

~~diverse. As in any properly conducted court hearing, it is the task of the judge and jury to piece together the full account of the occurrence under investigation on the basis of the report of each individual witness. Much of their testimony will, of course, be identical; but in each case there will be some details recalled or thought worth mentioning that are not forthcoming from the other witnesses. There is under the laws of legal evidence no good ground for concluding, as some biased scholars mistakenly do, that the differences between the Gospels involve genuine discrepancies and unresolvable contradictions. Critics such as these would be utterly incompetent to sit in judgment in any court of law.~~

Does the New Testament teach pacifism or the abolition of capital punishment?

Matthew 26:52 records our Lord Jesus as saying to Peter, after he had drawn his sword in defense of his Master, "Put your sword back in its place, for all who draw the sword will die by the sword" (NIV). This could be interpreted as a condemnation of all resistance against crime or aggression by means of force, especially force leading to the death of the aggressor. Those who so interpret it often cite 2 Corinthians 10:4-5, where Paul describes the battle procedure of the Christian minister: "The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ" (NIV). Unquestionably this passage describes the weaponry of Christian evangelism as being far more effective than any instrument of physical violence when it comes to capturing and subduing the souls of men for God. But the real question is whether

either of these citations have a bearing on the question of war or capital punishment as exercised by the state government in the defense of society and in the maintenance of justice.

The Sermon on the Mount sets forth the wholly different standard of life that characterizes a true child of God in his role as a private citizen. His conduct is governed by the holy love and kindness of God. The Christian is to come to an agreement with his adversary before they actually present their case in court (Matt. 5:25). When he is smitten on one cheek, he is to turn to him the other (v.39), rather than retaliating in kind. In general, he is not to resist evil; that is, he is not to fight back in the defense of his own personal rights. He is never to return evil for evil (Rom. 12:17). By faithfully following this policy he will be "walking in the light," and that bright testimony of holy love will draw others to the light of Christ Himself (Matt. 5:16).

All these directives pertain to the personal conduct of the Christian as a citizen of the kingdom of God in the midst of a depraved and sin-cursed world. But they have very little bearing on the duty of the state to preserve law and order and to protect the rights of all its citizens. Romans 13 spells this out very clearly: "The authorities that exist have been established by God. . . . Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right and he will commend you. For he is God's servant to do you good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword for nothing. He is God's servant, an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer" (vv.1,3-4).

It hardly needs to be pointed out that "the sword" is not a symbol of imprisonment but of capital punishment. When he appeared before the Sanhedrin under the protection of Festus, Paul said, "If then I am a wrongdoer, and have committed anything worthy

of death, I do not refuse to die" (Acts 25:11, NASB). Very clearly this constitutes an acknowledgment on the part of the inspired apostle that the state continued to have the power of life and death in the administration of justice, just as it did from the days of Noah, when God solemnly committed that responsibility to human government (Gen. 9:6: "Whoever sheds man's blood, by man his blood shall be shed, for in the image of God He made man" [NASB]).

If Matthew 5:39 applied to the state and to human government, then the principle of "Resist not evil" would mean the abolition of all law enforcement. There would neither be police officers nor judges nor prisons of any kind. All society would immediately fall prey to the lawless and criminal elements in society, and the result would be total anarchy. Nothing could have been further from Christ's mind than such Satan-glorifying savagery and brutality. In connection with the parable of the pounds (or minas), Christ pronounced this judgment on those who had rebelled against their king (Luke 19:27): "But these enemies of mine, who did not want me to reign over them, bring them here, and slay them in my presence" (NASB). This sounds very much like an endorsement of capital punishment. Again, in Luke 20:14-16, as He concluded the parable of the wicked husbandmen (or tenants), our Lord said: "But when the tenants saw him [the son of the landlord], they talked the matter over. 'This is the heir,' they said, 'Let's kill him, and the inheritance will be ours.' So they threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. What then will the owner of the vineyard do to them? He will come and kill those tenants and give the vineyard to others." Thus it is very clear that neither Christ nor His apostles intended to abrogate the God-given responsibility of the government (under Old Testament law) to

protect its citizens and enforce justice by capital punishment.

There is nothing in the New Testament that sets aside the solemn sanction against unavenged murder contained in Numbers 35:31,33: "You shall not take ransom [i.e., allow mere monetary damages] for the life of a murderer who is guilty of death, but he shall surely be put to death. . . . So you shall not pollute the land in which you are; for blood pollutes the land and no expiation can be made for the land for the blood that is shed on it, except by the blood of him who shed it" (NASB). So far as God's Word is concerned, then, neither life imprisonment, nor that brief term of years (with time off for "good behavior") that is usually meted out to murderers in modern society, nor any kind of monetary damages to the survivors of the victim can discharge the solemn obligation of the state to impose capital punishment on those guilty of first-degree murder. After the long reign of unavenged murder in Jerusalem during the days of King Manasseh, when the city was "filled with bloodshed from one end to the other" (2 Kings 21:16)—as a natural consequence of abandoning the standards of Scripture and substituting false idols (or modern concepts of penology based on humanism)—God pronounced His judgment on the Jewish state and allowed it to be totally destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon.

On the related issue of national defense against foreign aggression, does a "Christian" government—and whether there are any such today is a matter of definition—have a right to summon its citizens to arms in order to repel an invader? Or may it send an expeditionary force abroad in order to crush an invader before he has an opportunity to land his troops on our soil? No one questions whether this right was accorded to Israel under the Old Testament; the God-blessed ca-

reers of Joshua and David are a sufficient demonstration of that right. But what about the New Testament and the teaching of Jesus?

