE CITY ALONE.**

**I WAS MUCH MORE AFRAID IN MONTGOMERY WHEN I HAD A GUN IN MY HOUSE. WHEN I DECIDED THAT I COULDN'T KEEP A GUN, I CAME FACE-TO-FACE WITH THE QUESTION OF DEATH AND I DEALT WITH IT. FROM THAT POINT ON, I NO LONGER NEEDED A GUN NOR HAVE I BEEN AFRAID. HAD WE BECOME DISTRACTED BY THE QUESTION OF MY SAFETY WE WOULD HAVE LOST THE MORAL OFFENSIVE AND SUNK TO THE LEVEL OF OUR OPPRESSORS.**

**Charles Spurgeon**

**I WISH THAT CHRISTIAN MEN WOULD INSIST MORE AND MORE ON THE UNRIGHTEOUSNESS OF WAR, BELIEVING THAT CHRISTIANITY MEANS NO SWORD, NO CANNON, NO BLOODSHED, AND THAT, IF A NATION IS DRIVEN TO FIGHT IN ITS OWN DEFENCE, CHRISTIANITY STANDS BY TO WEEP AND TO INTERVENE AS SOON AS POSSIBLE, AND NOT TO JOIN IN THE CRUEL SHOUTS WHICH CELEBRATE AN ENEMY'S SLAUGHTER.**

**(CHARLES SPURGEON, AN ALL-ROUND MINISTRY, CHAPTER 5: "A NEW DEPARTURE")**

**Dietrich Bonhoeffer**

**TO BELIEVE THE PROMISE OF JESUS THAT HIS FOLLOWERS SHALL POSSESS THE EARTH, AND AT THE SAME TIME TO FACE OUR ENEMIES UNARMED AND DEFENSELESS, PREFERRING TO INCUR INJUSTICE RATHER THAN TO DO WRONG OURSELVES, IS INDEED A NARROW WAY.**

**Menno Simons**

**ALL CHRISTIANS ARE COMMANDED TO LOVE THEIR ENEMIES... TELL ME, HOW CAN A CHRISTIAN DEFEND SCRIPTURALLY RETALIATION, REBELLION, WAR, STRIKING, SLAYING, TORTURING, STEALING, ROBBING AND PLUNDERING AND BURNING CITIES AND CONQUERING COUNTRIES?**

**Mahatma Gandhi**

***I OBJECT TO VIOLENCE BECAUSE WHEN IT APPEARS TO DO GOOD, THE GOOD IS ONLY TEMPORARY; THE EVIL IT DOES IS PERMANENT.***



## COUNTER-REBUTTALS:

I tried to compile all of the best rebuttals I could think of and find, and then refute them - or at least supply a reasoned alternative. I'm sure I have missed some arguments, but I believe these are pretty representative.

### **Biblical Claims:**

#### 1. [Didn't Christ use violence in the temple when overthrowing the moneychangers?](#)

The account of Christ cleansing the temple is found in all four gospels ([Mt. 21](#), [Mark 11](#), [Luke 19](#), and [John 2](#)). The basic charge levied at Christ is that he was violent towards the moneychangers. John says that Jesus even made a whip, and this seems to indicate that Christ was injuring others. However, John explicitly tells us what Jesus was using the whip on, as he drove "them" out, "both sheep and cattle."

All of the gospels do indicate that Jesus did drive out the moneychangers, but it does not at all indicate that he harmed them. He was angry and did overturn inanimate objects, but we have zero indication that he used violence on another human being. In fact, in several of the passages the account ends by saying that the religious leaders were looking for a way to accuse Jesus of some wrongdoing, but could find nothing. It's hard for me to believe that if Jesus was whipping or assaulting people that there wouldn't be any grounds on which the religious leaders could accuse Jesus. It seems very clear that this is not a case of Christ using violence on other humans.

#### 2. [Didn't Jesus tell his disciples to buy swords?](#)

In [Luke 22](#) Jesus tells his disciples that if they don't have swords, they should go buy some. On its face this looks like a ringing endorsement of force and setting up for self-defense. However, there are a number of facts that turn this notion completely on its head.

1. Luke explicitly says that Jesus told his disciples to get swords to fulfill prophecy - that he would be numbered with the transgressors. When Christ was met by officials in the garden, he could be numbered a transgressor (or a political anarchist, maybe like a zealot) because his group was obviously armed. Verse 52 of the chapter adds to this plausibility when Jesus says, "Am I leading a rebellion, that you have come with swords and clubs?" Luke tells us that the reason Jesus had his disciples get swords was to be considered a transgressor and says nothing about considering them for defense.

2. When the disciples come up with a whopping two swords, Jesus says that it is enough. It certainly wasn't enough to consider for self-defense, but it was enough to be numbered with the transgressors. The number two may have some significance to bolster this notion. In Jewish law, one could not be convicted of a crime based on one witness. So if there would have been only one sword present, it may not have been enough of a witness or evidence to hold a charge against Jesus.

3. When Peter uses his sword in Christ's defense, Jesus tells him to sheath it. Some of the early church fathers took this command as an example of Christ's command for all Christians to put away violence (see [section 4](#)). The fact that none of the apostles ever (to our knowledge) unsheathed their swords against anyone again seems to indicate to me that Christ was making more than a momentary statement. In light of the evidence of example and early church interpretation, it seems that such a conflicting notion implies that this more ambiguous notion must be explained in another way than that Christ was advocating violence.

4. Compare Luke 22:36 in the betrayal scene with Luke 9:3 when Jesus sent out the disciples to spread the good news of the Kingdom.

***“BUT NOW IF YOU HAVE A PURSE, TAKE IT, AND ALSO A BAG; AND IF YOU DON'T HAVE A SWORD, SELL YOUR CLOAK AND BUY ONE.”***

***“TAKE NOTHING FOR THE JOURNEY, NO STAFF, NO BAG, NO BREAD, NO COAT, NO EXTRA SHIRT.”***

In Luke 9, we see Christ send out the disciples to proclaim the Kingdom. This is the good news for the world! They were to heal, drive out Satan's demons, and not worry about their lives. Later on in Luke 9 Jesus talks about all the persecution they'll face, how they need to bear their cross, and how they are to lose their lives so they will gain them. In Luke 22, are we supposed to conclude that at the climax of this Kingdom concept - the moment when Satan and Jesus literally come face to face (because Luke, unlike the other gospels, tells us that Satan has entered Judas at this point) - that Christ's ethic has changed? Are we to conclude that Christ's way of bringing about the Kingdom is different?

In Luke 9, Christ's servants were not to worry about money, about possessions (a bag), and they were to have only the clothes on them (but no extra undershirt). In Luke 22 we see a complete reversal. Now Jesus says that the disciples should take their money and possessions, but sell their outer garments (their main article of clothing) to purchase a weapon - a weapon Jesus will condemn them for using in just a few moments. There is obviously something weird going on here. This

becomes even more apparent when you see Christ's words in Luke 22:35, immediately preceding him telling the disciples to buy swords. Jesus refers to the command of Luke 9 to take no money or possessions and asks the disciples if they lacked anything. The disciples answered that they had not lacked anything. God provided and was sufficient. So if they didn't need anything but the clothes on their back, how had God changed now that would require them to take money, possessions, and a sword?

What we see in Christ's words found in Luke 22 is that he is predicting the betrayal of the apostles (see video at the bottom for thorough explanation). Just as he told Peter that he would betray Jesus in word, now he is telling the apostles that they will betray him in action. Immediately prior to this conversation, the disciples had been fighting over who would be greatest in the Kingdom, and Christ said that it was the one who serves. Then he goes on into the betrayal texts. It's as if Jesus was saying,

**HEY, WERE YOU GUYS LACKING ANYTHING WHEN I SENT YOU OUT TO PROCLAIM THE KINGDOM? NO? WELL, ACTUALLY, I THINK YOU WERE. DO THE EXACT OPPOSITE OF WHAT I TOLD YOU TO DO BEFORE, AND PICK UP SOME WEAPONS WHILE YOU'RE AT IT. OH, WHAT? YOU ALREADY HAVE TWO SWORDS ON YOU? WHERE DID THOSE COME FROM AND WHY DID YOU FEEL THE NEED TO ADD TO WHAT I TOLD YOU WAS SUFFICIENT BEFORE? I GUESS ISAIAH WAS RIGHT. THIS FULFILLS THE PROPHECY. I AM NUMBERED WITH THE TRANSGRESSORS.**

5. There are many aspects of the Lucan account here that don't add up as many normally interpret it. We import a lot of ideology here rather than allowing Luke to tell his story. As one example, where the passage says that Jesus was to be numbered with the transgressors, many think this refers to the thieves on the cross. In the immediate context, however, that interpretation is obviously wrong. We import that interpretation.

When you look at Luke's narrative of the two swords and the surrounding events, his message begins to pop out. Luke diverges from Matthew and Mark in his use of Isaiah 53 for reference rather than Zechariah. Luke is the only gospel that mentions the healing of the servant's ear. And the list goes on. Luke's main story is centered around the suffering servant, and he displays how this servant was left on his own by the betrayal of Peter with his words, and the disciples by their actions.

I understand this is a very insufficient explanation, but it would require pages to

parse this whole concept out. If you're interested in discovering the beauty of Luke's writing in this narrative, you really need to check out the [Naked Bible podcast](#) on this issue (or watch the video below).

<https://youtu.be/A3Q1HBZbyM8>

### 3. [Didn't Christ say he came to bring a sword and not peace?](#)

[Matthew 10](#) has Jesus declaring that he came to bring a sword and not peace. While that sounds like an endorsement of violence on his part, I actually think the context of the passage makes this section a strong proof text for pacifism.

1. Augustine's argument for why Peter was reprimanded by Christ for defending his savior in the garden is that Christ did not give Peter the authority to use the sword. Matthew 10 gives us the context for what authority Christ gave his disciples, and it has no inclusion of violence. They had the authority to drive out demons, heal, lodge with those who were hospitable, and share the gospel of the Kingdom. The use of the sword is not included. If you want to use an Augustinian line of reasoning to justify violence based on authoritative command, you can't use this passage.

2. In this same passage, preceding Christ's reference to the sword, he tells his disciples that they will be sheep among wolves, and they are to remain as innocent as doves. He proceeds to tell them how they'll be beaten. This hardly seems that Jesus is advocating violence in response to opposition.

3. Jesus does give one specific response his disciples are to have to persecution. They are to flee. Jesus just told them that they would be put to death due to their family members betrayal. We're not just talking about how to respond to a beating, but to imminent death. Jesus tells his disciples to run away.

4. The verses immediately preceding Christ's sword comment are the familiar ones about not fearing what men can do to our bodies, God has numbered our hairs, we're worth more than sparrows, etc. This is not at all the language of the disciples bearing the sword, but rather the disciples receiving the sword.

When we come to the verse where Christ talks about the sword, then, the context is that the disciples have authority to help others and spread good news, they will be persecuted and betrayed yet are to remain innocent through that, and they should try

to escape evil, but if they don't, remember that the Spirit will help them and God cares for them no matter what. The verse about the sword, then, is metaphorical in the sense that Christ divides a family like a sword (reminds me of the dividing language in Hebrews 4:12), but it is also literal in the sense that a disciple's own family may put them to the sword.

5. Jesus goes on to say that disciples are to love Christ more than their family, and here tells the disciples what that love looks like. It doesn't look like self defense against persecution, it looks like taking up their cross and following Christ. Because "whoever finds their life will lose it, and whoever loses their life for my sake will find it." This passage, then, is not at all about the preservation of one's physical life, but rather the loss of it in light of the eternal.

#### 4. John the Baptist doesn't censure the centurion for being a soldier even though the soldier asks him what he must do for true repentance.

In [Luke 3](#) we see some soldiers come to John the Baptist seeking repentance and baptism. This is a much more powerful passage against pacifism than the one where Jesus tells the centurion that he's never seen as much faith as he had, because there is no context there for an admonishment or exhortation. Jesus wasn't talking about the man's profession and since the passage isn't about that, we have no idea what else they talked about or what the centurion did with his life. Just as we know so little about all the sinners Jesus met with, what they did with their lives after Jesus, and just as Jesus doesn't admonish every sinner with whom we see him, that centurion passage doesn't show anything.

In this Luke passage, however, the soldiers ask John what they must do to repent and John tells them three things (NIV)- don't extort, don't accuse falsely, and be content with pay. What seems to be missing from John the Baptist's exhortation is that he doesn't tell the soldiers that they must leave the army. This seems to imply that being in the army - which would certainly mean doing bodily harm for some - was legitimate. So what do the pacifists have to say?

1) This is one of those passages where the translation makes a big difference. If you read the text from the KJV, John tells the men to - do no violence, don't accuse falsely, and be content with your wages. In fact, the rendering of this word as "extortion of money" is a very narrow reading, as most of the definitions for [the Greek word](#) used here involve physical violence.

Now if John is telling soldiers to do no violence, what might that mean for their career? It may mean they have to leave their profession (more on that [here](#)).

2. Even if we take the more generous interpretation for anti-pacifists, John the Baptist failing to tell soldiers to leave the army wouldn't be all that surprising. John was the last prophet of the OT. There were a number of times he didn't really understand Christ's way or what he was doing, and at one point he even sent messengers to ask Jesus if he really was the Messiah. Jesus was extremely revolutionary, and the extent of his Kingdom was not realized by any of his closest disciples until after the resurrection. John's failure to directly exhort soldiers to leave warfare wouldn't mean that much to me.

3. This argument is at best an argument from silence. Even if we take out alternate interpretations of the word "violence" and we assume that John knew exactly what Christ's kingdom was and how he would bring it, this passage would still say nothing of itself about violence. It may be an interesting piece of evidence to bolster an already strong case, but I don't think anti-pacifists a foundation for this verse to be very helpful to them.

5. [When Jesus talked about turning the other cheek, he was being metaphorical.](#)

Jesus used a lot of parables and a lot of hyperbole. Those who claim to have Christ's words and teaching perfectly understood are likely fooling themselves. While the main section of Christ's direct teaching used by pacifists comes in a passage that isn't an ambiguous parable, Jesus does use some hyperbolic language throughout. At least I would assume it's hyperbolic when he says something like "if your right hand causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it away." It is definitely better to lose your hand than end up in hell, but I don't think Jesus is advocating for us to actually cut off our hands.

I get the whole idea of hyperbole and metaphor. I understand wanting to use that to explain away Christ's words on enemy love and self-sacrifice here in Matthew 5. But I just can't buy this method of explaining away the teaching for several reasons.

1) The repetition of the expectation undermines the notion of hyperbole. If Jesus said "it's better to cut off your right hand than burn in hell," then followed it up a little later with, "no, seriously guys, cut off your right hand," then a little later talked about it again, it would make me wonder whether this was really hyperbole. The repetition and building of a concept undermine this way of explaining away the teaching.

2) Christ literally exemplified what he taught here. In fact, his life exemplified a much stronger ethic than he even taught. Jesus wasn't just slapped on the cheek. He was beaten and murdered yet did no violence in return.

3) Go check out the [early church quotes](#) and study the church fathers and the early martyrs. Their words and lives embody the ethic of Matthew five taken at face value.

4) Pragmatically speaking, if my goal is to advance the gospel of Christ, then his words in Matthew five make much more sense if taken at face value. I know this because when I look at examples like Jim Elliot, MLK, the Amish, and other individuals or groups who embody non-violence at times, the gospel comes to life and is validated like it isn't when violence is used. Violence often invalidates a message.

5) Christ's words in the isolation of this one passage may be argued as metaphor. But taken in the broader context of apostolic teaching, biblical examples of non-violence, and the rest of the cumulative case for pacifism, it's hard to take Christ's words here on non-violence as metaphor.

This is obviously a very short response to this rebuttal. John Howard Yoder in "The Politics of Jesus" does a fantastic job of laying out the case for why Christ isn't using metaphor in his teaching on this. I recommend the book, or you can check out my somewhat shorter synopsis of it [here](#).

## 6. [God tells Noah that "whoever sheds man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed."](#)

Some non-pacifists are for the death penalty today. In general, pacifists don't believe that the death penalty should be used - or if it is, it certainly shouldn't be something a Christian does. But the Bible seems to clearly teach that capital punishment should be used on those who kill another human being. Since this immediately precedes the Noahic Covenant, which most Christians believe is still valid and not yet fulfilled, it seems like this directive may still stand for today. But there are a large number of problems with interpreting this passage as being a necessary directive for today.

1. It isn't part of the Noahic covenant. We find the passage on capital punishment in Genesis 9:6, but the covenant part begins in 9:8.

