SHOULD CHRISTIANS BEAR ARMS? *

Christ began His teaching by laying down the principles of the kingdom of God as recorded in Matthew’s Gospel, chapters 5 to 7. Eight times in His first discourse He uses the expressions, “the kingdom of heaven” and “the kingdom of God,” in introducing the principles of the kingdom which He came to reveal among men. One hundred times these and similar expressions are recorded in the Gospels as falling from His lips in declaring His mission to earth. His last words before His ascension were about the kingdom of God. Acts 1:3. Thus from first to last His theme was the kingdom of God.

What instruction did He give to His disciples about bearing arms and engaging in war?

“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.” Matt. 5:38, 39.

“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.” Matt. 5:44, 45.

“Behold, I send you forth as lambs among wolves. . . . And into whatsoever house ye enter, first say, Peace be to this house. And if the son of peace be there, your peace shall rest upon it: if not, it shall turn to you again.” Luke 10:3-6.

“Behold, one of them which were with Jesus stretched out his hand, and drew his sword, and struck a servant of the high priest’s, and smote off his ear. Then said Jesus unto him, Put up again thy sword into his place: for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword. Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to My Father, and He shall presently give Me more than twelve legions of angels?” Matt. 26:51-53.

* Quotations from tract by R. C. Porter, president of the South African Union Conference during the World War.
“My kingdom is not of this world: if My kingdom were of this world, then would My servants fight.” John 18:36.

“It came to pass, when the time was come that He should be received up, He steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem, and sent messengers before His face: and they went and entered into a village of the Samaritans, to make ready for Him. And they did not receive Him, because His face was as though He would go to Jerusalem. And when His disciples James and John saw this, they said, Lord, wilt Thou that we command fire to come down from heaven, and consume them, even as Elias did? But He turned and rebuked them, and said, Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of. For the Son of man is not come to destroy men’s lives, but to save them. And they went to another village.” Luke 9: 51-56.

The civil government was ordained of God to keep the peace by compelling civility and by punishing crime. It was to protect all citizens in the exercise of their civil and religious rights. For this purpose it is authorized to use the sword. It was not ordained for wars of conquest with other nations, nor to compel Christians to violate their principles by compulsory military training or pay the penalty by imprisonment or martyrdom. Rom. 13:1-6. Christians are ever instructed to obedience to the laws of civil government, unless those laws conflict with the higher laws of God’s government; then, “we ought to obey God rather than men.” Acts 5:29. Even in such cases the Christian’s principles forbid the use of the sword.

“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 strongholds).” 2 Cor. 10:3, 4.

SOLDIERS KNOW THAT WAR IS ANTI-CHRISTIAN

Napoleon, the greatest soldier of modern times, recognized this distinction between the kingdom of Christ and the kingdoms devoted to war. While meditating upon his misfortunes, when confined to the island of St. Helena, he said: “Alexander, Caesar, Charlemagne, and myself founded empires. But upon what did we rest the creation of our genius?—Upon force. Jesus Christ alone founded
His empire upon love: and at this hour millions of men would die for Him."—"The Bible and Men of Learning," by Matthews, p. 342.

He understood the relation of the kingdom of Christ to earthly kingdoms, which through the ambitions of men had drifted far from the principles of their Author. Christ taught peace; they teach war. His teaching stands in marked contrast to the spirit of militarism of our time. Sixteen-inch guns, 26,000-ton battleships, and compulsory military training are the response of professedly Christian nations of our time to this instruction of Christ. . . .

"From whence come wars and fightings among you? come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members?" James 4:1.

Lust is from Satan.

"But if ye have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, glory not, and lie not against the truth. This wisdom descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish. . . . The fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace." James 3:14-18.

Christ, the Prince of Peace, is the Christian’s example. Did He bear arms and kill His fellow men?—Never! Peter says:

"Even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow His steps: who did no sin, neither was guile found in His mouth: who, when He was reviled, reviled not again; when He suffered, He threatened not; but committed Himself to Him that judgeth righteously." 1 Peter 2:21-23.