

Gospel Truth

Biblical Instruction and Encouragement for the Mission Field Worldwide.

TWO KINGDOMS—EARTHLY & HEAVENLY

For our conversation [citizenship, government] is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ. —Philippians 3:20

The heroes of faith detailed in the eleventh chapter of Hebrews were of sundry nationalities, lived in different generations, and died diverse deaths; but they had something in common. Their eyes were enlightened with a spiritual perspective which caused them to confess they were “strangers and pilgrims on the earth.” In their pursuit of a heavenly country, their purpose was not to be mindful or overly considerate of their earthly home.

It is incumbent upon children of God today to understand clearly that there are two kingdoms. One kingdom is of this world and the other is a spiritual kingdom. One kingdom is entered into by natural birth and the other is entered into by being “born again” through the Spirit of God (John 3:3). Jesus Christ is the ruler of this second kingdom and He said, “My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight” (John 18:36). The Kingdom of God is within every blood-washed child of God (Luke 17:20-21). It is not a political kingdom but a kingdom of “righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost” (Romans 14:17).

Children are citizens of the country in which they are born. It is natural and proper for children to grow up with a love and appreciation for their

respective countries. Citizenship is one element which defines who people are and is a big part of an individual’s identity. However, people are often drawn into a spirit of nationalism and patriotism for their home country. They pledge their allegiance and devotion to their earthly country and stand in its defense, sometimes even to the degree of bloodshed. Nationalism is often accompanied by a spirit of superiority which is contrary to the Spirit of God. That which is in the interest of one country is often diametrically opposed to that of another country. Which government or people is best in the eyes of God? To which country and to which cause would Christ pledge His allegiance? In Christ, “There is neither Jew nor Greek” (Galatians 3:28) in the sense that while there are different nationalities, all are equal in the Kingdom of God through the plan of salvation.

While saints of God are citizens of an earthly kingdom or country, they are called to be strangers and foreigners in this earth as they seek for spiritual things in their love and service to God. Children of God answer to a higher call and to a deeper allegiance than that which the countries of this world demand.

As citizens of both an earthly and spiritual kingdom, one of those kingdoms will take precedence. While it is important for saints to be respectful of their countries and to be good, hard-working, law-abiding citizens, they are

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Children of God answer to a higher call and to a deeper allegiance than that which the countries of this world demand.

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John 3:3-7; 2 Cor. 5:17; Rom. 6:1-4;
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Matt 25:31-46

Pacifism

Luke 6:27-29; Luke 18:20

Worship

John 4:23-24; Eph. 5:19; 2 Cor. 3:17

Great Commission

Mark 16:15

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to devote themselves and align their beliefs, practices, and lifestyles to the spiritual rather than the earthly kingdom. When Jesus prayed for His disciples in John 17:14-16, He clearly communicated that His followers, while in the world, were not to be of the world.

Followers of Christ will have very different purposes and motivations than those reflected by the kingdoms of this world. Saints of God must keep a guard against aligning themselves wholeheartedly with their respective country lest it come into conflict with the basic tenants of love and humility required in the spiritual kingdom. A militaristic spirit or a spirit of carnal protest is not compatible with the Scripture, no matter what the cause.

There is a place of
peace for Christians
in the recognition that
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an earthly kingdom,
their chief citizenship
and identity rests in
a spiritual kingdom.

While saints around the world are of different races, nationalities, and languages, their unity is in Jesus Christ. That unity should never be broken nor should saints ever be at odds with one another because of earthly kingdoms. Saints are a “called out” people and they should live accordingly.

The apostle Paul, referring to spiritual warfare, said, “No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier” (2 Timothy 2:4). Children of God must be careful not to get entangled with the

affairs of this earthly kingdom. Politics, nationalism, protests, etc. can very quickly begin to dominate one’s life and cause one to violate the deep and eternal principles of Christ Jesus.

It is worthy to give God thanks in whatever country for the blessings and benefits of the earthly kingdom in which one lives. Children of God should appreciate any and all freedoms extended by the governments of their natural citizenship. That appreciation should not turn into vain promises and pledges that violate the loyalty and allegiance to the Lamb of God. While pilgrims and strangers in this land, the benefits of heavenly citizenship far outweigh those of the governments of this world.