2. There are some other directives that are given with capital punishment, such as not eating meat with blood in it. Those of us who eat rare to medium steaks break this command, but few Christians think this still applies today. Maybe it does. But then there

are some other aspects, like God giving all animals for Noah and his family to eat. God rescinded that in the Mosaic Law when certain animals were restricted, but then opened that back up with Peter's vision. So obviously these things are moveable and not necessarily set.

3. Keeping in mind that we intuitively believe some of the other items mentioned in Genesis 9 are moveable, we seem to have clear teachings from the New Testament that Christians are to love enemies, do no harm, etc. If Christ can usher in a new freedom for food, it seems he can do the same for sinners - even murderers.

4. God doesn't say here that capital punishment is only to be used for murder. We read that into the text. God's argument for capital punishment is that human life is so valuable, if someone kills another, then they themselves should be killed. We see this same sort of notion with the Ark of the Covenant when Uzzah tries to save it from falling. While Uzzah even had a good intent, God killed him for marring what is holy. We see something somewhat similar in [Numbers 35](#). While God differentiates between murder and manslaughter, he does make allowance for a blood avenger to kill one who commits manslaughter. Even though manslaughter is not malicious, God seems to recognize that a human life was taken and can allow for retribution. So if you want to take God's valuing of human life and his allowance for retribution here in Genesis, I think you have to take a look at the language and recognize all that might entail.

5. Even if this command in Genesis 9 stands, it doesn't mean Christians should enact it. If God gave the government the sword, perhaps they should fulfill it. And if a Christian is to enact capital punishment, that wouldn't undermine the whole pacifistic argument. Many pacifists are ok with corporal punishment (though many are not) because God has given them direct charge over their children. So if we have a directive for capital punishment that withstands scrutiny, that is one limited case in which we may harm another. You still have a long way to go to completely undermine the other instances of pacifism.

## 7. [What about all the killing in the OT?](#)

Using the OT as a metric for how to view violence is pretty thin ice, in my opinion. The fact that Israel was a theocracy directly commanded by God, that Christ came to fulfill the law and bear sin, that Christ commanded us to allow God to have vengeance, and that Christ explicitly exemplified how he wanted us to live as he established his Kingdom, all make the OT a bad metric for justifying our personal defense. While Israel was a kingdom of God, of sorts, it was a physical, national kingdom. Christ brought the



Kingdom which is not of this world, and whose servants don't bear the sword for this reason. God was absolutely legitimate in his justice in the OT. But only God can mete out justice and only God can judge. While God gave the ability to judge and mete out justice to Israel in the OT, he rescinds this ability to the new Israel - the church - in the NT, and places the sword in the hands of the government alone. God will bear the sword through governments as he did with Assyria, Israel, and other nations (willing or not). He will not bear the sword through his people.

If one wants to use OT justice to salvage war and self-defense, they have a lot of explaining to do as far as upholding consistency with the severity of punishment we should mete out, why they don't advocate family revenge for manslaughter, and all sorts of other things we find in the OT that even just-war advocates think we shouldn't implement. What is the rationale for incorporating a civic law from ancient Israel despite seemingly clear teachings in the NT that this civic law doesn't apply? Yes, the moral law is immutable, but the sacrificial and civic laws were structures used to convey aspects of the moral law. Under Christ and the NT, how is capital punishment a more accurate vehicle to convey the New Covenant and the moral law as understood through the revelation of God in Christ Jesus?

It is this last part that is really the most important. Colossians and Hebrews are two books that emphasize the perfection of Christ's representation of God. Yes, God did reveal his justice in the Old Testament at times. But now, we have a better revelation. It's better than the angels, the prophets, the Torah, and all previous revelation, as Hebrews argues. We have the image of God himself. And what has that image revealed? The image has revealed self-sacrificial enemy love. If you want to argue that this aspect isn't a reflection of God and is only a role Christ filled to become the Messiah, than what hope do we have, those who were once at enmity with God? No, we love God because he first loved us, while we were still his enemies. The enemy love of Christ is prescriptive. He is the perfect revelation of God.

8. [St. Cyril tells us that it is possible to do two goods - to pray for our enemies and defend our friends. Don't pacifists create a false dichotomy between loving enemies and loving friends?](#)

It's important to look at Cyril's quote because I think he succinctly and eloquently explains how most non-pacifists feel.

[Taken from this site:](#)

**ST. CYRIL THE ENLIGHTENER OF THE SLAVS WAS APPROACHED ONE DAY BY SOME CHRISTIANS WHO WERE FACING OPPOSITION FROM ISLAMIC MILITANTS. THEY MENTIONED THE PASSAGE FROM MATTHEW ABOUT TURNING THE OTHER CHEEK, AND WANTED TO KNOW IF SUCH A STATEMENT FROM OUR LORD PREVENTED ANY CHRISTIAN OF A GOOD CONSCIENCE FROM SERVING IN THE MILITARY. HIS ENLIGHTENED RESPONSE IS USEFUL:**

**ST. CYRIL SAID: "IF TWO COMMANDMENTS WERE WRITTEN IN ONE LAW AND GIVEN TO MEN FOR FULFILLING, WHICH MAN WOULD BE A BETTER FOLLOWER OF THE LAW: THE ONE WHO FULFILLED ONE COMMANDMENT OR THE ONE WHO FULFILLED BOTH?"**

**THE SARACENS REPLIED: "UNDOUBTEDLY, HE WHO FULFILLS BOTH COMMANDMENTS."**

**ST. CYRIL CONTINUED: "CHRIST OUR GOD COMMANDS US TO PRAY TO GOD FOR THOSE WHO PERSECUTE US AND EVEN DO GOOD TO THEM, BUT HE ALSO SAID TO US, 'GREATER LOVE HATH NO MAN THAN THIS, THAT A MAN LAY DOWN HIS LIFE FOR HIS FRIENDS' (JOHN 15:13). THAT IS WHY WE BEAR THE INSULTS THAT OUR ENEMIES CAST AT US INDIVIDUALLY AND WHY WE PRAY TO GOD FOR THEM. HOWEVER, AS A SOCIETY, WE DEFEND ONE ANOTHER AND LAY DOWN OUR LIVES, SO THAT THE ENEMY WOULD NOT ENSLAVE OUR BRETHREN, WOULD NOT ENSLAVE THEIR SOULS WITH THEIR BODIES, AND WOULD NOT DESTROY THEM IN BOTH BODY AND SOUL." (FROM THE PROLOGUE OF OCHRID)**

St. Cyril makes at least two missteps here. First - and hopefully you see by now this is a common mistake - he assumes that to not take up arms is inactivity. It's choosing not to love your neighbor and disobeying Christ's command to do so. But that's not the case. Christians could harbor Christian refugees, provide resources, helped them to flee, stand in solidarity for what is morally right and be killed as well, etc. These actions wouldn't have been effective in halting the Islamic advance. The Muslims would advance, the Christians and those who aided them would be harmed, and the laying down of one's life would be ineffective in bringing safety for Christians. But you can't say that if you abstain from taking up violence yourself that you aren't doing anything to love your neighbor.

Second, Cyril, like most non-pacifists, views pragmatism as defined by humanity too highly. Cyril might argue that if the Saracens didn't take up arms to defend their neighbors, then what good would they do? But as a Christian, my job is not to determine the ends God brings about, but rather to use the means he has prescribed for me. If violence is wrong - if repaying evil for evil is wrong - then those means are off limits for me as a Christian. I can't redefine morality. Perhaps killing an aggressor is less evil than being an aggressor (if you can somehow kill the aggressor without hatred), but it's still an evil. Let me give an example that I think most Christians would agree to, and then apply that to the pacifistic position.

One of the books we read for family devotions has a story in it about a moral choice. The bread winner of a family is asked to do something immoral at work (fudging numbers or something like that). His boss tells him that if he refuses to do it, he'll be fired. The man refuses to participate in the moral action and loses his job. Most Christians would agree that this is the right thing to do, even if they'd have a hard time doing it themselves.

But now what if this family was living paycheck to paycheck. One lost day of work means a day without meals, and more than one day missed means going without utilities, being able to pay rent, etc. They have no family to turn to and their church is filled with impoverished people who cannot help as well. It is the job of the parents to provide for their family. Does the family's dire situation mean that the father should choose to fudge the numbers and keep his job so he can provide for his family? What about if the immoral action was to set up a co-worker so the employer had just-cause to fire them, and then that individual would not be able to provide for their family. What about single mothers with no skillset and no ability to get any job but the job of a prostitute? Not at all. None of these things are justified, and you only have to walk the hypothetical moral compromise down the line until you get to something someone considers so immoral, they'd have to cave. We know that immoral means are not excused on account of our notions of pragmatism. Now we might be able to empathize with someone who chose to do the wrong thing and keep their job. We might be able to feel sympathy for the impoverished single mom who is a prostitute. It's a tough situation to be in. But as Christians we still have to call these acts immoral. We must fiercely love those who choose immorality, just as we love our neighbors and our enemies, but we must not take on evil ourselves in order to accomplish what we determine to be God's ends.

Doing violence to another is the same sort of thing as the scenario above. Just as we aren't to be immoral in our workplace, we are not to do violence to image

bearers of God. That is not a moral means we Christians have at our disposal. The situation may be very dire. I may be able to empathize with someone who does violence in certain situations. I may even feel joy when I see violence done to someone like a Hitler or a Stalin. I may one day use violence myself against another human being because I am too weak to submit to the means of God. We can empathize all we want with the use of violence for self-defense, just as we can empathize with a parent who chooses immoral means to provide for their family. But difficulty in implementing the moral means doesn't legitimize or moralize choosing the immoral means.

9. [Romans 13 says that the God gives the government the right to bear the sword, so Christians can bear the sword as long as we are working in a governmental role. Our government decrees that we can protect ourselves, therefore we are an arm of the government if we act justly in self-defense?](#)

It is absolutely fair to say that it is legal for Christians to bear the sword against aggressors who are fellow citizens and who aggress unjustly. Our kingdom tells us that we are able to do so. However, the ultimate question for Christians is what our King says. While the state may have a right to bear the sword, should we as Christians bear that sword - even if we are an extension of the state in some sense?

The early church is very enlightening on this aspect. They seem to view the state as an entity to whom they can submit, but not an entity for whom they would sacrifice core Christian values. You can see this in a number of the quotes on soldiers and magistrates from [Section 4](#). You may also be able to pull such a notion from Luke 3:6 - one of the passages some use at times in an attempt to disprove pacifism (see an expounding of the passage [here](#)). If early soldiers were told that they can continue soldiering, but that in their soldiering they were to do no violence, that has serious implications for our justification of violence - even in positions of governmental authority - today.

Beyond the early church teachings of doing no violence, which extended even to soldiers, it is good to take another look at Romans 13. To do this, you really need to begin reading well before chapter 13. When you look back to chapter 12, Paul is telling Christians to be living sacrifices. To live as an offering to God leads to these actions of not cursing others, blessing those who persecute us, not repaying evil for evil, not taking revenge, leaving wrath to God and trusting his judgment, giving food and drink to our enemies, and overcoming evil with good. That is the Christian call to be a living sacrifice.

Immediately following all of these commands, Paul addresses the government in Romans 13. Interestingly, Paul shifts his language. Instead of using the "you" and "you understood" language of Romans 12, Paul uses "they" language when talking about governments. You, the Christian, are supposed to do all of these self-sacrificial things. But they, the government, the rulers, the authorities, they bear the sword, and we can be ok with them doing that. Just as God was in control when evil Assyria bore the sword for God's purposes (Is. 10), not out of obedience, but in God's sovereignty, so it is with governments today. God is in control over them and he has given them the sword to bear. It is not for we Christians to bear. How could we bear it and continue to be the sacrifice we're called to be in Romans 12? So give taxes, revenue, respect, honor, or whatever else is owed (notice that violence isn't on the list). We'll respect government's God-given authority. But for God's sake - as sacrifices to him - don't give them what they don't deserve.

As if to put an exclamation point on this, Paul immediately shifts back into the "you understood," "you," and "we/us/our" language after discussing the government. And what is the topic at hand immediately following the short remarks on the government? Paul immediately jumps back into how we are to love others and how we are to do no harm.

For those who have never read Romans 13 in context, this idea can be rather foreign. That foreignness is heightened by our culture which emphasizes the importance of tapping into the power of the government, particularly through politics. While I think it is clear that Christ came to establish his political enterprise, the Kingdom, to which we are to have our primary allegiance, most do not see that. Most feel as though - at least in the democratic West - politics and religion don't often have competing allegiances. Fortunately, I think I can point to another passage that makes my case for Romans 13 even clearer - I Corinthians 6:1-6. I will put the text of this passage below and highlight the items I want to emphasize.

*"If any of you has a dispute with another, do you dare to take it **before the ungodly** for judgment instead of **before the Lord's people**? **2** Or do you not know that **the Lord's people** will judge the world? And if you are to judge the world, are you not competent to judge trivial cases? **3** Do you not know that we will judge angels? How much more the things of this life! **4** Therefore, if you have disputes about such matters, do you ask for a ruling **from those whose way of life is scorned in the church**? **5** I say this to shame you. Is it possible that there is nobody among you wise enough to judge a dispute between believers? **6** But instead, one brother takes another to court—and this **in front of unbelievers!**"*

Some might point out that Paul is dealing with more trivial cases here in I Corinthians. He is dealing with what seem to be lawsuits. How then does this compare to Romans 13 where we're talking about weighty matters like bearing the sword? Because if believers are being told by Paul that the very government which is bearing the sword against them should be given taxes and respect because God is sovereign over that authority, then certainly this governmental authority extends down through the whole system. Certainly Paul didn't mean that God has only given authority to Caesar, and not to any governmental extensions (e.g. courts). The very system Paul is referencing here in I Corinthians is a part of the government Paul is referencing in Romans 13. And how does Paul talk about that system? Beyond a shadow of a doubt he distances believers from the system. Just look at the way he talks about the church (green) and the government (red). The church - the Kingdom - is the political affiliation for believers. The government - while it is to be given the respect and taxes and whatever else it's due, so long as it doesn't conflict with the Kingdom's affiliation - is for the non-believers. While Romans 13 doesn't have the explicit language of distancing found in I Corinthians 6, there seems to be a shift from the we/us/you (the church) language to a they/them/the rulers sort of language. I Corinthians 6 similarly deals with government interactions, and it is written by the same author as Romans - Paul.

Some may retort that Paul is simply being descriptive in I Corinthians 6, and not prescriptive. He is just identifying that the current governmental system is filled with unbelievers, which only makes sense since Christianity was very new. But this lack of believers in the government at the time of Paul doesn't mean he didn't think Christians should enter coercive governmental positions. But arguing such ignores the first three centuries of early church understanding on the issue. When you have the great majority of voices telling soldiers to quit or do no violence, elders telling magistrates to do no violence, an ecumenical council chastising a return to the army, etc - it helps to show that Paul's words here aren't simply descriptive. Paul's distinction of Christ's political Kingdom and the world's kingdom makes sense if Christ established his Kingdom when he walked the earth. Christ's Kingdom isn't some ethereal, esoteric, future oriented thing. Yes, the Kingdom hasn't fully come yet. Christ is making his enemies his footstool. But he's doing so through the politic he established in his Kingdom, the church. We are Christ's, and we cannot serve two masters.

If there was any doubt as to the reading of Paul's writings, Peter seems to clarify things even further by writing the book of I Peter, which focuses on the issue of authorities, submission, suffering, and love. It's really an invaluable book to go through when trying to discern what the Bible says about these aspects of the Christian life. Unfortunately, most tend to just cherry-pick the notion of submitting to authority in I Peter 2 without

first looking at the context, and without understanding that submission is different than obedience. This is why Peter and Paul can ask wives to submit to husbands (even unbelievers) and slaves to submit to masters, and is why Christians are asked to submit to a government that is unjust. In context, I Peter continually tells us that we are subjects and servants of God first. We are exiles and strangers here. But while we serve God wholeheartedly and without compromise, we can acknowledge God's sovereignty over authorities and give them honor and respect. This is true even when authorities and institutions are unjust - like a persecuting government, an unbelieving husband, or a master of slaves. This is true whether the persecution is for religious reasons or not. Apart from suffering for doing evil, our suffering here is in the hands of God. Suffering without doing evil, without retaliating, and with a trust in God's justice is what Christ did, and it's what we are called to do as we walk in his steps. I don't want to tear apart the whole book, so I am just going to put some of the themes I think you should look at as you sift through I Peter yourself.

**Political Allegiance and Authorities:** I Peter distinguishes sharply between God's Kingdom and humanity's kingdom. It even uses political language to distinguish the two (as do the gospels).

