

May A Christian Be A Policeman And Bear Arms?

The question, “May a Christian be a policeman and bear arms” is closely akin to the question, “May a Christian serve in a combative role in the armed forces?” In view of the teaching of I Peter 3:15, that is, that the Christian should be ready to give an answer for his doctrinal positions, it is the author’s task in this brief tract to seek to answer from the New Testament of Christ (that law we are under today, Gal. 6:2) the above questions.

Two Positions Held Today

Some today insist that a Christian may *not* serve in the local or national services of the government if his position involves carrying arms (deadly weapons). Thus, a Christian cannot be a policeman, nor can he be a soldier in the armed forces of his country. This position has been called the *dove* position, while the opposite view (that a Christian may serve) has been referred to as the *hawk* position. May I say at the outset that the author holds to the latter position, i.e., it is most certainly scriptural for a Christian to serve as a policeman and/or soldier in the army, navy, or marines and bear arms in that position.

To correctly represent the *dove* position the proponents say that a Christian may serve as a policeman or soldier *provided* he does not carry arms, i.e., provided he does *not* serve in a combative position. These refer to verses in the New Testament that teach the passivity of the Christian with reference to violence, e.g., Mt. 5:39, where Jesus taught to turn the other cheek; Jn. 18:10-12 and Mt. 26:52, where Jesus told Peter to put up his sword; and Jn. 18:33-36, where Jesus stated to Pilate that his servants would fight to deliver him if his kingdom was of this world.

The Centurion, An Approach

What did Jesus require of the converted Roman Centurion in regard to his relationship to the civil government? *Unger’s Bible Dictionary* tells us that the Centurion in the New Testament referred to:

“The captains of the sixty *centuries* (companies of 100 men) in the Roman legion. The centurion carried a staff of vinewood as his badge of office.”¹ “There were various degrees of rank among the centurions according as they belonged to the three divisions of the 1) Triarii, 2) Principes, and 3) Hastati. The first centurion of whom mention is made in Scripture is the one who in our Lord’s early ministry sent a request that he would recover his dying servant (Mt. 8:5-10). The other centurion mentioned is Cornelius, an early convert to Christianity (Acts 10:1).”² Others mentioned are found in Luke 7:2, 6, and throughout the Book of Acts.

Cornelius, The Converted Centurion

Was Cornelius required by the gospel of Christ to cease being a soldier of the armed forces of his day? If one can determine the answer to this question, he can also determine the answer to the question of the title of this tract.

The Conversion of Cornelius

The conversion of Cornelius is found in Acts 10:1-48. Peter recounted what happened when he arrived at the house of Cornelius (Acts 11:1-18). Peter had preached about the salvation of them that were “*afar off*” (Gentiles) in his first complete gospel sermon (Acts 2:39). Eight years later (A.D. 41) the Gentiles came into the body of Christ (Acts 10). “The spiritual promise of Acts 2:39 is related to the Abrahamic promise of Genesis 12:1-3 and applied by Paul in Galatians 3:8.”³

Note that three miracles took place in the record of Acts 10. **Miracle Number One:** The angel appeared and spoke to Cornelius (1-8). The purpose of this miracle was to inform Cornelius where to find the preacher who was to preach the gospel to him. Angels do not preach the gospel to men since Jesus gave this commission to men (Mt. 28:19-20). If an angel *did* preach to a man, it would be a false doctrine (Gal. 1:8-9). **Miracle Number Two:** Peter then had a miraculous vision (9-16). The purpose of this miracle was to show Peter that he should go and preach to the Gentiles (v. 28). Peter then took with him six Jewish witnesses and traveled to the house of Cornelius. **Miracle Number Three:** Then Cornelius and his household

received the Holy Spirit *directly* from heaven (44-48). The purpose of this miracle was to convince the whole Jewish church that the Gentiles were acceptable to God as gospel subjects (Acts 10:34-35; 15:6-11; Gal. 3:26-28). What greater way to prove to prejudiced, misguided Jews that Gentiles could be acceptable to God than to send the Holy Spirit (evidenced by miraculous tongues) upon a group of Gentiles? This was the exception to the rule with reference to the reception of the Holy Spirit baptism, since the only other persons to receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit in the first century were the apostles (Acts 2:1-4; I Cor. 15:8; 2 Cor. 12:11-12; Gal. 1:11-12). Peter then commanded Cornelius to be baptized (water baptism for the remission of sins, Acts 10:48; 2:38).

Was Cornelius Required to Cease Being a Soldier in the Roman Army?

Was Cornelius to cease being a Centurion? The Bible does not record what he personally chose to do in regard to this question since only his conversion is revealed to us (Acts 10). Therefore, we must study other verses in the New Testament to determine the future course Cornelius was allowed to pursue (Jude 3; 2 Pet. 1:3; 2 Tim. 2:15). What did the Lord require of Cornelius, a Centurion, in regard to his relationship with the Roman civil law? *First*, the New Testament teaches *all* Christians are soldiers in the spiritual army of Christ (Eph. 6:10-18). This included converted Roman soldiers. This is to be taught to *all* Christians today, not just to those who find themselves in the position of policemen when they obey the gospel. Jesus is our captain (Heb. 2:10). We are to put on our armour daily for the fight (Eph. 6:10-18). We are to endure hardness as good soldiers of Christ (2 Tim. 2:3). We are to give our captain top priority (2 Tim. 2:4). *Secondly*, as a Christian soldier in the spiritual battle, neither Cornelius, nor any other Christian, was allowed to use the material sword *in teaching the gospel to others!* This is the meaning of all those verses in the New Testament where the Christian is told to resist violence by passivity!

When teaching a person the gospel, suppose he will not obey, should one pull out a gun, point it at him and insist that he get into the baptistry? No!

Jesus told Peter to put up his sword in trying to convince a person to do what is right religiously! It is inappropriate (sinful) to “pistol whip” a person with one’s Bible as a means of persuasion in matters pertaining to salvation, Christianity and religion. Then Jesus told governor Pilate that the reason his disciples did not physically fight against him, the Jews and the Romans was because His (Jesus’) kingdom was not of this world. Jesus’ statement was in the context of fighting for religious goals, *not* fighting in behalf of the civil government! Neither were acts of vengeance to take place with the sword by the disciples of Christ, e.g., if Pilate refused to believe that Jesus was the Son of God, this would not have authorized Peter to behead Pilate with his sword. The reason Jesus did not call down more than twelve legions of angels in the Garden of Gethsemane was because the battle was with reference to belief in his divine nature (religious goal, Mt. 26:53). On the other hand, the government is ordained (appointed) by God and bears not the literal sword in vain. The church, also ordained by God, is not to bear the spiritual sword in vain (Rom. 13:1,4; Eph. 6:17; I Tim. 6:12). Thus, Cornelius could continue to serve in the position of centurion provided he followed these proper principles taught to all Christians.

Was the Role of a Roman Centurion an Honorable Calling?

Cornelius may have wondered about this matter, just as some in the Corinthian church had questions about their own callings.⁴ They had even written questions to the apostle Paul (I Cor. 7:1). Some of the Corinthians mistakenly thought they were to divorce their non-Christian companions *at the point of* becoming Christians. However, Paul instructed them to *abide in the same calling* wherein they had been called, *provided these were honorable callings!* (I Cor. 7:20).⁵

If the role of a Roman soldier was an *honorable* calling, then Cornelius could have continued in the same calling wherein he found himself at the moment in time he became a Christian. Being a Centurion in the Roman Army was not intrinsically sinful. Consider the statement made by John the Baptist to the soldiers mentioned in Luke 3:10-14. *First*, the Tax Collectors asked what would be