

# THE TRINITY REVIEW

For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare [are] not fleshly but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ. And they will be ready to punish all disobedience, when your obedience is fulfilled.

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## The Bible and the Draft

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The federal government is again contemplating the conscription of young people for both military and civilian labor. The liberals are supporting "national service," *i.e.* they advocate forcing young people to spend two or more years of their lives in some sort of "public service"—including, but not limited to, the military; and the conservatives are supporting the military draft, *i.e.*, forcing people to serve in the armed forces. The liberals' position is consistent with their other positions favoring unlimited government. The conservatives' position seems to be inconsistent with their usually limited government views. What is the Christian position? Can the consistent Christian favor either the draft or national service?

Unlike either the conservative or the liberal, the Christian must derive his views on the morality of the draft and national service solely from Scripture, not from any theory of natural law or general notion of justice, but from the propositions and commands written in the Bible. The Christian position on the draft—as on all moral and theological questions—is based upon the principle of *sola Scriptura*, the Bible as the only and as the final authority.

Paul, writing to Timothy, said, "All scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work." The Scripture is sufficient: It equips the man of God *thoroughly* for every good work,

including the good work of politics. Furthermore, the Old Testament as well as the New is God-breathed and useful: "*All* Scripture is God-breathed and useful for teaching...." Paul definitely contradicts the popular idea that the Old Testament does not concern us. The laws of God that are found in the Old Testament—unless they have been repealed in the New—are still in force. The *Westminster Confession of Faith* recognizes these two basic Biblical ideas—*sola Scriptura* and the perpetuity of the law—in the following words:

Under the name of Holy Scripture, or the Word of God written, are now contained all the books of the Old and New Testaments... all of which are given by inspiration of God to be the rule of faith and life.

The whole counsel of God, concerning all things necessary for his own glory, man's salvation, faith and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture....

God gave to Adam a law ... by which he bound him, and all his posterity, to personal, entire, exact and perpetual obedience...

Having now explained the basis of the present argument, let us examine what the Scripture says about a military draft and national service.

### *Exodus 20:15: You shall not steal.*

The first of the many verses that are pertinent to a discussion of the draft and national service is the Eighth Commandment prohibiting theft. Two common misconceptions must be eliminated if we are to understand the meaning of this Commandment. First, the Commandment does not refer only to inanimate property. The Hebrew word is used in connection with both property and persons, and in *Exodus 21:16* we read of "manstealing," *i.e.*, kidnapping, which is a capital crime. This commandment clearly forbids not only the theft of property, but also the removal of innocent persons against their will.

The second misconception is that the Ten Commandments, including this one, apply only to private individuals and not to governments. This notion, which has absolutely no foundation in Scripture, illustrates how far we have gone toward deifying government, for it is attributing divine qualities to rulers to say that they in their official (or private) capacities are exempt from the law. The Commandments, as both the Bible and the *Westminster Confession* say, bind all men without exception. Rulers and governments are commanded not to steal, murder, covet, lie, or do any other act prohibited in the moral law. Zacchaeus the tax collector stole from the people, and upon his regeneration he recognized his subordination to the moral law. King Ahab broke the Sixth, Eighth, and Tenth Commandments in desiring and taking Naboth's vineyard. John the Baptist in *Luke 3:14* specifically applied the moral law to an agent of the government. There is not the slightest hint in Scripture that governments are above the moral law. And that moral law, as we have already seen, includes a prohibition on manstealing. Yet what are national service and the draft if they are not manstealing? There is no moral distinction between the actions of a private individual who kidnaps a person and a government that drafts its subjects under color of law. Both actions are clear violations of the Eighth Commandment.

### *1 Samuel 8:10-18*

It is typical of the goodness of God that he does not leave us with general principles—such as, You shall not steal—but that he goes on to give us specific examples of stealing, and specific commands against and proper punishments for theft. John Calvin, in his commentary on *Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers* and *Deuteronomy*, lists these instances and their punishments under his discussion of the Eighth Commandment.

