

Fundamentals of Belief
#15A: War and Military Service

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Jon W. Brisby; 7-28-2001

Well, brethren, we are continuing, as you might expect, with our series on the Fundamentals of Belief of the Church of God, The Eternal. It has turned out to be quite a lengthy series. Yet, each fundamental is very distinct from the other, which means I think we have had an opportunity to have quite a variety of material covering many, many aspects of Biblical teaching.

Now, we have come to fundamental number fifteen, which reads as follows:

We believe that Christian disciples of Christ are forbidden by Him and the commandments of God to kill, or in any manner directly or indirectly to take human life; by whatsoever means; we believe that bearing arms is directly contrary to this fundamental doctrine of our belief; we therefore conscientiously refuse to bear arms or to come under the military authority.

The one thing that I thought was interesting is that the times and circumstances in which the Church lives are often reflected in those teachings which are front and center. It is very likely that, had Mr. Armstrong been putting those Fundamentals of Belief together in a day like ours, this particular concept might not have been the highest in priority.

I don't know exactly what year Mr. Armstrong wrote these first twenty Fundamentals of Belief for the Radio Church of God, but I am pretty sure it was in and around the time of the Second World War. Whether it was during that time or even in the following years of the Korean War, I am pretty sure it was in that time frame. So, the Church was being challenged with that very question of what is our responsibility

and obligation in this country in respect to accepting the responsibility that the government imposes upon its citizens of bearing arms in the military service. We might say it was more of a pointed issue for the brethren back in those years during the 40's and 50's than it is today, but I am very sure, brethren, that the time is probably coming when we as a Body will face this very dilemma again. We don't have a draft now, so the young men of this country, and maybe even the young women—as they have begun to include women within the military services more and more—may yet face certain challenges concerning their conscientious objection to military service.

I think you are going to find many of the concepts that we are going to go through today very interesting as they relate to the way God thinks on this subject of killing. We will see the very basis and foundation that resulted in the teaching that Mr. Armstrong verbalized as our conscientious objection to bearing arms under the military authority. I think a lot of aspects will be very enlightening.

In order to justify why we believe the Bible indicates that we are not to be under the military authority, we have to go back and determine what it is that God says about killing. Again, the very first portion of our fundamental says, "We believe that Christian disciples of Christ are forbidden by Him and the commandments of God to kill, or in any manner directly or indirectly to take human life; by whatsoever means . . ." That is the portion we want to focus on today.

Let's begin by turning to Genesis 9:5. When was the origin of God's command against killing and murder? Did it really happen with Ancient Israel at Mt. Sinai with the giving of the Ten Commandments, or did it precede that? Yes, it did. The original command, limitation and prohibition against murder went all the way back to the beginning of creation and was verbalized here for the first time, as we see in Genesis 9:5–6:

And surely your blood of your lives will I require; at the hand of every beast will I require it, and at the hand of man; at the hand of every man's brother will I require the life of man. Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed . . .

There it is. God imposed a penalty upon any human being who was guilty of taking the life of another.

Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed [Why? Was it just an arbitrary law that God established?]: for in the image of God made he man.

God not only gave the command here in Genesis 9, but He also gave the very reason that supports His intent that human beings not engage in murder. Even though we are weak flesh, fallible human beings, corrupt in mind by our own carnal natures, yet physically, God created us to look like He, Himself. We are created in the image of God. We are not like the animals that He also placed upon the earth who have their very important functions. Man is separate and distinct; and unlike what you are being told by everything in the media and all that is propagated by science and the humanistic concepts of men, we are not animals. God created human beings as a separate and distinct entity from the animal kingdom because the capacity to become the sons of God was never given to animals. God created us from the beginning, even as He formed Adam, to look like the very God who is responsible for that creation. Why? It is God's intent to reproduce Himself and to create an expanded family that will live and reign with Him for all eternity.

So, even though He gave us carnal minds which war and hate everything that God stands for, the very imprint of God's will and purpose in His future plan is upon every one of us. When you look in the mirror, do you realize that within the physical characteristics of your visage, though our features are all different from one to another, you hold the very likeness of the great God who rules in heaven, who created all that exists in heaven and earth? It is a reminder of that Creator and what His plan and purpose is for us—salvation, sonship in His kingdom. Through that very physical act, God has placed His stamp on each one of us—all humanity.

We are different from animals. There are many who are out there claiming that we are not. I saw something recently on the news concerning the growing ideology of pets going to heaven. Business is really booming in the category of pet cemeteries and all of these elaborate and expensive ceremonies offered for dogs and cats and all kinds of animals. They have grave sites, cremations, and who knows what, as they set up these altars for their animals that they think have an immortal soul like they do—and we all know how true that is. They think they are all going to be in heaven together. Well, none of them are going to be in heaven, but certainly, the pets are not going to be in heaven, and they are not going to be resurrected either. That capacity and potential is for human beings, and human beings alone, out of all that God created.

So, why did God command that human beings are not to take the life of other human beings? Because each human being is special and has the opportunity and promise of something much greater than what we are in the flesh. Let's turn to the command in Exodus 20:13. This is where God gave Moses the Ten Commandments to speak to the children of Israel, and here is a rehearsal of this very command that existed from creation.

