

Thrasher - Green Debate

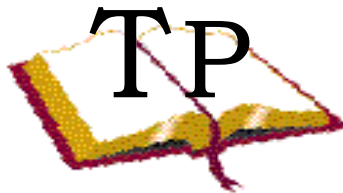
on

The Christian as a Punitive Agent
of the Civil Government

Thomas N. Thrasher

&

Ken Green



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Thrasher-Green Debate
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Introduction

The issue of the participation of a Christian in functions relating to the civil government has been a matter of controversy among God's people for a long time. Most frequently discussed, often with highly emotional appeals and heated exchanges, is the question of whether or not a Christian may scripturally act as a punitive agent of the government. On December 19, 1970, brethren Ken Green and Thomas N. Thrasher began a written debate on this particular issue. In December 1989 they participated in an oral debate in Huntsville, Alabama on the same issue. Their written debate was published by the Gospel Defender Publishing Company in 1973. This volume has been out of print for more than twenty years. The present volume is a new edition of that debate.

At the time of this discussion, Ken Green lived in Louisville, Kentucky, and he was serving as an evangelist with the South End church of Christ. He has now been preaching about 40 years and participated in numerous debates on a variety of subjects. His discussion with Allan Turner on “The Foreknowledge of God” was published in *Gospel Anchor* from November 1989 to February 1990. He presently labors in Nashville, Tennessee.

Thomas N. Thrasher has preached in North Alabama for about 37 years. He has participated in 100 formal debates in 14 different states. Nine of his debates have been published in book form. In addition to his preaching, he has worked as a mathematics teacher and school administrator in the Decatur City Schools since 1970.

The publisher urges the careful consideration of this material by every Christian. Only God's inspired word determines whether a practice is right or wrong.

“You shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” (John 8:32).

—The Publisher



Thomas N. Thrasher



Ken Green

First Proposition

"The Scriptures authorize the Christian's acting as a punitive agent of the civil government."

Affirm: Ken Green
Deny: Thomas N. Thrasher

Green's First Affirmative

I welcome this opportunity to express myself in the affirmative of the proposition and to try my conclusions in the crucible of honorable debate.

G. K. Chesterton once wrote: "The only way to say anything definite is to define it, and all definition is by limitation and exclusion ... in short, I think that a man does not know what he is saying until he knows what he is not saying."

I shall proceed to define the terms of the proposition, and then to specify certain matters that the proposition does not entail.

By "the scriptures" I refer to the Bible, the inspired word of God. By "authorized" I mean sanction; empower; justify; allow. By "Christian" I signify the obedient disciple of Christ. By "acting as" I mean being; performing the duty of; serving as. By "punitive agent" I refer to one who inflicts punishment in the place of another by authority from him. By "civil government" I refer to human organization ordained by God to govern affairs pertaining to the relations of man with his fellowman.

I am not affirming the Christian's obligation, but his authority.

I am not affirming that I would be willing to accept this role but that I am authorized by God to accept it.

I am not affirming that extenuating circumstances may not alter one's right to so act. (For example, if the civil government oversteps the boundary of Divine Authority, the Christian could not participate.)

I am not affirming that the Christian is not personally responsible for his actions and may do whatever he is ordered to do. When a conflict arises between what God authorizes, or commands, or forbids, and what the civil government commands, "We ought to obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29).

I am affirming that no such conflict exists in the principle of one's acting as a punitive agent of the civil government.

Argument One

I will first state my argument in form and then elaborate:

- 1) God authorizes civil governments to be punitive agents.
- 2) God authorizes Christians to serve as civil governments.
- 3) Therefore, God authorizes Christians to be punitive agents of the civil government.

Point One:

In John 19:10-11 we read of an incident which occurred during the trial of our Lord: "Then saith Pilate unto him, Speakest thou not unto me? Knowest thou not that I have power to crucify thee, and have power to release thee?"

"Jesus answered, Thou couldest have no power at all against me, except it were given thee from above; therefore he that delivered me unto thee hath the greater sin."

The word "power" is translated "authority" in the New American Standard Bible. Pilate claimed the authority as a civil officer to act as a punitive agent. Jesus did not repudiate his claim, but strengthened it. He revealed unto him that this authority was delegated to him. "It was a sacred trust, a responsibility for the discharge of which Pilate was answerable to God" (Hendriksen).

Pilate misused his authority by releasing a murderer who should have been executed, and condemning the Just One.