There is a place of peace for Christians in the recognition that while they abide in an earthly kingdom, their chief citizenship and identity rests in a spiritual kingdom. ■

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Editorial



Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual.
—1 Corinthians 2:13

The subject this quarter is biblical nonresistance or pacifism. There are some differences in the two definitions as pacifism can imply a resistant attitude to war and government— which is contrary to the New Testament teaching of nonresistance. For this writing, pacifism relates to the refusal to bear arms on religious grounds.

The teaching of nonresistance rests primarily in the New Testament rather than the Old Testament. This does not undermine the credibility of the doctrine as many things radically changed under Christ. Nonresistance is neither a topic nor a practice of life for the faint of heart. Some may scoff and say a real man defends himself when facing opposition, but in reality it takes more power and strength to love and forgive than to fight with fists or guns. While the focus of the doctrine of nonresistance is often on the negative principle of not going to war; it teaches a positive, powerful way of life that can break down walls and change enemies more than a tomahawk missile could ever accomplish. The nonviolent power of the cross found in humility does not retreat in cowardice from the world but rather embraces it with love and goodness.

Christians will have a warped understanding of the call to follow Jesus in nonresistance without fully understanding the function and dual existence of the two kingdoms.

Christians will have a warped understanding of the call to follow Jesus in nonresistance without fully understanding the function and dual existence of the two kingdoms. While vengeance is something that belongs to God Himself, He does use secular governments at times to execute judgment here on earth and to maintain law and order for ungodly people. We can honor and appreciate our civil government and the freedoms provided without giving a loyalty that conflicts with the devotion and pledge of fidelity that should only be given to God. Christians are to be pilgrims and strangers. We are to be traveling through, not getting attached or over-involved with the affairs of this world. Politics and rallying around causes that excite the passions are generally not reflective of the spirit of Christ. This world is our temporary home and we should spend more time and effort preparing for the eternal home.

In everything we do, we need to practically ask ourselves the question, “Would Jesus do this?” We must answer that question based not upon our own ideas and proclivities but upon the example He left us in life. We do not find Jesus advocating for political freedom through war or by protesting on the streets. Jesus did not rally the Christians to march on Rome nor to stand in self-defense against those that would persecute them. We read of a Christ who went the extra mile, doing good to His enemies and loving them. Christ’s example does not align with violence either as a private citizen or as a servant of the state. We as a church need to diligently fulfill our responsibility individually and collectively to spread the gospel of peace and let the state do its job without aggressive interference.

John D. Roth summed it up so well in *Choosing Against War*, “In the end, Christian pacifism is not an argument to be won, or a tool for reaching ideal political outcomes, or even an airtight ethical system. It is simply a commitment to follow Jesus sincerely and completely, even if that path should lead to the cross.”

Michael W. Smith

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Bible Study Guide

Subject: Biblical Nonresistance



Scripture Reading: *Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth: But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloke also. —Matthew 5:38-41*

Summary: The teachings and example of Jesus Christ demonstrate a life of love and nonresistance. Disciples of Christ are called to follow His example and meet evil and injustice with prayer, love, and forgiveness rather than with force and violence. God's church historically and presently renounces military service.

Definitions: **Nonresistance**—The policy or practice of not resisting violence or established authority by force, even when tyrannical (dictionary.com).

Pacifism—Refusal to bear arms on moral or religious grounds (Merriam-Webster).

I. Prophecy

- A. Jeremiah 31:31 A new covenant (Hebrews 8:13).
- B. Micah 4:2-3 God's people will not learn war any more.

II. Two Kingdoms

- A. Philippians 3:20 Citizenship is in Heaven.
- B. John 3:3 Kingdom of God entered by spiritual birth.
- C. Luke 17:20-21 The Kingdom of God is a spiritual kingdom (Romans 14:17).
- D. John 18:36 Jesus' kingdom is not of this world.
- E. John 17:14-16 Disciples of Christ are in the world but not of it.
- F. Hebrews 11:13-16 Strangers and pilgrims on the earth.
- G. Ephesians 2:19-20 Fellow citizens with the saints.