We are strangers in this world (1:1)

Live as strangers (1:17)

We are aliens and strangers in the world (2:11)

Submit to the world's authority so we can remain blameless and not tarnish Christ (2:13-15)

Give honor to kings, but we are to serve and fear God (2:16-17)

We are being built spiritually (2:5)

We are a holy nation (2:9)

Christ is our Lord (3:15)

The church (our Kingdom institution) shouldn't be coercive and Lord power over others (5:3)

**Suffering:** Suffering in I Peter is called for because Christ suffered. Just as he suffered to heal (2:24), so our suffering can heal (3:1-2 / 4:8). God is in control of suffering. He doesn't want us to suffer for doing the wrong thing, but even if we suffer when not doing the wrong thing, we can take joy in knowing that God is sovereign and will bring justice.

Trials result in rewards on Christ's return (1:8)

Prophets said that Christ would suffer (1:11)

We are redeemed through blood (1:19)

Submit to suffering because Christ did and we follow in his footsteps (2:21-22)  
Submit to suffering from unjust authorities - even for non-religious reasons - because of God (2:18-20)  
Submit even to unjust authorities so that non-believers might believe (3:1-2). Live blameless for the sake of the pagans (2:12)  
You're blessed if you suffer for/while doing right (3:14)  
Take on suffering because Christ suffered (4:1)  
Those who suffer are in God's control (4:19)

**Judgment:** Judgment in I Peter is viewed as a future event, but an event that is determined by what occurs now. Believers who endure suffering and are obedient to God, while experiencing pain and some sense of judgment now (I Pet. 4:17), are being purified. Their actions also influence the lives of others, especially unbelievers. Those unbelievers who don't endure sufferings on behalf of God and in the footsteps of Christ Jesus don't escape judgment and purification, however. Their judgment is future oriented and God will exact that judgment perfectly. It is not for the believer to take into their hands here and now.

Trials and suffering will perfect our salvation (1:9)  
We are purified through obedience to pure love (1:22)  
Pagans will be judged by God (4:5)  
God will lift the humble up in due time (5:6)  
Christ will restore with his power (5:10)

**Resistance and Defense:** Coercive force is viewed in a bad light (5:3) when done by the church, and we are told not to repay evil with evil. The only time resistance and force are used for the Christian here is where we are told to resist the Devil - a spiritual battle rather than a physical one. Time and time again the physical is downplayed - not in a gnostic sense as if the physical is bad - but in the sense that our battle is not with flesh and blood. Christ's Kingdom is not of this world and violence in this world is not to be a part of Christ's work here.

Shielded by God (1:5)  
Prepare our minds for action (1:13)  
No retaliation to injustice but leave to God's judgment (2:23)  
Do what is right without fear of unjust authorities (3:6)  
Don't repay evil with evil (3:9)  
God controls all authorities (3:22)  
Cast our cares on God and resist the Devil (5:9)



I saved resistance and defense for last because there is a really awesome part of this particular point. In I Peter 3:10-12 we find Psalm 34 quoted. Undoubtedly, those who heard Peter's words likely knew that Psalm well and could fill in what Peter left out. I will put that psalm in its entirety below. When you look at it, notice the language (I will bold some of the most interesting parts for my emphasis). It is all about God's people taking refuge in him. God does all the fighting and all the protecting and all the justifying. It is about complete trust and dependence on him for justice through a resting in him, by taking on the means of Christ - suffering love. God defeats evil, and he uses the wicked to slay the wicked (vs. 21)

#### PSALM 34

- 1 I will extol the Lord at all times;  
his praise will always be on my lips.
- 2 I will glory in the Lord;  
let the afflicted hear and rejoice.
- 3 Glorify the Lord with me;  
let us exalt his name together.
- 4 I sought the Lord, and he answered me;  
**he delivered me** from all my fears.
- 5 Those who look to him are radiant;  
their faces are never covered with shame.
- 6 This poor man called, and the Lord heard him;  
**he saved him out of all his troubles.**
- 7 The **angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear him,**  
**and he delivers them.**
- 8 Taste and see that the Lord is good;  
**blessed is the one who takes refuge in him.**
- 9 Fear the Lord, you his holy people,  
for **those who fear him lack nothing.**
- 10 The lions may grow weak and hungry,  
but **those who seek the Lord lack no good thing.**
- 11 Come, my children, listen to me;  
I will teach you the fear of the Lord.
- 12 Whoever of you loves life  
and desires to see many good days,
- 13 keep your tongue from evil  
and your lips from telling lies.
- 14 Turn from evil and do good;  
seek peace and pursue it.
- 15 The eyes of the Lord are on the righteous,

and his ears are attentive to their cry;  
**16 but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil,**  
to blot out their name from the earth.  
**17 The righteous cry out, and the Lord hears them;**  
**he delivers them from all their troubles.**  
**18 The Lord is close to the brokenhearted**  
**and saves those who are crushed in spirit.**  
**19 The righteous person may have many troubles,**  
**but the Lord delivers him from them all;**  
**20 he protects all his bones,**  
not one of them will be broken.  
**21 Evil will slay the wicked;**  
the foes of the righteous will be condemned.  
**22 The Lord will rescue his servants;**  
**no one who takes refuge in him will be condemned.**

I Peter clarifies even further what we find in Romans 13. A reading of Romans that views the authorities who bear the sword as distinct from the church is not anomalous. And if I Corinthians 6 and I Peter didn't make that clear enough, we have the first three centuries of church history and the first ecumenical council to reinforce such a reading (see [section 4](#) on the early church teaching).

In summary, the main passage in view, Romans 13, discusses government, but surrounds it with the notion of love, self-sacrifice, mercy, doing no evil, and doing no harm - even to enemies. This sandwiched passage on government is an excursion away from Paul talking to the believers about what they should do, and explaining what this separate entity - the government - does. His intention is to affirm God's sovereignty over governments, even the most evil ones, which the persecuted Christians much needed to know. The Bible has always advocated seeking the welfare of the city in which we live, which extended even to exiles in Babylon who were ripped from their homes illegitimately and found themselves living under the rule of another kingdom. But even as they sought the welfare of this foreign country that was now their temporary home, they were not to break with God's law. We see this very clearly in the story of Daniel and his three friends. The same is true for we Christians today. Our allegiance is to the Kingdom, and we are to live under the rule of our king. I can pay taxes to my government. I can respect their authority and submit to them. But to bear the sword against my enemy is to accept an allegiance to the wrong kingdom. I Corinthians 6 helps to highlight this distinction as Paul separates the church from the coercive arm of the secular government. God in his sovereignty can use this secular kingdom to restrain evil with evil - with violence. He did it through Assyria - a despicably

wicked nation - in Isaiah 10. God's sovereignty gives me hope and it helps me to trust in his provision that even in evil, God has control. But while God is sovereign even over the hearts of humanity and the evil they do, God has not given me charge to use this evil over which he is sovereign in an attempt to bring about good. While God can use governments to judge as he did with Assyria, he can also judge those governments. God's use of a vessel for his purposes does mean he places a stamp of approval on them.

This was one of the most difficult concepts for me to wrap my mind around, I posted a video below which helped me to understand the role of the church vs. the state. I think it's important to understand that I am not advocating retreat or isolationism. I'm also not saying that Christians shouldn't be involved in institutions or endeavors like education, art, etc. What many pacifists are saying is that at least at a certain level, governmental allegiance conflicts with our Kingdom allegiance and God's expectations for his people. When we begin to do violence to our enemies and use coercive force, we are no longer living as our King would have us live in his Kingdom - a Kingdom he makes available now and wants to show off to the world through the church. The video below is a little choppy, but you can draw the important ideas from it you need. I also wrote a bit more about Romans 13 awhile back. If you'd like to think about it a little more, you can follow [this link](#).

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uIPZrEAn30s>

10. Most biblical examples are of a submission to authority. It's one thing to submit to a government who proceeds through the justice system and laws - even if unjust - than to withhold violence from another citizen who seeks to do us harm (e.g. a robber, rapist, murderer, etc).

Many of the examples of persecution and harm I have given were done at the hands of the government and/or were done for religious reasons. Anti-pacifists like to argue that while the Bible explicitly tells us to submit to the government, and while the Bible tells us that the message of the gospel takes priority in our lives, a citizen rapist or murderer who attacks us for non-religious reasons does not have authority over us, and we do not hinder the gospel since his reasons for attack are not religious.

Again, I would point you back to the early church. What were they teaching? What

actions did they embrace? Would they buy the argument that they were free to kill someone in their community who attacked them? If they killed, wouldn't the community already know or find out that the one who took another's life is a Christian? Wouldn't the message of the gospel be colored by this action? If the church taught that the government bore the sword for punishment, wouldn't bearing the sword yourself, a citizen, in preemptive punishment, go counter to this notion?

11. Jesus, the one you claim teaches pacifism, doesn't seem so pacifistic in Revelation when we see him slaughtering those who are evil.

We see clearly that God, at times, has chosen to enact his judgment on the world. In the Old Testament, his judgment was often exacted on individuals and nations via other individuals and nations. The people of God often justly exacted his judgment, and the enemies of God, like Assyria, often unwittingly exacted God's harsh judgment. In the New Testament, God has taken our judgment upon himself and called us to withhold our own judgment. He has given the sword to the State and asks Christians not to bear anything but love and kindness even to their enemies. This isn't because God is soft on evil, but because he will ultimately exact perfect justice. He calls us to place our trust in his provision - not that he will always keep us safe, though he will often protect us - but rather that he will not give us more than he will bear us through. And when Christ the perfect, omniscient, omnipotent God returns, he will do so for judgment, with the martyred saints looking on.

Violence and justice are not antitheses of God, but he asks the Christian who has had their deserved violence placed on Christ to bear the violence of others. Injustice has been borne by the just one so the unjust could be justified. We don't know the hearts of others. We don't know where the Spirit will move and how it may touch the most wicked heart. It is not for us to decide the fate of others. It is for us to decide to lay down our lives, to forgive to the depths we've been forgiven, to love others even more than ourselves, and to trust God in his sovereignty and justice.

12. Christ's example of non-violence is not prescriptive. It was a messianic role he took on for the sole purpose of dying as a sacrifice for sins. We are not called to do the same.

Jesus Christ was certainly unique, as was the role he fulfilled. It is perfectly fair to be cautious about being overly prescriptive. We could turn many aspects of Christ's

life which shouldn't be prescriptive into prescriptions. We could say that because Christ was 30 when he began his ministry, we should require all who desire to work in ministry to be at least thirty years of age. We could say that because Christ was an itinerant teacher, we should likewise be itinerant. We could over-spiritualize and over-prescribe directives if we attempt to imitate Christ's life in total. The question here, then, is should non-violence be prescriptive, or was it just an optional mode Christ used for his ministry, and/or a specific role he needed to fulfill as the savior of the world?

It seems hard to imagine that the enemy love of Christ was a means taken on by Christ only to fulfill his messianic role. Am I to believe that enemy love is a role of Christ, and not a characteristic of God which we are to emulate? Isn't the notion of enemy love vital to my salvation? Didn't Christ die for me while I was his enemy, while I was far off, and before I loved him? Enemy love is vital to soteriology, and it is vital to understanding the character of God. To say that this is simply a role God uses just doesn't fit with the God of the Bible as revealed through Jesus Christ.

Beyond that, of the relatively few specifics Christ gave to his followers, two things we see pop up over and over in the gospels, and continue throughout the epistles, is the promise that we Christians are to bear our crosses and expect persecution. I love the way John Howard Yoder describes this expectation for the cross and persecution.

***THIS GOSPEL CONCEPT OF THE CROSS OF THE CHRISTIAN DOES NOT MEAN THAT SUFFERING IS THOUGHT OF AS IN ITSELF REDEMPTIVE OR THAT MARTYRDOM IS A VALUE TO BE SOUGHT AFTER. NOR DOES IT REFER UNIQUELY TO BEING PERSECUTED FOR 'RELIGIOUS' REASONS BY AN OUTSPOKENLY PAGAN GOVERNMENT. WHAT JESUS REFERS TO IN HIS CALL TO CROSS-BEARING IS RATHER THE SEEMING DEFEAT OF THAT STRATEGY OF OBEDIENCE WHICH IS NO STRATEGY, THE INEVITABLE SUFFERING OF THOSE WHOSE ONLY GOAL IS TO BE FAITHFUL TO THAT LOVE WHICH PUTS ONE AT THE MERCY OF ONE'S NEIGHBOR, WHICH ABANDONS CLAIMS TO JUSTICE FOR ONESELF AND FOR ONE'S OWN IN AN OVERRIDING CONCERN FOR THE RECONCILING OF THE ADVERSARY AND THE ESTRANGED.***

Bearing our cross is simply unrelenting obedience to God in the face of seemingly overwhelming odds, and the temptation to use other means. Christ refused religious rule, political rule, and military rule at the outset of his ministry when the

Devil tempted him in these three ways. He refused to be crowned king by the poor when he provided them bread, he refused rule from the religious on Palm Sunday and when he taught in the temple, and he refused military rule when he withheld the legions of angels he could have called to defeat Rome on the night of his betrayal. The harshest words Jesus ever had for his disciples was when he linked Peter with Satan. And why did Jesus tell Peter and Satan to stand aside? Because they declared that God's means of suffering were not valid means to use in the world. The lesson wasn't learned, however, as Peter more forcefully attempted to circumvent God's means at the height of Christ's temptation to do the same. Peter used his sword to swipe at Christ's accusers, as Jesus looked his enemy the Devil (who had indwelt Judas) in the eyes and chose love, healing, and submission to God's foolishness. Jesus saved his condemnation not for Judas or his armed band, but for Peter, when he said, "No more of this!" All who live by the sword will die by it.

Christians have turned the bearing of our crosses into something we rarely see (at least in the West), and something we absolutely try to avoid. But that doesn't seem like something that is a possibility for Christians, if Jesus has made bearing a cross an expectation for following him. As Yoder points out, bearing our cross is not something we wait around for. It's something purposeful. It's pursuing the means of God without regard for the powers of society. We take the cross upon ourselves. We purpose it. We don't wait for it. Jesus also shows us that our cross is not quietism or insurrection. You can't say that Christ was passive. If he was, of what interest would he have been to the rulers of his day? But at the same time, he wasn't an insurrectionist. He did not attack the powers with force. The cross is also not the Golden Rule. Jesus doesn't just tell us to do to others as we'd have done to us, but to follow his example. The cross of Christ

The way of Jesus in his submission to God and his means of love in the face of evident defeat is apparent. We're not talking about trivial prescriptions here. We're talking about the core of Christ's message and the means that are meant for his Kingdom. Christ's death on the cross wasn't just a transaction. Jesus didn't come only to die on the cross. He came to exemplify what obedience to God looks like in the face of seemingly insurmountable powers, and he tells us that we have the same lot.

I'm sure this explanation is far too short to be convincing, but hopefully it piques your interest. I highly recommend John Howard Yoder's book "[The Politics of Jesus](#)," where he makes a case for Christ's example here to be followed.

13. Living in a fallen world sometimes necessitates that God use means he otherwise wouldn't want to. God used divorce (Mt. 19) because of the hardness of Israel's hearts. Maybe God uses violence because of the hardness of our hearts.

The argument here is that if God can allow something like divorce in a fallen world - due to the hardness of hearts - then perhaps violence is a means God can and should use in a fallen world. Maybe it's a necessary evil. Advocates of this look at the passage where we see Jesus talking about marriage in Matthew 19. He tells the Pharisees that marriage is very serious, and the Pharisees push back. If it is as serious as Jesus says it is, why did Moses (or God through Moses, which I believe is implied) permit divorce?

First, it's important to note that Jesus did not change the moral law. If divorce was wrong in the OT, it is wrong in the NT.

Second, if a means is inherently evil, then God wouldn't use it as a means. God is perfect. We can argue about first and second causes, God's sovereignty, and all of that, but these things are irrelevant to the conversation. God would not use or condone actions that are immoral. In Matthew 19, Jesus is very clear that divorce was permitted civically in the OT. Civic permission is different than endorsement or use. God seems to endorse violence in the OT, so it can't be something that is immoral in and of itself.

While violence is not in and of itself immoral, it seems that it is only moral in extremely specific situations. It is moral as a tool for the judgment of God. God made humanity and has a right over their lives. He is their creator. It is at his discretion, then, that men and women live and die. In the OT, God brought this violence about by his people, Israel. But in the NT we see that this violence was placed upon Christ on the cross. While we will be judged, this will be a future event and it will be done by Jesus himself. Jesus has likewise called his followers to love their enemies, not judge, and leave vengeance to God. While violence towards others is not inherently immoral, it is only made moral in extremely limited circumstances - when God himself places his approval upon it. It seems like the NT gives some pretty sweeping claims about God's permission for Christians to use violence. This is not a picture of God using immoral means in the OT and rescinding that. It's not an acknowledgement that if God "gave in" to the fall and used a fallen means of violence, then it must still be necessary to use violence now. Those things are not at all true. Instead, the violence God exacted as judgment in the OT has now been tempered both by the violence done to Christ, but also by the example of Christ in his endurance of violence and injustice for even his enemies.

