

## The Christian Fight for Peace (Part 1)

by John Cobin, Ph.D. for *The Times Examiner*  
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*This column is the first segment of a two-part series dealing with the Christian's struggle to establish peace.*

Some things are worth fighting for and at times struggling for peace forms a part of our civic duty. Christians may justly fight, when prudent, either by rhetoric and diplomacy or by political power and arms—especially when their purpose is to quell the evil intrusions of the interventionist state. In order to establish sanctuary in a fallen world, Christians may thus forcibly oppose tyrants or other criminals who attempt to undermine fundamental rights through destroying life and property.

In chapters 7–9 of *A Christian Manifesto* (1982), Dr. Francis A. Schaeffer argues that there is a point at which a Christian must take up arms against the state. He maintains that resisting tyrants is ultimately part of a Christian's civic duty. Following the feisty preacher John Knox and Samuel Rutherford in *Lex Rex*, Schaeffer says that prior to violent action, a Christian must take certain steps as his civic duty: (1) petition elected officials, (2) utilize the courts to establish precedent that favor Christian values, and (3) flee when persecuted (if possible). He notes that the actions of the American Founders were justified because they followed this prescription, having petitioned the Crown and finding nowhere to flee (or perhaps having no need to flee given that the Crown was already so remote from them), observing that the Crown had lost its legitimacy when it became a lawbreaker. Thus, not doing one's civic duty by forcefully resisting the King would have been *sin*. For a Christian to do nothing in the face of collectivist or interventionist tyranny is to permit injustice and violence in society—clearly a sinful action for those who are commanded to “pursue peace” (2 Timothy 2:22; Hebrews 12:14; 1 Peter 3:11).<sup>1</sup>

How can Schaeffer's doctrine of civil disobedience be reconciled with biblical teaching? After all, Jesus clearly says: “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” (John 18:36). The apparent contradiction is resolved once the *redemptive purpose* of Christ's earthly ministry is taken into consideration. When Jesus walked on the earth, neither He nor His disciples defended themselves, realizing that His “time is not yet come” (Luke 4:30; 9:51; John 7:6; 8:59). Jesus meant that although He came to die for His people it was not yet the *right* time for Him to die according to the Father's predetermined plan (Acts 2:23). After His redemptive purpose had been accomplished, however, the dissemination of the Gospel of peace began through Christian transformational action bounded by different criteria. Jesus had wrought peace with God for His people. Now His people were to promulgate peace by engaging their culture.

On the one hand, the people of this world often do not know what makes for true peace (Luke 19:42).<sup>2</sup> There is a peace that the world gives, often granted through state “magistrates” and rulers like Felix (Acts 16:36; Acts 24:2). But this peace is fleeting, as the Apostle Paul warns: “For when they say, ‘Peace and safety!’ then sudden destruction comes upon them, as labor pains upon a pregnant woman. And they shall not escape” (1 Thessalonians 5:3). When God judges the nations and the kingdoms of this world, He will “take peace from the earth” so “that people should kill one another” (Revelation 6:4).<sup>3</sup> So not only is the “peace” of earthly states characteristically fleeting, but also God Himself will remove any earthly peace established by states when He comes in judgment. Thus, man-produced peace is vain.

On the other hand, Jesus Christ brings another message to His people: “These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world” (John 16:33). Peace is part of the “fruit of the Spirit” (Galatians 5:22) and peacemakers are blessed, being called “sons of God” (Matthew 5:9). “Now the fruit of righteousness is

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<sup>1</sup> 2 Timothy 2:22: “Flee also youthful lusts; but pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart.” Hebrews 12:14: “Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord.” 1 Peter 3:11: “Let him turn away from evil and do good; Let him seek peace and pursue it.”

<sup>2</sup> Luke 19:42: “If you had known, even you, especially in this your day, the things that make for your peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes.”

<sup>3</sup> The result of the Lamb opening the second seal was: “Another horse, fiery red, went out. And it was granted to the one who sat on it to take peace from the earth, and that people should kill one another; and there was given to him a great sword” (Revelation 6:4).

sown in peace by those who make peace” (James 3:18). Christians are to bring peace both spiritually by the Gospel and socially by engaging their culture, although the Bible teaches that the peace they convey does not always “remain” where they go (Matthew 10:13; Luke 10:5-6).<sup>4</sup> One of the greatest benefits of Christ’s advent was that it brought the way of peace to men (Luke 1:79; 2:14) through the Gospel, both “with God”—“in believing” (Romans 5:1; 15:13) and “always in every way”—as Christians live their lives (2 Thessalonians 3:16). And therefore Christians are called to be at peace with one another, providing a good testimony to those who do not believe (Mark 9:50; 2 Corinthians 13:11; 1 Thessalonians 5:13).<sup>5</sup>

The invasion of the kingdom of God into the world has not come by force of arms but by the suffering Servant who casts out Satan and makes peace between God and men. If Christ wanted to conquer the Romans militarily He could have done so (cf. Matthew 26:53). But that was not God’s plan. Nevertheless, since the resurrection and ascension, the Gospel is spreading and the dominion mandate (Genesis 1:26-27) is being implemented by peacemaking Christians who are called to transform their culture. And defending themselves against predators so that men may live in peace becomes part of their civic duty.