Paul, the great ambassador of Christ, announced at Caesar's judgment seat: "...if I be an offender or have committed anything worthy of death, I refuse not to die..."

He recognized that there were crimes worthy of death and that the civil government may act as the punitive agent.

Earlier, the apostle had written the well-known passage in Romans 13:1-4. Verse 4 says:

"For he is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, (you should dread him and) be afraid, for he does not bear and wear the sword for nothing. He is God's servant to execute His wrath (His punishment, His vengeance) on the wrongdoer" (Rom. 13:1-4, Amplified New Testament).

This passage is a continuation of the remarks in chapter 12, verses 19-21. Personal vengeance is proscribed. We are to leave vengeance to God. In the verses just quoted we learn that God does not exercise His vengeance directly, but through civil governments which are His authorized punitive agents.

We are told in 1 Peter 2:14 that civil officers “are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers, and for the praise of them that do well.”

From these scriptures we conclude that civil governments exist and function as punitive agents by Divine right.

Point Two:

This is a controverted point, but I believe unnecessarily so. In Acts 10:1-2 we read of Cornelius who was a Roman soldier, sworn to protect the Roman Empire even to the taking of life. The evidence indicates that his moral purity and sincerity were incontestable. Though Peter was to tell him what he “oughtest to do” (Acts 10:6; 11:14), there is no implication that he was told to sever his military connections.

John the Baptist was sent before the Lord to prepare the way for Him. He demanded the multitude to “Bring forth therefore fruits worthy of repentance” (Lk. 3:8). This caused the people to inquire as to what such repentance would demand (v. 10).

“And the soldiers likewise demanded of him, saying, And what shall we do? And he said unto them, Do violence to no man, neither accuse any falsely; and be content with your wages” (v. 10).

The footnote in the King James translates the phrase "Do violence to no man": "Put no man in fear."

The Revised Standard Version renders it: “Rob no one by violence...”

The New American Standard Bible: “Do not take money from anyone by force...”

Obviously John did not advise them to be content with their wages as soldiers, yet refuse to perform as soldiers. If these men could not serve as punitive agents after repentance and consequent preparation for the Lord and His Kingdom, they would have been told to leave military service.

Instead, they were instructed to not use their authority as civil agents to intimidate the people and line their pockets. The admonition concerned unlawful violence and not that which became necessary in the line of duty to preserve law and order.

Examples of Christians who served as civil agents with apparent apostolic approval include the Philippian jailer (Acts 16), the Ethiopian treasurer (Acts 8), and Erastus, the treasurer of Corinth (Rom. 16:23).

My argument is that the civil government is authorized to serve as God’s punitive agent, and Christians may serve as the civil government. I have not built my case wholly upon the silence of the scriptures, but have offered examples of Christians who did serve in such capacity in those days when the direct representatives of Christ lived and directly oversaw the church.

The conclusion follows that God authorizes Christians to be punitive agents.

Argument Two

- 1) A man cannot become, by virtue of the same act or office, both a minister of God for good and a sinner.
- 2) The authorized punitive agent is a minister of God for good.
- 3) Therefore, this office and the duties of it do not make him a sinner.

Point One:

Faithful teachers have long taught that truth cannot conflict with truth. Truth in one realm cannot oppose truth in another. Truth is harmonious.

This becomes a necessary inference when one realizes that all truth finds its source in the Eternal God. Since God cannot be inconsistent with Himself, truth cannot be inconsistent with itself.

Who will deny our proposition in premise one? If one serves God by appointment and sins by the same act, then God is the author of sin.

Point Two:

Rom. 13:4 expresses the second premise.

Two of the fundamental reasons for the existence of civil government as stated in the Preamble to the Constitution of the United States are: 1) Insuring domestic tranquility; and 2) Providing for the common defense. As Alexander Hamilton put it, "...the passions of men will not conform to the dictates of reason and justice without constraint."

In every land and nation there are those who have no scruples against accosting innocent citizens, even children, on the streets, or against breaking into their homes to rob and kill. The civil government exists to discourage such and to punish offenders. In so functioning it is the minister of God for good.

The argument revolves about this question: Can the same thing which makes one a minister of God for good make him a sinner?

My conclusion is no. The authorized office and duties of the civil government do not entail sin.

Since the Christian may perform that which is not sinful, he may therefore fill the office and perform the duties of the civil government.

Argument Three

- 1) Moral laws are eternal and universal.
- 2) God has authorized and even commanded civil governments to act as His punitive agents.

