

Love Thine Enemy (Are Believers Commanded to be Pacifists)

Introduction

Let me start by asking the question, should a believer enlist in the armed forces? There are those who would say that it is against YHWH's ethics but the first census of Israel instructed by YHWH in Numbers chapter 1 was based on military service. But what about the sixth Commandment you might ask? Well, the Tanakh (Old Testament) evidences the author Himself repeatedly endorsing warfare, starting with the conquest of Jericho described in Joshua chapter 6. What is described in verse 21 we would call ethnic cleansing today still, verse 27 says YHWH was with Joshua. YHWH deliberately chose warfare as the method for removing the inhabitants of the Land, He didn't have to. He could have removed them by any number of ways, natural or supernatural. But the reason, is in the historical records themselves. The details of Israel's victories against the inhabitants of the Land are decorated with YHWH's miracles. Has any nation ever gone to war and not lost a single warrior? According to the accounts Israel did. YHWH used wars to reveal His divine power and to direct Israel to trust in Him. Israel were to understand that their victories were by divine intervention and not their own power. So, we come back to the question of enlistment. It comes down to defending righteousness as we will see later. If the war is to repel an invading neighbour intent on territorial conquest, then the war could be justified under the ninth Commandment: not to covet your neighbour's possessions. What is more Mashiach never commented negatively on soldiers with whom he came in contact,

And tax collectors also came to be immersed, and said to him, "Teacher, what shall we do?" And he said to them, "Collect no more than what is appointed for you." And soldiers also asked him, saying, "And what shall we do?" And he said to them, "Do not intimidate anyone or accuse falsely, and be satisfied with your pay." (Matt3:12-14).

When the Roman officer came before Mashiach pleading for help because his orderly was lying paralysed, Mashiach did not chastise him for being a soldier in the Roman army, instead He commended him for his faith. It is the same for all law enforcement officers, they are in a position of unique responsibility (life or death responsibility) and should follow righteous principles when exercising their duty, such people are not at liberty to unlawfully take a life, their position does not exempt them from a charge of murder.

Another issue is YHWH explicitly instructing the murder of certain people; Exod.21:12-29 for example and the ruling of 'an eye for an eye and tooth for a tooth.' It all seems very confusing but YHWH is not an Elohim of confusion, so we need to put everything into a context aligning with an Elohim who we are told is a 'prince of peace' (Isa.9:5) and we can start with Genesis.

A Perfect/Peaceful Creation

All violence is the result of a fallen creation. At the end of each creation day we are told that YHWH looked down on all He had created and saw that it was good. Knowing that YHWH is the personification of perfection, what He produced was a perfect creation. He intended for there to be no bloodletting, human or animal. Enoch tells us it was the fallen messengers who taught man warfare, such knowledge was never YHWH's intention. The first man was to be a vegetarian and when YHWH, via His wrath, restores His creation to the beginning, the cow and bear, wolf and lamb will live together (Isa.11:7, 65:25). All will return to a wholly peaceful and harmonious creation as at the beginning.

Did Sin Change YHWH's Character?

This is a superfluous question because YHWH is the same yesterday, today and tomorrow (Mal.3:6, Heb.13:8). YHWH may be a prince of peace but He does not advocate peace at any cost. An adversary with spiritual power and a strong following has arisen, an adversary who, right at the beginning, introduced sin

thereby destroying the perfect creation. Sin is like a cancer, it is a destroyer that feeds on itself and the only solution is to remove it. The apostle tells us that the sting of death is sin, every sinner will suffer spiritual death but YHWH as creator has the right to subject sinners to physical death if He so desires. Death is the result of sin and if we can agree, YHWH does not want sin, we can agree YHWH does not want death. Thus, we must conclude YHWH's character has never changed. What is more, to save mankind and negate the effect of the adversary's interference, YHWH provided mankind a route from the path of sin – His Torah. This itself is confirmation that YHWH's character is one of life not death.