Exodus 20:13:

"Thou shalt not kill." It is one of the Ten Commandments. Actually, the Greek word for "kill" is *ratsach* in the Hebrew, and it doesn't actually mean kill, but murder. So, really, God's command is, "Thou shalt not murder." What is the difference between murder and killing? This may shock you, but, this afternoon, we are going to go through and prove that God is a killer. Do you know that to be true? God is a killer. God reserves the right to kill. God has killed, and He will yet kill; but God is perfect, as we are also going to see. Killing, in and of itself, is not sin, but in what circumstances can killing be OK and by whom can it be authorized? That is going to take us to the heart of the matter of why we do not participate in the wars between human beings on the face of this earth or allow ourselves to come under the military authority.

We have to start at the beginning. God does kill, as we are going to see. But first, let's look at Exodus 21:12. We want to look at the distinction that God makes, within the statutes and judgments, between murder and what we will call manslaughter, which is an accidental killing of a human being. There is a distinction between the intention and the will to take life versus the accidental taking of a life, even if it is by personal negligence.

Exodus 21:12–14:

"He that smiteth a man, so that he die, shall be surely put to death." Here is a direct command right off the bat that tells us that God has ordered killing. He has ordered the penalty for a capital crime, which murder is, and that penalty is death for anyone who is guilty—just as we read back in Genesis 9 where He said, "Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed . . ." So, God authorized killing from the very beginning for somebody who is guilty of murder.

He that smiteth a man, so that he die, shall be surely put to death. And if a man lie not in wait [Meaning, he did not intend or, on a premeditated basis, lie in wait.], but God deliver him into his hand [Meaning, He allows it to occur.]; then I will appoint thee a place whither he shall flee.

So, there is another whole category of penalty for killing, which does not involve having a human life taken in response. What are we talking about? We will see as we go along.

But if a man come presumptuously upon his neighbour, to slay him with guile [Meaning, there is actual intent and premeditation in his heart.]; thou shalt take him from mine altar, that he may die.

I am sure you are hearing the great debates in this country, on the media programs and different talk shows, over the fairness, the appropriateness and the value of the death penalty. It makes me shake my head to think that if human beings really understood and accepted the word of God, we wouldn't be having all of these debates. All of these human beings, by their humanistic thoughts, have determined in their own hearts and minds that killing under any circumstance is wrong and that there should be no such thing as capital punishment—taking a life—for any infraction of the law whatsoever. They consider themselves the humanitarians. They consider themselves as the ones who are showing love and regard for their fellow man.

Is our God a God of love? Is He the perfect personification of love and mercy, or is He not? If He is—as we know He is—then how can we reconcile the fact that He is also the author of capital punishment? Somehow, in order to understand the real nature of God and His character, we have to be able to reconcile those two factors. Human beings can't do it. Human beings point their fingers at that old, heartless, cold, calloused God of the Old Testament and say, "I could never serve a God like that." They do not realize that He is the very Being who divested Himself of His eternal glory and was born as our Savior Jesus Christ with the exact same character. Yet, He is the one who authored capital punishment—killing—in response to an infraction of God's law.

Numbers 35:15–27:

These six cities shall be a refuge, both for the children of Israel, and for the stranger, and for the sojourner among them: that every one that killeth any person unawares [Meaning, it was accidental and not intended at all.] may flee thither. And if he smite him with an instrument of iron, so that he die . . .

Here is a contrast between an accidental killing, that which we will call manslaughter, as opposed to premeditated murder:

And if he smite him with an instrument of iron, so that he die, he is a murderer: the murderer shall surely be put to death. And if he smite him with throwing a stone, wherewith he may die, and he die, he is a murderer: the murderer shall surely be put to death. Or if he smite him with an hand weapon of wood, wherewith he may die, and he die, he is a murderer: the murderer shall surely be put to death.

Through the inspiration of His Holy Spirit, God recorded this statute so that there would be no misunderstanding. He says premeditated murder automatically incurs the loss of life upon the offending party, no matter what weapon was used. It was the intent of the heart to take the life of another which made him guilty, and then forfeited his own life as a penalty.

The revenger of blood himself [the injured party—a close family member whose loved one was murdered at the hands of the offending party] shall slay the murderer . . .

How would this go over in our society today? Can you just imagine the debates from the liberal-minded individuals if capital punishment were instituted for all murder? In this country, we only have capital punishment—a death sentence—in certain states and for certain, very heinous murders. Everyone debates about the applicability and the value of the death penalty. Many say, "It doesn't work. Why do we have a death penalty when it doesn't deter crime?" Because human beings will not enforce the law as God intended it to be enforced. If they applied the very laws that are written here in the Old Testament, I can guarantee you there would be a deterrent for murder. If all murderers were executed for their crimes—not just those crimes that were deemed to be of an especially heinous nature—I guarantee you that would be a deterrent; but human beings can never come into compliance with God's will. He is the one who created us. He is the one who made the very hearts and minds that we possess—this carnality—and He is the one who knows best how to create a physical system of government to deter us from acting upon those natural impulses. I guarantee you, if all murderers were killed, you would have a lot less crime today.

