

Military Service, War and the Use of Lethal Force

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If you've been watching the news much lately, you're probably aware of this situation in the Middle East. The battle that, as Glen and I were discussing earlier today, it's not a question of if it escalates, it's how much it will escalate and how fast it will escalate. If you've watched much of the news events and commentary on it—we don't know how it's going to turn out but there are a lot of predictions about how this could escalate, involving numerous countries and turn into a world war situation. Between the U.S.'s involvement in that and our proxy involvement in the Ukraine and Russia war, there is a potential of the U.S. being involved in several wars on several fronts.

Because of that and the potential of where that could go, I thought it would be a good opportunity to address the biblical view of the subject of military service, war, and even the use of lethal force. This is sometimes a controversial subject in church of God circles. I thought with all the events happening in the news that these may escalate to the point where it becomes very relevant in our lives. It would be good to go over this subject and look and review what the Bible says about this and specifically how we, as New Covenant Christians, should address these subjects. One of the things we are going to see today is there is a very different approach in the New Covenant, taught by the New Testament as to how we should approach this versus how Ancient Israel addressed these subjects in the Old Covenant.

If you would like a title for this sermon, it's:

Military Service, War, and the Use of Lethal Force

All of these subjects tend to tie together. The important thing for us to understand about the subject as New Covenant Christians, is not just what the Old Testament says and the examples we can see of how Israel handled these subjects. We need to focus on what Christ and the apostles taught in the New Covenant because there is quite a difference. Let's start first of all by turning to Deuteronomy 20. If we look at this solely from an Old Covenant perspective and the example of Ancient Israel, it's very easy to come to the conclusion that God isn't against people being involved in war because there are rules of war covered in the Old Testament. God is quite specific about it and we'll see He even addresses the use of lethal force and self-defense. If we only look at those scriptures, we can very clearly and dogmatically come to one conclusion that doesn't exactly match what the New Testament is going to tell us. That's one of the things we need to realize going into this. Let's first of all look from an Old Covenant perspective, what instructions God gave to Ancient Israel on these subjects. Start off in Deuteronomy 20, this is the Bible's covering on the rules of war.

Deuteronomy 20:1 *When you go out to battle against your enemies, and see horses and chariots and people more numerous than you, do not be afraid of*

them; for the LORD your God is with you, who brought you up from the land of Egypt.

2) So it shall be, when you are on the verge of battle, that the priest shall approach and speak to the people.

3) And he shall say to them, Hear, O Israel: Today you are on the verge of battle with your enemies. Do not let your heart faint, do not be afraid, and do not tremble or be terrified because of them;

4) for the LORD your God is He who goes with you, to fight for you against your enemies, to save you.'

5) Then the officers shall speak to the people, saying: 'What man is there who has built a new house and has not dedicated it? Let him go and return to his house, lest he die in the battle and another man dedicate it.

6) Also what man is there who has planted a vineyard and has not eaten of it? Let him go and return to his house, lest he die in the battle and another man eat of it.

7) And what man is there who is betrothed to a woman and has not married her? Let him go and return to his house, lest he die in the battle and another man marry her.'

8) The officers shall speak further to the people, and say, 'What man is there who is fearful and fainthearted? Let him go and return to his house, lest the heart of his brethren faint like his heart.'

9) And so it shall be, when the officers have finished speaking to the people, that they shall make captains of the armies to lead the people.

10) When you go near a city to fight against it, then proclaim an offer of peace to it.

11) And it shall be that if they accept your offer of peace, and open to you, then all the people who are found in it shall be placed under tribute to you, and serve you.

12) Now if the city will not make peace with you, but war against you, then you shall besiege it.

13) And when the LORD your God delivers it into your hands, you shall strike every male in it with the edge of the sword.

14) But the women, the little ones, the livestock, and all that is in the city, all its spoil, you shall plunder for yourself; and you shall eat the enemies' plunder which the LORD your God gives you.

15) Thus you shall do to all the cities which are very far from you, which are not of the cities of these nations. (NKJV)

What we are about to read is, he gives a much more brutal approach to the cities that are specifically in the land they are going to take over and inhabit. As I mentioned in my last sermon, the reason for this is the people who were in these cities that they were to conquer, are part of the Promised Land that God was giving them. These were a demon worshipping, very perverted culture. They were child sacrificers, they were evil in every way. So, God takes a tougher approach with them because He didn't want that whole culture infecting the Israelites. You'll see when He covers how they should handle that, it's not nearly as nice as what we have just read.

16) "But of the cities of these peoples which the LORD your God gives you as an inheritance, you shall let nothing that breathes remain alive ... (NKJV)

It's not just—kill the males that could fight against you—it's wipe everything out.

17) but you shall utterly destroy them: the Hittite and the Amorite and the Canaanite and the Perizzite and the Hivite and the Jebusite, just as the LORD your God has commanded you,

18) lest they teach you to do according to all their abominations which they have done for their gods, and you sin against the LORD your God. (NKJV)

As I mentioned in my last sermon, there was a reason He took this very rough approach with them. It was because of how perverted their culture was and He knew that if the Israelites stayed influenced by that culture, they would wind up taking on these practices, intermarrying with the people and it would become an infection in terms of their culture. That would affect the Israelites and pull them away from God. That's why the approach is so much more severe.