## B. Historical Claims:

### 1. Most churches, including the mainstream ones that pride themselves on historicity, aren't pacifists.

There are obviously some protestant churches that are pacifists. However, Catholics and Orthodox are not outright pacifists. The Catholics have had a number of pacifistic groups within, the most notably the "Catholic Worker Movement" of which Dorothy Day was a part. Pacifism is not unheard of in the Catholic Church. In the Orthodox Church, however, their stand is much more pacifistic than you might think. By and large, the church views wars as necessary, but not justifiable. So if a soldier engages in a war and kills, while that action may have been necessary, the soldier is still required to repent. In fact, some Orthodox traditions say that one cannot be a religious worker if they have ever shed another's blood - even if that blood was shed by accident. I found these ideas confirmed by many sources, but [this source](#) is perhaps the best overall synopsis which also provides external links. If one is not a pacifist, I find the Orthodox tradition to be much more in line with what was taught in the early church and by Christ than most protestant denominations.

### 2. We find historical records of Christians who are accepted by the church being soldiers from the mid-late 100's on.

While there are records of Christian soldiers serving in Rome's military, it is unclear whether most or all of these were converted as soldiers or joined the army after conversion. We have a number of records which show the church wasn't keen on individuals joining the military post-conversion. In fact, the first ecumenical council of [Nicaea Canon 12](#) (325) says that the church should break communion with those who re-enter the military after conversion. Other early sources show that those soldiers who were Christians were commanded to do no harm to others (like some translations of the Luke 3 passage). So if you were already a soldier when you converted, finish your 20 or 25 year enlistment because you can't just drop out for religious conviction. But don't join the military because of the moral compromise it would likely eventually bring.

Since early Christianity arose during a time called the *pax romana* (Peace of Rome) from around 30 BCE to 180 CE, being nonresistant in the army might not



be as difficult as one might think. Often times the soldiers would double as construction workers, repair men, postal deliverers, etc. But that doesn't mean soldiers were never faced with the choice to compromise. [Martin of Tours](#) is one great example who threw down his arms rather than do violence. And when they did refuse to do the State's bidding of violence or the worship of gods, they were often killed.

If one still wants to hold a pacifist's feet to the fire (something a pacifist would never do) on this, they run into a huge moral issue. The Apostles - especially Paul - had plenty of opportunity to tell slaveholders - people who owned and objectified other human beings - to give up their slaves. In fact, there's a book of the Bible, Philemon, which is solely dealing with a master and his slave. But Paul never tells the slaveholder to release his slave. Rather, he tells the master to accept his slave back, and most importantly, treat him with love like a brother.

Paul was not looking to upend the social structure of Rome. The issue for Christians saturated with the gospel and the fresh image of Christ and his sacrifice was that their lives and positions meant nothing. If they were slaves, so be it. If they were abused by fellow Christians, absorb the cost and don't take them to court. If you're a wife to a non-believing husband, show him love. If you are living in an oppressive government that persecutes you, submit and be good citizens. The important thing was the gospel of love.

John Howard Yoder, in his book "The Politics of Jesus," sums up this notion of the gospel's way to go about addressing our position and seeking social justice.

**"[PAUL'S] FIRST ELEMENT OF COUNSEL IS TO REMAIN IN THE SOCIAL STATUS WITHIN WHICH ONE IS; 'IN WHATEVER STATE EACH WAS CALLED, THERE LET HIM REMAIN WITH GOD' (V. 24). THIS APPLIED TO THE SLAVE'S REMAINING A SLAVE, TO THE SINGLE PERSON'S REMAINING SINGLE, TO THE MARRIED WOMAN'S REMAINING WITH HER UNBELIEVING HUSBAND, TO THE FORSAKEN MARRIED WOMAN'S REMAINING UNMARRIED WITHOUT HER HUSBAND AS LONG AS HE LIVES; TO ACCEPTING ONE'S STATUS AS CIRCUMCISED OR AS NOT CIRCUMCISED. THE REASONING SUPPORTING THIS GENERAL ADMONITION IS NOT THAT TO CHANGE IN ANY OF THESE WAYS WOULD BE SINFUL OR WRONG, IN THE SENSE OF AN INFRACTION OF THE LAW OF GOD. THE CONCERN OF THE APOSTLE IS RATHER TO ASSIST EVERYONE TO REMAIN 'FREE FROM ANXIETIES' (V. 32), IN A WORLD WHOSE**

**STRUCTURES ARE IMPERMANENT, AND NOT SO IMPORTANT THAT WE SHOULD CONCENTRATE OUR EFFORTS UPON CHANGING OUR STATUS WITH REGARD TO THEM. ('THE APPOINTED TIME HAS GROWN VERY SHORT; FROM NOW ON LET THOSE WHO HAVE WIVES LIVE AS THOUGH THEY HAVE NONE...FOR THE FORM OF THIS WORLD IS PASSING AWAY' [VV. 29-31].)...**

**YET RIGHT ALONGSIDE THIS CONCERN FOR THAT FREEDOM WHICH IS MAINTAINED BY NOT BEING REBELLIOUS ABOUT ONE'S STATUS IN THE PRESENT, THERE RUNS A SECOND STRAND OF INSTRUCTION WHICH SEEMS AT FIRST TO BE OPPOSED TO IT. IF A SLAVE CAN BECOME FREE, HE SHOULD AVAIL HIMSELF OF THIS OPPORTUNITY (V. 21). IF THE HUSBAND OF THE FORSAKEN WOMAN DIES SHE IS FREE TO REMARRY (V. 39); IF ANYONE IS STRONGLY INCLINED TOWARD MARRIAGE, THAT IS QUITE PROPER (V. 36), BUT A FREED MAN MUST NOT BECOME A SLAVE SINCE THAT WOULD BE TO MOVE AWAY FROM RATHER THAN TOWARD FREEDOM (VV. 22-23). THUS THE CHRISTIAN IS CALLED TO VIEW SOCIAL STATUS FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF MAXIMIZING FREEDOM. ONE WHO IS GIVEN AN OPPORTUNITY TO EXERCISE MORE FREEDOM SHOULD DO SO, BECAUSE WE ARE CALLED TO FREEDOM IN CHRIST. YET THAT FREEDOM CAN ALREADY BECOME REAL WITHIN ONE'S PRESENT STATUS BY VOLUNTARILY ACCEPTING SUBORDINATION, IN VIEW OF THE RELATIVE UNIMPORTANCE OF SUCH SOCIAL DISTINCTIONS WHEN SEEN IN THE LIGHT OF THE COMING FULFILLMENT OF GOD'S PURPOSES... THE APOSTLES RATHER TRANSFORMED THE CONCEPT OF LIVING WITHIN A ROLE BY FINDING HOW IN EACH ROLE THE SERVANTHOOD OF CHRIST - THE VOLUNTARY SUBORDINATION OF ONE WHO KNOWS THAT ANOTHER REGIME IS NORMATIVE - COULD BE MADE CONCRETE. THE WIFE OR CHILD OR SLAVE WHO CAN ACCEPT SUBORDINATION BECAUSE 'IT IS FITTING IN THE LORD' HAS NOT FORSAKEN THE RADICALITY OF THE CALL OF JESUS; IT IS PRECISELY THIS ATTITUDE TOWARD THE STRUCTURES OF THIS WORLD, THIS FREEDOM FROM NEEDING TO SMASH THEM SINCE THEY ARE ABOUT TO CRUMBLE ANYWAY, WHICH JESUS HAD BEEN THE FIRST TO TEACH AND IN HIS SUFFERING CONCRETIZE."**

It is this allegiance to the Kingdom, and our freedom from the powers of the world's kingdoms which allows us to truly live free. And when we do, we change

society more holistically than any other power structure, because we use God's means and because we begin with the hearts of humanity rather than the coercive powers lorded over them. And we because we begin with our own hearts, the world can see that we truly are loving, genuine, and changed. Such freedom becomes irresistible to those who observe it.

Now, if you begin to make these prescribed changes in yourself. If you begin to live free despite your circumstances, and without a focused agenda of toppling structures and regimes. If you follow what the apostles tell you and you pray for kings (even evil ones) and submit to their rule, the apostles don't have to say outright that you shouldn't be a zealot. If you are a slaveholder and you are told to love everyone - including your human property - as brothers, you don't have to attack slavery head on and upend that institution. And if you tell soldiers to do no violence, you don't have to tell everyone to quit being soldiers or not to join the army. We moderns have it backwards as we tend towards the pursuit of legislation to change hearts. Maybe the apostles didn't attack institutions like slavery or the army head-on because doing so could have labeled them as subversive to the national good. But I think the Apostles understood that rather than changing legislation and abolishing institutions in order to change hearts, changed hearts would undermine evil institutions and evil within institutions.

3. [The current theology of the trinity wasn't solidified until the 4th century, yet we accept that. Why then can't we accept a doctrine of self-defense and just war?](#)

I want to begin with a lengthy quote from Roland Allen's book, "The Spontaneous Expansion of the Church."

**THE GREAT HERESIES IN THE EARLY CHURCH AROSE NOT FROM THE RAPID EXPANSION RESULTING FROM THE WORK OF THESE UNKNOWN TEACHERS; BUT IN THOSE CHURCHES WHICH WERE LONGEST ESTABLISHED, AND WHERE THE CHRISTIANS WERE NOT SO BUSILY ENGAGED IN CONVERTING THE HEATHEN ROUND THEM. THE CHURCH OF THAT DAY WAS APPARENTLY QUITE FEARLESS OF ANY DANGER THAT THE INFLUX OF LARGE NUMBERS OF WHAT WE SHOULD CALL ILLITERATE CONVERTS MIGHT LOWER THE STANDARD OF CHURCH DOCTRINE. SHE HELD THE TRADITION HANDED DOWN BY THE APOSTLES, AND**

**EXPECTED THE NEW CONVERTS TO GROW UP INTO IT, TO MAINTAIN IT AND TO PROPAGATE IT. AND SO IN FACT THEY DID. THE DANGER TO THE DOCTRINE LAY NOT IN THESE ILLITERATE CONVERTS ON THE OUTSKIRTS; BUT AT HOME, IN PLACES LIKE EPHESUS AND ALEXANDRIA, AMONGST THE MORE HIGHLY EDUCATED AND PHILOSOPHICALLY MINDED CHRISTIANS. IT WAS AGAINST THEM THAT SHE HAD TO MAINTAIN THE DOCTRINE.**

**NOW ALL THIS SUGGESTS QUITE A DIFFERENT ATMOSPHERE FROM THAT WITH WHICH WE ARE FAMILIAR. THE CHURCH OF THOSE AGES WAS AFRAID OF THE HUMAN SPECULATION OF LEARNED MEN: WE ARE AFRAID OF THE IGNORANCE OF ILLITERATE MEN. THE CHURCH THEN MAINTAINED THE DOCTRINE AGAINST MEN WHO WERE CONSCIOUSLY INNOVATING: WE MAINTAIN THE DOCTRINE AGAINST MEN WHO MAY UNCONSCIOUSLY MISREPRESENT THE TRUTH THAT THEY HAVE LEARNT. THE CHURCH THEN MAINTAINED THE DOCTRINE BY HER FAITH IN IT: WE MAINTAIN OUR DOCTRINE BY DISTRUSTING OUR CONVERTS' CAPACITY TO RECEIVE IT. THE CHURCH THEN MAINTAINED HER DOCTRINE BY THINKING IT SO CLEAR THAT ANY ONE COULD UNDERSTAND IT: WE MAINTAIN OUR DOCTRINE BY TREATING IT AS SO COMPLICATED THAT ONLY THEOLOGIAN CAN UNDERSTAND IT. CONSEQUENTLY, THE CHURCH THEN WAS QUITE PREPARED THAT ANY MAN WHO BELIEVED IN CHRIST SHOULD TEACH OTHERS WHAT HE KNEW OF HIM: WE ARE ONLY PREPARED TO ALLOW MEN WHOM WE HAVE SPECIALLY TRAINED TO TEACH IT. WHEN OTHERS WHOM WE HAVE NOT SPECIALLY TRAINED OF THEIR OWN SPONTANEOUS MOTION DO TEACH OTHERS WE HASTEN TO SEND A TRAINED TEACHER TO TAKE THEIR PLACE. THAT IS, OF COURSE, EXACTLY WHAT THE EARLY CHURCH DID NOT DO, YET IT MAINTAINED ITS STANDARD OF DOCTRINE.**

**AND HERE I WOULD RECALL THE FACT THAT IN ALL THOSE SPORADIC CASES OF SPONTANEOUS TEACHING WITH WHICH WE ARE FAMILIAR IN OUR OWN DAY WE NEVER HEAR OF ANY DELIBERATE CORRUPTION OF CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE. WHEN OUR MISSIONARIES DISCOVER THESE CASES, THEY NEARLY ALWAYS FIND THAT THE TEACHING GIVEN IS, SO FAR AS IT GOES, TRUE, AND IS VERY OFTEN SURPRISINGLY TRUE AND DEEP. THESE**

**CONVERTS SEEM TO HAVE LEARNED BY THEMSELVES MUCH THAT WE THINK CAN ONLY BE TAUGHT BY US. AND WHAT THEY HAVE LEARNED IS VERY FUNDAMENTAL. AND THEY SEEM ALSO INVARIABLY TO SHOW A GREAT READINESS TO LEARN MORE. NOW THAT IS NOT THE SPIRIT WHICH BREEDS HERESY. THE SPIRIT WHICH BREEDS HERESY IS A SPIRIT OF PRIDE WHICH IS PUFFED UP WITH AN UNDUE SENSE OF ITS OWN KNOWLEDGE AND IS UNWILLING TO BE TAUGHT.**

**THE REASON WHY THE SPONTANEOUS ZEAL OF NEW CONVERTS DOES NOT BREED THAT SPIRIT IS NOT HARD TO FIND. SUCH CONVERTS ARE ALMOST INVARIABLY MEN WHO HAVE HAD SOME REAL RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE. THEY HAVE HEARD SOMETHING OF CHRIST; THEY HAVE RECEIVED SOME TEACHING ABOUT HIM; THEY HAVE GENERALLY LEARNED TO REPEAT THE CREED AND TO READ THE BIBLE; THEY HAVE CALLED UPON CHRIST AND BEEN HEARD; AND THIS HAS WROUGHT A CHANGE IN THEIR WHOLE OUTLOOK UPON LIFE, SUCH A CHANGE THAT THEY ARE EAGER THAT OTHERS SHOULD SHARE THEIR EXPERIENCE. HENCE THEY BEGIN TO TEACH OTHERS, AND TO SHARE THEIR EXPERIENCE WITH OTHERS. NOW ALL RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE DEMANDS DOCTRINE FOR ITS PROPER STATEMENT AND EXPLANATION. IF THEN THESE MEN ARE NOT WELL INSTRUCTED IN THE CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE, WHEN THEY ATTEMPT TO SHARE THEIR EXPERIENCE WITH OTHERS THEY FEEL THAT THERE IS MUCH IN IT WHICH THEY CANNOT UNDERSTAND. CONSEQUENTLY INSTRUCTION IN CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE COMES TO THEM WITH AN ENLIGHTENMENT AND A POWER WHICH IS A JOY, AND THEREFORE THEY GLADLY RECEIVE IT, BECAUSE IT SUPPLIES A FELT NEED OF THEIR SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCE. IN SUCH AN ATMOSPHERE CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE IS IN LITTLE DANGER, FOR THOUGH FALSE OR INADEQUATE TEACHING, IF THEY RECEIVED SUCH, MIGHT PREVAIL FOR A TIME, YET THE TRUE TEACHING WHEN IT COMES MUST INEVITABLY DRIVE OUT THE FALSE. FOR THE EXPERIENCE IS A TRUE EXPERIENCE, AND A TRUE EXPERIENCE DEMANDS A TRUE DOCTRINE. IT IS AS THE COMPLEMENT OF EXPERIENCE THAT CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE FIRST TOOK SHAPE. IT IS NOTORIOUS THAT THE CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE OF THE TRINITY, FOR INSTANCE, WAS FORMULATED THROUGH THE ATTEMPTS OF THE DISCIPLES OF CHRIST TO EXPLAIN THEIR EXPERIENCE. CHRIST APPEARED, AND**

**THE APOSTLES EXPERIENCED HIS POWER: THE HOLY GHOST DESCENDED, AND THE APOSTLES AND THEIR IMMEDIATE FOLLOWERS KNEW HIS INDWELLING; THE CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE OF THE TRINITY AROSE OUT OF ATTEMPTS TO EXPRESS THAT EXPERIENCE.**

**AS THE COMPLEMENT OF EXPERIENCE, DOCTRINE RENEWS ITS YOUTH FROM AGE TO AGE; BUT DIVORCED FROM EXPERIENCE IT IS NOTHING MORE THAN THE STATEMENT OF AN INTELLECTUAL THEORY, AND TO REST IN SOMETHING WHICH AN INTELLECTUAL PROCESS HAS CREATED IS TO REST IN THAT WHICH AN INTELLECTUAL PROCESS CAN DESTROY...**

The last paragraph summarizes one of Allen's main points, which is that doctrine must be a description of our experience with God. Our God is a living God and our religion is centered around relationship. We are not stalkers of God, but friends, servants, and communers of God. The doctrine of the trinity was formed from experience. The Apostles encountered Christ and he was truly human. They encountered Christ and he was truly God. No doctrine could be formed which did not adhere to these two experienced truths. The doctrine took so long to solidify because the true experience of God couldn't let humanity get away with rationalizing how we think God should work. The experience of God held theology ransom until it aligned.