Actually, according to God's law, murder was not the only capital crime. We will get to that in a moment. Here, we are still making the distinction between murder—the intent of the heart in a premeditated fashion—and accidental death or manslaughter.

And if he smite him with throwing a stone, wherewith he may die, and he die, he is a murderer: the murderer shall surely be put to death. Or if he smite him with an hand weapon of wood, wherewith he may die, and he die, he is a murderer: the murderer shall surely be put to death. The revenger of blood himself shall slay the murderer: when he meeteth him, he shall slay him.

God even provided the opportunity for the injured family members to actually act upon the sentence—to be the executioner.

But if he thrust him of hatred, or hurl at him by laying of wait, that he die; Or in enmity smite him with his hand, that he die: he that smote him shall surely be put to death; for he is a murderer [God is defining what murder is, and He is distinguishing it from the classification of that which we call manslaughter.]: the revenger of blood shall slay the murderer, when he meeteth him. But if he thrust him suddenly without enmity [It was not premeditated. He did not intend to kill; but he was negligent, and the result was the death of a human being.], or have cast upon him any thing without laying of wait, Or with any stone, wherewith a man may die, seeing him not, and cast it upon him . . .

He was careless. He cast a stone or took some action that was foolish, careless and certainly unwise, and it caused a death; and yet, it was not an intentional killing.

Then the congregation shall judge between the slayer and the revenger of blood [What is the basis for that judgment?] according to these judgments . . .

Even according to the very statute that we have been reading and which God gave to distinguish between murder and manslaughter. The congregation of Israel was to make a judgment of the facts and determine whether the offending party was guilty of an unintentional, careless act of killing or whether that party was actually guilty of murder.

And the congregation shall deliver the slayer out of the hand of the revenger of blood, and the congregation shall restore him to the city of his refuge, whither he was fled: and he shall abide in it unto the death of the high priest, which was anointed with the holy oil.

Manslaughter, an accidental killing, was still a very serious crime because the result, though unintentional, was the foolish loss of life. God wanted to make the point—and did so within His laws for Israel—of how serious manslaughter was. No, it didn't deserve the death penalty as God determined, but the individual had to live within one of those six cities that were set apart as cities of refuge within the borders of Israel. They had to stay there until the death of the High Priest. If you had a relatively young priest, that could be a life sentence, couldn't it? It certainly could. What happened if that individual left the city? Let's read further.

But if the slayer shall at any time come without the border of the city of his refuge, whither he was fled; And the revenger of blood find him without the borders of the city of his refuge, and the revenger of blood kill the slayer; he shall not be guilty of blood . . .

Interesting, isn't it? As long as that party who was guilty of manslaughter stayed within the city of refuge, God protected him. If he got out of that city of refuge, the family member of the killed party had the right under God's system to take revenge. We are going to see a whole different orientation in the administration for the Church after Christ instituted the New Covenant. Yet, the philosophy stands here that, in the ultimate wisdom of God, He still provided a serious penalty for manslaughter in order to make sure that human beings, and those of Israel, were very aware of the serious price of being foolish and accidentally taking life.

If there had been no penalty, then you would have had a nation that was totally careless in every way, with no regard whatsoever for other people, and perhaps there would have been a lot more accidental deaths. Having a serious penalty, even if it wasn't a death penalty, provided the means for a deterrent in order to cause everyone in that nation to be very careful to make sure that they didn't cause that infraction. If we had that kind of a wise system in this country, you would have many fewer deaths caused by DUI's (driving under the influence); people behind the wheel driving recklessly, intoxicated or in some way impaired; and many other deaths that occur unintentionally, in a foolish nature, because of a lack of wisdom. If there were a severe penalty, even if it wasn't death, and it was acted upon every single time without exception, I guarantee you it would act as a deterrent. God in His wisdom made a distinction between murder and manslaughter, and provided a death penalty for the murderer and a very severe penalty for one who foolishly caused the death of someone else.

Killing was only authorized in order to carry out capital punishment. That is what you find in God's law. Remember, I told you that God is a killer. He obviously instituted laws that required killing. Any time that God Himself kills (and we will see instances of that) or authorizes and instructs killing, it is to carry out a sentence of capital punishment upon somebody who has incurred the death penalty. God is not an indiscriminate killer. This is the God of love, the God of mercy and longsuffering. He is the perfect personification of righteousness; and so when God kills, it is not a violation of that love.

Deuteronomy 32:3–4:

Because I will publish the name of the [Eternal]: ascribe ye greatness unto our God. He is the Rock, his work is perfect: for all his ways are judgment: a God of truth and without iniquity [What is iniquity? The breaking of the law.], just and right is he.

These liberal-minded human beings in our society do not accept this whatsoever. No, they see the hard, unfeeling, unyielding, unmerciful God—as they determine it—who authorized the slaughter of human beings, in some cases on a wholesale basis. If we believe the truth about the nature of that Creator God who made us all, then we must accept the fact that He is perfect; and His state of perfection involves perfect righteousness. There is no sin in Him. There is no hatred or wrong spirit in our Creator. ". . . a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is he."