One of the central passages that must be discussed in relation to the Eighth Commandment is *1 Samuel 8:10-18*:

Samuel told all the words of the Lord to the people who were asking him for a king. He said, "This is what the king who will reign over you will do: He will take your sons and make them serve with his chariots and horses, and they will run in front of his chariots. Some he will assign to be commanders of thousands and commanders of fifties, and others to plow his ground and reap his harvest, and still others to make weapons of war and equipment for his chariots. He will take your daughters to be perfumers and cooks and bakers. He will take the best of your fields and vineyards and olive groves, and give them to his attendants. He will take a tenth of your grain and of your vintage and give it to his officials and attendants. Your menservants and maidservants and the best of your young men and donkeys he will take for his own use. He will take a tenth of your flocks, and you yourselves will become his slaves. When that day comes, you will cry out for relief from the king you have chosen, and the Lord will not answer you in that day."

This passage is important, not only because it contrasts the Hebrew republic with the later monarchy, but also because it contrasts Christian government with anti-Christian government. The Israelites had demanded a king "such as all the other nations have." God says to Samuel that "it is not

you they have rejected as their king, but me." They were rejecting the government of God for an ungodly government. They would eventually become slaves to this anti-Christian government, yet they refused to listen to Samuel's warning of their impending slavery.

There are two things, both quite obvious, that must nevertheless be pointed out about this passage. Earlier we had to stress the obvious point that all men and human institutions are subject to the law of God. Now we must stress the two obvious points that this passage is a warning to the Israelites and a statement that God disapproves and condemns the type of actions listed in this passage. First, this is a warning. As such, it would make no sense if these actions had already been commanded and approved by God for the government of Israel. It makes sense only if the Hebrew republic was given a government by God that did not do these things. One does not yell, "Look out for the train" to someone already sawed in two by its wheels. Second, God condemns the actions that the future kings will take. We have already noted his condemnation of Ahab, whose actions are prophesied by Samuel in this passage. God does not command, approve, or condone the governmental actions described here, and the government he had established for the Hebrew republic was empowered to do none of these things.

What specifically are the policies or actions condemned in this passage? The draft (verses 11, 12, 16), exorbitant taxes—ten percent or over (verses 15, 17), eminent domain—the taking of private property (verses 14, 16), forced labor—national service (verses 12, 13), the redistribution of property (verse 14), and slavery through unrestrained political power (verse 17). This passage is central to any discussion of the Biblical view of civil government, for it clearly delineates many ways in which ungodly governments violate the Eighth Commandment. Notice the repetition of the phrase "He will take..." It is used six times. Rulers violate the Eighth Commandment by drafting men or women, forcing them to perform labor, imposing taxes ten percent or higher, taking private property, redistributing property, and finally imposing total slavery. Other verses of Scripture

mention other ways in which governors violate the Commandment: taking bribes, and the debasement and manipulation of the money. It is unmistakably clear that the draft and the national service are prohibited by the Eighth Commandment. But to persuade anyone who may be yet doubtful, let us proceed to the next passage.

### *Deuteronomy 20:5-8*

"The officers shall say to the people: 'Has anyone built a house and not dedicated it? Let him go home, or he may die in battle and someone else may dedicate it. Has anyone planted a vineyard and not begun to enjoy it? Let him go home, or he may die in battle and someone else may enjoy it. Has anyone become pledged to a woman and not married her? Let him go home, or he may die in battle and someone else marry her.' Then the officers shall add, 'Is any man afraid or faint-hearted? Let him go home so that his brothers will not become disheartened too.' "

These verses give us specific information about military service in the Hebrew republic. There are four classes of men (note that all the references are to men, none to women) who may not serve in the Hebrew army:

1. Those who have a new house;
2. Those who have a new vineyard;
3. Those who have a fiancée; and
4. Those who are afraid.

Some commentators have interpreted this passage to mean that those four classes of men were not compelled to serve as were all the other men, but that they might serve if they so wished, in a manner much like the exemption system that has characterized the draft in this country in this century. That is an impossible interpretation for at least two reasons. First, it contradicts the meaning of the verses we have already studied which demonstrate that there was no draft in the Hebrew republic. Second, the pertinent verbs are in the

imperative mood. The officers are not commanded to say, You may leave if you wish. They are commanded to say, Go home! The four classes of men were prohibited from volunteering for military service, not exempted from a draft. They could not serve if they wished to.