III. Teaching of Christ—Law of Love

- A. Matthew 22:36-40 Love is the great commandment (Romans 13:9-10).
- B. Matthew 5:38-41 Resist not evil (Luke 6:27-29).
- C. Matthew 5:43-48 Instruction on how to love your enemies.

IV. Warfare of the Saints

- A. Matthew 26:51-52 Put up thy sword.
- B. 2 Corinthians 10:3-4 Weapons of the saints are not carnal.
- C. Ephesians 6:11-12 Fighting is to be spiritual, not physical.

V. Function of Government

- A. Daniel 2:21 God removes and sets up kings (Psalms 75:7).
- B. Daniel 4:17 The most High ruleth in the kingdom of men.
- C. 1 Peter 2:13-14 Earthly leaders are appointed to punish the evildoers.
- D. Romans 13:1-4 Governments are ordained to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil (Jeremiah 25:8-9).

VI. Role of Saints

- A. 1 Peter 2:21-24 Called to follow Christ's example of passivity.
- B. 1 Peter 3:9 Saints are not to render evil for evil.
- C. 1 Peter 2:13-15 Submit to earthly ordinances and government.
- D. 1 Timothy 2:1-3 Pray for all in authority that the saints might lead a quiet and peaceable life.
- E. 2 Timothy 2:3-4 Be not entangled with affairs of this life.
- F. Romans 12:14-21 Bless them which persecute you. Avenge not yourselves.

Conclusion

For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps. —1 Peter 2:21

Biblical Nonresistance

THE CALL OF CHRIST TO THE LAW OF LOVE

Jesus Christ instituted a doctrine of love whereby God's children bear injustice without retaliation and render good for evil. War and the shedding of blood practiced under the Old Testament dispensation are no longer acceptable for God's people in the dispensation of grace.

A New Covenant

While warfare and the doctrine of an "eye for an eye" were foundational practices for historical Israel, a new covenant was prophesied. "Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel" (Jeremiah 31:31). The prophet Micah foretold of a time when God's people would "beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up a sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more" (Micah 4:2-3). These prophecies were fulfilled in the plan of salvation through Jesus Christ.

Law of Love

In the New Testament, God's people are called to follow the teaching and example of Jesus Christ. The foundational principle of Christ was the doctrine of loving God supremely and loving "thy neighbor as thyself" (Matthew 22:36-40). God's children are to have a deep love and care for all men and to seek for the welfare of all people, even evildoers. Where the Israelites, even under God's direction, were militaristic, Jesus taught passivism and nonresistance. "Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth: But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also" (Matthew 5:38-39). This reference was not only giving instruction for interpersonal conflict but also for people of the Jewish nation living under the tyrannical rule of the Roman government. While many people were looking for a messiah who would give a call to battle against the Romans, instead, the Messiah preached "resist not evil."

Jesus' Example

Did Jesus really mean for His people never to fight or go to war? His words were more than rhetoric and idealistic language. It was a pivotal moment when Jesus, facing death, instructed Peter to put up his sword (Matthew 26:52). Rather than meeting/evil and injustice with force and violence, Jesus suffered without

threatening or reviling. He prayed for the Father to forgive His enemies. Jesus proved by His own life, as did His followers, that suffering and bearing injustice with love was more noble than retaliating or fighting on a personal level or in the name of the state.

It is incumbent upon true children of the Father to lay down all sources of warfare and violence. "Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven" (Matthew 5:43-45).

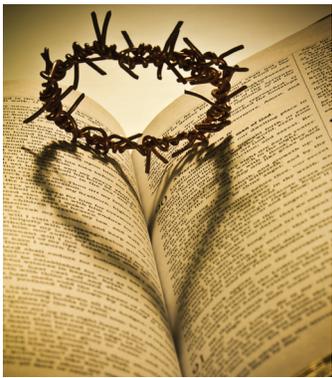
Spiritual Warfare

Paul, in addressing spiritual warfare, declared plainly that "For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh: (For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;)" (2 Corinthians 10:3-4). Not only are physical weapons of warfare carnal, but even the spirit of war is totally contrary to the spirit of love. Jesus said, "all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword" (Matthew 26:52). The life of a Christian is to be dedicated to the cause of Christ and to the gospel of peace. While saints are in conflict and battle, it is spiritual rather than physical. "For we wrestle not against flesh and blood" (Ephesians 6:11-12).

