

# WAR AND PEACE

“In all the camps they were subject to ridicule.... Some...were brutally handled in the guardhouse; they were bayoneted, beaten, and tortured by various kinds of the water cure; eighteen men one night were aroused from their sleep and held under cold showers until one became hysterical.... Every conceivable device—ridicule, torture, offer of promotion, and other tempting inducements were resorted to in order to get them to give up their convictions; but with only few exceptions the religious objectors refused to compromise with their consciences” (The Mennonite Encyclopedia, p 902).

What would induce men to endure such persecution and suffering? These men were conscientious objectors, men who chose not to enter military service because they could not find it in themselves to kill a fellow man. In Switzerland, Holland, Russia, and America up to the present time Anabaptists have sought to follow Christ’s command to “love your enemies” and to follow His example of quiet non-resistance.

What exactly is the basis for the principle of nonresistance? Why do so few other traditions not follow it? The answer to both these questions is relatively simple. The main basis for nonresistance is the example and teachings of Christ. Ever since the time of Constantine and the union of church and state, most traditions have not followed this example. They have not held to the two-kingdom theology of the Anabaptists, believing that it is possible to be a part of the world’s government and Christ’s kingdom at the same time. The Anabaptists believe that, as Christ’s kingdom is not of this world, they also cannot serve in the kingdoms of this world.

The most obvious support for nonresistance is found in the command of Christ to “Love your enemies” (Matthew 5:44) and to turn the other cheek (Matthew 5:39). Some have compromised these statements by saying that these passages refer only to personal attacks, that just war is a necessary part of government, and that participating in war is justified if it is for the right reasons. However, I find several problems with the just war view. First, I cannot justify killing my enemy, no matter how just it may seem, while loving him at the same time, knowing that I may be sending him to hell and eternal separation from God. God in his mercy spared me in my sin requiring death; I cannot cut off my enemy’s chance at receiving the same mercy. Second, Christians are the light of the world (Matthew 5:14). If Christians engage in such a carnal action as killing their enemies, how are we any different from the world around us? We have a much better witness when we love our enemies rather than killing them, no matter how just it may seem. Finally, a clarifying point: I do not deny the right—and responsibility—of governments to bear the sword (Romans 13:4). However, I feel that Christians, in light of Christ’s command, cannot participate in those government offices that require them to use the sword. I believe that a Christian

must follow Christ in both his personal life and his public, social responsibilities.

A second major support for nonresistance is found in the example of Christ’s life. Isaiah 53:7 says, “He was oppressed, and He was afflicted; yet He opened not His mouth.” Jesus did not retaliate when he was condemned and crucified. One may argue that he was merely fulfilling Scripture; therefore, his example does not apply to us Christians today. Yet I refer again to the “light of the world” reference, as well as the description of the church as the body of Christ. As someone once said,

“We are the only Bible that some people will ever read.” As followers of Christ, we must point others to Him and His character. If we respond in retaliation when we are persecuted, or even if we kill those who oppress others, we do not give a true witness of the character of Christ, his mercy, and his forgiveness.

Granted, I still struggle with the practical application of this principle of nonresistance. It goes against every human impulse to allow someone to harm me without retaliation. And the dilemma intensifies when it is expanded to the realm of social justice. How can I love my neighbor and allow him to be killed by my enemy? Yet how can I kill my enemy before he kills my neighbor and still love them both? I do not have the complete answer to these questions. I can only trust that if I am ever in such a situation, Christ will give me the wisdom and strength to respond as he would. Christ cared for the poor and downtrodden and even condemned their oppressors, yet he was not a violent social reformer. Instead, with his quiet love and wise teaching, he transformed the hearts of both the victims and the violators. In order to stay true to His example, I also must find peaceful ways of resolving conflict and bringing justice to the oppressor and the oppressed. Maybe by my peaceful example I can point both my neighbors and my enemies to the love of Jesus. That hope is the heart of nonresistance. **BB**

*Editors note: Want to talk about non-resistance? Or think about other relevant issues? Check out <http://rbcforum.heavenforum.com>. The site was designed by the author to continue stimulating discussions about relevant issues after his time at Rosedale Bible College.*

*Darin Beachy, a graduate of Rosedale Bible College, lives in Denver, Pennsylvania. He is currently enrolled in Harrisburg Area Community College to pursue an education degree in History. In addition to reading and writing, Darin enjoys playing video games, watching baseball, and playing basketball.*

## TEEN TALK

WITH GUEST WRITER  
DARIN BEACHY