First, I would argue that the theology of the trinity was debated pretty thoroughly for several hundred years. To my knowledge you don't see the same sort of thing occurring with non-violence. The church was fairly univocal for the first few hundred years. Sure, the topic wasn't covered nearly to the same extent, but you just don't have the same sort of back and forth you have with the discussion of the trinity.

Second, the lack of debate seems to have a pretty clear source - there was no room for a competing view. The early church struggled to explain the trinity because they had two seemingly competing ideas. They thought they had a paradox, when in reality they had an antinomy. How can Christ be God and human? To see the same sort of debate about violence vs. non-violence, there would have to be two competing foundations - a seemingly non-violent Jesus and a seemingly violent Jesus. But the early church seemed to only recognize a non-violent Christ and non-violent commands, as he reserved all judgment and violence for his coming.

Third, it wasn't until the empire and the church merged and philosophizing began that a non-violent approach was explained away. Allen points out that it is rationalizing and philosophizing that tend to create doctrinal problems - as you move away from explaining experience. The experience of Jesus and his means was clear to the Apostles, and they made it clear to their disciples. The early church didn't have a problem with non-violence because as an experience of Christ, it made sense. It wasn't until they began trying to figure out how to fit God into the empire that things began to change, as they moved away from describing their experience with Christ.

The power of the pacifistic position comes in the fact that it is not only the most natural reading of Christ's and the Apostles's teachings, but it is also the common practice of the early church. You have some teachings, like the trinity, which aren't explicitly taught in the Bible, and are only solidified a few hundred years after the establishment of the church. You have other practices, like the sharing of property, which are early traditions in the church, but not explicit teachings. Pacifism doesn't fit either of these categories. Pacifism, unlike the trinity, is less a deduction and more of a natural reading. Along with being the most natural reading of the text, pacifism is also the common practice of the early church. When you find something that is both early tradition (as opposed to developed tradition) and the most natural reading of explicit teaching from Christ and the apostles, you have a very hard teaching to overturn.

#### 4. [The early church was against joining the military because of the often required bachanal feasts and god worship.](#)

It's undeniable that a huge consideration for the early church in regard to joining the military was based on oaths soldiers may have had to take, required god worship, participation in carnal feasts and partying, intimidating behavior through the use of power, and the list could go on. It's for some of these same reasons that other, seemingly harmless professions were judged wrong for a Christian. As one great example, you can see a quote from the early church (Hippolytus, I believe) which condemns Christians who become actors. Now part of this may have been because some actors put on plays in the Colosseum and sometimes used the condemned as props in battle reenactments (so deaths weren't acted, but real), but the condemnation was likely due to other aspects of the theater scene which couldn't be separated from the immorality in which they were saturated.

While all of these additional reasons for prohibiting individuals from joining the military

may be true, it seems very difficult to say that doing violence wasn't one of the issues the early church had. You can look at many of the quotes in [section 4](#) and see that violence against those found guilty for capital punishment, violence in general, violence allowed by public laws, violence in self-defense, and violence to the extremely wicked are all things some in the early church were vocal about condemning. You can also look at the context of some of the soldiers like Martin of Tours who stated his reason for leaving the army as an inability to fight. Sure, the early church may have had reasons other than violence to prohibit jobs which required one to do harm to others, but violence was certainly one of the central reasons for such a prohibition.

5. [Men, like Bonhoeffer, who renounce pacifism in the face of extreme evil, show that pacifism isn't correct or viable.](#)

1. Most of Christ's commands are harder than their alternative. Being generous is more difficult than being selfish. Being pure is much harder than lusting after our desires. Being faithful to Christ is much harder than becoming a martyr. But just as the fact that selfish, lustful, and unfaithful Christians have walked the earth don't disprove Christ's ethic, so it would be for Bonhoeffer's example of throwing off pacifism in the face of great evil. A Christian denying Christ in the face of torture and death no more disproves Christ than Bonhoeffer throwing off pacifism in the face of a man like Hitler.

2. Even if Bonhoeffer gave up on the pacifistic ideology, we could find a number of individuals who clung to non-violence in the face of great evil (a good starting list can be found in [this article](#)).

3. I'm not familiar with the evidence, so I will emphasize that you must look into this further if it is of interest. Some believe (as in [this article](#)) that Bonhoeffer did not actually throw off his pacifistic ideology at the end of his life. They use documentation of his arrest, his own writings, and other evidence to make the case that Bonhoeffer held onto his pacifistic ideology until the end. If he did, that certainly doesn't prove pacifism right, but it would help to at least undercut this argument a little more.

### C. National Claims:

1. [Doesn't pacifism minimize patriotism and a respect for those who sacrificed their lives in war?](#)



Not at all. First, pacifists should want their city and country to thrive. All Christians should seek the welfare of the land in which we live. Pacifists are not anti-government or anti-nation, but their primary allegiance is to the Kingdom. In the Kingdom, we are one blood. All men and women are created in the image of God and we seek the well-being of all people, even enemies, which means that we don't want to harm any other human. We wish for our land to not only thrive economically, but we wish for our land to be moral and to be at peace. Therefore, Christian pacifists take up the role as priests - like you will find in several early church quotes - as we pray for our country though we cannot fight for her.

As far as a respect for soldiers go, Christian pacifists have more respect for soldiers than non-pacifists. That may sound crazy, but the Christian pacifist (and the Eastern Orthodox view, though they are not a "peace church") not only views a soldier's sacrifice as their bodily well-being, but a moral marring too. To kill another human being is to bear a great weight upon your soul. Even someone who kills another person through accident or negligence can attest to the great moral and emotional weight they feel pressed upon them. How much more so should it be for someone who purposefully seeks out to kill their enemies in battle? While some Christians who hold to the notion of a just war may recognize the difficulties battle can produce within soldiers, most don't fully respect the emotional and moral sacrifice soldiers have chosen to take upon themselves. Just war theorists are usually too caught up in justifying what soldiers have done. Our notion of justification often implies that an individual is completely absolved of or distanced from negative consequence. Even if a war can be just, it doesn't absolve soldiers from the great burden their actions place upon them. Pacifists recognize this and respect the sacrifice that has been made for what one thought was the right cause.

Imagine that an individual from an extremely impoverished family in the deep inner city of the worst city in the country is prostituting themselves in order to make money for their family. For a non-Christian who thinks a person should have the free choice to use their body as they desire, the prostitution isn't really a sad aspect of this scenario. The poverty and perhaps the seeming inability to choose otherwise is what is sad. As a Christian, the sadness of the situation is not only the poverty and confinement of choice, but the prostitution itself. Christians know that even though the individual may not have had any other way to make money and feed their family, by taking on this moral evil, they have been marred in yet another way.

Pacifists view killing - even "justified" killing - in the same way. We live in a terribly evil world where war and killing are sometimes necessary for states. But the fact that people feel so trapped as to have to resort to killing - rather than be solely tragic - makes the

situation doubly tragic. That we live in an evil world is sad. But that some people kill other people to preserve life and keep evil at bay makes the situation even sadder. Christian pacifists don't glorify the soldier, but they love them, respect them, and weep for them. Pacifists don't elevate killing to glory, honor, pride, and the like - they elevate the human to an image bearer of God, both countryman and enemy alike.

2. If pacifists think that governments and laws are necessary, but a Christian shouldn't serve at levels of the government which would require them to legislate or enact harm, does that mean pacifists are just passing the necessary governmental responsibility on for others to do?

Many Christian pacifists think that participating in governmental positions like the president or congress are compromises for one's Christianity. The president is the commander in chief of the military and congress passes all sorts of forceful legislation and legislation that allows for harm to come to others (self-defense laws, voting to go to war, etc). It seems like a shirking of duties, then, if pacifists are unwilling to participate in government to a certain extent.

There are several problems with this accusation. The first is that pacifists acknowledge that the Kingdom overrules the kingdom. Their primary responsibility is not to compromise the lesser for the greater. It doesn't matter if people think they are shirking responsibilities.

Second, a participation in lower government is still possible. There are all sorts of levels in which a pacifist can do great good (public education, healthcare, federal benefits, etc). Why does one have to be willing to serve as a higher level official to be considered a beneficial participant in the land?

Finally, I hear many conservative Christians bemoaning the onset of what they view as growing socialism in the United States. They hate that we have, in their minds, become a welfare state. But then, sometimes in moments of self-reflection, they acknowledge that the government has likely gotten involved because the church wasn't handling her own business. In Rome the secular government acknowledged that the Christians were taking better care of her people than the government was. We don't have that same problem in the States. Many Christians acknowledge that we would have less intrusion, waste, and handouts from the government if only the church would value life and participate in self-sacrifice more. Unfortunately, I often hear from the same conservative Christian group that legislation is the answer for the moral ills in the United States. So what is it - a bottom up approach or a top down one?

I would argue that a marriage to the state, an embracing of legislation, and a top-down approach is not at all the answer. Early Rome had gladiatorial events, temple prostitution, state laws requiring worship of Caesar and the gods, slavery, and the list goes on. The Roman state changed for the good by leaps and bounds before Christianity began to be legislated, when there was a bottom up approach. When Christians really lived as Christ taught them to, that seeped out of their everyday lives, into the local communities, and into the nation - long before any Christian was an emperor. While just war theorists can embrace this same sort of notion and recognize the importance of the church, the approach of Christian pacifism highlights and underlines this notion. Christian pacifism places the lever of power on the Church, the gospel, and the Christian life rather than armies, governments, etc.

### 3. How can a nation survive if everyone is a pacifist?

First, we can all agree that if everyone in the world were pacifists, then we wouldn't have this problem. Pacifism is obviously the ideal way of life. The problem is that if you and I live with this ideal, we know that others won't. But this doesn't seem like it should be a problem for the Christian. We're asked to do all kinds of things that don't make sense. We're to take up our cross, be willing to be persecuted, be generous with our resources, and the list goes on. Christ's teachings are hard teachings that ask us to do things that make life unstable and open us up to be wounded.

But beyond this simple fact that the Christian must base their morality on Christ's teachings rather than on what is convenient, I think there is a simple answer to the question posed here. Yes, I as a pacifist should not harm other human beings. But I don't have to worry about other Christians who are following Christ's teachings. We are in his Kingdom and we are choosing not to do evil. So if the United States is attacked, it won't be by Christians (or at least Christians who embrace Christ's teachings on non-violence). Where should violence be coming from? It should be coming from those who are not Christians. It's coming from the world. As a Christian, I have done my part to combat evil by spreading the gospel and pacifying a portion of the world to violence. That is the Christian way. But those who are secular do not have the same ethic as Christ's ethic. Individuals who are instigating violence are not pacifistic Christians. So let the world take care of its own problems with its own means. Yes, this may mean that when those from the

world invade our lives and attack us, we do not retaliate with violence. But that is not our fight, it is God's fight, and his means is to use his sovereignty over governments to deal with evil by using the sword.

Obviously, under this idea, were a nation to become largely pacifistic, then they would not have the ability to fight violence with violence. But first, this is why pacifists tend to view the government as something left to the world - particularly positions which would require compromise with Christian values (the president is commander in chief of the army, the military, congress because they need to make decisions about war, etc). Pacifistic Christians tend to recuse themselves of governmental roles that would require a split allegiance. The government's role is to look out for its own interests. That is not even close to the Christian's call. Therefore, as a Christian, I should abstain from positions of government that would cause me to betray one of my commitments. Second, when would any nation ever become 100% Christian? If there remain secular individuals in society, than the government can be run in a secular way and can wage wars if it wants. As the early church advocated, Christians can pray for these wars and be the conscience at home, but we are not to do harm to another.

Many Christians have problems with this because they are think that abstention from significant governmental roles is 1) avoiding our responsibility, and 2) not leveraging an important power structure for Christian influence. To these accusations I would argue that this is a misrepresentation of what pacifists argue. Pacifists are not saying that we avoid action, but rather that we focus our action through a different means. God may be sovereign over governmental institutions, but he conquers hearts and the world through his church who uses the means of love. Governments legislate. The body of Christ lived as he commanded reforms. So instead of spending countless dollars and hours lobbying for laws on abortion, pacifists are more likely to advocate for actions that change lives by directly enacting good and by touching the hearts of others though example rather than words, laws, and force. Pacifism isn't shirking responsibility in refusing to leverage government for Christ. Rather, it views the lever of power, the means of God, as being something altogether different. the Kingdom is lived out through the church and it is this community living in love that bears witness to our true allegiance, as Jesus himself says. It is also through this Kingdom that true change will come.

It is not the Christian's job to ensure the outcome of events. It is our job to submit

in obedience to our king. We must understand that God's means are always better. Sometimes they're better because they're more effective. Love and sacrifice may change hearts whereas war and violence may create temporary peace only to embitter nations against each other for centuries. Sometimes God's ways are better because our obedience and faithfulness to God causes him to respond with protection and provision in return. Though immediate temporal blessing isn't always linked to moral actions, sometimes it is. Sometimes God's ways are better not because they provide temporal provisions, but because following God's means are eternally more rewarding, both in terms of the souls who see God through our faithfulness and come to know him, and in our storing of our own treasures in heaven. So yes, we are to seek the welfare of our cities and nations. But to act as though seeking the welfare means pulling on whatever levers of power we must to ensure the outcome is just wrong. If non-violence is the means God has called us to, the metric of ensuring ends is not a metric of God. Faithfulness is. Yoder, in "The Politics of Jesus," summarizes this concept well.