Historical Evidence

According to historic documents, the early Christians completely renounced war and the shedding of human blood in accordance with the teachings of Christ. Historians imply, if not directly state, that nonresistance had been the position of Christians from the beginning of the church. Early Christians refused military service because of their faith and obedience to Christ. In the middle of the second century, Justin Martyr writes: "we...have...changed our warlike weapons, our swords into plowshares, and

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"It was a pivotal moment when Jesus, facing death, instructed Peter to put up his sword."

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our spears into implements of tillage.” Ancient church canons officially forbade military service.

“Christian” Governments Brought Compromise

There was evidence that as compromise spread, Christians began to join the military. In response, Tertullian wrote in A.D. 174, “Shall the son of peace take part in the battle when it does not become him even to sue at law?” Tertullian further wrote that if a soldier was converted, he should immediately abandon the military or take whatever punishment he must endure. After the Roman emperor Constantine (312 A.D.) was converted, he gave Christianity legal status. This began to have a greater influence on Christians to change their practice of nonresistance, as the government was no longer professedly pagan. Around 380 A.D., emperors Theodosius and Gratianus made Christianity the official religion of the state and eventually required all soldiers to be Christian. This was a reversal of the nonresistance stand taken by primitive Christianity and it was greatly influenced by military leaders who now fought as professing Christians.

Division Between Secular and Spiritual

Many Christians today have likewise compromised their stand on this issue. The position a child of God on nonresistance should not rest on history but on the simple teachings of Christ. It is foundational to recognize the two kingdoms—one temporal and one spiritual. The Kingdom of God “is not of this world” (John 18:36) and Christians, while in the world, are not to be of it (John 17:14-16). As strangers and pilgrims, saints in the Kingdom of God are to refrain from temporal warfare in the name of the state because it is in direct conflict with the requirements of a citizen of the spiritual kingdom. There is a clear division between the requirements of God’s children who live under grace and the God-ordained responsibility of the secular government that operates carnally. These two are often mutually exclusive of one another.

Government Ordained of God

The book of Daniel teaches that it is God that “removeth kings, and setteth up kings” (2:21). “The most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will, and setteth up over it the basest of men” (4:17). While

governments are incapable by laws to bring about complete harmony and peace because most of mankind rejects God’s grace, they are able to help control chaos by carnal methods. Hence, God made provision for kings and governors to punish evildoers (1 Peter 2:13-14). It is not the function of the saints living with love and grace to administer punishment to the violent and evil criminal or rogue nation. The civil authority of this world, referred to as “ministers of God”, were ordained of God to be a “revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil” (Romans 13:1-4).

The Christian’s Call

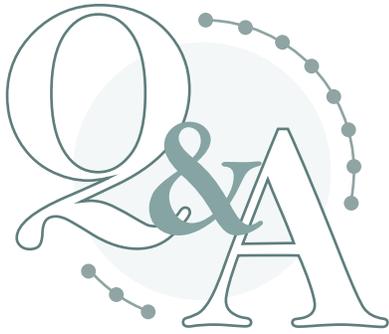
The mission of the church is to be an extension of Christ’s mission on earth. Christ’s role was not to punish the evildoer but to bring a message of salvation and love to a fallen world. While citizens of this world, the Christian mission is to live to a higher calling. The Bible defines the roles and responsibilities of the child of God. “Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord’s sake” (1 Peter 2:13). Christians are to obey the laws of their given country as long as they do not conflict with the law of God. Christians should pray and make intercession “for kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty. For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour” (1 Timothy 2:1-3). The purpose is to lead a quiet and peaceable life; and as soldiers of the cross, Christians must not entangle themselves with the affairs of this life (2 Timothy 2:3-4).

While war wages and nations rise and fall, may the saints of God continue to follow in the footsteps of Christ (1 Peter 2:21-24)—not “rendering evil for evil” (1 Peter 3:9), being steadfast in love, doing good to personal and national enemies, blessing them which persecute, and overcoming evil with good (Romans 12:14-21).