19) When you besiege a city for a long time, while making war against it to take it, you shall not destroy its trees by wielding an ax against them; if you can eat of them, do not cut them down to use in the siege, for the tree of the field is man's food.

20) Only the trees which you know are not trees for food you may destroy and cut down, to build siegeworks against the city that makes war with you, until it is subdued. (NKJV)

Notice, He takes a very harsher approach with the cities where they are going to inhabit and are part of the Promised Land. He says the areas that are farther off, try to make peace with them if you can. Try to make an arrangement where you don't have to go to war, but if you can't work out peace with them then He gives you rules for how you are to handle that. He even goes to the point of commanding them not to take the approach that is often referred to as the scorched earth approach. Where an army goes in and attacks an area and they may win the battle but they just obliterate everything in the area and the land is not inhabitable after that because they destroyed everything. He says if you go in to do this, don't cut down all the fruit trees. Leave the area where it can support human beings after this battle is over and people can still eat and use that for food. Don't destroy everything and have a scorched earth approach to it. He gave specific rules for war.

If we look at this from our perspective today, it's easy to take this and say God has no problem with people going to war. He specifically said in the Bible, here's the rules of war. You have to understand, as we're going to see as we go forward in this sermon, there is quite a different approach between how He addressed these subjects with Ancient Israel under an Old Covenant arrangement versus what He teaches us in the New Covenant for people who have been called and given His spirit to change their

hearts. As we're going to see, there are number of subjects where there is a very different approach in the New Covenant and that's because of the Holy Spirit being able to soften our hearts; that's why He takes a different approach.

We've addressed the subject of military service and war, let's also take a look at how the subject of using lethal force in self defense is addressed in the Old Testament. You'll see circumstances where that is fully justified as well. Turn to Exodus 22:1.

Exodus 22:1 *If a man steals an ox or a sheep, and slaughters it or sells it, he shall restore five oxen for an ox and four sheep for a sheep.
2) If the thief is found breaking in, and he is struck so that he dies, there shall be no guilt for his bloodshed.
3) If the sun has risen on him, there shall be guilt for his bloodshed. He should make full restitution; if he has nothing, then he shall be sold for his theft. (NKJV)*

In other words, what it's saying is, that if a guy breaks in, in the middle of the night and surprises a family—he's a burglar coming into your house at night—and you killed him in self-defense, that's not considered a crime. The guy got what was coming to him. That's the approach it's taking here. It's easy to look at this and say God doesn't have a problem if someone is attacking me, I can kill him. The Bible says it's okay here. If we take that approach, we have to take into consideration what the New Covenant teaches, which is quite a different approach. We're going to see this not only in terms of military war and service, we're going to see this in terms of self-defense and even with capital punishment. These are dealt with very differently with New Covenant Christians than what you see with Ancient Israel and the Old Covenant.

To establish a little precedence, as we're going to see, there is a number of subjects where the way the rules were laid out with Ancient Israel, under the Old Covenant. However, there is a significant change where there are much stricter rules that we have to abide by as New Covenant Christians, compared to what the Old Testament teaches us. We can't just turn to what the Old Testament says and say "That's the rules and the end of the subject." As New Covenant Christians, we have to take into consideration, did Christ teach a different approach to this subject? Those are the rules we have to follow.

Just to give you an example of this—this is a great one because it explains why this approach is different. Let's look at the subject of divorce and remarriage. You'll see a very different approach here from what Moses instructed Ancient Israel to do and what Christ says in the gospels. Christ specifically explains why the change is different. Notice Deuteronomy 24:1; this is how the subject of divorce and remarriage was handled with Ancient Israel.

Deuteronomy 24:1 *When a man takes a wife and marries her, and it happens that she finds no favor in his eyes because he has found some uncleanness in her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce, puts it in her hand, and sends her out of his house,*

- 2) *when she has departed from his house, and goes and becomes another man's wife,*
- 3) *if the latter husband detests her and writes her a certificate of divorce, puts it in her hand, and sends her out of his house, or if the latter husband dies who took her as his wife,*
- 4) *then her former husband who divorced her must not take her back to be his wife after she has been defiled; for that is an abomination before the LORD, and you shall not bring sin on the land which the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance. (NKJV)*

We have a restriction, if there's a divorce and the wife leaves and marries some guy, she can't come back to the first husband and remarry him after that marriage has taken place, but it doesn't restrict it in other means. It gives that one restriction but basically, it's okay if he just gives a certificate of divorce, she leaves, he can go marry another woman, there's no other restrictions involved. Christ's approach in the New Testament is quite different. Not only have the rules changed but His explanation as to why. In Matthew 19 there's several interesting things we can learn from this example. Bigger than just the subject of divorce and remarriage. What we want to see is the reason why and to notice what the reaction of the people hearing this was. That reaction is relevant to the subjects we're going to look at in more detail today.