## **The Christian Fight for Peace (Part 2)**

by John Cobin, Ph.D. for *The Times Examiner*  
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*This column is the first segment of a two-part series dealing with the Christian’s struggle to establish peace.*

Considering the spiritual battle raging between God and Satan, it should come as little surprise that the spread of God’s kingdom often does not occur peaceably. Paradoxically, the Lord is both the “God of peace” and the God who assails the kingdom of Satan: “And the God of peace will crush Satan under your feet shortly” (Romans 16:20), implying that His judgment will come upon Satan’s kingdom in both the spiritual and temporal realms. The Christian’s civic duty should be similarly directed. Jesus is called the Prince of Peace (Isaiah 9:6) and yet He tells us: “Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword” (Matthew 10:34). The reason is simply that even though a battle rages in the spiritual world between principalities and powers (2 Corinthians 10:4-6, Revelation 12:7; Jude 1:9; Daniel 10:13), this battle spills over into time and space, being manifested principally through conflicts between Christians and false religion or the state. However, God’s kingdom has invaded the world, casting out Satan’s kingdom and disrupting the false “peace” that Satan gives (Luke 11:21).

Surely, the preaching of the Gospel and its transformation of hearers brings men peace with God. But the preaching of the Gospel also yields a threat to Satan’s kingdom, resulting in social rancor and violence as Satan seeks to defend his turf. The church is to neither be the initiator of violence nor use force to create converts. Yet the Bible indicates that individual Christians may use force to defend themselves against attacks from criminals—even state criminals. Martyrdom is not their only choice. Indeed, the threat of force is the only deterrent that keeps a state in line and Christians must be ready to use their might to that end. Of course, prudence would direct that using force should only be considered for egregious, ongoing violations of civil liberties. The civil disobedience and resistance doctrine of Dr. Francis A. Schaeffer thus has no quarrel with the Scriptures and rightly concurs with Jefferson’s caution in the Declaration of Independence.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Matthew 10:13: “If the household is worthy, let your peace come upon it. But if it is not worthy, let your peace return to you.” Luke 10:5-6: “But whatever house you enter, first say, ‘Peace to this house.’ And if a son of peace is there, your peace will rest on it; if not, it will return to you.”

<sup>5</sup> Mark 9:50: “Salt is good, but if the salt loses its flavor, how will you season it? Have salt in yourselves, and have peace with one another.” 2 Corinthians 13:11: “Finally, brethren, farewell. Become complete. Be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you.” 1 Thessalonians 5:13: “Be at peace among yourselves.”

<sup>6</sup> “Prudence, indeed, will dictate that governments long established should not be changed for light and transient causes; and accordingly, all experience hath shown, that mankind are more disposed to suffer, while evils are sufferable, than to right themselves by abolishing the forms to which they are accustomed. But, when a long train of abuses and usurpations, pursuing invariably the same object, evinces a design to reduce them under absolute despotism, it is their right, it is their duty, to throw off such government, and to provide new guards for their future security.”

Ironically, Christians must *fight* for peace, and their greatest achievement and objective should be to promote *peace*. Conversely, let us recall that the great “achievements” of modern man—unbelief, totalitarianism, secular humanism, Darwinism, and socialism, just to name a few—have brought poverty, misery, hatred, and war to human civilizations. But Christians should have the opposite record. They can promote peace with God by preaching the Gospel and they will promote peace and goodwill among men by advocating limited government and free markets. They may also promote earthly peace by engaging their culture politically: by voting, by signing petitions, by writing to congressmen, and by serving on juries in order to establish and secure fundamental rights for all people equally (and utilizing civil government as a means to defend these rights).

If we remember that the state is humanity’s foe, how can Christians justly use it to be their henchman? The state has wrought the antithesis of peace on earth. It has brought terrestrial hell to millions of people: shortening lives, extorting funds, degrading the environment, and destroying property. Therefore, Christians should not work to recruit the state into God’s service. Instead, they should be active in transforming their culture, reducing the impact of evil and the grief that comes from the state.

For this reason, it is important for American Christians to be informed and vote for candidates who will stand by the principles of liberty. They should not cop out and vote pragmatically, viz. for “the lesser of two evils”. Christians must overcome evil with good and that feat cannot be achieved by pragmatism. A Christian’s vote is never “wasted” when it is cast for someone or some policy backing good principles. But it is always wasted when it is cast for evil—even the lesser of two evils.

Some Christians might go beyond merely voting and even venture to get involved with politics. They may do so when they believe that running for office will allow them to pursue peace by encouraging the recognition of fundamental rights, the maintenance of free markets, and the rule of law.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, all Christians should be eager to sit on a jury in order to be ready to free any captive of the state who is having his fundamental rights violated. They can do this by nullifying an unjust or stupid decree (i.e., the procedure known as “jury nullification”).

Freedom is neither free nor cheap and Christians who want to enjoy political freedom need to be prepared to pay the price of keeping it. Professor Richard Beeman reminds us: “There is a story, often told, that upon exiting the Constitutional Convention Benjamin Franklin was approached by a group of citizens asking what sort of government the delegates had created. His answer was: ‘A republic, if you can keep it.’ The brevity of that response should not cause us to under-value its essential meaning: democratic republics are not merely founded upon the consent of the people, they are also absolutely dependent upon the active and informed involvement of the people for their continued good health.”<sup>8</sup> Accordingly, American Christians fighting for peace now face the challenge of trying to *keep* the republican form of government that the Founders entrusted to them.

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<sup>7</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer was simply mistaken when he wrote in *The Cost of Discipleship* that Christians should never aspire to high political office. Some peace-making Christians might be effective in government office that promotes proactive policy. In remarking on the humility that a disciple must display he did not take into account the role a disciple has in engaging his culture and being a peacemaker. Whether or not they pursue a *legitimate* political office (i.e., one based in reactive policy) ought to be left to the liberty of each Christian’s conscience.

<sup>8</sup> Richard R. Beeman, “A republic, if you can keep it” (2005), National Constitution Center, <http://www.constitutioncenter.org/explore/ThreePerspectivesontheConstitution/ARepublic,IfYouCanKeepIt.shtml>.