It is interesting to note why. In the case of the first three classes, we are explicitly told that the private interest of these men to enjoy their new homes, vineyards, and wives is superior to the public interest of the nation. That statement should give pause to those who believe that everybody owes a legally enforceable "debt" to his country. The Bible explicitly says that the enjoyment of these domestic pleasures is more important than the public interest. This is all the more striking when one recalls that Israel was God's chosen nation, and the wars on which they were about to engage were holy wars conquering the Promised Land and executing God's judgment. If private interests were superior to the public interest in that situation, then they are all the more so today when no nation is God's chosen nation, no holy wars are being fought, and no Promised Land is being conquered.

A study of the fourth and last class of men is even more instructive. First, unlike the first three classes mentioned, these men were sent home not for their own pleasure, but because their presence in the army would undermine the morale of the troops. Second, the criteria that distinguish the first three classes are somewhat objective criteria, but the criterion for membership in the last class is completely subjective. It could easily be determined who had a new home, a new vineyard, or a fiancée. But the membership of the last class, the timid, could be determined by no one except the individual himself. Let us assume, for the sake of argument, that we have totally misunderstood all the verses we have studied so far and that there was or at least could have been a draft in the Hebrew republic. In that case, this last class of men alone would destroy that possibility, for it is impossible to draft anyone when the potential draftee is made the sole judge of whether or not he is ineligible for service. Military service that precludes the service of the timid must, of necessity, be voluntary. Note also that the timid may not be forced to perform alternative service,

*i.e.*, there was no national service or conscientious objector status. He, like the members of the other three classes, was commanded to go home, not to carry bedpans or plant trees in the young adult conservation corps.

In his commentary on this passage Calvin writes: "God will not have more required from anyone than he is disposed to bear.... [T]he lazy and timid were sent home, that the Israelites might learn that none were to be pressed beyond their ability; and this also depends upon that rule of equity which dictates that we should abstain from all unjust oppression."

### *Romans 13:3-7*

Lest anyone feel uneasy about the fact that all the verses (except for those referring to Zacchaeus and John the Baptist) discussed so far have been from the Old Testament, we shall discuss a couple from the New. Not that this is necessary, of course, for the proper rule of interpretation of any law code is that any command not repealed is still in force. Those who wish to argue that the commands we have cited from the Old Testament are no longer binding must demonstrate where they have been repealed in the New. The New Testament need not repeat all the commands of the Old that bind us. If it is silent, the commands are still in force.

The Eighth Commandment has not been repealed, nor have the legitimate functions of government changed from the days of Samuel. Those who wish to argue that those functions have changed ought to cite their evidence. They cannot use the words of the apostle Paul, for he wrote:

For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong. 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. Therefore it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment, but also because of

conscience. This is also why you pay taxes, for the authorities are God's servants, who give their full time to governing. Give everyone what you owe him: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor.

In these verses Paul clearly lays down the two legitimate purposes of civil government once again: to punish the wrongdoer and to praise the good. The purpose of government is not the punishment of innocent men, nor the education or rehabilitation of evil men, nor the redistribution of property. Justice is the end of government, not "social justice." But if that be so, then the government cannot punish innocent people by forcing them to labor in the army or the conservation corps for two or more years. This principle, no punishment without a crime, is so basic that we frequently overlook it. It was written into the U. S. Constitution by the Thirteenth Amendment: "Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist in the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction." It is characteristic of our times that an elementary principle such as this must be defended against those who favor sentencing innocent young people to two or more years of hard labor. Paul clearly says that the purpose of government is to punish the wrongdoer, not the innocent. A draft or national service exacts forced labor from the innocent.

Also to the point is the silence of Paul about the right of a government to compel service. Romans 13 would have been the appropriate place for him to mention it, yet he does not do so. If the legitimate functions of government had changed from the time of Samuel, Paul most certainly would have mentioned the change in this passage where he lists the right of a government to collect taxes. His silence, and the silence of the rest of the New Testament on the point, speaks volumes. The Old Testament law is still in effect.

### *Objections to the Argument*

Most of the objections to our analysis of the Bible's view of the draft and national service will fall into two categories. First, those which challenge the binding nature of the Old Testament law on twentieth-century America; and second, those which cite other passages of Scripture in support of a draft. The first is the more quickly answered, for we have already answered it in principle.