- Matthew 19:1** *Now it came to pass, when Jesus had finished these sayings, that He departed from Galilee and came to the region of Judea beyond the Jordan.*
- 2) *And great multitudes followed Him, and He healed them there.*
 - 3) *The Pharisees also came to Him, testing Him, and saying to Him, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for just any reason?"*
 - 4) *And He answered and said to them, "Have you not read that He who made them at the beginning made them male and female,"*
 - 5) *and said, "For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh?"*
 - 6) *So then, they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate."* [Notice the response they have in verse 7]
 - 7) *They said to Him, "Why then did Moses command to give a certificate of divorce, and to put her away?" (NKJV)*

They are not incorrect in saying this—we just read this in Deuteronomy—they are accurately quoting what Moses taught them. But notice Christ's response.

- 8) *He said to them, "Moses, because of the hardness of your hearts, permitted you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so.*
- 9) *And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery; and whoever marries her who is divorced commits adultery." (NKJV)*

Christ has a much higher standard that is much stricter than what Moses laid out in Deuteronomy 24. But He's saying, that because of the hardness of the hearts, is why

God allowed these rules with Ancient Israel. The Holy Spirit wasn't being offered; this is not a New Covenant situation. It was strictly an Old Covenant nation, a physical relationship with a physical nation and that's why He took that more physical approach. Notice also verse 10 and how the people respond to this.

10) His disciples said to Him, "If such is the case of the man with his wife, it is better not to marry." (NKJV)

Now they are saying, Christ is being unreasonable; "That's too strict, that's too harsh, we can't do that." As we joke in modern day culture, it's like they looked at Christ and said, "You quit preaching with the meddling now—that's too hard." He gave these stricter rules to a people who He's going to be offering the Holy Spirit to. To change our minds, to change our perspective, to put His mind and character in us and that changes the rules. The reason I point this out is, that often when we talk about how the New Covenant addresses the subject of *violence*—just to give one particular word—whether it's war, military service, lethal force in self-defense—that whole subject, when you talk about the passivist's point of view that the New Testament very consistently teaches, the reaction is the same way. "That's just unreasonable, that's just not logical, we can't do that." That same approach is how people respond just like the disciples responded to Christ when He explained divorce and remarriage.

With that in mind, let's look at how Christ addressed the sermon on the mount and this whole subject of how we deal with our enemies. We saw in Deuteronomy you have this other nation that is being ornery and you can't get along with them—you go to war with them. Christ has a totally different approach that He is teaching in the New Covenant. In Matthew 5:21 He goes way beyond the actions and now the standards addressed are our hearts and how we think and the attitudes we have. It becomes a much stricter situation.

Matthew 5:21 *"You have heard that it was said to those of old, You shall not murder, and whoever murders will be in danger of the judgment."*

22) But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment. (NKJV)

Whenever Christ is saying, "but I say to you...", He's clarifying that "Yes you have been taught that; but let Me tell you the higher standard." That's basically what He's laying out here.

22 continued) ... And whoever says to his brother, Raca! 'shall be in danger of the council. But whoever says, 'You fool! 'shall be in danger of hell fire.

23) Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you,

24) leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.

25) *Agree with your adversary quickly, while you are on the way with him, lest your adversary deliver you to the judge, the judge hand you over to the officer, and you be thrown into prison.*

26) *Assuredly, I say to you, you will by no means get out of there till you have paid the last penny. (NKJV)*

Continuing in verse 38) ...

38) *“You have heard that it was said, An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’*

39) *But I tell you not to resist an evil person. (NKJV)*

Notice once again, He’s quoting from the Old Testament but saying, “I’m giving you a higher standard now and this is the standard you’re going to have to follow”.

39 continued) ... *But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also.*

40) *If anyone wants to sue you and take away your tunic, let him have your cloak also.*

41) *And whoever compels you to go one mile, go with him two.*

42) *Give to him who asks you, and from him who wants to borrow from you do not turn away.*

43) *“You have heard that it was said, You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’*

44) *But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you ... (NKJV)*

That has to be one of the hardest things for us as Christians to do. It’s one thing to go out of our way and to be loving and kind to people that we like. That are nice to us. Maybe they have some annoying traits but we can forgive that because overall they are a nice people and I like to be around them. But your enemy who is persecuting you and treating you badly—I have to be kind and nice to that person? Now you are being unreasonable. That’s our carnal approach to it because that is how our carnal, physical minds think. Christ is telling us a higher standard of what we have to do with His spirit to develop His mind. Look at verse 45.

45) *that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.*

46) *For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same?*

47) *And if you greet your brethren only, what do you do more than others? Do not even the tax collectors do so?*

48) *Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect. (NKJV)*

He's saying that if we want to be perfect like our Father in heaven is perfect, one of the criteria is loving our enemies and being good to those who persecute us. Just to give you an idea, the same Greek word used for *persecuted*, turn to Luke 21 and see what that can include. It's the same Greek word for *persecute*. I want you to see, this isn't just for people who say bad things about you or are kind of rude and ugly to you.

Luke 21:12 *But before all these things, they will lay their hands on you and persecute you ... (NKJV)*

The form of *persecution* we're talking about here, this is people getting physical with you and laying their hands on you.