Psalm 119:171–172:

My lips shall utter praise, when thou hast taught me thy statutes. My tongue shall speak of thy word: for all thy commandments are righteousness.

So said the psalmist. What commandments and statutes are included in that, brethren? The very ones we read concerning the proper way to handle murder and manslaughter. It is a part of God's perfect and righteous law—equitable and just. Let's notice an example of God personally carrying out such a sentence. As I mentioned, God kills in order to enforce a penalty—a death sentence—upon somebody who is guilty of a capital crime. It is not an infraction of His law for Him to take life. He is the one who made us all. God can do whatever He wants, and no

one can question or challenge Him; and yet, God is a perfect, loving and merciful God. So, when He kills, it is still totally consistent with the principles of love. As totally contradictory as that will sound to human minds, that is absolutely true, brethren.

Genesis 38:6–7:

And Judah took a wife for Er his firstborn, whose name was Tamar. And Er, Judah's firstborn, was wicked in the sight of the [Eternal] [In fact, so wicked that he was guilty of that which was considered a capital crime and worthy of incurring the death sentence. Why? Read what follows.]; and the [Eternal] slew him.

It doesn't tell us how and in what way He took His life, but this firstborn of Judah was guilty of that which was so heinous in God's eyes, that he had forfeited the right to live; and God Himself was the executioner and took his life. Remember, I told you that God is a killer. God is a killer; He killed Er. No question about it. We won't continue to read, but if you read further on, you will find that the second born of Judah, Onan, also forfeited his life at the hand of God for something that God considered him equally guilty of—and it wasn't murder, but it was a capital crime in the eyes of God.

It is interesting, brethren, and it made me stop and think: this is the ancestor through whom Jesus Christ was born. Christ came out of the very lineage of Judah. What is the natural nature of those human beings that God called out of this world and separated as His holy nation, the nation of Israel? The first-born and second-born sons of Judah were so corrupt in their orientation that God personally slew them. Yet, out of that family and the ancestors who came down generation after generation, this very God became flesh and blood and was born into that same physical human family. Doesn't that give you pause? Think about the significance of that which God is really working out. He knows exactly what we are by nature, and He even selected a family that had, by natural consequence, serious character flaws; and yet, He actually became part of the physical lineage of that very family—that very branch of Israel. The lineage of Judah, then, had to be continued on through the third son, not the first two. Very fascinating.

Exodus 13:15:

"And it came to pass, when Pharaoh would hardly let us go, that the [Eternal] slew all the firstborn in the land of Egypt . . ." Here is an example of not just a single killing—passing a sentence upon one man—but here we have God Himself directly, through the act of His agent the death angel, slaying all of the firstborn.

. . . slew all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both the firstborn of man,
and the firstborn of beast . . .

God executed all of the firstborn in the land of Egypt. He carried out the sentence for capital punishment. They were guilty. If this is a righteous God, if He is a God of perfect justice and love, as we have already read, then the killing that God does is authorized. It is not inconsistent with His character or His makeup whatsoever. If that is true, it means that those human beings whom God has killed were worthy of death.

Any of these liberal-minded individuals who reject the whole idea of a death penalty at all—that no human being is worthy of death—will automatically reject the God who made them. It is God who set the criteria for when death is absolutely appropriate and just. God executes righteous judgment upon the guilty. God enforces capital punishment; therefore, the proper enforcement of capital punishment is not sin. It is the actual fulfillment of His very perfect law—the commandments, statutes and judgments of our Creator.

As I mentioned before, capital punishment applies to more than just murder. We have a problem in this country debating its applicability for murder, let alone debating the applicability of a death sentence for things other than murder. Can you see it? What if there were a discussion about capital punishment for rape or stealing, in certain instances, or other things? You would be laughed to scorn, wouldn't you?

Let's notice Exodus 21:15–17. What about making disobedience to parents a capital crime? "And he that smiteth his father, or his mother, shall be surely put to death." You won't ever see that in our systems of government on this earth, will you? It is part of the perfect wisdom of God. The commandment concerning respect for parents is very important in the eyes of God. It was a capital crime to show disobedience to parents.

And he that smiteth his father, or his mother, shall be surely put to death.
And he that stealeth a man, and selleth him, or if he be found in his hand, he shall surely be put to death.

That is the one category of stealing that had a capital punishment. Stealing other things, monetary things or physical possessions, did not carry a death penalty; but stealing human beings—kidnapping—was a capital crime. How quickly would all of these kidnappings cease if the penalty for being caught was forfeiture of life?

And he that curseth his father, or his mother [even if you don't lay a hand on them], shall surely be put to death.

That was quite the serious penalty.

Exodus 31:14–15—this is the one that would cause human beings to laugh you to scorn more than any other, but it is part of the very perfect law of God.

Ye shall keep the sabbath therefore; for it is holy unto you: every one that defileth it shall surely be put to death: for whosoever doeth any work therein, that soul shall be cut off from among his people. Six days may work be done; but in the seventh is the sabbath of rest, holy to the [Eternal]: whosoever doeth any work in the sabbath day, he shall surely be put to death.