3) Therefore, no moral law is transgressed when civil government acts as God's punitive agent.

Point One:

The laws of God are divided into two general categories. These are the positive laws and the moral laws. Positive laws have changed from dispensation to dispensation. Some positive commands recorded in the Bible were given only to certain persons. Abraham was commanded to offer his son, Isaac; the blind man of John 9 was told to wash in the pool Siloam; we, this side of the cross, are commanded to be baptized in the name of the Lord.

Positive commands may be limited in extent and duration but moral laws are eternal and universal. They are rooted in the eternal and universal attributes of God. These kinds of commands are "obligatory upon all of God's moral creatures, i.e. those endowed with a capacity for understanding the relations of right and wrong" (McClintock and Strong).

In Rom. 1:32 we read: "Who knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them".

How did these heathen of whom Paul wrote know that those who practiced these things were worthy of death? R. L. Whiteside suggested: "There is embedded in man's nature a consciousness of right and wrong" (Commentary on Romans). Many students feel that God's moral laws were revealed to Adam and Eve in the dawn of time and were passed from generation to generation as essential to the preservation and prosperity of society. The latter possibility appeals to me, but in either case the point is sustained.

Rom. 2:15 says that men have a consciousness of certain principles of right and wrong even if they have no revelation: "Which shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness and their thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another."

Point Two:

We have already quoted many N.T. passages which show that God authorizes civil governments to punish wrong doers. There are also many examples in the Bible of God commanding certain nations or individuals to act as punitive agents. A classic example is recorded in 1 Samuel 15. King Saul was instructed to "go and smite Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have, and spare them not..."

Saul failed to fully obey. He saved Agag, the King of Amalek alive as well as the best of the sheep and oxen. It was godly Samuel who completed the job. Verse 33 says, "And Samuel said, as thy sword hath made women childless, so shall thy mother be childless among women. And Samuel hewed Agag in pieces before the Lord in Gilgal."

Point Three:

If the preceding premises are true, I believe the conclusion follows that no moral law is transgressed when civil government acts as God's punitive agent.

Therefore it is not immoral for a Christian to so act.

Questions

1. In your estimation, is only the executioner and/or soldier who takes life guilty of murder, or do you hold that all who cooperate are equally guilty?
2. Do you believe that it is right for civil governments to provide for defense and discipline?
3. If so, can you establish that it is right for some and wrong for others to participate in such (barring individual compunctions)?



Thrasher's First Negative

It is a distinct privilege for me to participate in this discussion and to address children of God in denial of the proposition: "The Scriptures authorize the Christian's acting as a punitive agent of the civil government." Let us study together, in all honesty and sincerity, the evidence presented in the first affirmative.

In defining the terms of the proposition, we notice that brother Green says "authorize" means that the Bible sanctions, empowers, justifies, or allows the Christian to act "as a punitive agent of the civil government." We understand that the Scriptures authorize a practice in three ways, either by (1) **express command**, (2) **approved example**, or (3) **necessary implication**. Brother Green's obligation, then, is to produce an **express command** given to a Christian to execute punishment as an agent of the civil government, or an **approved example** of a Christian acting in this capacity, or a **necessary implication** for his doing so. Please observe that we are discussing what a **Christian** should do, and not what God permitted or required of his children in another dispensation and under a different law. Please keep this in mind as we review brother Green's article.

Notice that brother Green says, "I am not affirming the Christian's obligation, but his authority." Furthermore, "I am not affirming that I would be willing to accept this role but that I am authorized by God to accept it." However, the Christian is commanded to "Render therefore to all their dues" (Romans 13:7). If the Christian may serve as an agent of the government in a punitive capacity, and he is called upon to render such service, would he not be **obligated** to do it? Should he not be willing to serve, if God gives him the authority, the opportunity, and the ability? If not, why not?

Next he says, "I am not affirming that the Christian is not personally responsible for his

actions and may do whatever he is ordered to do. When a conflict arises between what God authorizes ... and what the civil government commands, 'We ought to obey God rather than men' (Acts 5:29)." I am glad that we agree: **The Christian is personally responsible for his actions.** When he acts without divine authority, contrary to God's law, then he is **personally** accountable. Now, what we need to determine is **where** do "the Scriptures authorize the Christian's acting as a punitive agent of the civil government"? When Brother Green produces the Bible authority for such practice, then I will accept it. He has not done it yet!