12 continued) ... delivering you up to the synagogues and prisons. You will be brought before kings and rulers for My name's sake. (NKJV)

When he's talking about people persecuting you, he's not just saying to be good to those who are rude and ugly to you, they are short and say some nasty things about you, he's saying we have to be good to those who lay their hands on you. Who even get physical with their persecution. As we're going to see through this sermon, if you look through the New Testament, there is a very consistent track record—if you just look at the lives of the apostles, with one or two exceptions, almost all of them were violently murdered. They were attacked, they were persecuted, yet not one single account of when they got killed, they whipped out their sword and went down fighting to the death. It's just not there. What we're going to see is a very consistent track record through the New Testament and these are often people who were persecuted, attacked, murdered—they went through some very nasty stuff and there are many accounts of that and there's not a single account of them fighting back with a sword. We're going to look at the one single account where that happens in the New Testament and see Christ chastised Peter for that and corrects him.

In Romans 12 Paul taught this same approach of being good to your enemies, making peace with everyone, even if they are not being good to you. This is the approach that he taught. This is in Romans 12:17.

Romans 12:17 *Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men.*

18) If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men. (NKJV)

He's acknowledging that there are some people who are not peaceful and you're not going to live peaceably with them. It takes two parties to live in peace with each other but everything in your control that you can do, try to live peaceably. That's what we are supposed to do.

19) Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord.

20) Therefore "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; If he is thirsty, give him a drink; For in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head."

21) Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. (NKJV)

The very consistent approach in the New Testament is we rely on God to be our protector. That doesn't always mean that God protects us from being attacked or from being killed. As we're going to see, most of the apostles—how did they die? They got violently murdered. We're going to see the example of Paul later in the sermon—the Bible documents at least nine violent attacks that Paul suffered. He's trusting in God though all of this but that doesn't always mean he is pain free and God keeps him from ever being attacked or killed. There are plenty of Christians who did that, but it's trusting in God to be our avenger and not taking that upon ourselves.

We're also going to see this whole subject of violence even in regard to capital punishment—the term we use today—has a very different approach in the New Covenant with how the church handled this versus the instructions that are given to Ancient Israel. I want you to see several examples of this so you see a consistent theme. In Leviticus 20 there is an example of what Moses laid out about how they were supposed to handle a situation where people were caught in adultery. He's going to specifically mention a form of adultery where a man has his father's wife. The reason I mention this, is we're going to see what Moses said and then see Paul addressing this exact same situation in the New Covenant and see a very different approach of how he went about it.

Leviticus 20:10 *The man who commits adultery with another man's wife, he who commits adultery with his neighbor's wife, the adulterer and the adulteress, shall surely be put to death. (NKJV)*

He's saying if they get caught and it is confirmed that they did this, what you're supposed to do is kill them.

11) The man who lies with his father's wife has uncovered his father's nakedness; both of them shall surely be put to death. Their blood shall be upon them. (NKJV)

It was very, very clear that if this happened in Ancient Israel, what they were supposed to do was stone them. They were supposed to take them out and kill them and be done with this. What I want you to see is there is a quite a contrast with how the church addresses this. It's not like this sin is accepted as being okay. It's not the Protestant view of just have love in your heart and you don't need to keep that law; it's not like that at all. The whole issue of violence is taken out of the equation. In 1 Corinthians 5 we see Paul addressing a situation with the Corinthian church that is exactly, in terms of the offense, just like what we just read. It's a situation where a man has his father's wife—exactly what was addressed in Leviticus—but notice as Paul addresses this, at no point does he say, you know what Moses said—take the guy out and kill him and be done with it. That's not what he says.

1 Corinthians 5:1 *It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and such sexual immorality as is not even named among the Gentiles—that a man has his father's wife! (NKJV)*

We're talking about the exact same offense we read in Leviticus. Paul is not saying this is okay. He's not saying just be nice and loving and overlook it. He's not saying that at all. In fact, he's chastising the Corinthians church because that's what they're doing. They are proud of themselves for being so nice and loving and overlooking it; there's no consequences coming to this guy and Paul is specifically chastising them for how they are handling it, saying they are doing this all wrong. Notice how he addresses this, at no point does he say, follow Moses' instructions and take the guy out and stone him. He doesn't say that.

2) And you are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he who has done this deed might be taken away from among you. (NKJV)

In other words, they were allowing him to attend services and not giving him any consequences and Paul is chastising them for this.

3) For I indeed, as absent in body but present in spirit, have already judged (as though I were present) him who has so done this deed.

4) In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when you are gathered together, along with my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ,

5) deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus. (NKJV)

As we're going to see as we keep reading, he's referring to the concept that we refer to today as being disfellowshipped. Cast this guy out of the congregation, don't let him attend, don't fellowship with him because there are two things he's trying to accomplish. One as he mentions, as we keep reading, he makes the analogy of leaven. This sin is going to be like leaven and if you treat this like it's okay and it is no big deal, it's going to encourage that behavior and affect the rest of the congregation. The other thing he wants to happen is the social ostracizing of this guy to create some pain in his life. Then the pain level may motivate him to want to change. If he doesn't face consequences, then he just thinks it's no big deal and he can keep continuing in this behavior. If he faces painful consequences, maybe it will cause him to think that maybe he should change his behavior and stop doing this.

