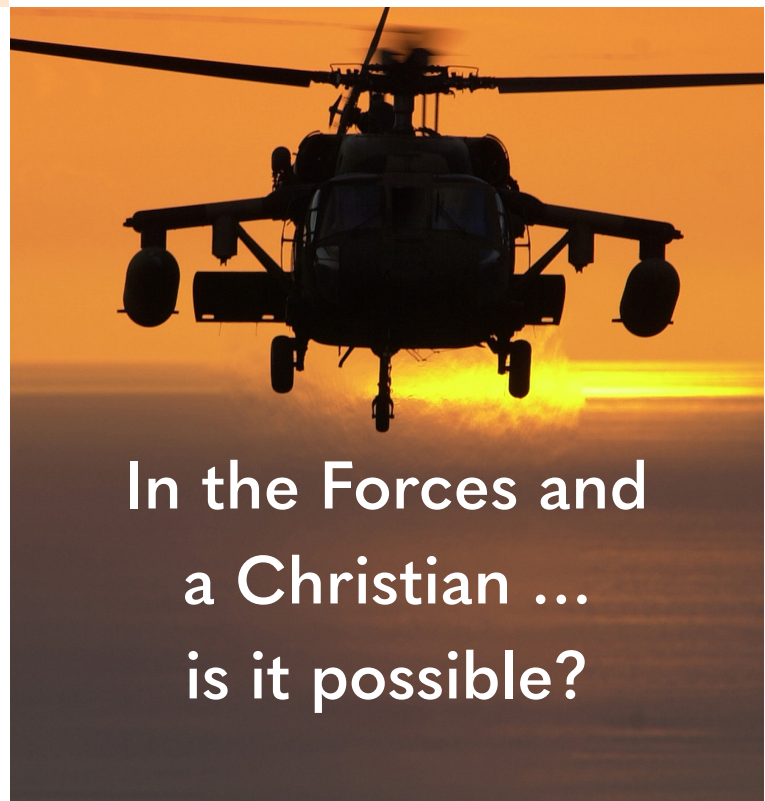




In the Forces and a Christian ... is it possible?

1. AUTHORITY

- In seeking 'God's view' of soldiering, some very important principles must be considered.
- Our supreme authority is the word of God, not simply the thoughts of humans, however enlightened.
- From beginning to end of the Bible is a complete unity. It doesn't contain the word of God, it is the word of God, for individuals and for nations.
- Its requirements are timeless, as relevant today as ever they were.
- The author of the Bible - the Holy Spirit - never contradicts. If something doesn't seem right to us, the problem lies in the limitations of our human understanding.
- Verses of Scripture must be understood in the context in which they appear and interpreted by other Scripture references.

So can a Christian serve in the Forces?

2. SOLDIERING

Throughout the Bible, soldiers are referred to in the same positive way as workers, farmers and athletes, among others. The soldier is also used to illustrate noble characteristics:

Serving one's country (1 Corinthians 9:7)
 Standing firm (Ephesians 6:11-17)
 Fighting for what is right (1 Timothy 6:12)
 Enduring hardship (2 Timothy 2:3)
 Single-minded perseverance (2 Timothy 2:4)

Some of the great Old Testament leaders were soldiers - Gideon and David, for example - while the centurions in the New Testament are all referred to as honourable men. If, for some reason, it is 'wrong' to be a soldier, these examples would not have been used. Nowhere in Scripture is soldiering condemned.

4. CONTROL

Members of the Armed Forces, as with other citizens, are instructed to live in submission to the ruling authorities (1 Peter 2:13-14), with obedience (Titus 3:1) and in exercising prayer on their behalf (1 Timothy 2:2). By so doing, this provides the necessary safeguards and controls to ensure the legitimate use of force.

3. RESPONSIBILITY

God's plan for humankind is that human governments will have responsibility to maintain law and order. He clearly approves the use of force when this is necessary, in order to restrain evil for the sake of society as a whole (see Romans 13:7).

IN THE SERVICES AND A CHRISTIAN

This is a matter on which there are many shades of opinion. The teaching and example of Jesus convince some professing Christians that they should be pacifists. Others, however, see things very differently. Accepting the practice of non-resistance in personal relationships, they would maintain that the use of force is permissible in issues of national and international security.

So, what's the answer?

Is it just a question of personal opinion?

What does God say about all this?

If you'd like to discuss anything further, contact your Base Chaplain or ring 1300 333 362 and ask for the Duty Chaplain on your Base or closest to you. You are also welcome to email the Military Christian Fellowship of Australia.

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5. RESISTANCE

At first glance this seems to run contrary to the command of the Lord Jesus when he said, 'Do not resist an evil person' (Matthew 5:39). But this statement was made in relation to the individual, and not the state. To apply this verse 'across the board' would mean allowing violence and injustice to prevail unchecked, disbanding the Police and Armed Forces throughout the world, and inviting global chaos. A true interpretation of this verse would be, 'Don't take the law into your own hands'.

6. KILLING

The greatest challenge facing any service man or woman is surely the prospect of having to take someone's life in the line of duty. Luke 11:2 is likely to ensure restraint. We must, therefore, live in the world as it is and not as, in a person's better moments, they would like it to be. Sin in the heart of each individual is a sad fact of life (James 4:1).

8. PEACEMAKING

Peacemaking is not the same as pacifism, and those who actively pursue peace obtain God's favour (Matthew 5:9). As Christians, including those in the Armed Forces, must not only loathe war but seek peace and vigorously pursue it. It is possible to 'love your enemies' (Matthew 5:44), in exercising respect and compassion, while at the same time bringing them to justice as duty demands. (While hating sin, God loves sinners like us). When all else fails, the appropriate use of force in the short term can promote justice and peace in the long term. Nowhere in Scripture is self-defence condemned (see Luke 22:36).

Only in Christ we find forgiveness and a new life. Throughout history, the sixth commandment 'Thou shalt not kill' has been a major stumbling block to many who have been honestly seeking the will of God. Yet the original Hebrew clearly confirms that a more accurate translation is 'Thou shalt not murder'; in other words, killing on our own behalf. Nevertheless, this is still a major moral dilemma with which service personnel must come to terms. Provided they have acted within the law, Christians who find themselves in the extreme position of having to take life will have acted correctly before God and humankind.

7. PACIFISM

There are a number of powerful arguments in favour of pacifism and unilateral disarmament. Yet history records no case where defencelessness of a nation has protected it from attack. Only a 'strong man, fully armed' (Luke 11:21).

CONCLUSION

The concept of a 'just war' is a midway position between the extreme pacifist ('peace at any price') and the extreme patriot ('my country, right or wrong'). In Scripture, peace is frequently shown as being the outcome of righteousness, which 'exalts a nation' (Proverbs 14:34). Our attitude should therefore be one of 'Righteousness at any cost, and not peace at any price' – in which a soldier, sailor or airman can most certainly be a true Christian.



For further information use the QR code to go to our MCF website.

