

**January 18, 1848**

**To Brother Hodel in Ehrstaedten (Baden)**

**by Samuel H. Froehlich**

Concerning war service, I first of all wish to say that I ten to twelve years ago was strongly inclined to the side or opinion of the brothers in Canton Bern, who by a law in the church forbid, with expulsion, war service to all whom it concerned. However, since then I have reverted from this severity and hold that we are not permitted to make a law if God does not make one. He is the only Lawgiver (Jas.4:12), and consequently we may not punish. A divine command and an inhibition concerning it I do not find in the Scripture, neither in the Old or in the New Testament, but the passages which I believed I can or should refer to in the matter are such that perhaps permit of application only, for example, II Corinthians 10;3. All that I find in the New Testament is that the Lord Jesus for His cause, for His spiritual kingdom, for the defense of the faith would not have it that we lay hold of carnal weapons.

But therewith is war service in itself not done away with, which will have its continuance and use of force as long as the present form of this world stands, for the time of which is prophesied that no nation will learn war any more and in which swords will be beaten into plowshares, still lies ahead in the Millenium Sabbath of the people of God, when the rest of the nations will be converted to the Lord and will bow under His scepter of peace.

In the Old Testament, war service for the people of God was like a divine service and David carried on many wars for the Lord and nevertheless was a man after the heart of God and the Lord was with Him. Only he was not permitted to build the temple because he had shed so much blood, the work having been reserved for the man of peace, Solomon.

In the New Testament, we find war people who also were more concerned about the salvation of their souls and, what is more, were outstanding believers and blessed children of God, and of whom I do not find that either John the Baptist or Jesus Himself, or His apostles gave them a command that if they become converted they would have to give up their rank. To me, the chief question is simply this: Is war service itself such a work that excludes men from the kingdom of God and robs them of their eternal salvation? I believe that if it were so, God would have not left us in uncertainty concerning it, but would have given us a definite command to warn everyone. For the commandment, Thou shalt not kill, cannot possibly apply or refer to war service, but only to high-handed, perfidious killing out of hatred in peace times. Thus, for example, did Joab kill many people in war, but only his treacherous assassination of Abner and Amasa was accounted to him as sin.

But even if I should be forced to bear arms, it would still lie with me whether I wanted to kill men, and the oath least of all would I swear, and if I had to suffer on that account it then were for conscience' sake to God. Even though I at heart would not like to make law against war service, it nevertheless as a matter of conscience is left to each brother's

option as to whether he would not accept such service and is willing to suffer on that account. In this he is a law unto himself and should do according to his conscience before God and not against his conscience. But if a brother should say: I have no conscience concerning it, then should I not make him a conscience.

What belongs to war service, to me, is far not synonymous with churchly acts such as infant baptism and the like, but is a physical service which the authorities demand inasmuch as we are subjects of the worldly authorities. I would consider it a civic duty and not like a churchly idolatry and defilement of the Spirit, but which one banishes himself from God. Now, if I can agree to expulsion of such who defile themselves with churchly acts because the word of God distinctly decrees concerning it, I nevertheless would not agree to expulsion on account of war service because I find no decision and decree in the word of God on it and also because I do not believe that God excludes those in it from His kingdom or He might not have revealed Himself to them in such a glorious way and even if the first converted believer from the heathen (in Acts 10:7) were of the order of war people. I will say no kind word in favor of war service, but I would like to consider the matter in the right light, so that at all events no schism exist in the churches.

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