6) Your glorying is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump?

7) Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us.

8) Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

9) I wrote to you in my epistle not to keep company with sexually immoral people.

10) *Yet I certainly did not mean with the sexually immoral people of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world.*

11) *But now I have written to you not to keep company with anyone named a brother, who is sexually immoral, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner—not even to eat with such a person.*

12) *For what have I to do with judging those also who are outside? Do you not judge those who are inside?*

13) *But those who are outside God judges. Therefore “put away from yourselves the evil person.” (NKJV)*

Paul’s approach is to disfellowship the guy. At no point does he say, Moses told us to go and kill him. He doesn’t take him out and say, “Let’s stone the guy because he deserves the death penalty.” The point I want you to see is, the approach of violence is taken out of the equation with the New Covenant Christians. Whereas clearly Moses said if that happens among the congregation of Israel, the physical nation’s instructions were to take the guy out and kill him and be done with this. What Paul instructed the New Covenant church was to disfellowship him. If you read through 2 Corinthians, the guy gets the message later, repents of the sin, stops the behavior and Paul says to forgive him, let him back, he stopped the behavior, let it be in the past and let us move forward from here. What I want you to see this completely different approach.

This was also true of how we dealt with heretics. What I mean by that is, we are going to look at examples of how the Old Covenant dealt with those who were knowingly, blatantly teaching false doctrines to lead people away from the God of Israel. How Moses’ instruction in Deuteronomy tells how they were to handle that and how Paul says to handle that in the New Testament. We have the same offense but a completely different approach to how it’s dealt with. Turn to Deuteronomy 13:1.

Deuteronomy 13:1 *“If there arises among you a prophet or a dreamer of dreams, and he gives you a sign or a wonder,*

2) and the sign or the wonder comes to pass, of which he spoke to you, saying, ‘Let us go after other gods’—which you have not known— ‘and let us serve them,’

[He trying to lead them away from truth and into heresy.]

3) you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams, for the LORD your God is testing you to know whether you love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul.

4) You shall walk after the LORD your God and fear Him, and keep His commandments and obey His voice; you shall serve Him and hold fast to Him.

5) But that prophet or that dreamer of dreams shall be put to death ... (NKJV)

Notice the solution was, “Go and kill the guy.”

5 continued) ... because he has spoken in order to turn you away from the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt and redeemed you from the

house of bondage, to entice you from the way in which the LORD your God commanded you to walk. So you shall put away the evil from your midst.

6) "If your brother, the son of your mother, your son or your daughter, the wife of your bosom, or your friend who is as your own soul, secretly entices you, saying, 'Let us go and serve other gods, which you have not known, neither you nor your fathers,

7) of the gods of the people which are all around you, near to you or far off from you, from one end of the earth to the other end of the earth,

8) you shall not consent to him or listen to him, nor shall your eye pity him, nor shall you spare him or conceal him;

9) but you shall surely kill him; your hand shall be first against him to put him to death, and afterward the hand of all the people.

10) And you shall stone him with stones until he dies, because he sought to entice you away from the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage.

11) So all Israel shall hear and fear, and not again do such wickedness as this among you. (NKJV)

It's a very clear approach; you have this known heretic who is trying to lead people into falsehood, away from the God of Israel and what is the solution? Kill the guy; stone him and be done with the problem. Paul addresses a similar type of issue in the New Testament but let's notice, violence does not come into the equation. Turn to Romans 16 and we will see a similar offense but a very different approach.

Romans 16:17 *Now I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them.*

18) For those who are such do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly, and by smooth words and flattering speech deceive the hearts of the simple. (NKJV)

Those who are not following the true God but are purposefully out here serving themselves and trying to lead people away from the true God. Paul doesn't say, it's not a big deal, just ignore them. He doesn't say keep them a part of the congregation and be nice. He's saying if you notice this and there is a consistent track record of this, don't have them in the congregation, don't fellowship with them, get yourself out of that environment, stop listening to them. Realize, let me put one disclaimer in here, it's not an issue of every time you disagree with one point of view someone has or they don't have full understanding of a particular subject that you disfellowship and ostracize them. We are all imperfect in our understanding but what he is saying is, if you have someone that is knowingly stirring up trouble and teaching false doctrines, get away from that person. Stop listening to them, don't socialize them, don't encourage this behavior. At no point does Paul say, you know what we need to do here—Deuteronomy 13 says kill the guy. Take him out, stone him and be done with this, let's end this once and for all and have him be dead—he doesn't take that approach. We're going to see again this whole issue of violence is handled very differently in the New Covenant church for New Covenant Christians as it was for the physical nation of Israel.