***WHETHER JESUS BE THE CHRIST OR NOT, WHETHER JESUS THE CHRIST BE LORD OR NOT, WHETHER THIS KIND OF RELIGIOUS LANGUAGE BE MEANINGFUL OR NOT, MOST TYPES OF ETHICAL APPROACH WILL KEEP ON FUNCTIONING JUST THE SAME... THE CROSS IS NOT A RECIPE FOR RESURRECTION. SUFFERING IS NOT A TOOL TO MAKE PEOPLE COME AROUND, NOR A GOOD IN ITSELF. BUT THE KIND OF FAITHFULNESS THAT IS WILLING TO ACCEPT EVIDENT DEFEAT RATHER THAN COMPLICITY WITH EVIL IS, BY VIRTUE OF ITS CONFORMITY WITH WHAT HAPPENS TO GOD WHEN HE WORKS AMONG US, ALIGNED WITH THE ULTIMATE TRIUMPH OF THE LAMB.***

***THE VISION OF ULTIMATE GOOD BEING DETERMINED BY FAITHFULNESS AND NOT BY RESULTS IS THE POINT WHERE WE MODERNS GET OFF. WE CONFUSE THE KIND OF 'TRIUMPH OF THE GOOD,' WHOSE SOLE GUARANTEE IS THE RESURRECTION AND THE PROMISE OF THE ETERNAL GLORY OF THE LAMB, WHICH AN IMMEDIATELY ACCESSIBLE TRIUMPH WHICH CAN BE MANIPULATED, JUST PAST THE NEXT SOCIAL ACTION CAMPAIGN, BY GETTING HOLD OF SOCIETY AS A WHOLE AT THE TOP. WHAT IN THE MIDDLE AGES WAS DONE BY ROMAN CHRISTIANITY OR ISLAM IS NOW BEING ATTEMPTED BY MARXISM AND BY DEMOCRATIC NATIONALISM. IN SPITE OF ALL THE DIFFERENCE IN LANGUAGE,***

**AND IN THE DETAILED VISION OF JUST WHAT A GOOD SOCIETY WOULD LOOK LIKE (AND AS A MATTER OF FACT EVEN THE VISIONS ARE NOT THAT DIFFERENT), THE REAL UNIQUENESS OF EACH OF THESE POSITIONS IS ONLY THAT IT IDENTIFIES DIFFERENTLY THE PARTICULAR MORAL ELITE WHICH IT HOLDS TO BE WORTHY OF GUIDING ITS SOCIETY FROM THE TOP. WE MAY WELL PREFER A DEMOCRATICALLY CONTROLLED OLIGARCHY TO SOME OTHER KIND. WE MAY WELL HAVE A CHOICE BETWEEN MARXIST AND ISLAMIC AND OTHER STATEMENTS OF THE VISION OF THE GOOD SOCIETY. BUT WHAT OUR CONTEMPORARIES FIND THEMSELVES PRACTICALLY INCAPABLE OF CHALLENGING IS THAT THE SOCIAL PROBLEM CAN BE SOLVED BY DETERMINING WHICH ARISTOCRATS ARE MORALLY JUSTIFIED, BY VIRTUE OF THEIR BETTER IDEOLOGY, TO USE THE POWER OF SOCIETY FROM THE TOP SO AS TO LEAD THE WHOLE SYSTEM IN THEIR DIRECTION.**

**ONCE A DESIRABLE COURSE OF HISTORY HAS BEEN LABELED, ONCE WE KNOW WHAT THE RIGHT CAUSE IS, THEN IT IS FURTHER ASSUMED THAT WE SHOULD BE WILLING TO SACRIFICE FOR IT; SACRIFICE NOT ONLY TO OUR OWN VALUES BUT ALSO THOSE OF THE NEIGHBOR AND ESPECIALLY THE ENEMY. IN OTHER WORDS, THE ACHIEVEMENT OF THE GOOD CAUSE, THE IMPLEMENTATION IN HISTORY OF THE CHANGES WE HAVE DETERMINED TO BE DESIRABLE, CREATES A NEW AUTONOMOUS ETHICAL VALUE, 'RELEVANCE' ITSELF A GOOD IN THE NAME OF WHICH EVIL MAY BE DONE.**

On a final note, I have always found it interesting that we prop up kings and rulers, as if government is this great gift from God. But if you remember your Bible, the issuing of government was a curse that God allowed Israel to bring on itself. "Do you really want a king?" God asked. "Fine, I'll let you have a king. But you'll regret it." Government was an allowance by God, not a blessing. Israel lived directly under God's rule in a theocracy. They were to obey God, love God, and have their only allegiance to him. When Israel got a king, nothing really changed other than they now had a fallible intermediary who often misrepresented or shunned God and lead the people into disaster. I fail to see how things are to be different today, save for one thing. We now have the Spirit of God and a perfect intermediary. We are living in God's Kingdom now, and he is expanding that Kingdom more and more each day. Yes, like the people of Israel who threw off their theocracy, we live

as subjects to a kingdom. But Christ has now established his Kingdom and we live directly connected to him and should seek to expand his blessed kingdom, not looking to a hope we derive from a temporary kingdom - this alternative to the Kingdom which has always been a curse.

#### **D. Moral Claims:**

##### 1. [Pacifists embrace injustice because they're willing to let other innocent people die for their convictions.](#)

Assuming that killing another person is the only way to protect the innocent in a given situation, then yes, pacifists are willing to let innocent people die to avoid transgressing their conviction that killing is wrong. However, for those who think there is such a thing as a just war, the same problem applies. If one believes that there are parameters in which a war can be just, and parameters in which it can be unjust, then that individual has certain convictions pertaining to war. They recognize that there are actions that can make a war or an action within war wrong. This often means that the just war adherent is faced with causing or allowing the innocent to suffer.

We can look at civilian death as a result of wartime action as one clear example. WWII saw about the same numbers of civilians killed by direct military action as military participants who were killed. When you factor in civilian deaths from indirect causes (famine, the elements, etc), it is estimated that WWII saw over twice as many civilian deaths as military deaths. But even if we leave the civilian travesty that was WWII, it is still a given today that some civilians will lose their lives for our convictions that our cause is just. When we bomb, assault, raid, or blockade a locale, we have an effect on civilians. Sometimes our bombs and bullets hit civilians, and sometimes our bombs and blockades destroy or prevent the building of shelters, hospitals, or food supplies. We know that even in a war most consider just, civilians will pay for that conviction.

But civilians can also pay for our convictions in another way. Instead of dying due to an army's actions, civilians can die due to an army's inaction. There are many genocides and humanitarian crises in which the United States did not intervene because they couldn't or didn't justify the action as a whole. Our picking and choosing of which innocent lives to save based on our just war convictions means that we let some people die for those convictions. Furthermore, there can be civilian deaths due to our inactivity in specific situations. In Vietnam we had the problem of the Vietnamese often dodging

in and out of Cambodia - a country in which the U.S. was not allowed to go to pursue fighting. Imagine that hostages or civilians across the border faced imminent harm. What would we do? In general, we would refuse to assist them because it would breach our parameters for warfare. Entering Cambodia would be unjust for us because we didn't have sufficient cause to pick a fight with them. There are many circumstances in which an army under just war conditions must not save the innocent for the sake of their convictions.

Just war theory faces the same accusation as pacifism here. The difference is that those who adhere to a just war tend to think that a loss of civilian life can be legitimate in the long run if the loss is unintentional (though many think intentional killings, like the A-bomb were legitimate) and if the loss is as a result of military action that seeks a greater good. Just war adherents also think that a loss of civilian life by withholding force in morally compromised situations provides them with an excuse for allowing civilian deaths, as they seek to maintain their convictions and standards so their war can continue being justified in their eyes.

## 2. [Pacifism claims to value human life but actually seems to disdain it by refusing to protect innocent life from harm.](#)

Some anti-pacifists claim that while pacifists proclaim love, their actions of non-violence can actually be examples of something that is unloving. They claim that if I had access to a weapon and were to see an innocent person in the process of being raped, murdered, tortured, etc - and if I didn't use that weapon to save the innocent person from harm - then I would actually be unloving. To be able to stop harm from befalling someone and to not do it, would be wrong for me.

Most Christians will agree with the above sentiment. Unfortunately, they lose too much when they believe such a thing. This charge of failing to secure the protection of someone is the same charge critics levy against God. If God truly loves people, and if he is truly capable of stopping evil, then all of these bad things that occur shouldn't happen. I shouldn't have the opportunity to stop a rape by shooting the attacker because I should be able to trust that God will stop it - if he loves us and can stop evil. Surely if I can stop evil with a gun, God could stop evil with his word. But God often doesn't stop evil. So is God unloving? Is he incapable? Or is there a reason every evil man and woman aren't destroyed prior to, or upon the commission of an evil act? If pacifists are guilty of "inaction" and an action that is "unloving," then surely the same accusation applies to God.



Pacifists, however, understand that the most loving action might not always produce the results we want with the expediency we want. Instead of killing an assailant, it may mean talking to them. Instead of killing an attacker, it may mean enduring their attack, then looking them in the eyes with forgiveness at trial. It may mean taking in refugees or a persecuted group in your country under penalty of prison or death, rather than taking up arms against another. Rather than inaction, pacifism produces an action that can be infused with far greater bravery than those who bear arms. And in so choosing a life of self-sacrifice and endurance - a life that faces evil and power with humility and love - the message of Christ can be heard and validated. How will our enemies hear the gospel if they're dead? How will they take in the gospel if we have not modeled that we, like we claim of our God, will die that our enemies may truly live? Pacifistic action does not use inaction as its means, but rather implements the means of God. Pacifism is not human pragmatism. It doesn't view our goal as the prevention of our suffering because we're innocent, for this is not what Christ modeled to us. Pacifism embraces the means of God for the purposes of God, even though this may be foolishness to the world.

In the end, God has given the sword to the government. It is the government's role to punish. The same Bible that says this is by no means ignorant as to the great evil that government may embody. The church was on the receiving end of much harsh persecution. They understood that governments can be corrupt. Nevertheless, they also understood that God is sovereign over the institution to whom he gives the sword, and they understood the means that God had given to the church to use, which conflict greatly with a Christian's use of this sword (see church father quotes). The Christians of the early church embraced the suffering Christ had promised would be theirs, submitted to the authorities God had ordained rather than claiming they were illegitimate, and loved unto death rather than seeking to preserve their own lives.

Pacifism is the most loving action one can have. It elevates all life, even the life of enemies. It says that another's life is more important than my own and more important than any suffering I may have to endure. It says that I will put my life on the line to help others even though I myself am defenseless. It says that the message of the gospel is more important than my life, and I will abstain from taking my assailant's life so that they might one day have the opportunity to hear explained what they see me demonstrate in the laying down of my life.

3. [If we were all pacifists, we would all be taken advantage of. Our nation would collapse and evil would prevail.](#)

It is interesting that pacifistic notions on the teaching of Christ persisted for the first 300 or so years of Christianity. There are a number of explanations for why such notions faded out of popular teaching, but I think it fairly clearly coincides with the elevation of the state. Just War Theory came about with Augustine (354-430) who lived and thrived right at the time when Christianity reached a tipping point and became the official religion of the Roman Empire in 380. If your country is now officially Christian and more and more countrymen and rulers are becoming Christian, it might not be a great thing to embrace pacifism. If a large number of your potential soldier pool are pacifists, how will you defend your country from outside evil? Maybe it's just a coincidence, but the disappearance of more pacifistic teaching with the rise of the Christian state seems like the teaching changed due to a conflict of interest, not because of any biblical enlightenment as to what Christ really meant.

I can't say what would have happened to the Roman Empire if they continued in the the prominent pacifistic tradition that seemed to be present from the beginning of Christianity. Maybe the empire would have fallen far sooner than it did and God would have used their dispersion to spread the gospel to the ends of the earth much sooner than it would have otherwise been spread. Maybe God's hand would have been on Rome and would have protected it from destruction and the Roman empires *pax Romana* would have been extended *ad infinitum*, so long as they followed God and used his prescribed means. Maybe Christians would have found that they had to abstain from government service, leaving the secular citizenry to run the army and legislature, and letting them bear the sword. I don't know. Certainly sheathing the sword as a country seems like it's a death wish. But then again, assuming such has two significant problems.

First, assuming that using means of God which are foolish means destruction fails to trust God. Daniel prayed in the open and was fed to lions. Daniel's three friends failed to bow to the king in public and were thrown into the furnace. Gideon was told to whittle his army down to a few hundred men. In all of these cases, God provided protection and salvation for his people.

Second, assuming the Roman Empire would have been destroyed if it didn't use the sword places the goal of action on the wrong thing. The goal of using God's means is not preservation of our lives or preservation of a kingdom in which we like living. We use God's means because he tells us to. We use God's means because it sanctifies us. It builds faith. If non-violence is the means to which God calls us, what does it matter if our enemies overthrow our kingdom? Won't we then have more opportunity to show the best imagery of the gospel - enemy love? Is our obedience and our desire for love

and the gospel to shine even if it is at the expense of our own life and our country's standing?

#### 4. So if there was another Holocaust, you'd let the genocide occur without resistance?

The most common misconception about pacifism is that it means inaction. I'd like to show how pacifism has a basis not only for action, and not only meaningful action, but how it also resists being manipulated and misused.

If I were a Jew living in Nazi Germany, I may actually wish to be surrounded by pacifists than those who are militant, as I'd have a better chance of being assisted in a meaningful way.

1). Those who accept violence tend towards pragmatism.

I remember a story a few years back from Panama City, Florida, where a girl was raped on the beach by a group of guys while a number of others did nothing. In my experience, non-pacifists tend to be pragmatic in their approach. If a non-pacifist has a gun, has the numbers, or is a confident fighter, they may go take on a group of aggressors. If they don't have the upper hand, they are less likely to confront. That's because force is acceptable to the non-pacifist because it's effective. If someone has a knife but I have fists, I'm out. If someone has a gun and I only have a knife, I'm out of the fight. Violence as a solution requires that it be of equal or greater violence than the potential violence it wishes to meet. If you can't meet the level of violence, you likely won't engage. This is also a core component of "Just War Theory." If you don't have a reasonable chance of winning, the war is not justified. Why engage if you can't win?

Christian pacifists, however, have already counted their life as nothing, and the lives of victims and enemies as everything. If they see a group of individuals raping a woman, they are much more likely to intervene. Maybe their action - bringing evil into the light - causes the men to flee. Maybe it stalls the act until help can arrive. Or maybe the intervention doesn't cause the act to stop. Maybe it only calls out evil, shows solidarity to the victim, and brings injury to the pacifist. But I can tell you that this bears the message of the gospel. The gospel isn't about pragmatism.

If I were a Jew under Nazi occupation, I would hope those around me were pacifists, as they'd likely help me even though there was a great risk to their own safety.

2). Those who accept violence are more apt to be coerced.

There is a fascinating book about the death squads of WWII called "[Ordinary Men](#)." It researches how the majority of death squads who killed Jews in Eastern Europe weren't hardened members of the Nazi party. They were the background, conscripted police forces composed of bankers, lawyers, bakers, etc. They were ordinary men. The [Milgram Experiment](#) backs up this very notion, that authority so easily directs our actions.

How is it the case that a Europe still saturated with Christian values could have its average citizen willing to carry out executions of innocent victims? Because if you're willing to make exceptions for doing violence to another human being, one only needs to expand or redefine your exceptions to direct your violence on innocent lives. If you can ever make the exception that some human is not worthy of life, it's just a very steep and slippery slope (as "Ordinary Men," the Milgram Experiment, and the Stanford Prison Experiment show) to get you to harming others. Pro-life advocates use this argument all the time. They say we can't redefine another group as unworthy of the human right to life. But even pro-life advocates will often do that with their enemies. Especially when you couple this directable violence with a sense of nationalism and fighting for your country, it becomes easy to see how a generally non-pacifistic culture (like Germany and the surrounding "Christian" countries that implemented death squads) can easily direct their violence to innocent groups.

Sadly, coercion can even extend to those who you may think couldn't be coerced. In his book "The Destruction of the European Jews," Raul Hilberg discusses how Jews themselves were implemented as a police force to round up fellow Jews. Hilberg says, "Each Jewish policeman was told to bring seven people for deportation each day or face 'resettlement' himself. Now every policeman brought whoever he could catch-- friends, relatives, even members of his immediate family.... Bribes were offered to Jewish policemen to ward off arrest.... A middle aged woman held on to a lamppost and a line of Jews crawled on a catwalk on roofs, trying not to slip. Furniture, crockery, and shoes littered the streets."

As a Jew, I would hope that the community around me were pacifistic, as they value the lives of all - even enemies - and have already counted their lives as nothing. They would be much less susceptible to expanding their definition of human value and they would be much more likely to help me escape. There is a great quote by MLK which highlights this very notion, as he describes his attitude before he embraced non-violence and compares it with his attitude after accepting non-violence. King says, "I was much more afraid in Montgomery when I had a gun in my house. When I decided that I couldn't keep a gun, I came face-to-face with the question of death and I dealt with it. From that point on, I no longer needed a gun nor have I been afraid. Had we become distracted by

the question of my safety we would have lost the moral offensive and sunk to the level of our oppressors."

Pacifism is a dying to self. It is putting oneself last. Christian pacifism views the ultimate authority as God and recognizes that he is the judge and he has issued the means and standards he sees fit. One who has disarmed themselves and relinquished their life has less with which they can be coerced.

3). Those who accept pacifism tend to love all life.

At the core of Christian non-violence is that all human life is sacred. Human life, even the life of an enemy, is worth preserving, even at the cost of one's own life. With that in mind, were I to be a Jew in Nazi Germany, I would rather be in a community that was of a pacifistic mindset than a community that wasn't, as I would be more likely to encounter those individuals who would be willing to safeguard me at the risk of their own lives.

Many seem to have in their mind that an abstention from violence means an abstention from action. That is not at all the case. To smuggle and hide Jews, to help Jewish store owners clean up after their stores were destroyed, to not remain silent when indoctrination was occurring, etc - these are all non-violent ways to do something positive. By killing a German soldier (who may or may not align with the genocidal notions of the Third Reich) I reduce the country's manpower by one. I remove the possibility of that soldier ever changing his life, repenting, hearing the gospel, etc. I create hatred within that soldier's friends and create a cycle of perpetuated violence.