Brother Green presents three arguments in his efforts to prove his affirmation. I will discuss these in the same order, point by point, as he did. Please give particular attention to see if he shows: (1) where a **Christian** was ever commanded to inflict punishment as an agent of the civil government, or (2) an approved example where a **Christian** did so, or (3) the **Christian's** right to kill or injure another person while acting as the civil government's agent is necessarily implied.

Argument One

- 1) God authorizes civil governments to be punitive agents.
- 2) God authorizes Christians to serve as civil governments.
- 3) Therefore, God authorizes Christians to be punitive agents of the civil government.

Reply:

I agree that God authorizes the civil government to act in a punitive capacity, for the Bible clearly teaches this (Romans 13:1-4; 1 Peter 2:13-14). With reference to Romans 13 brother Green says, "This passage is a continuation of the remarks in chapter 12, verses 19-21. Personal vengeance is proscribed [prohibited, TNT]. We are to leave vengeance to God.... God does not exercise His vengeance directly, but through civil governments which are His authorized punitive agents." Observe that **civil government** is authorized to execute vengeance, and not the **Christian**.

Please notice carefully the clear distinction made in Romans 13:1-6 between **civil government** and the **Christian**. "Let every soul [**Christian**] be subject unto the higher powers [**civil government**] . . . For rulers [**civil government**] are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou [**Christian**] then not be afraid of the power [**civil government**]? do that which is good, and thou [**Christian**] shalt have praise of the same [**civil government**]: For **he** is the minister of God to **thee** for good. But if **thou** do that which is evil, be afraid; for **he** beareth not the sword in vain: for **he** is the minister of God.... Wherefore **ye** must needs be subject.... For, for this cause pay **ye** tribute also: for **they** are God's ministers..." If "God authorizes Christians to serve as civil governments," as brother Green claims, then why is such a clear difference made in Romans thirteen?

In trying to substantiate his point two, brother Green cites Cornelius as an example. However, this argument is wholly based upon the silence of the Scriptures. Cornelius could have been "devout" while being a soldier in the Roman army, since "devout" simply means "reverential." It obviously does not designate approval for all of his activities, for he was not a **Christian** at that time! One must presume, entirely without scriptural warrant, that Cornelius

continued to serve as a soldier after he became a Christian. Presumption is not proof. One could just as easily argue that converted priests (Acts 6:7) continued to perform all of the functions of priesthood, since there is no implication they were told to sever their priestly connections!

Brother Green goes next to the conversation between John the Baptist and the soldiers in Luke 3:14 in his efforts to find approval for “Christians to serve as civil governments.” I am amazed at our brother’s reasoning! We have taught for years that **John lived and died under the Law of Moses**, which authorized God’s people to take vengeance (Numbers 35:15-21). John gave his instructions to the soldiers while the law was still in force. It was not instruction to people under the law of Christ. We can see this easily when we consider the “thief on the cross” (Luke 23:39-43). What the “thief” did while the Law of Moses was in force is no example of what one must do to become a Christian. If we can understand this, why not understand that John’s instruction to the soldiers is not instruction to Christians! Brother Green, does John’s failure to tell Jewish priests to cease their priestly functions prove that these functions are approved for Christians (John 1:19ff)?

Brother Green seems to think that the Philippian jailer (Acts 16) is an example of a Christian who served as a punitive agent of the civil government. This is an assumption similar to that made with reference to Cornelius. It is based upon the silence of the Scriptures. Since the record does not reveal that the jailer was told to cease his duties, our brother assumes that he continued to perform the acts of that office. However, this reasoning would prove that it was right for him to continue in all functions of his office. The passage shows that when the magistrates “laid many stripes upon them (Paul and Silas), they cast them into prison, charging the jailer to keep them safely: who, having received such a charge, thrust them into the inner prison, and made their feet fast in the stocks” (Acts 16:22-24). From this we learn that part of the jailer’s responsibility had been to chastise Christians and put them in stocks. Did he continue to do this **after** he became a Christian? **That had been his obligation previously!**

Furthermore, this argument that he continued as a sword bearer would mean “that it was right for him to use the sword for all purposes for which he had believed it sanctioned before his conversion. So ... did he still believe it right to use the sword for suicide? He had intended to use it to kill himself. That is the only use mentioned in connection with him (Acts 16:27).... Shall we argue that the jailer thought that such was right, that he started to do it, that Paul did not say it was wrong, that he continued to carry the sword and that therefore all uses of the sword which he had believed were approved, and which were not condemned in the record given by Luke, are approved for the Christian”? If brother Green’s logic is correct, that is exactly what the jailer’s example would prove!