On that note, one thing we need to address here is the one scripture that is typically twisted to teach the idea that Christ said—as we often joke in our culture today—“packing heat” was okay. Because there is one scripture where Christ talks about getting the sword. People often don’t take that full context into what Christ said here and follow the story to see what was really happening. We take that scripture out of its context and say, Christ Himself said *to pack a sword and in fact encouraged it*. I’ve heard that idea put forward in the church of God for many years. Let’s look at his statement in detail, understand what Christ actually said and follow the story through. What we’re going to see is, the lesson that Christ is teaching is literally the polar opposite of how people try to twist the scripture. Luke 22:35.

Luke 22:35 *And He said to them, “When I sent you without money bag, knapsack, and sandals, did you lack anything?” So they said, “Nothing.”*
36) *Then He said to them, “But now, he who has a money bag, let him take it, and likewise a knapsack; and he who has no sword, let him sell his garment and buy one.* (NKJV)

Christ is clearly encouraging them to go and buy a sword. People take that statement and say that Christ said “Packing a sword is okay.” Christ Himself said it. Let’s keep reading the next verse and see why He said that and follow the story through. We’re going to see the exact opposite conclusion in terms of how it affects our behavior.

37) *For I say to you that this which is written must still be accomplished in Me:* [There’s a prophecy that has to be fulfilled and He’s about to quote Isaiah 53]
And He was numbered with the transgressors. (NKJV)

Most Bible translations are going to put quotations around that statement because it’s a direct quote from Isaiah 53:12. We won’t take the time to turn there but if you want to look it up later, it’s quoting word from word.

37 continued) ... For the things concerning Me have an end.” (NKJV)

He’s directly saying the reason He’s telling them to go get a sword is to fulfill Isaiah 53:12, that Christ has to be numbered among the transgressors. We’re going to see the transgression later when Peter tries to cut off a guy’s head with a sword and Christ chastises him for it.

38) *So they said, “Lord, look, here are two swords.” And He said to them, “It is enough.”* (NKJV)

Notice another thing. You have 12 apostles, and they are going out to get swords and they say there’s two and He says, that’s all you need. If He’s telling them—as I’ve heard a lot of people over the years try to twist this verse into saying—they were going to have dangerous situations when they all went to preach the gospel so He’s telling them to pack a sword, so they are packing heat to protect themselves. Wouldn’t they need 12

swords if that was the case? Just think it through. If the purpose was for all of them to pack heat to protect themselves, wouldn't they all need one? They are all going to go out in different directions so wouldn't that be necessary?

Also, with all the examples in the New Testament of the church being persecuted, people being killed, the apostles themselves being killed—if that is what Christ was saying, wouldn't there be at least one example of one of these guys that when they got killed, they were fighting to the death with their sword and they went down fighting until the end? There's not a single example of that. It kind of begs a question, doesn't it? Now let's follow through the actual rest of the story. Turn to Matthew 26 and see what happens here and Christ's reaction to it. This follows through the fulfillment when Christ said, I want you to go get a sword because I have to be numbered against the transgressors among them. Notice what happens.

Matthew 26:47 *And while He was still speaking, behold, Judas, one of the twelve, with a great multitude with swords and clubs, came from the chief priests and elders of the people.*

48) Now His betrayer had given them a sign, saying, "Whomever I kiss, He is the One; seize Him."

49) Immediately he went up to Jesus and said, "Greetings, Rabbi!" and kissed Him.

50) But Jesus said to him, "Friend, why have you come?" Then they came and laid hands on Jesus and took Him.

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

The Matthew account doesn't say this, but if you put all the gospel accounts together, what you'll see is that it's Peter who does this. He whips out the sword and swings it. The part I'm about to state is speculation but I think it's logical when you think about it. It says he cut off the guy's ear. If he's swinging at him with the sword, I think in all probability, he wasn't just trying to cut his ear off, he was probably trying to cut his head off. If you think about it, if you are swinging a sword at someone's head, if you duck and the sword is coming at you and misses, it can take your ear off. But the intent was to chop his head off. That's probably what Peter was actually doing. Another detail once we read Christ's response to this, because the Matthew account doesn't include this part—not only does Christ chastise Peter for doing this. He picks up the guy's ear and supernaturally heals it and puts it back on the guy. So He repairs the damage Peter did and then scolds Peter for doing it.

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

In other words, Christ doesn't say, Peter that's what you're supposed to do—whip out your sword and go down fighting. No, He says to put it away. Notice after this, He's pointing out to him that God has the situation under control? Don't you think He can handle it all without you trying to chop people's heads off?

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

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

Once again, this has to happen—all these events have to play out as prophesied. As we read earlier when Christ says to go get a sword, The next verse gave the reason—so Christ can be numbered among the transgressors. Peter is the transgressor; he's the guy who whipped out a sword and tried to lop off heads and Christ is chastising him for doing it.

55) In that hour Jesus said to the multitudes, "Have you come out, as against a robber, with swords and clubs to take Me? I sat daily with you, teaching in the temple, and you did not seize Me.