We have already seen that Christ's dictum to Peter in Matthew 26:52 ("All they that take the sword shall perish with the sword") has to do with the personal witness of the Christian soul-winner; it has nothing to do with the Christian's obligations as a citizen, concerned with the protection of society or the defense of his country. Jesus also upheld the right of kings to resort to warfare if the circumstances warrant it, for this is certainly implied in Luke 14:31: "What king, going to make war against another king, does not first sit down and take counsel as to whether he is able with ten thousand troops to meet in battle with one who comes against him with twenty thousand?" No pacifist could use such an illustration as this without appearing to condone warfare as a legitimate measure for a head of state. But even more clearly is this implied by what Jesus said to Pilate in John 18:36: "My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, My servants would fight to prevent My arrest by the Jews." It was only because Christ's kingdom (prior to the kingdom age of the end time) was not of this world that Peter's resort to the sword was restrained and Christ allowed Himself to be arrested by the Jewish authorities. But the implication is unavoidable that a kingdom that *is* of the world has a perfect right to resort to warfare and the killing of enemy aggressors.

In the parable of the wedding feast, Jesus seems to speak approvingly of the action of the king (who clearly represented God Himself) when he "sent forth his armies and destroyed those murderers and burned up their city." The prediction of Jesus in the Olivet Discourse, that wars will continue to be fought on earth until He returns in sovereign power and imposes peace by

overwhelming force (Matt. 24:5-7, 25:31; Mark 13:7-8), leaves little room for the dream entertained by pacifistic socialism of the establishment of a warless society that abolishes murder and violence by doing away with capital punishment and the use of arms in national defense.

Nor is there any hint of disapproval of military service as a legitimate calling for a true believer in Christ. In fact, our Lord reserved His highest praise for the faith of the centurion whose servant He healed at Capernaum (Matt. 8:10). There was no suggestion that he would have to give up his martial calling in order to be saved. The same was true of the centurion Cornelius of Caesarea, who was honored by Peter as the first of the converts from the Gentiles and was welcomed into the family of God as a true believer (Acts 10:47-48). Nothing was said about his promising to change to a more peaceful profession as a condition for his being baptized. Paul frequently draws analogies from the obligation, commitment, and self-giving devotion of a good soldier in his description of a dedicated Christian life: "Suffer hardship with me, as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No soldier in active service entangles himself in the affairs of everyday life, so that he may please the one who enlisted him as a soldier" (2 Tim. 2:3-4), *NASB*.

The military profession is linked up with the professions of vinedressing and the raising of livestock in 1 Corinthians 9:7: "Who at any time serves as a soldier at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard and does not eat the fruit of it? Or who tends a flock and does not use the milk of the flock?" (*NASB*). It is hard to see how on the basis of this verse a pacifist would not also have to condemn a farmer, for they are here both put on the same level of legitimacy.

A pacifist position is impossible to reconcile with the praise heaped by

Hebrews 11:32-34 on warriors like Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, Samuel, and David, who along with the Old Testament prophets "by faith conquered kingdoms, performed acts of righteousness, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions, quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, from weakness were made strong, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight" (NASB). It would be quite difficult to imagine the author of this passage as adding, in agreement with the pacifist advocate, "Oh yes, all those who did engage in warfare in Old Testament times would have to be condemned as wicked sinners today, according to the law of Christ." Of such a "law of Christ" neither Christ Himself nor any of His apostles betray the slightest awareness, according to the text of the New Testament itself. We must therefore conclude that pacifism is completely lacking in support from the Word of God.

How did Judas Iscariot die?

Matthew 27:3-10 records Judas's remorse at having betrayed Jesus to the Jewish authorities. Judas first attempted to return the thirty shekels that they had paid him for leading the temple posse to Gethsemane, where Jesus was arrested. But the priests and temple officials refused to take the money back, since it was the price of blood and therefore unsuitable as an offering to God. Judas therefore cast the money pouch onto the floor of the temple treasury, departed from the city, and "hanged himself" (*apēnxato* — the aorist middle third person singular from *apanchō*, a verb used with that specific meaning ever since the fifth century B.C.). This establishes the fact that Judas fastened a noose around his neck and jumped from the branch to which the other end of the rope was attached.

In Acts 1:18 the apostle Peter reminds the other disciples of Judas's shameful end and the gap he left in the ranks of the Twelve, which called for another disciple to take his place. Peter relates the following: "He therefore acquired a plot of land [*chōrion*] from the reward of wrongdoing." (This could mean either that Judas had already contracted with the owner of the field that he originally had wanted to buy with the betrayal money; or — as is far more likely in this context — Peter was speaking ironically, stating that Judas acquired a piece of real estate all right, but it was only a burial plot [*chōrion* could cover either concept], namely, the one on which his lifeless body fell.)

Acts 1:18 goes on to state: "And he, falling headlong, burst asunder, and all of his inwards gushed out." This indicates that the tree from which Judas suspended himself overhung a precipice. If the branch from which he had hung himself was dead and dry — and there are many trees that match this description even to this day on the brink of the canyon that tradition identifies as the place where Judas died — it would take only one strong gust of wind to yank the heavy corpse and split the branch to which it was attached and plunge both with great force into the bottom of the chasm below. There is indication that a strong wind arose at the hour Christ died and ripped the great curtain inside the temple from top to bottom (Matt. 27:51). This was accompanied by a rock-splitting earthquake and undoubtedly also by a thunderstorm, which normally follows a prolonged period of cloud-gathering and darkness (Matt. 27:45). Conditions were right for what had started out as a mere suicide by hanging to turn into a grisly mutilation of the corpse as the branch gave way to the force of the wind and was hurtled down to the bottom.