How much of a chance do you think is possible, in the kingdoms of men, that breaking the Sabbath would ever be a capital crime? You can't even get human beings to acknowledge the Sabbath, let alone consider it important enough that it would incur a capital punishment and the forfeiture of life for breaking it. That is how serious God considers the keeping of His Sabbath.

In this respect, brethren, of all that we have covered in these commandments concerning capital crime, we see that God executes judgment upon the guilty; and He kills, and authorizes the killing of, those who are guilty of such crimes. So, killing, in and of itself, is not what is contained in the commandment we read in Exodus 20. It is not appropriately translated, "Thou shalt not kill." It should be, "Thou shalt not murder." You shall not, on a premeditated basis, take the life of another human being.

It goes beyond that, because there is not a physical nation today that has been given the civil authority at the hand of God in order to carry out capital punishment—not like ancient Israel. God has given the governments of this earth the authorization to enforce laws that comply with the laws of God and to execute those capital criminals. We will see that in the next sermon. But today, we do not have a

physical nation established with a civil government under God. We have the Church, which is the Body of Christ, but we all live within the confines of physical human governments who impose their own wills, laws and statutes upon us. We are obligated to live in those societies and under that law as long as it does not violate the very immutable laws of God. We are not dealing with governors, mayors, police and law enforcement organizations, and judges who have any respect for God's law. So, even though they do execute judgment, it is certainly not according to the perfect wisdom of our Creator.

We certainly have demonstrated that God Himself does kill. God, my dear brethren, is a warrior. He is a warrior. We are talking, remember, about this subject of war and military service; but before we get into the specifics in the next sermon, I want to lay the groundwork to demonstrate that killing and war, in and of themselves, are not inherently wrong. They are only wrong when they are used, approved and executed without the authority of the Creator. Then, the question becomes, "Well, under what circumstances does God authorize killing and war? Has He been the author of any of the wars that we have seen extant upon the face of the earth?" But, I don't want to get ahead of myself. First, as a foundational principle, we want to demonstrate now that God is a warrior.

Let's notice 1 Samuel 15:2. This is a story you are familiar with. The Amalekites were guilty of a serious crime in the eyes of God because when Israel was in a vulnerable state, soon after leaving Egypt, the Amalekites actually attacked them from behind. They did their level best to destroy them. God remembered this and pronounced a curse upon the Amalekites—that they would forfeit their lives. The entire nation would be wiped out according to the righteous judgment of God. Here, we see the actual fulfillment of that prophecy.

1 Samuel 15:2–3:

Thus saith the Lord of hosts, I remember that which Amalek did to Israel, how he laid wait for him in the way, when he came up from Egypt. Now go and smite Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have, and spare them not; but slay both man and woman, infant and suckling, ox and sheep, camel and ass.

That is the perfect, loving Creator God; and yet, He declared war on the Amalekites. Here is an example to show you that God was not using any kind of rules

of the Geneva Convention—limited warfare only against other armed forces, but protecting women and children, and all of these kind of things. No, here is an example of the ultimate war—not sparing anything, nothing, no one, not even a little child, not even a tiny, infant baby. Of course, this is the text used by those who want to ridicule the Bible, Christianity, and any form of respect for the Old Testament and the Ten Commandments. They will turn to these very passages in order to show that they could never serve such a cold-hearted God who would wipe out an entire nation, including women and children. However, if you know that God, if He has called you and given you His truth and His understanding, then you recognize absolutely that these Amalekites were guilty. They, as a nation, had brought upon themselves the death penalty by heinous crimes against the very perfect laws of God, and God has a right to execute judgment upon any human being.

. . . go and smite Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have, and spare them not; but slay both man and woman, infant and suckling, ox and sheep, camel and ass.

He is a warrior, and in appropriate times according to His perfect wisdom, God acts as a warrior to kill and to slaughter. What about Jesus Christ? People love to make a distinction between that old, hard God of the Old Testament and the loving, merciful, longsuffering Christ. What are the prophecies in the Old Testament about what Jesus Christ would do?

Isaiah 66:15—this is a prophecy for the return of Christ when He will take possession of His Kingdom. What does it say that this very Being, this eternal Being of great and awesome power, will be doing?

Isaiah 66:15:

"For, behold, the [Eternal] will come with fire, and with his chariots . . ." What are chariots? Are they not implements of war? They are war machines. We are talking about Jesus Christ as a great warrior who is coming to do battle.

For, behold, the [Eternal] will come with fire, and with his chariots like a whirlwind, to render his anger with fury, and his rebuke with flames of fire. For by fire and by his sword [an implement of war—an offensive weapon for killing] will the [Eternal] plead with all flesh: and the slain of the [Eternal] shall be many.

Who is the author of killing and war in this particular war that is prophesied to occur? It is none other than the very God whom we serve and with whom we seek to live in eternity forever and ever. Is He a hardhearted, calculating, evil God without mercy? No. This is a God of perfect love, mercy and longsuffering; and yet, He is a warrior who executes judgment upon the guilty. The thing is, brethren, human beings are going to have to come to understand that breaking God's law does render a death penalty. There is a capital penalty for committing heinous sins against God's perfect law, and He has the perfect right—the obligation—to uphold those laws by executing the penalty.