All governments are subjects to the moral law, and the draft poses a question of morality. *1 Samuel* 8, *Deuteronomy* 20, and *Romans* 13 all draw out the implications of the Eighth Commandment for governments. There is nothing in the New Testament indicating that the Eighth Commandment has been repealed, that God now approves the draft and national service, or that governments are permitted to kidnap their subjects and force them into slavery with God's blessing. Unless God has repealed his commands—as he has done with the Old Testament ceremonial and food laws—they are still in force.

The second objection does not dispute the perpetuity of the law, including its political applications, but attempts to show that there was in fact a draft in the Hebrew republic. These objectors cite verses such as this one from the first chapter of *Numbers*:

Take a census of the whole Israelite community by their clans and families, listing every man by name, one by one. You [Moses] and Aaron are to number by their divisions all the men in Israel twenty years old or more who are able to serve in the army.

The problem with this verse and those like it is that it says nothing about a draft; it refers only to a census of the people. The earliest censuses in the United States were taken in a similar fashion, by writing down only the names of the male adults. The Old Testament nowhere says that the men thus counted were drafted into the army. Nor is it logical to say that the phrase "who are able to serve in the army" must mean that the census was a preparation for a draft. Even if the census were a military action, the existence of a draft still would not

follow. Those who deduce a draft from these verses have invented some new laws of logic.

What, then, is the purpose of the census if it is not a preparation for the draft? The answer is given in *Numbers* 26:53-54. Following a census-taking, "The Lord said to Moses, 'The land is to be allotted to them as an inheritance based on the number of names. To a larger group give a larger inheritance, and to a smaller group a smaller one; each is to receive its inheritance according to the number of those listed.' " Another more speculative answer may be that the census was taken for the purpose of illustrating in macrocosm what Gideon's experience illustrated in miniature: that God is not on the side of the larger divisions. God had the able-bodied men of Israel counted and then used only a tiny fraction of them in the battles to conquer the Promised Land. In Gideon's case, out of over six hundred thousand able men, his army initially had only thirty-two thousand and ultimately only three hundred. But if one looks at all the other data in Scripture on the numbers of the Hebrew army, nowhere will he find any figure even remotely approaching six hundred thousand. To say that all the men in *Numbers* 1 were drafted is completely false. The census had nothing to do with a draft for there was no draft in the Hebrew republic.

There was, however, one census whose purpose was military. It could not have been for the conquering or dividing up of the land, for the land had already been conquered and divided. The account of this census is given in *1 Chronicles* 21:

Satan rose up against Israel and incited David to take a census of Israel.... but Joab replied [to David], "May the Lord multiply his troops a hundred times over. My lord the king, are they not all my lord's subjects? Why does my lord want to do this? Why should he bring guilt on Israel? ...." Joab reported the number of the fighting men to David.... But Joab did not include Levi and Benjamin in the numbering, because the king's command was repulsive to him. The command was also evil in the sight of God.

Of course it was evil in the sight of God. That is what Samuel had said in *1 Samuel* 8. Joab recognized the evil; he found it repulsive. Joab believed in limited government. It is too bad that so many who claim the name of Christ do not share Joab's apprehension of this truth. When the government considers registering men for the draft or national service, Christians must, like Joab, protest. "Are they not all Americans, are they not all innocent? Why does the government want to do this?" In 1917 a man by the name of John Gresham Machen did protest. Later to become the founder of Westminster Seminary and the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, Machen wrote these words to Members of Congress:

The country seems to be rushing into the two things to which I am more strongly opposed than anything else in the world—a permanent alliance with Great Britain...., and a permanent policy of compulsory military service with all the brutal interference of the state in individual and family life which that entails, and which has caused the misery of Germany and France....

After a residence in Europe I came to cherish America all the more as a refuge from the servitude of conscription. That servitude prevails whether the enforced service be required by a vote of the majority or by an absolute government. Compulsory military service does not merely bring a danger of militarism; it is militarism. To adopt it in this country would mean that no matter how this war results we are conquered already....

I am not arguing against preparedness.... What I am arguing against is *compulsion*, which I believe to be brutal and un-American in itself, and productive of a host of subsidiary evils.

Machen's protest went unheeded, but at least he took the correct position on the draft. Today's Christians are not taking even the correct position. They, like David, have erred, and need to bring all

their thoughts into conformity with Christ. In politics, that means advocating limited government, a government that does not have the power to compel young men or young women to labor in its service. Nothing less than this can stop our descent into savagery and totalitarianism.