"For I have no pleasure in the death of one who dies," declares YHWH, "So turn yourselves back (from unrighteousness) and live." (Ezek.18:32).

YHWH never desired death within His creation but the only way to remove the pollution of sin is through death and on occasion it requires a physical death. But YHWH only ever instructs or allows killing to restore/maintain righteousness and this is an important principle. A good example of this point is the record telling how Pinehas speared the Israelite woman and the Midianite leader at Pe'or and by so doing stopped the plague against Israel. YHWH rewarded him with a covenant of peace and awarded him the priesthood everlasting. (Num.25:1-18).

It was in the interest of righteousness that YHWH instructed the Israelites to exterminate the original inhabitants of the Land (Jos.6:21,8:2,26-27). These people lived polluted/corrupted lifestyles (Lev.20:10-24). What is more, YHWH's esteem had spread throughout the land (Jos.2:9-10, 9:24) but these people rebelled against Him and chose instead to worship idols. Let us not forget it is in the cause of righteousness that Mashiach returns as a warring king.

Do Not Kill or Do Not Murder – Which Is It?

What does the sixth Commandment instruct: not to kill or not to murder? Whilst the result may be the same, the two terms kill and murder are not synonymous and insofar as YHWH is concerned the difference between the two is considerable, kill means:

- Taking any life -- whether of a human being or an animal.
- Taking a human life deliberately or by accident.
- Taking a human life legally or morally.

Whereas YHWH considers murder as the illegal or immoral taking of a human life. Mashiach confirms that murder is from the devil and HaSatan is himself the murderer (John.8:44). Whilst killing is acceptable clearly murder is not. When YHWH instructed the taking of a life, His instruction was always to kill not murder. A murderer was always to suffer the same fate as his victim.

Does not society itself distinguish between these two terms: it is more correct to say "I killed a mosquito," not "I murdered a mosquito" and "the worker was accidentally killed," not "the worker was accidentally murdered." Several translations confuse these two words when presenting the sixth Commandment but YHWH would never instruct anyone to transgress His Commandments yet on several occasions He instructed for a transgressor to be killed, thus 'Do not murder' has to be the correct translation.

Did Mashiach Command Pacifism?

A pacifist is defined as a person who is opposed to the use of violence for any reason, neither The Father nor The Son fit this definition. The Torah allows for retribution where murder has been committed (Num.35:19,21). What is more, Revelation does not describe a pacifist riding a white horse but a warring king. Mashiach never advocated violence (Matt.5:39-42 discussed below) but being opposed to violence is not necessarily the same as being non-violent.

So, let us examine some of Mashiach's comments,

But I say to you, do not resist the wicked. But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also. And whoever compels you to go one mile, go with him two. Give to him who asks of you, and from him who wishes to borrow from you, do not turn away. (Matt.5:39-42).

But what exactly is Mashiach saying, did Mashiach intend for His comments to be literal? Are we to allow an attacker to continue beating the pulp out of us until we are unconscious or brain damaged? It is hard to believe this is what Mashiach expects of us. What we need to remember is that Mashiach regularly and intentionally articulated important principles by a means of provocative hyperbole to focus his listener's attention on the character required for discipleship. For example,

"If your right eye causes you to stumble, gouge it out. . . . If your right hand causes you to stumble, cut it off" (Matt. 5:29-30).

Did Mashiach really expect his followers to dismember themselves to prevent sin? Or did he mean that they should take every reasonable measure possible to avoid sin?

"If you have the faith of a mustard seed, you could command this mountain to move, and it will move" (Matt. 17:20, Luke 17:6).

Did Mashiach really mean that his followers could move actual mountains through their faith? Or was He saying that, through their faith, YHWH could, in them, accomplish more than they ever thought possible?

The principle behind turning the other cheek is one of restraint and not pacifism. We should do what is necessary and sufficient just to stop an attack and nothing more. To do more is to become as the attacker himself and against the precepts Mashiach is teaching in Matt.5:39-42. To do anything more than is necessary to stop an attacker is vengeance and repaying evil with evil, (Rom.12:17). To turn the other cheek is to accept the injuries inflicted without physical retaliation. Indeed, the Peshitta Interlinear New Testament has the following rendering for Matt.5:39,

But I am saying to you that you shall not rise up against an evil person but who ever strikes you on the right side of your cheek turn the other also to him.