Brother Green has failed in his attempt to prove that “God authorizes Christians to serve as civil governments,” thus his first argument remains unproved.

Argument Two

- 1) A man cannot become, by virtue of the same act or office, both a minister of God for good and a sinner.
- 2) The authorized punitive agent is a minister of God for good.
- 3) Therefore, this office and the duties of it do not make him a sinner.

Reply:

This argument, as far as the proposition is concerned, is defective. Even if I were to agree with it completely, it would not come anywhere near proving his proposition. The argument states that an authorized punitive agent, while properly executing his duties in that capacity does not become a sinner (as a result of those authorized actions). Notice that the argument is based upon the authorized punitive agent. However, **the Christian is not the authorized punitive agent!** The minor premise says: “The authorized punitive agent is a minister of God for good.” Certainly! But brother Green has not yet proved that the **Christian** is an “authorized punitive agent” of the civil government. This is the very point that he is obligated to show. Thus, since this point has not been proved, the affirmation based upon it is without scriptural foundation.

Argument Three

- 1) Moral laws are eternal and universal.
- 2) God has authorized and even commanded civil governments to act as His punitive agents.
- 3) Therefore, no moral law is transgressed when civil government acts as God’s punitive agent.

Reply:

Once again, if I were to agree completely with this argument, it would not sustain our brother’s proposition, for he has not yet given the scriptural authorization for “Christians to serve as civil governments.” This point is fundamental to every argument that he attempts, and until it is clearly and unquestionably established, he cannot prove what is required.

One matter needs to be clarified with reference to the third argument: I do not believe that any “moral law is transgressed when civil government acts as God’s punitive agent.” Although the **moral law** from the beginning has been against killing, God has instituted, at various times and under specific conditions, **positive laws** which authorized the taking of life by His authorized agents. No person has ever been sanctioned for taking punitive action except the divinely authorized agent. For example, under the Law of Moses the sixth commandment stated: “Thou shalt not kill.” This represented the **moral law** (that which is “eternal and universal”). However, God legislated certain **positive laws** which permitted (and often commanded) the taking of life by God’s authorized agents (e.g., Leviticus 20:9-16; Leviticus 24:10-23; Numbers 35:15-21; Deuteronomy 21:18-21; Joshua 7:1-26; 1 Samuel 15:1-33; etc.).

God has always made provision for punishing evildoers, and His provision includes an authorized agent for executing vengeance. Civil government has been ordained for this purpose today (1 Peter 2:13-14; Romans 13:3-4). That is God’s authorized agent. **The Christian is not God’s agent for executing vengeance** (Romans 12:17-21; 1 Peter 2:18-21; Matthew 5:38-45). The **moral law** (“Thou shalt not kill”) remains today, for it is “eternal and universal.” Now, where is the **positive law** authorizing the Christian to execute vengeance? Will brother Green tell us in his second affirmative?

Answers To Brother Green's Questions

1. The authorized punitive agent is not guilty of murder. However, since the Christian is not authorized to execute vengeance, he may not serve in any capacity that makes him responsible—either as legislator, judge, or executioner—for inflicting punishment upon another person, contrary to New Testament teaching.

2. Yes.

3. Romans 13 teaches that the **civil government** is ordained of God to “provide defense and discipline” (“execute wrath upon him that doeth evil”); however, the **Christian** may not act as the agent of the civil government in so doing, for he is not the agent that God has ordained for that purpose. The context of the passage shows very clearly the distinction between the **civil government** (as one party) and the **Christian** (as another).

Questions For Brother Green

1. Where do “the Scriptures authorize (by **express command**) a Christian’s acting as a punitive agent of the civil government”?

2. Where do “the Scriptures authorize (by **approved example**) a Christian’s acting as a punitive agent of the civil government”?

3. Where do “the Scriptures authorize (by **necessary implication**) a Christian’s acting as a punitive agent of the civil government”?



Green's Second Affirmative

In this article we shall attempt to clear up some misunderstandings and point out some basic fallacies in the reasoning of our honorable opponent.

First, we should recognize that every authorized individual action of the Christian is not necessarily expressed in Command, Approved Example, or Necessary Implication. Whenever we discuss questions of morality in the lives of individuals, we reason deductively. We deduce or conclude specific applications from general principles.

