

Is War With North Korea Biblically Justifiable?

May Christians bear the sword? In these days of terrorist attacks and nuclear threats, it's a question worth asking. The answer: Yes, if they are proper agents of a proper state about its proper business.

According to Christian pacifists, Jesus sheathed the sword once and for all when He told Peter, "Put your sword back into its place. For all those who take up the sword will perish by the sword" (Matt. 26:52). But Romans 13:4 brandishes it again, without endorsing a life of violence: "But if you do what is evil, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain, for he is the servant of God, an avenger to execute wrath upon him who practices evil."

The passage teaches that governments and their representatives may and should exercise deadly force as God's servants against evil.

Bad men have great difficulty understanding talk of decency and compassion, but the sword speaks a language they can comprehend. Some hope that the example, counsel and pleadings of charitable men will suffice for peace, but the Bible is not so optimistic.

The Greek word for "fear," *phobos*, appears in many English words. Most of these words denote curious, unfortunate fears—such as acrophobia (heights), claustrophobia (confinement) and agoraphobia (crowds). Romans 13, however, introduces a healthy phobia, one all evil men should have—fear of the armed, avenging governing authority.

When rogue states threaten the peace of their neighbors, ordered civil governments may wage war. When terrorists detonate bombs, all those involved in planning the attack may

be brought to account. These responses do not ignore the Lord's command to turn the other cheek (Matt. 5:39). It is one thing to turn your own cheek; it is quite another to turn your neighbor's other cheek.

Whether the menace comes from within or without the nation's boundaries, the sword should secure the lives and freedoms of the citizenry. Police and soldiers are cut from the same biblical cloth.

It would be nice to live in a world without murderers, thugs and thieves, but God would have to repeal the Fall for that to happen. This He has not done. Instead, He has instituted and armed governments to adjudicate public affairs, and for this, Christians should be grateful. Indeed, they should feel free to become involved in that very policing as patrolmen and soldiers, even to the point of exercising deadly force, for this is part of God's economy.

The church of Jesus Christ cannot be silent about the preservation and restoration of justice. She must stand for the prevention and righting of wrongs. Pastors and teachers can help by informing their hearers of the state's mandate to maintain a principled peace at the invitation of God Almighty. Through such a disposition, the church points to the great truth of final authority—that God the Father is altogether holy and that one day His Son Jesus Christ shall come to judge the quick and the dead. {eoa}

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