The one thing I think I have mentioned to you in times past, brethren, is that there is no effective law unless there is a penalty for breaking that law. As parents, you probably understand that better than anyone else because you know what it is like to make a requirement of your children and then not be willing to back it up. You say, "Little Johnny or little Suzie, don't do this or don't do that. Don't touch the stove. Don't touch the vase on the table." However, when they rebel and break the law that you set down, if you don't enforce a penalty, what are they going to do? The little child, because he or she is very smart, is going to find out that it is not really a rule if there is never any penalty for breaking it. Isn't that true? You can say and talk all you want, but if they always get away with it and there is no loss—no penalty that comes as a result of the infraction—then it was never really a rule to begin with. It was just words.

The same thing applies to the laws of God. There really is no law of God if there is not a penalty for breaking the law. Isn't that true? When God says that murder, kidnapping, disrespect for parents, and breaking the Sabbath are so heinous that He wants to impress them upon the minds of men, that they are worthy of a death sentence, you can be sure that God is going to carry out those penalties. If He doesn't, then He is lying. He is telling you that there is a penalty, but if He doesn't act upon it, then He is proving that it is not really a law at all. He is just blowing smoke at us. I guarantee you, brethren, that God does not blow smoke at any of us. You can bet His word is Truth. When Christ returns in power and glory to take possession of His Kingdom, He is going to kill as a warrior. However, He will be killing to execute capital punishment upon those who have absolutely brought it upon themselves in total disrespect and rebellion against His perfect ways.

Ezekiel 9:3—this is another prophecy that applied historically to Jerusalem and will apply yet into the future at a time of great tribulation which is coming upon God's own people.

Ezekiel 9:3–10:

And the glory of the God of Israel was gone up from the cherub, whereupon he was, to the threshold of the house. And he called to the man clothed with linen, which had the writer's inkhorn by his side; And the [Eternal] said unto him, Go through the midst of the city, through the midst of Jerusalem . . .

We are not even talking about heathen nations; we are talking about God's handling of His own chosen people for their infraction of His law.

And the [Eternal] said unto him, Go through the midst of the city, through the midst of Jerusalem, and set a mark upon the foreheads of the men that sigh and that cry for all the abominations that be done in the midst thereof.

He is saying, "Mark specifically those who are not guilty." They are fewer in number. He said, "Mark those who are not taken over by this spirit of rebellion and deception, those who actually love my law and who groan at all that they see going on around them in the city of my people. Mark them and set them aside"—just as God set aside Israel in Goshen from the plague of the death angel as He killed the firstborn. Here, He is setting a mark upon those who have not partaken of the heinous crimes that the rest of the nation became guilty of.

And to the others [those without the mark] he said in mine hearing, Go ye after him through the city, and smite: let not your eye spare, neither have ye pity: Slay utterly old and young, both maids, and little children, and women: but come not near any man upon whom is the mark; and begin at my sanctuary . . .

He is saying even to start at the very house of God, where they make a pretense of worshipping at the temple—all those who, as hypocrites, use the name of God, and yet absolutely defy Him in their behaviors and the fruits of their lives. Start, He said, even with the ones who use the name of Christ and God and claim to be His servants and representatives. That is where the slaughter was going to begin—with those who had carried the nation into the deception of paganism.

. . . Then they began at the ancient men which were before the house. And he said unto them, Defile the house, and fill the courts with the slain: go ye

forth. And they went forth, and slew in the city. And it came to pass, while they were slaying them, and I was left, that I fell upon my face, and cried, and said, Ah Lord God! wilt thou destroy all the residue of Israel in thy pouring out of thy fury upon Jerusalem? Then said he unto me, The iniquity of the house of Israel and Judah is exceeding great . . .

God wasn't just killing indiscriminately. He didn't command the slaughter of His own people because He was a hard, ruthless, calloused God. No, they were incurring the death penalty for their own serious infractions of the perfect law.

. . . The iniquity of the house of Israel and Judah is exceeding great, and the land is full of blood, and the city full of perverseness: for they say, The [Eternal] hath forsaken the earth, and the [Eternal] seeth not.

That is the very same thing that people are saying today, brethren. Where is God? We don't believe in any kind of a God; we believe in the power of our own minds in order to make our way and to create a utopian society in the future. We are going to figure it out for ourselves using our own wisdom. We don't need God. We don't need hard-hearted rules like capital punishment—the taking of life. No, we are more merciful and loving. We are going to create a society that is so much better, peaceful and unified in every way. In their deception, they are going to bring upon themselves the wrath of their Creator God whom they have rejected.

. . . The [Eternal] hath forsaken the earth, and the [Eternal] seeth not. And as for me also, mine eye shall not spare, neither will I have pity, but I will recompense their way upon their head.

God is a warrior and He executes judgment as a warrior in battle, but it is a righteous fulfillment of the law—the perfect law of love—to execute judgment upon those who have broken the law. ". . . I will recompense their way upon their head." It wasn't God's fault. It was the fault of those who disobeyed and rejected their Creator.