The stand of the saints and their renunciation of military service stands firmly on the teaching and example of the Prince of Peace. The doctrine of nonresistance will be misunderstood by the world and will require suffering, sometimes even death; but it is part of the narrow way that leads to life everlasting. ■



“There is a clear division between the requirements of God’s children who live under grace and the God-ordained responsibility of the secular government that operates carnally.”



Is it wrong for a Christian to resort to physical violence in self-defense?

This question elicits many emotional responses and arguments. It is noteworthy that Christians (erringly) developed the “just war theory” in order to reconcile warfare with nonresistance teaching. The same can be done with self-defense on an individual level. Christ did not defend Himself when taken to be beaten and crucified. The apostles and thousands of martyrs did not retaliate or fight in self-defense when unjustly taken to their death. It defies logic not to resist when personally threatened, therefore it takes a divine grace and enablement from God to respond with the greater power of love and forgiveness.

How supportive can a Christian be of law enforcement and the military?

As good, Christian citizens it is not hypocritical to appreciate the role and function of law enforcement and the military while not engaging ourselves in combat-type situations where we would have to take someone’s life. Without local and national keepers of the peace, there would be chaos and very little freedom. We experience the freedoms we do because of the sacrifice of people who daily place their lives at stake for our benefit. There are supportive and even spiritual functions that Christians can fill for law enforcement and military personnel. It is important to remember that Christians are citizens of two countries. Our primary service and code of conduct is founded in the spiritual, but that does not preclude appreciation for the other.

It is also important that Christians not glamorize the function of government even though it serves an extremely useful function for those not living under grace. It does a disservice to our children to promote callings and jobs in this world that are not compatible with Christian living.

There were times that the multitude attempted to capture Jesus and kill Him. Jesus evaded them and slipped away on more than one occasion. Hence, evasion from a wrong doer is different than physical defense. There are many scenarios that can be described to seemingly bring about a contradiction of this truth. I willingly acknowledge I would not take it upon myself to tell children not to resort to physical defense to escape from an abductor. God has promised not to put more on us than what we are able to bear, and I believe in extreme situations there is extreme grace and wisdom from God that we might be able to maintain spiritual integrity.

CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTION

Obeying God Rather than Man

A conscientious objector is a person who refuses to serve in the armed forces or bear arms on moral or religious grounds. Historically, many conscientious objectors to war have been imprisoned and even executed when their beliefs conflicted with that of the government.

Some conscientious objectors are willing to do noncombatant service in the armed forces and others are conscientiously opposed to all military service. In modern times, some countries have made provision for and grant conscientious objector status on religious grounds. Some of these countries provide an alternative to combatant service such as civilian service as a substitute for conscription or military service.

Christians should make all effort to work within the parameters of their government’s legal system to be a contributing citizen as required by law. When this comes into direct conflict with the spirit of Christ, then the Christian must in humility obey the law of God rather than the law of man. ■





DID YOU KNOW?

Thou shalt not kill. —Exodus 20:13

Some translations use the word “kill,” but the word is better translated “murder” in this passage. Murder is the unlawful, intentional taking of a life with malice.

Right after this command was given, God instructed the Levites to take up the sword and kill people who had turned to idolatry. God was not being contradictory under the law He had just given to Moses, for the killing was administered justice.

While the Bible places great value on human life, this specific command is not the foundation of New Testament, biblical nonresistance.



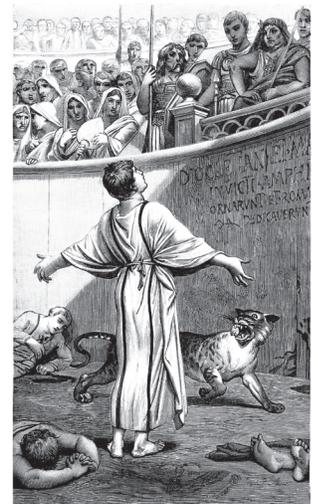
A Word
in Season

A SPECTACLE UNTO THE WORLD

God hath set forth us the apostles last, as it were appointed to death: for we are made a spectacle unto the world, and to angels, and to men. We are fools for Christ's sake....
—1 Corinthians 4:9-13

The apostle Paul paints a vivid picture of the trials and suffering of the apostles in 1 Corinthians 4:9-13. It is an encouragement and challenge to devoted ministers of the gospel.