But when I house Jews, like the [ten Booms](#), how many lives do I positively save? How much solidarity do I show and how much do I encourage my fellow brother and sister in love? When I get arrested for helping, how does that influence my neighbors and my community, knowing that I risked my life to save others, and without fault or any possible accusations of my harming another through resistance? What impact can I have on the guards during my detention? They may not see Jews as human, but what of one of their own countrymen who saw the Jews as human and helped them? What does that do to their system? What might that do to their heart? If the country would have been filled with Christian pacifists, there would have been less people whose violence could have been manipulated and coerced, less people who would have done nothing due to their god of pragmatism, and there would have been a love for all mankind. There would have been less blood shed by the soldiers of the nation and there would have been less Jews found by the state as more would have been hidden. World War

Two was far more atrocious than it had to be because countries with a Christian foundation were willing to do violence.

**5.** Sometimes the use of violence is the only way to prevent worse violence. Bombing an ISIS convoy on their way to slaughter a village seems like a justified use of violence.

First, I think it is necessary to continually undercut this notion that we are responsible for securing the ends of God. Our job is not to accomplish God's ends, but rather to trust God with accomplishing his ends as we remain faithful to using his means. Moses held up the staff and the waters parted. Daniel prayed and God delivered him. The prophets followed God and were murdered. Jesus submitted to injustice and died. Sometimes God accomplishes his ends in the moment, and sometimes his ends are only realized far into the future. We cannot assess the morality of a situation by the ends we think we are obtaining. We must be faithful to God's prescribed means.

Second, even though I don't think arguing pragmatism and ends is the right course for discussion, since it is the focal point of the anti-pacifistic argument, I think it's worthwhile to undermine the smugness that anti-pacifists seem to have when they offer scenarios like ISIS or Nazi Germany, saying that violence obviously produces better results. If Hauerwas's article and all of the other rebuttals I provide aren't enough to convince you, I think the following clip from the movie "The Kingdom" provides a fantastic look into what violence is more likely to breed than justice and peace.

To set up the scene, an American unit was retaliating to an injustice that occurred to innocent lives. They wanted justice and vengeance. They hunt down the guy who was responsible for the injustice and kill him. The man leaves a family behind who sees their beloved's death as an injustice, and in turn, vows to get justice through violence. Now we could argue that the Americans were right in killing this "terrorist," but the end of the movie leaves us in recognition that violence is a never ending cycle. So the "terrorist" killed some who we think are "innocent" people. But I wonder what injustice may have motivated the terrorist to view these individuals as culpable and worthy of death - worthy of what he viewed as justice. On the surface, violence may prevent imminent violence. Violence may even end up preventing the loss of a great number of lives. But Christians are commanded to love. We're not commanded to use violence because violence tends to beget more violence. The use of violence comes with a high probability of ultimately solving nothing. The use of love and patience in awaiting God's vengeance comes with a high probability of suffering, but it comes with a promise that this will put us in the company of our savior, and that God will use such foolish means to show the world his Kingdom come and accomplish his purposes.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aua344pPib8>

## E. Philosophical Claims:

1. Pacifists are just idealists. Pacifism can't work in the real world (See Hauerwas's argument at the bottom of [section #7](#)).

2. Our intuition tells us that pacifism doesn't work (See Hauerwas's argument at the bottom of [section #7](#)).

### 3. [Rebuttal to C.S. Lewis's "Why I Am Not A Pacifist."](#)

*-We can't know that pacifism produces better results than a just war.*

*- Pacifism means doing nothing. Inactivity: Pacifist isn't inaction due to hatred of evil but embracing love. Christian vs secular pacifist.*

*- War has been universally accepted by governments throughout the ages. Have all governments been wrong? Even if they are wrong, we owe the government our service.*

*- Almost all of the great minds throughout the ages have declared war necessary and pacifism bad.*

*- Pacifism rests on ambiguous statements of Jesus.*

*- Pacifism is inconsistent in that it doesn't take all the words of Christ literally. Should we really give to everyone who asks?*

*- Pacifism is just self-interest. It gets you out of sacrifice.*

Though I will get into counter rebuttals in more depth later, I want to open this section with what one of my heroes, C.S. Lewis, says about pacifism. Lewis, like most of my other Christian heroes, was not a pacifist. Being the thinker that he was, though, he gave us an explanation as to why he was not. In summary, Lewis's arguments largely reflect an overarching idea that pacifism just isn't practical. In fact, Lewis's objection was the same objection that had always held me back from pacifism and caused me to explain away the text of scripture, examples of early martyrs, etc. Lewis's objection is the objection I find most common among non-pacifists. It's the idea that pacifism is an ideal, but we live in the real world. It doesn't work.

Here are Lewis's basic arguments and my responses.

### **We can't know that pacifism produces better results than a just war.**

It is true that we can't prove whether pacifism or war does more good. It's obvious that if everyone were pacifists, the world would be a much better place. But since that is an unattainable ideal, the question is rather dealing with whether or not pacifism is better in a world where aggressors and evil abound. We couldn't even get Christian Europe to restrain itself from war for more than a year or two at a time, so how could we ever put pacifism on a large scale to the test? The question is unanswerable in this regard.

But I don't need to answer this question as a Christian. I think Lewis misses a glaring issue in his theology here. It doesn't matter whether pacifism produces "better" results, if by "better" we mean less deaths, less dictatorships, less suffering, etc. As a Christian, that's not my concern. That's God's concern. He can protect, mete out justice, and do whatever he wants to do in his world through the powers that be. My question must be "what are the means God has given me to live life and share the gospel?" Jesus Christ told me I would suffer, be persecuted, and bear my cross if I am a true follower of him. Pragmatism is not my metric for deciding whether or not a moral action is good.

### **Pacifism means "doing nothing."**

Lewis feels that pacifists are kind of a waste of space. They don't do anything. I understand his thought, but I think Lewis is confusing secular pacifism with Christian pacifism. Secular pacifism is a pacifism born of humanism. Secular pacifism has this notion that I want to see other humans thrive. This life is all we have, so I don't want to hurt anyone or take their lives. Humans are, at their core, good, and anyone can be changed through training and stimuli. That bad person isn't really evil, but misguided. On secular pacifism, there may be an onus not to harm another human, but the positive ethic of Christ (love, forgiveness, generosity, self-sacrifice, etc) is missing. Often times secular pacifists thrive in a liberal society (as Lewis points out). They live in societies that are wealthy, free, and where it's easy to be an ideological or armchair pacifist.

But this is a mischaracterization if applied to Christian pacifism. True Christian pacifism isn't inaction against evil. Not at all. Pacifism is merely choosing to use means of love to combat actions of evil rather than choosing to fight evil with evil means. One might find this inefficient. Maybe choosing love seems as though it has no effect on evil. But you can't call it inaction. In fact, if you look at the story of pacifists throughout history and their bearing of suffering for the sake of their enemies, then pacifism requires much more difficult actions over longer periods of time than simply choosing to immediately end an evildoer's life in an instant.

**War has been universally accepted by governments throughout the ages. Have all governments been wrong? Even if they are wrong, we owe the government our**



**service.**

It strikes me that until about 200 years ago, Lewis's argument for perpetuating war would have worked as an argument for perpetuating slavery. Almost all governments had condoned slavery and made laws for it. Since I believe that all humans are born in sin, since governments are just powerful conglomerations of sinners, and since most governments throughout history have failed to have a Christian influence, then yes, I do think it's quite possible for all governments throughout the course of history to be wrong. They were wrong about slavery.

When you look at the early church and the teachings we find on governments and violence, I think Lewis's ideas are easily overturned. Many in the early church seemed to think that all governments throughout history were wrong and that Christ had called them to a higher way. ([SEE CHURCH HISTORY](#)). And while the early church did submit, submission is different than obedience. To submit to a government is to submit to their authority, not to obey their every command. This is why Christians could disobey laws on emperor worship, yet submit to the government's authority in receiving punishment for their disobedience. I do not owe the government the service of killing others for them, even if they command it of me.

**Almost all of the great minds throughout the ages have declared war necessary and pacifism bad.**

This is another appeal to authority or an appeal to consensus from Lewis. I don't blame Lewis for using such an appeal, as I think authority and consensus can be valuable if it is used to bolster other strong, core arguments. But to address Lewis's appeal, most great minds have not been pacifists. But there have been some brilliant and moral people who were. But even if there were none in our history who were pacifists, what would this prove? Individuals are sinful, self-interested, and pragmatic. Of course most people throughout history would be bent towards thinking violence was appropriate at times. Lewis's argument here seems akin to his argument from government consensus, but with less basis due to the numerous brilliant individuals who have been pacifists.

**Pacifism rests on ambiguous statements of Jesus and doesn't take all the words of Christ literally.**

Should we really give to everyone who asks. Here Lewis attacks the statements of Jesus as being taken too far. This is a completely understandable accusation, as Jesus often used hyperbole and metaphor. However, I have already shown how the cumulative case of other scriptures, testimonies of lives from the Bible, early church tradition and teaching, martyrs for the faith, and implementers of non-violence all help to validate pacifism as not only a valid route, but the route of Christ.

However, I think Lewis spins this argument a different way that is far more convicting to me. Lewis asks why, if we take Christ's words literally here, don't we take him literally when he says in the passage "give to the one who asks of you and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you."? But if Lewis is correct that some pacifists are hypocrites, taking Christ's words on non-violence seriously but not his words on generosity, all he's proven is inconsistency. He may not have proven Christ's words easier than they are and pacifism wrong. He may rather have proved that Christ's words are even harder than bare pacifism, and our love needs to extend even into the generosity and free giving of our wealth. I'm much more inclined to believe the latter, especially as this falls in the same area as the extremely hard teachings that hate is murder and lust adultery. We're not talking about easy things here, we're talking about how even the smallest of things looms large over us.

**Pacifism is just self-interest. It gets you out of sacrifice.**

Lewis lived during an era where conscription was common. There were two World Wars in a short period of time, and WWII was one of the clearest good vs. evil wars in history - if only in retrospect. When Lewis spoke, then, it seemed to him that pacifism was all too convenient a position to hold, as conscientious objectors could elude conscription and service to their country. They could avoid sacrifice.

I think there are two main problems with Lewis's argument here. The first problem is that, as I've already shown, pacifism often requires more sacrifice and discipline than warring. To take up arms against someone who is attacking me may be hard, but how much harder is it to love them, endure their assault, forgive them, and seek their good? A true pacifist doesn't escape evil just because he or she refuses to do violence. The sacrifice of a pacifist is training their mind and soul to do what few can do - to endure evil head on in love. Their contribution, as some of the early church fathers confirm, was their example to their countrymen and their world. They show by their sacrifice that there is another way to live. There is another, better Kingdom - and it is for everyone, friend or foe. War may seek to bring unity through violence and destruction, but the pacifists know that true reconciliation and a confirmation of the gospel of Christ comes through self-sacrifice. Patriots, like Lewis, seem to say in statements like these that the only true sacrifice worth anything is a sacrifice of body. A pacifist would sacrifice that. But a pacifist is also willing to sacrifice their heart - bearing the the full weight of evil their enemy directs towards them, through love and forgiveness. A soldier may die bodily for his kingdom, but a pacifist is willing to bear not only the weight of death upon the body, but upon their very being, for the sake of the Kingdom.

4. If God wants to protect an aggressor against my use of force, he can do it.

I have frequently heard this defense from non-pacifists. If someone comes into their home, they'll kill them because it's their right to self-defense. And if God wants that aggressor to come to Christ, God is able to protect the attacker from harm if he really wants.

The funny thing about this line of reasoning is that if God is able to protect the attacker, isn't he able to protect the defender? Why should a defender be so willing to take another's life, to do violence to another human being? Why are we ok with trusting another person's life to God, but not our own? The question should not at all be "what is God capable of doing." Of course God can protect whomever he wants. The question is "what means has God prescribed for us to use." The pacifism argument shouldn't turn into an argument about God's sovereignty. I fully believe that God is sovereign, more fully than most, as I am in the Reformed camp. The issue is rather about God's commands. My job is not to determine the path I believe to bring me the better chance of survival and allow God to override tweak the outcome if he wants. My job is to figure out what path leads to obedience and allow God to determine the outcome he desires, which may be the message my decision sends and the soul it touches rather than than the life it fails to preserve.

## QUESTIONS FOR JUST WAR ADHERENTS:

It's really easy to ask hard questions from a competing viewpoint without providing a positive case of your own and defending that. Hopefully I've proven that I have been willing to address the hardest questions anti-pacifists have to throw at me. But now I want to take a turn to ask some of the hard questions. If you aren't a pacifist, I hope you'll look at the questions below and think about how you would answer them. While uncertainty about any one of these questions doesn't prove your position wrong, the more difficulty you have in bringing all these questions under the umbrella of your ideology, the more likely it is that your ideology just isn't coherent enough to warrant your adherence. I hope you'll accept the challenge!

I will keep most of my questions relatively succinct, but I do want to elaborate on the question that tipped the scales for pacifism in my mind. When you talk about pacifism, it's inevitable that non-pacifists will bring up the Holocaust. It's a great example of good vs. evil. The soldiers who fought the Nazis, the resistance who sabotaged, and the spies who undermined were all doing a noble thing in killing Nazis and bringing them out of power. While the knowledge of what they were doing to Jews and other minorities really only came out after the war and can only be used as a post-justification, the Holocaust solidifies in the minds of most the legitimacy of killing Nazis.

There is a huge problem here, however. Pro-life advocates often refer to abortion as a modern day holocaust. If aborted babies are human lives with intrinsic human value, then they have been victimized like no other group on the face of the Earth. Yet when we see a terrorist bomb an abortion clinic in an attempt to stop the "holocaust," most pro-life advocates distance themselves from the bomber. "That's not what Christ would do," they say. They recognize that abortion is horrendous, but bombing people isn't how Christians are to go about defending these lives.

There are all sorts of nuances you can place on the scenario of the situations you want to compare between WWII and bombing abortion clinics. But I have yet to meet someone who can tell me why they think a German resistance fighter who knows the horrors of the Holocaust killing a Nazi was justified, but us killing abortion doctors isn't. That leaves us in a conundrum, because if the two scenarios are morally equivalent, then the conclusion about one is faulty. If the scenarios are morally equivalent and the German resistance fighter should defend Holocaust victims with deadly force, then American citizens should defend the unborn with

deadly force. However, if the scenarios are morally equivalent and we know that it is wrong to kill abortion doctors, then the German resistance fighter shouldn't defend Holocaust victims with deadly force.

I thought about this for years and just couldn't figure out the answer. But of the two scenarios, I was more certain it was wrong to kill the abortion doctor. It wasn't until I researched pacifism that it finally clicked for me.

There are all other sorts of moral scenarios you can begin to play around with. Since just war adherents are usually more pragmatic, there a lot of scenarios that are conundrums for them which the pacifist just doesn't have to face. [Here is an example](#) using a Mash episode that highlights one of my favorites. I hope these questions and thoughts help you to think a little deeper about your beliefs.

## **WAR:**

What just war has been fought in the 20th century? The most "just" war I can think of is WWII, but it failed the just war test on at least three points I identified at the bottom of [section 7](#). I could argue that it failed on all but one.

We're not a Christian nation, so we may often do bidding of a misguided ruler and don't have discretion on whether or not we go to war. How is it possible to be in the military knowing that your government inevitably wages unjust wars (economic motives for waging war, proxy wars for political reason, wars that don't fit all "just war" criteria, etc)?

There are no more battlefields anymore. Combatants are often fighting from amongst dense populations of civilians and aren't easily distinguished from civilians. Any war is going to produce significant civilian casualties. How can modern wars be just?

WWI saw the creation of the homefront. With the huge armies and the amounts of supplies needed, war efforts became as much about civilian producers as it did about the armies. In WWI and WWII armies bombed war factories with civilian workers. So who is a combatant in today's society? Who is a fair target if the U.S. goes to war? Is the person working in a factory in Texas who makes bullets fair game? What about the person in Michigan who makes tires for army vehicles? What about the farmer who supplies the army with food? What about the person in California who makes circuitry for Cruise Missiles? What about the person in

China who makes components and tools and harvests the raw materials for the guy in California who makes the circuitry for cruise missiles?

If you think all of the workers in the above question are non-combatants and shouldn't be targeted, what do you then think about blockades? Are you free to prevent other nations from supplying your enemy with war materials? What if there are food supplies along with the shipment of war materials? What if there are only food supplies - can you blockade food supplies from your enemy? Is keeping food from enemy civilians justified if you are also keeping it from their army? If such as a blockade that hurts all enemies (civilians and army) indiscriminately is legitimate, why not a bombing that blows up a factory and kills hundreds or thousands of civilians in the process like the Tokyo firebombing or the A-bomb?