What about Revelation 19:11? Let's notice this very descriptive passage concerning the return of Christ as King of Kings and Lord of Lords who will come with the very capacity and authority of a great warrior.

Revelation 19:11–21:

And I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse; and he that sat upon him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he doth judge and make war.

Human beings will tell you that those concepts do not go together. You cannot have righteousness, judgment and war at the same time; but according to our perfect God, we know that He can. ". . . he doth judge and make war." That is what Christ is going to do when He comes back; He is going to be making war. So, war, in and of itself, is not sin, is it? Otherwise, Christ would be guilty of sin; and yet, He is perfect. He qualified as our Savior.

His eyes were as a flame of fire, and on his head were many crowns; and he had a name written, that no man knew, but he himself. And he was clothed with a vesture dipped in blood: and his name is called The Word of God. And the armies which were in heaven followed him upon white horses . . .

Is He a warrior? You better believe He is. He is a great general at the head of the most powerful army that will ever be known.

. . . clothed in fine linen, white and clean. And out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword [that offensive weapon whose sole purpose is to kill], that with it he should smite the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron: and he treadeth the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God. And he hath on his vesture and on his thigh a name written, KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS. And I saw an angel standing in the sun; and he cried with a loud voice, saying to all the fowls that fly in the midst of heaven, Come and gather yourselves together unto the supper of the great God; That ye may eat the flesh of kings, and the flesh of captains, and the flesh of mighty men, and the flesh of horses, and of them that sit on them, and the flesh of all men, both free and bond, both small and great.

This is the loving, merciful "Jesus" that all of these Protestant religions like to quote. This is the Christ that they view as a weak, wimpy personality who is just full of oozing love—as they define love—and who, by their description and portrayal of Him, wouldn't have a strong bone in His body. Yet, here is that Christ, whose name they use, who is absolutely going to be the author of an incredible slaughter in that final

battle of Armageddon before He takes possession of His Kingdom. They don't even begin to know Him, do they? Not unless they know everything that is a part of His character.

And I saw the beast, and the kings of the earth, and their armies, gathered together to make war against him that sat on the horse, and against his army. [Are we talking about a great war, a great battle? You better believe it.] And the beast was taken, and with him the false prophet that wrought miracles before him, with which he deceived them that had received the mark of the beast, and them that worshipped his image. These both were cast alive into a lake of fire burning with brimstone.

Yes, they are going to pay the penalty for their sins and infractions of God's law. It is going to be capital punishment.

And the remnant were slain with the sword of him that sat upon the horse, which sword proceeded out of his mouth: and all the fowls were filled with their flesh.

The greatest slaughter that will ever be manifested upon the face of this earth is that which Christ will conduct Himself as a general in returning to take possession of His Kingdom. He is a warrior. Yes, He is. The big question, though, is who authorizes war? When is war justified and who can deem it as such? Just because the country of our citizenship initiates a war against another nation on the face of this earth, does that mean that it carries God's approval? That is the big question. Obviously, by the definition in our fundamental of belief number fifteen that Mr. Armstrong originally wrote, we don't believe that the wars initiated by men of any country, including our own, have the approval of God.

Romans 12:17–19:

Recompense to no man evil for evil. Provide things honest in the sight of all men. If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men. Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the [Eternal].

What is it that Paul recorded under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit? Yes, there is an appropriate time for vengeance. There is an appropriate time to enforce the penalty

for capital crime, but what we have been told as Christians is that we are not the ones who unilaterally determine to execute God's judgment upon other human beings. That authority has not been given to us in the same way that He gave it to the civil government in the nation of Israel under Moses. No such authority has been given in a civil form to the Church. We are a spiritual nation, a holy nation—the very Body of Christ. He has reserved to Himself the prerogative to execute judgment upon those who have broken His priceless laws, and the time for that judgment is not now. It will be at the time that Jesus Christ determines. We have already read the way that He will fulfill the sentencing of those who have been lawbreakers.

". . . Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord." Paul is quoting something directly out of the Old Testament. Let's go back and find that. It is actually quoted from Deuteronomy 32:35. Let's notice this whole passage that Paul was quoting from.

Deuteronomy 32:35–43:

"To me belongeth vengeance . . ." See, God reserved it for Himself. He said, "No man can assume it or take it unto himself to be my agent—the executioner of my will—when I have not called him and when I have not deemed it appropriate." No, God reserves that office as judge and executioner for Himself.

To me belongeth vengeance and recompence; their foot shall slide in due time: for the day of their calamity is at hand . . .

He is saying not to fret about the evil doings of people around you; their just desserts are going to come. But don't think that you have the authority now to step in, in the name of God, and act.

. . . for the day of their calamity is at hand, and the things that shall come upon them make haste. For the [Eternal] shall judge his people, and repent himself for his servants, when he seeth that their power is gone, and there is none shut up, or left. And he shall say, Where are their gods, their rock in whom they trusted, Which did eat the fat of their sacrifices, and drank the wine of their drink offerings? let them rise up and help you, and be your protection.