56) But all this was done that the Scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled." Then all the disciples forsook Him and fled. (NKJV)

If we read through Isaiah, there's very detailed prophecies of what would happen to Christ. One of them was He would be numbered among the transgressors. Christ is saying that all of this had to play out in specific detail and that was one of them. That's why when He said, you guys go pick up a sword and they said "Here's two", Christ said "That's all you need." The purpose of this is for this event to take place. He's not teaching the apostles that "When you go out to preach the gospel, you're going to get in some hairy situations, so you all need to be 'packing heat' to protect yourself." That is the exact opposite of everything that Christ taught and the example that we see, if we look at the history of the apostles—not only recorded in the Bible but even in history—there's not a single example of the church all took up swords and had an armed revolt. Or they went down fighting when the apostles were being attacked, everybody took up arms and they all went down in a bloody battle. There's not a single example of that. There is a 100% track record in the opposite direction.

When you think of the issue of military service and war, Christ Himself specifically said that His followers don't fight because His Kingdom is not of this world and we are His followers and we should follow that example. In John 18:36 Christ talking to Pilate and we're breaking into the context.

John 18:36 *Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here." (NKJV)*

We're His followers too and we follow that same example.

37) Pilate therefore said to Him, "Are You a king then?" Jesus answered, "You say rightly that I am a king. For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice." (NKJV)

If we are of the truth, we follow His instructions; we follow His example of what He said and His servants don't fight. If we are to be His servants, that's the example we need to follow. Paul talked in a similar context—turn to Philippians 3:20.

Philippians 3:20 *For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, 21) who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself.* (NKJV)

As Christ said, My Kingdom is not of this world so My servants don't fight in this world's armies and going to these battles. We don't do that because we are following a different government. Paul is saying the same thing. Our citizenship is in heaven. This is why the church of God has always taught that we don't get involved in military service, we don't get involved in the politics and the fights of this world because we are essentially ambassadors of God's government. Just to use the physical concept of what an ambassador is, if you have an ambassador to a nation, they are there living amongst the other people but are representing a different government. As a result, they don't vote in the elections of the particular nation that they are physically living in, they don't fight in the wars because they are representing a different government. It's a similar concept for us; we are followers of Christ and representing His government with God the Father and it's not of this world. That's why we don't get involved in the violent fights of this world and of our physical nations—we stay out of that. We stay out of its politics because we don't get involved in that.

If you look through the New Testament, other than how people try to twist Christ's example of saying "Get a sword", what you will find is a very consistent track record throughout the New Testament of the church being attacked. Even being violently attacked, being persecuted, church members being murdered. Even the apostles being murdered. Not one example of, "They whipped out a sword and they went down fighting to the death." Or all the church members ganged up together to keep this servant of God from being attacked and they whipped out their sword and had a violent revolt. You can't find that, it's not there. It's completely absent from the record. Let's look at a few examples. Acts 7 has the stoning of Stephen. In most of this chapter, Stephen is giving a powerful sermon that rubs the Jews of his time the wrong way, to the point that they get so mad they literally kill him. Notice, as he's going through this, at no point does Stephen whip out a sword and goes down fighting. Or all the other church members see that Stephen is about to get attacked so they whipped out their sword and go to battle—that's completely absent from the story. Pick up in verse 54.

Acts 7:54 *When they heard these things they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed at him with their teeth. 55) But he, being full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God,*

56) and said, "Look! I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!"

57) Then they cried out with a loud voice, stopped their ears, and ran at him with one accord;

58) and they cast him out of the city and stoned him. And the witnesses laid down their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul.

59) And they stoned Stephen as he was calling on God and saying, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit."

60) Then he knelt down and cried out with a loud voice, "Lord, do not charge them with this sin." And when he had said this, he fell asleep. (NKJV)

Stephen's example is frankly sometimes hard for our carnal minds to wrap around. Here he is being violently murdered and what is he doing? He's showing love to his enemy; he's being good to those who violently persecute him. He's following Christ's instructions. With our physical, carnal minds we think, these guys are killing him so why would you do that to guys who are killing you? Again, because we are supposed to follow Christ's example. That's foreign to our physical, carnal minds but that's the purpose of the Christian life. To develop that character, that viewpoint, that way of thinking in us because it's not natural in us. That's why we need the spirit of God to give us that character and mindset because it's not what comes naturally. What comes naturally to us is, "You're going to attack me so I'll attack you back." That's how we think carnally and physically.

Another way to see this very consistent track record of a pacifist approach when it comes to violence, look at the life of Apostle Paul. In 2 Corinthians 11 we can read through some of the lists of what Paul said he faced. The trials that he went through. Notice as we read through this, that there are at least 9 different violent attacks that Paul receives. At least one of them is listed as a stoning. With several of these I think he was being tortured and beat up and those who were beating him up didn't necessarily have the intention of killing him but when you stone a guy, you are trying to kill him. You're not just trying to rough him up, you're trying to kill the guy. This is what Paul faced. There is 9 different times where this happens and nowhere in all of Paul's letters does it say, "Then I started packing as sword because I got tired of getting beaten up." That's not mentioned.