How can you explain the warmongering of Christian Europe? Up through WWII, nations that identified almost wholly as "Christian" fought each other to the death. If we had a thousand years of utter evil and malice at the hands of Christian states (in war, inquisitions, tortures and public executions, etc) how are we to believe that a theory of just war is reasonable? We've seen the Christian state who adheres to just war in action and it's been found wanting.

How can you maintain reasonable success in Just War if you are so constrained by moral limitations? Does this qualification apply to the individual? What about the individual soldier or the unit in battle? What does that do to notions of honor and sacrifice?

If you were a soldier, what would be your threshold for determining whether you could kill someone justly? Or would you just follow commands and kill anyone who your government determined was the enemy?

Questions from the [Hauerwas article](#):

- What would an American foreign policy determined by just war principles look like?
- What would a just war Pentagon look like?
- What kind of virtues would the people of America have to have to sustain a just war foreign policy and Pentagon?
- What kind of training do those in the military have to undergo in order to be willing to take casualties rather than conduct the war unjustly?
- How would those with the patience necessary to insure that a war be a last resort be elected to office?

## **PUNISHMENT AND SELF-DEFENSE:**

If rape or robbery isn't punishable by the death penalty - and if we don't think it should be - then how can we justify killing someone in the act of rape or robbery? If you think an aggressor who is raping or robbing someone can be legitimately killed, are you saying that "the right to my body/property trumps another's right to life?" If you are essentially saying that "the right to my body/property trumps another's right to life," do you also advocate abortion - a position which makes this exact claim?

What situation can cause an individual to lose their right to life? How do aggressors lose their right to life, or how is this right subsumed? If an aggressor doesn't lose their inalienable right to life, by what justification can you then kill them?

If you are justified to harm or kill another person in self-defense, how can you avoid the conclusion that torture can be justified on the same grounds? You can rightfully shoot someone in your home if you have a reasonable belief that they could harm you. If I have a reasonable belief - or if I am almost certain that a suspect has information that could save another's life, why am I not justified in torturing them? What is the difference between harming them to save a life in torture, or harming them to save a life by shooting them while they are attacking? An intruder in my home is neutralized when they are in custody or incapacitated from doing violence. A terrorist is not neutralized until their plan is foiled, the bomb disarmed, all the hostages released, etc. Why can't we use torture to neutralize terrorists? In fact, isn't torture more merciful and just than killing in self-defense? If an intruder is in your home, to stop them with a gun means you will likely kill them. But by using torture, you can usually stop the crime by only using as much force as necessary without taking a life.

Is it possible to kill someone out of love for them? Don't many instances of killing in self-defense involve some sort of hatred? If you find someone in the act of raping your child, while you may kill out of a love for your child, is it possible to kill the aggressor without hate for them? If you harbor hate for them, doesn't that then turn your killing into murder? At that point, how is it a justified killing to stop a rape with murder? If many instances of self-defense are murder, what situations remain open to kill another human without doing so immorally?

## **Government:**

Christianity largely abolished slavery in Rome and early Christians were discouraged from military service. When the state and church were married, Christian Europe soon began warring with other religions and with each other, slavery made a return and was justified by Christians because it was in the interest of their conquering country, etc. Christianity instituted some of the most horrific tortures (e.g. breaking on the wheel) because people thought torture prevented evil action. The state has an interest in preventing evil (and revolt). Torture was ubiquitous among Christian nations for the sake of the state (and the souls of others). How has mingling Christianity with government and letting Christians bear the sword been beneficial to the advancement of the true gospel? Isn't the first objection most Christians today hear, "what about the Crusades and the Inquisition?" Doesn't it seem like Christians taking government upon themselves as a means has caused far more harm to the gospel message than good?

## **Bible and Tradition:**

Can you make a positive case for anti-pacifism and just war from the Bible? What examples can you give under the New Covenant?

Can you picture Christ or any of the apostles advocating using violence on other human beings until Christ returns in judgment?

How do you explain away the lack of anti-pacifism in the first few hundred years of the church? What about Canon 12 of Nicaea - an ecumenical document? What about all of this coupled with the first formulation of just war coinciding with the rise of Christian/state mingling and the felt need for soldiers due to the rising threat to Rome and its first sacking in about 800 years? Doesn't the transformation in the literature and tradition seem a bit convenient for a newly formed Christian state?



Christ's commands for non-violence aren't just a metaphor or hyperbole. Even if you explain away Matthew 5, you have the full force of the rest of the New Testament behind the ideology presented there. The Bible tells us to love our enemies, submit to authorities, bear our crosses, bless those who persecute us, and do not repay evil for evil. Jesus and the Apostles really mean it! We can see this not only in Christ's life, but also by the way Paul, Peter, Stephen, and Jason conducted themselves and the way they advocated for other believers to act under the threat and harm of others. We can see this in the way the apostles died at the hands of others, never picking up a weapon to defend themselves. And we can see this ethic lived out by and large for the first three hundred years of the church - a church which at the first ecumenical council even wrote this ethic into the records (Canon 12). This was a church universal notion, not just a notion from a few famous church fathers like Tertullian, Origen, etc, though that alone would be impressive. Jesus truly meant what he said in regard to enemy love.

But Western Christians are hell-bent on attacking evil in the most pragmatic fashions. We know that laying our lives down only leads to good being devoured by evil. It gives the aggressors what they want and doesn't stop them. There is no justice in such a wasted sacrifice. Therefore, we believe that it is our job to protect God and accomplish his ends, even if that means taking on evil acts to defend him. But who are we to forego the means whereby Christ said the world would know we were truly his disciples - love for one another? Who are we to escape from the method by which God promised he would conform us to the image of Christ - suffering? Who are we to throw off the means that God himself was willing to take on to save us - his enemies? We so often choose to throw off the foolish and painful means that God has prescribed for us, a prescription not meant only to change the world, but to change our own wicked and selfish hearts. Time and time again we choose the preservation of our own lives and the worldly wisdom of repaying or preventing evil with evil rather than fighting with the means God has given us. In doing so, we embrace actions which may be most wise and efficient for preserving our lives, but actions which may mar our souls. I thank God that Jesus Christ was not as pragmatic as we are, and that he submit to the foolish and painful means of God for the sake of the world.

Sometimes he who seeks to preserve his life loses it, and he who loses his life gains eternal life. Jesus not only taught that, but exemplified it in his submission to death and his resurrection in power. Likewise, the Christian call is one of sacrifice, persecution, and the bearing of a cross. This isn't a threat for Christians, it's a promise. Most of us find that day after day we avoid losing our lives - we avoid sacrificing ourselves for others, even in small ways. And in doing such, we have

ended up losing our grasp on the true life that comes by being like Christ. Jesus showed us that he wasn't speaking in metaphor when he literalized what he said and laid down his life for us, rising again three days later unto true, everlasting life. Surely if he was serious about the end being everlasting life, he was serious about the means of obtaining that life. Christ must be our Lord, and we know he is our Lord if we serve him as he commands. But God doesn't just promise us suffering. He promises us resurrection. He promises us that our old self will die and give birth to a new man. He promises that the work he has begun in us will bear fruit and will be completed by him, and the resurrected Christ is a sign that God will make good on his promise.

But Jesus Christ has some competition. Nationalism is once again on the rise - in Europe and in the States. I see many Christians who, like myself, have conflated their kingdom's ethics and priorities with those of the Kingdom. We have placed pragmatism, national security, and legislative morality above self-sacrifice and love. It may be all well and good when a secular government organizes their priorities in such a way, but how can a Christian justify this position? We're blinded by our societal traditions. It's funny to think about how critical I've been of other denominations in Christianity for their blindness to spiritual truths, only to find more and more how blind I've been my whole life as well. We are all blinded in some form or fashion. Taking a serious look at issues like non-violence is vital for us as we adjust our mirrors and hope to see what we may not have realized what we were missing.

Most who read what I've written will likely disagree with me. A non-violent position is not a popular one to hold, and it has taken me a good two years of intellectual pursuit and wrestling to admit that I believe non-violence is the most intellectually honest position for a Christian. But I understand that it goes against our intuition. Violence is so ingrained in me that even with my intellectual assent, I know there are just some circumstances that I couldn't avoid violence. But if you can't intellectually get on board with non-violence, I at least hope that if you are a Christian, you are conditioned to view violence as an absolute last resort. You should have done all you could to avoid it, and it must be something for which your heart would break for doing.

But if you're like me, your society has conditioned you otherwise. If someone attacks, they have given up their right to life. They deserve what comes to them. You have exacted legitimate justice to your assailant if you kill them. Way to exercise your freedom and preserve life. How American - I mean, how godly of you. Sadly, I think it would be very hard for me to lay down my life - or especially

my family's life - for an assailant. And if I did kill someone attacking my family, at least as I play it out in my mind, I can't bring myself to feel guilt or remorse for the hypothetical soul. Many in Nazi Germany dehumanized the Jews. Many who are pro-choice dehumanize babies in the womb. Many conservative Christians dehumanize their enemies.

Respecting your enemy's right to life isn't embracing injustice. In fact, it's quite the opposite. It embraces justice and value for all humans - even the ones who are the hardest to love. It takes God at his word that he will exact perfect justice, and that we can trust him with taking care of that. It endures persecution and hardship, knowing that these things make one like Christ, our Lord. Embracing non-violence removes inaction, as our lives are already counted lost for the sake of the Kingdom. We don't need to evaluate anything before doing what's right in protecting life. We don't evaluate our ability, our power, our chances of success, or any other pragmatic measure. We value the lives of others so much that we are willing to sacrifice self and not worry about the outcome. Our job and our passion is to enact the means of God. We obey him, even if it is foolishness to the world.

It is not armies, political positions, or wealth that change lives. If it were any of those, Christ's ministry would have looked much different, as he would have taken the Devil up on at least one of his offers in the wilderness - political, economic, or religious power. But Christ's Kingdom is not of this world. Changed lives come through a ministry of sacrifice that culminates in the bearing of a cross. It may be foolishness to accept a position of being despised and rejected by men. It may be foolishness to allow ourselves to be lead as lambs to the slaughter. But it sure seems biblical. And it sure seems like it changes lives.

Let me end with a quote for Soren Kierkegaard who I think sums up our discussion here better than anything else. Kierkegaard recognizes the power that Jesus Christ had on this world, but also the great expectations he had for his followers. We love to claim the power of Christ, and the end of eternal life he brings. But we also have an interest in explaining away the means he brought, as they are hard truths to bear.

**THE MATTER IS QUITE SIMPLE. THE BIBLE IS VERY EASY TO UNDERSTAND. BUT WE CHRISTIANS ARE A BUNCH OF SCHEMING SWINDLERS. WE PRETEND TO BE UNABLE TO UNDERSTAND IT BECAUSE WE KNOW VERY WELL THAT THE MINUTE WE UNDERSTAND, WE ARE OBLIGED TO ACT ACCORDINGLY. TAKE ANY WORDS IN THE NEW TESTAMENT AND FORGET EVERYTHING**

**EXCEPT PLEDGING YOURSELF TO ACT ACCORDINGLY. "MY GOD," YOU WILL SAY, "IF I DO THAT MY WHOLE LIFE WILL BE RUINED. HOW WOULD I EVER GET ON IN THE WORLD?" HEREIN LIES THE REAL PLACE OF CHRISTIAN SCHOLARSHIP. CHRISTIAN SCHOLARSHIP IS THE CHURCH'S PRODIGIOUS INVENTION TO DEFEND ITSELF AGAINST THE BIBLE, TO ENSURE THAT WE CAN CONTINUE TO BE GOOD CHRISTIANS WITHOUT THE BIBLE COMING TOO CLOSE. OH, PRICELESS SCHOLARSHIP, WHAT WOULD WE DO WITHOUT YOU? DREADFUL IT IS TO FALL INTO THE HANDS OF THE LIVING GOD. YES IT IS EVEN DREADFUL TO BE ALONE WITH THE NEW TESTAMENT.**

## RESOURCES:

[Unbelievable Podcast](#): "Unbelievable" is a fantastic podcast for tons of Christian issues. You always get to hear a proponent from each side argue their position. In this episode you can hear Hauerwas and Biggar - Duke vs. Oxford - have a cordial discussion on the topic. They're two of the greatest minds for their respective side and the podcast will fill you in on the main points and contentions in about an hour.

- ["It's Just War" video debate](#): This is the debate that kicked off my inquiry into pacifism. It's a great discussion and I think the pacifists win pretty handily. If I didn't think they won, I wouldn't be in their camp today.

- Naked Bible [Podcast](#) (or [Youtube](#)): This particular episode is on the two swords of Luke, referenced in my counterrebuttal to the idea that Christ validated self-defense in telling his disciples to arm themselves. While the episode is on that specific passage, I think it not only undercuts the initial rebuttal against pacifism, but shows how Christ was instituting an expectation for non-violence through the passage. It's a good reminder about how we can insert interpretations into the text because of tradition or misunderstanding, and the speaker points out a number of ways that we have done this in such an obvious manner (e.g. Christ being numbered with the transgressors so obviously has nothing to do with the thieves on the cross in context, yet that's how most interpret it today).

[The Christian Humanist Podcast](#): While I don't think any of the speakers on this episode are full-fledged pacifists, they do a pretty fair job explaining the positions and elaborating.

- [The Politics of Jesus Book](#): John Howard Yoder writes a phenomenal book that explains why we need to take Christ's words and commands seriously rather than metaphorically. He really focuses on the two kingdoms and explains what allegiance to the Kingdom means for our subordination to our kingdom (nation). I recommend the book, but if you want something a bit shorter, I pulled out the best quotes and summarized [this book here](#).

- [The Anatomy of a Hybrid Book](#): While there are better sources for the history of individuals or time periods, I think this book does a good job of making a case for the problems we get when the church and state are married. It helps to explain why a Europe run by professing Christians can be such a horrendous place to live - why there were tortures, wars amongst Christians, etc. Whereas "The Politics of Jesus" focuses on

Christ and his teaching, this book focuses on how an allegiance to nations and kingdoms along with or over Christ plays out.

- [Letters from a Birmingham Jail](#): This isn't specifically about Pacifism, but it's a fantastic document to read from a man who implements non-violence. There is some talk about non-violence, but I think the main thing it does is show how non-violence is not inaction. It can be a very active path. Martin Luther King Jr. is so eloquent here, and this is one of the best pieces of prose you'll find in the English language.

- [The Case for Christian Realism Article](#): Stanley Hauerwas is an influential, intellectual who happens to be a pacifist. In this article he assesses the Just War position and explains how it is as unrealistic (or more so) than pacifism. Pacifism can be lived out, but there has never been such a thing as a just war. It seems an impossibility to implement.

- [Does ISIS Prove Non-Violence Wrong Article](#): This article takes a modern day issue and discusses non-violence. It also provides a good list of successful non-violence campaigns from around the time of Christ until today.

- [Love Your Enemies Audio](#) by MLK: Martin Luther King Jr.'s voice is a treat to listen to in and of itself. He is so well spoken, genuine, and compelling. But hearing about enemy love from him with an understanding of his persecution and ultimate assassination just infuses this sermon with meaning. I have nothing to say to a man who preaches love and embodies it at the cost of his own well-being, and ultimately his life. While you might say that King is a fallible man and could have embodied the wrong ethic, what then do you have to say to Christ who unarguably preached and embodied the same ethic? The ethic isn't only for God. It's for us too. Jesus is a living example, and so is MLK. But sometimes it's helpful to see a more contemporary example and actually hear their voice. I hope you will see Christ through MLK's example and words.

- [The Upside Down Kingdom Book](#): This book isn't really about pacifism at all. It does have one chapter on it, but it can easily be skipped. The first time I read this book I wasn't even thinking about pacifism. I found the book to be extremely profound and applicable to anyone's Christian life. I highly recommend this book for every Christian, even if you want to skip the chapter on pacifism. The reason I'm recommending it here is because I have been arguing that pacifism isn't inaction (or passive). Pacifism is a mindset - a theology. It's a foundation for living. "The Upside Down Kingdom" is essentially a layman's version of Yoder's "The Politics of Jesus," which looks at what a Christian's life should look like in light of Christ's teachings. It's a fantastic book.

- [Christian Pacifism Article](#): This is a pretty long article, but it does a good job

highlighting some of the main theological grounding for Christian pacifism. It's not so much an argument as it is a framework for understanding how pacifists come to the conclusions they do. It really gets at the core of pacifism and is a good jumping off point to research more.

- [Quotes 1](#), [Quotes 2](#), [Quotes 3](#): These are some quotes from the early church fathers. While I included a lot of these in the tradition section, there are more here I left out.