This presentation also accords with Werner's Ancient Roots Translinear Bible. I would say 'rise up' in this verse is a euphemism for 'to repay evil for evil.' The believer is meant to rely on the judicial system for recompense, which brings us to the premise of 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth,' (Exod.21:24).

Scholars agree the intent of this verse from Exodus was to institute a judicial precept and ensure the judges inflicted penalties equivalent to the offences committed but it was for their direction only and not for the guidance of individuals. Justice was to be neither too harsh nor too lenient. The 'Eye for an eye' rule was no doubt meant to prevent arbitrary vigilante style justice, exactly what Mashiach is prohibiting and give a victim confidence of fair, just and legal compensation.

Then we have Mashiach's words quoted in Luke,

And He said to them, "But now, let him who has a purse take it, likewise also a bag. And let him who has no sword sell his garment and buy one. Luke.22:36).

To interpret this verse as legitimizing lethal force is difficult to reconcile with Mashiach's earlier comments quoted above. Not only that, but Mashiach Himself defuncts such a literal interpretation in His rebuke of Peter using his sword to cut off the ear of the High Priest's slave (Matt.26:51-52). But if Mashiach was not advocating violent resistance how should we understand His instruction for the disciples to acquire 1) a purse, 2) a traveller's bag and 3) a sword?

This instruction should be seen as Mashiach's call to 1) readiness, 2) resourcefulness, and 3) vigilance, taking

cognizance that the disciples are about to lose Him and be left on their own. Again Mashiach is warning His disciples in his characteristically attention-riveting manner—that in the coming days they will need to be prepared to fight battles spiritual and physical, like they have never before experienced, and He is hereby telling them that it will require a radically different mindset and approach.

Lastly, we come to Mashiach's comment forming the title of this article,

You heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbour (Lev.19:18) and hate your enemy. But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those cursing you, do good to those hating you, and pray for those insulting you and persecuting you, (Matt.5:43-44).

Nowhere is it written 'Hate your enemy' this was added by the Pharisees. From a spiritual point hate is worthy of a separate study but suffice to say to hate an enemy was promoted by the religious leaders and not YHWH.

We have all heard the story of the princess who was cursed and changed into a loathly serpent, The only way she could be released from the curse was to be kissed three times by a knight who thereby won for himself a fair bride with whom he lived in love and joy. This mythical legend could easily have been a parable used by Mashiach to express His comment. The point is, the only way to change the serpent of hate into the fair form of a friend is to kiss (love) it out of its enchantment.

Coming back to the verse, instructing us to '*love thine enemy*,' Mashiach is not using the term love in terms of emotion but rather as to seek the good in those who have shown us the most bitter hostility.

Conclusion

The book of Ecclesiastes presents life as a balance of contrasting activities,

There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens: . . . a time to kill and a time to heal, a time to tear down and a time to build, . . . a time to love and a time to hate, a time for war and a time for peace. (Ecc.3:1, 3, 8).

These are not the words of a pacifist. Mashiach Yahusha clearly taught His role would cause conflict,

Do not think that I have come to bring peace on earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword, for I have come to bring division, a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law – and a man's enemies are those of his own household. (Matt.10:34:36).

When it comes to defeating evil, God is not a pacifist. As said earlier, He never taught 'pacifism at any cost' and He never condemned the life, calling or duty of those in a position to exercised lethal force. The challenge for us is not to be content with a literal meaning of Mashiach's statements but question the text. We all have a duty to search beneath the surface for something deeper and more profound. Clearly if we are to avoid confusion, even contradiction, it is imperative for us to approach Mashiach's comments on this basis.

We are not commanded to forever surrender to violence but to follow the path of peace whenever possible.