2 Corinthians 11:24 *From the Jews five times I received forty stripes minus one.*

25) *Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been in the deep;*

26) *in journeys often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils of my own countrymen, in perils of the Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren;*

27) *in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness—*

28) *besides the other things, what comes upon me daily: my deep concern for all the churches.* (NKJV)

If you think of this from a physical, carnal perspective, if you are Paul and you keep finding yourself in a situation where you're taken captive and they are beating on you, with lashes, they are stoning you—don't you think if you thought Christ said we could pack heat if we wanted to and fight back, don't you think he would have done that? Just carnally speaking, wouldn't it get old getting beaten up all the time? That's how we would physically respond because that's natural. Paul is following Christ's instructions from the Sermon on the Mount, of being *good to those who persecute you*. Of taking that passive approach, realizing that doesn't stop the attack but I have to trust God for whatever His will is. If His will is that I wind up getting killed with this, I have to trust in Him because He's going to reward me with His Kingdom later, if I faithfully follow Him. So, it's going to turn out okay in the end. It may be ugly and unpleasant in the short term but it will end well if I faithfully obey Him. That's what Paul had to do. How else would you keep going through this and keep facing it time after time. That would get old, getting beaten up that many times. Obviously, Paul sincerely believed this and practiced it.

All we have to do is look at the extremely consistent track record throughout the New Testament. It's completely absent of, all the church members took up arms and fought back because they got tired of this. Or the apostles—they got killed but they went down fighting to the death—is just not there. It's not in the Bible, it's not in history. That's because they were following Christ's example and that's the example we have to follow. That requires a lot of faith and trust in God. Our carnal reaction is similar how the disciples responded to Christ when He said, the rules of divorce and remarriage are a lot stricter for New Covenant Christians. You can't just follow what Moses said in Deuteronomy 24, now the rules are a lot stricter and they say, maybe we shouldn't even get married if it's going to be like that. That's our same carnal reaction when we look at this subject. But we have to develop that faith to trust in God. Hebrews 11 is often referred to as the faith chapter. Let's see the example of those mentioned in this chapter. Much of this chapter is telling us stories that are fun to read. Daniel in the lion's den or things of that nature. He's about to get devoured by a lion but God protects him and he comes out unscathed. You have all these other examples and lots of examples in the Bible where people were in these very dangerous and treacherous situations but God intervened and they came out pain free in the end. We love looking at those examples because that is very comforting, to think trust in God and He'll take care of it all. We also have to remember there are numerous examples in this chapter as well, of people who are trusting in God and looking for the resurrection as their ultimate hope but they lost their lives. They got killed and God allowed them to be violently persecuted and even murdered and they just had to trust in God and suffer through that. Pick up in Hebrews 11:32. We're going to see some of these very warm and fuzzy, positive examples and then we're going to see the painful examples.

Hebrews 11:32 *And what more shall I say? For the time would fail me to tell of Gideon and Barak and Samson and Jephthah, also of David and Samuel and the prophets:*

33) who through faith subdued kingdoms, worked righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions ... (NKJV)

That's Daniel in the lion's den and the lion is about to eat him and he trusts in God and he comes out fine. He doesn't get eaten; that's a very comforting story but let's keep reading.

34) quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, became valiant in battle, turned to flight the armies of the aliens.

35) Women received their dead raised to life again. [Now let's notice others and what they endured in faith] Others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection.

36) Still others had trial of mockings and scourgings, yes, and of chains and imprisonment.

37) They were stoned, they were sawn in two, were tempted, were slain with the sword. They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented—

38) of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, in dens and caves of the earth.

39) And all these, having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promise,

40) God having provided something better for us, that they should not be made perfect apart from us. (NKJV)

In other words, these people were willing to trust in God, even when they got beaten up, tortured, killed, and they died being a pacifist and trusting in God. Looking forward to the resurrection but not enjoying this experience.

If I just trust in God, He's going to bring me up in the resurrection and reward me with His Kingdom and that's worth it.

That's the approach we have to take.

As I mentioned in the beginning of this sermon, if you watch the news lately with all that is going on in the world, particularly in the Middle East and the potential that has of escalating into a world war—I'm not saying I have any insider knowledge of how this situation is going to turn out, we all have to wait and see—but there is certainly potential for this to turn ugly on a number of fronts. As that plays out, we have to realize as New Covenant Christians, it's our responsibility to follow Christ's example. Whether that is the subject of military service and war or in terms of violence and self-defense. The New Testament teaches a consistent picture of pacifism on these subjects. It's very different from the example of Ancient Israel but that's not unusual. There are a number of subjects where Christ raised the requirements, raised the standards for New Covenant Christians because we have been granted God's Holy Spirit and as a result, we have to take a different approach than Ancient Israel did. That requires faith, trusting in God and that can be painful to endure through. We have to remember that God is going to be there for us. He never leaves or forsakes us and even if He requires us to lose our lives

in service to Him, as long as we are faithful to Him, it all turns out well. We wind up in the resurrection and being a part of His Kingdom. None of us are going to be complaining about what we had to go through in this life to get there, we're just going to be thankful that we made it. That we are part of His great reward.

As we go forward in this next year and what's likely to be some very scary times, let's make sure we are looking to Christ's example of pacifism and realize that it's our job to love our enemy, to do good to those who spitefully use us and persecute us. We need to follow that example like the apostles did and have faith in God and Christ that They are going to make it all worth it in the end.