Paul alludes to the Roman practice of bringing gladiators, armed with weapons, into the amphitheaters to fight wild beasts. If the gladiators survived, they were later disarmed and left defenseless before beast and man to be killed. If they escaped, they were eventually forced to contend with another assailant that would bring certain death. Ministers of the gospel may as Paul suffer many trials, persecutions, false accusations, poverty, and sufferings in this life; but it is an honor to be counted worthy to suffer for the name of Christ.



People of God are often a “spectacle unto the world.”

Spectacle refers literally to the amphitheater where the combatants fought. Seats surrounded the arena that could hold thousands of spectators to watch the assured death of the gladiator or the common criminal sentenced to death. The saints of God are surrounded by the world. Holy people often become a laughing-stock as they are gazed upon by unrighteous people. The principles governing the heart and soul of the child of God are radically different than those of the world. The world does not understand and so it often scoffs and ostracizes the child of God. Saints of God look and act differently than the world. They love and forgive rather than retaliate and fight. They preach humility, love, and unity rather than a doctrine of self-serving carnality and ambition. It is no wonder the saints of God are a spectacle.

The enemy is fighting hard to discourage and cause the ministers on the front lines to turn back. Rather than be discouraged and downcast at the certain suffering of this life, take heart! We have no need to be ashamed for standing faithfully on the Word of God and proclaiming the life-giving message of salvation and holiness. As others have suffered for the cause of Christ, so shall we. Stay faithful, for we are kings and priests in the kingdom of our Lord. ■

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HOLINESS UNTO THE LORD

Statement of the Position of the Church of God on War

Resolution Approved by Ministers of the Church of God in 1948 & 1961
(Printed in *Faith & Victory*, November 1961)

The ministers of the Church of God assembled at the Annual National Camp meeting (July 21-30, 1961) at Neosho (Monark Springs), Missouri, being aware of the present critical world situation and the urgent need for the Church to reaffirm its position in regard to participation in war, approved and adopted the resolution which had been approved by the ministers of the Church of God at the Oklahoma State Camp meeting in Guthrie, Oklahoma on August 13, 1948, which reads as follows:

“Whereas: The Holy Scriptures teach us that our first duty is to God, namely, “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, soul, mind, and strength,” and the second is like unto this, “Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.” Furthermore, Jesus taught His followers to love their enemies, do good to them that hate you and pray for them which despitefully use you and persecute you that you may be the children of your Father which is in heaven. (Matt. 5:39, 44-48).

“And Whereas: There are many other scriptures such as John 18:36; Matthew 26:52; Romans 12:14, 17, 19-21; Luke 6:81, which definitely forbid us to take up arms to fight or defend ourselves; and whereas, because of the teaching of such scriptures we are conscientiously opposed to accept non-combatant service in warfare or to work in any factory or plant which is directly engaged in producing instruments and/or munitions for the destruction of human life and happiness.

“And Whereas: We are conscientiously opposed to participation in war in any form at any time, whether civil, political, or religious.

“And Whereas: We are conscientiously opposed to the purchase of defense or war bonds and stamps for the prosecution of war.

“And Whereas: We are citizens of the United States of America, in all things willing to live honestly, believing that our government is ordained of God and praying for our President and for all that are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness.

“Now, Therefore Be It Resolved: That the above statement be adopted as a uniform teaching and practice of the Church of God.”

—L. D. Pruitt, Secretary, Guthrie, Oklahoma

[A resolution, similar to the above, is necessary from the church for legal purposes for members to be exempt from serving in the military if and when conscripted by some governments. Please note that truth stands on its own merit and needs not resolutions nor adopted statements of man to be uniform teachings and practices of the Church of God. Unless legally required, it is expedient to abstain from such practices as the Bible is the only creed of the Church of God. —Michael Smith]