Yes, men concoct all forms of ideologies and principles of their own making which they hold up as idols in their own minds. They think those principles are going

to stand in time of trial. God says, "Go ahead, put your trust in your own thoughts and those things that you think are right, moral and ethical. Go ahead and conduct your lives in the way that you have figured out for yourselves and see if you are blessed by it. You are going to pay the penalty." God's immutable laws govern every human being on the face of this earth whether we recognize Him and admit it, or not. We can deny all we want that the law exists, but we are still going to pay the penalty for its infraction. I have used the example many times of the law of gravity. One of us, in our own wisdom, can figure out some concoction to prove the fact that we do not think we are subject to the law of gravity anymore. You can have volumes and volumes of writing to demonstrate theoretically why it is true; but jump off the cliff, and you are still going to pay the penalty for ignoring the law. The law exists.

Human beings can rationalize it all they want, but we are absolutely subject to an immutable set of laws that God has used to govern humanity. Some of them are automatic and some of them are part of the judgment that He will bring upon mankind as a penalty for their rebellion.

And he shall say, Where are their gods, their rock in whom they trusted, Which did eat the fat of their sacrifices, and drank the wine of their drink offerings? let them rise up and help you, and be your protection. [That is when those ideologies are going to fall to the ground as dust.] See now that I, even I, am he, and there is no god with me . . .

God is saying, "I am the ultimate authority in heaven and earth. There is no God for me. I am that God—the ultimate authority."

". . . I kill, and I make alive . . ." Remember, I told you God is a killer. According to His righteous judgment, He does kill—not indiscriminately, but in order to enforce capital punishment.

. . . I kill, and I make alive; I wound, and I heal: neither is there any that can deliver out of my hand. [No, there is no human being who will ever escape the reach of God's laws, commandments, and the judgment and penalties for sin.] For I lift up my hand to heaven, and say, I live for ever. If I whet my glittering sword, and mine hand take hold on judgment; I will render vengeance to mine enemies, and will reward them that hate me. I will make mine arrows drunk with blood, and my sword shall devour flesh; and that with the blood of the slain and of the captives, from the beginning

of revenges upon the enemy. Rejoice, O ye nations, with his people: for he will avenge the blood of his servants, and will render vengeance to his adversaries, and will be merciful unto his land, and to his people.

That is what Paul was saying. For Christians, you see, we act in faith. We know that, regardless of the circumstances in which we are living now, there is a great God who sees all and knows all, and He is a righteous judge. There will be no human being who escapes that judgment. The penalties for sin will be executed upon those who will refuse to repent and turn from their corruption; and yes, God will execute upon humankind absolute judgment and the penalty for capital sin.

God cannot be questioned or judged of man, brethren. We cannot sit in judgment of that perfect God. His ways are higher than any of our ways; His knowledge and wisdom are above our greatest wisdom. We cannot even begin to comprehend the scope of His wisdom and understanding. All we can do is accept at face value that capital punishment—killing—according to His righteous judgment is not sin; that making war according to His perfect plan is not wrong. The question becomes, though, are the wars that governments of human beings declare against one another authorized by God, which would allow our participation as Christians?

We are going to have to answer all of those questions in the next segment of this sermon. Today, I am just setting the stage in order to verify that there is an appropriate time for killing. There is an appropriate time for war, but it is according to God's determination.

Romans 9:14–23:

What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? [Is He really a hard, calloused, cruel God of the Old Testament?] God forbid. For he saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy. For the scripture saith unto Pharaoh, Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might shew my power in thee, and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth. Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth. Thou wilt say then unto me, Why doth he yet find fault? For who hath resisted his will?

He is saying, if Pharaoh did exactly what God knew he was going to do and intended for him to do, then how can God find any fault with Pharaoh or execute a judgment or a death penalty upon Pharaoh?

Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus? Hath not the potter power over the clay . . .

Cannot God do what He wills to do? He made us all; we are His possessions. He is not mandated to be a loving and merciful God, even though that is exactly what His perfect character is. If He weren't, it would be His prerogative and His authority to do with us anything He wanted; but we are thankful that God is the perfect personification of love, longsuffering and mercy, because what would our lives be like if He had created us with an evil intent?

Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour? What if God, willing to shew his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction: And that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory . . .

The overall purpose of that Being is to glorify those that begin as human beings and grant them the incredible blessing of living for eternity with power and glory in His eternal family. That, you see, is the magnanimous, loving Father who is working all things through His Son Jesus Christ for that glorious end. Because human beings can't see that master plan in perspective—they can only see little pieces of the fruits of activities that occur—they take exception with God. They don't understand how it all fits together in this wonderful mosaic that we have been revealed as the Church of the last days.

He is a perfect God, and part of that perfection is carrying out sentences for the infractions of His laws. Those sentences include capital punishment and making war according to His perfect will. So, the killing that God does is according to His perfect plan, which is righteous and perfect in every way. Man, however, has no such right to declare wars of his own will or to kill, apart from that which God has approved.

Next time, we will get into the cause of man's wars and the very specific technical reasons why we, as Christians, do not participate in any way in the endeavors of war and military service in man's governments.