One could just as easily and justifiably ask the question: “Where do the scriptures authorize by express command, approved example, or necessary implication that a Christian may 1) play football, 2) play canasta, 3) go to a movie or play?” Surely we realize that principles must be considered here which are not covered by this question. The above things are not declared wrong because they are not authorized by one of three ways.

I've preached and heard others preach on the sinfulness of dancing, but I've never heard the argument advanced that dancing is wrong because 1) there is no command, 2) there is no approved example, and 3) there is no necessary implication for it. It's wrong because it's sinful.

I demonstrated in my first article that the office and duties of the authorized punitive agent do not entail sin. Since the Christian may perform that which is not sinful, he may therefore fill the office and perform the duties of the civil government.

The question of how to establish scriptural authority for our religious activities is not involved here and should not have been introduced.

Brother Thrasher's conclusion that opportunity, scriptural authorization and ability would obligate the Christian to serve as a punitive agent is unwarranted. Other considerations would be involved. Though an activity is all right per se, it is wrong to the person who violates his own conscience in his participation. This is the truth established in Rom. 14. It doesn't follow that it was wrong for all to eat meats because it violated the consciences of some. All were taught, however, to respect the consciences of those who did not understand their liberty in this matter.

I do not feel that I have the right to brand a "conscientious objector" brother as unsound or unfaithful. I respect his conscience. The basic question here is: do you, brother Thrasher, have the right to brand a Christian as an unfaithful brother if he happens to be a policeman or soldier. I am affirming in the proposition that you do not.

Brother Thrasher's principle fallacy is his misconstruction of Romans 13. He places an undue amount of emphasis on the distinction between civil government and the Christian and draws the **un**—necessary inference that the Christian cannot serve in the civil government.

If this is true, then the second premise of my first argument is disproved and my first argument falls. But one significant factor is being overlooked. There is a distinction between the Christian and the civil government because the Christian is an individual and there is a distinction between individuals and the civil government. But this doesn't mean that the government is not composed of individuals.

Paul teaches in this context that every person is to be subject to the government. Even those who are themselves in places of authority are obligated to submit to the powers and laws of the land.

The chapter begins, "Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers." No man is authorized by God to take personal vengeance and every man is commanded to be subject to the government which is God's authorized punitive agent. To transgress this command is to sin whether one is a Christian or not.

One could just as logically argue from Heb. 13 that no Christian can serve in the eldership as to argue from Rom. 13 that no Christian can serve in the civil government. In Heb. 13:17 we read, "Obey them [elders] that have the rule over you [Christians], and submit yourselves [Christians]: for they [elders] watch for your [Christians] souls, as they [elders] that must give account, that they [elders] may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you [Christians]."

Now if someone should counter, "Yes, but there are other passages which teach that the elders are Christians," we would agree and say that that's our point. There are other passages which teach that a Christian may serve in civil government. Erastus, in Romans 16:23 is one sure example. Paul relays salutations from this brother and identifies him as one acting in a capacity

that brother Thrasher says no Christian could scripturally do. Strange indeed!

My first argument stands.

Our brother accuses me of making an argument which is wholly based upon the silence of the scriptures “in the case of Cornelius.” I admit that this is true. But we should not overlook the fact that bro. Thrasher’s affirmation that Cornelius did sever his military connections is also based upon the silence of the scriptures. I find it significant that there is absolutely no indication that Cornelius had to leave the army when he became a Christian.

Bro. Thrasher says: “Presumption is not proof! One could just as easily argue that converted priests (Acts 6:7) continued to perform all of the functions of priesthood, since there is no implication they were told to sever their priestly connections!”

Could one really? The Bible is replete with evidence that the functions of the Old Testament priesthood foreshadowed the New Testament, and all of that system was made old by the New Covenant (Heb. 8:13). We would have no trouble whatever in demonstrating that the Bible is not silent in regard to the Old Testament priesthood. His parallel is not very parallel.

Our brother agrees that John the Baptist did not require a separation from military service on the part of the soldiers. His point is well taken that these were under the law. My purpose, however, was to show that one did not have to depart from the role of the punitive agent to be prepared for the kingdom of Christ. Apparently there was nothing immoral about the office itself.

In the case of the Philippian jailer, I am again accused of arguing from the silence of the scriptures. He says, “Since the record does not reveal that the jailer was told to cease his duties, our brother assumes that he continued to perform the acts of that office.”

Turn that around and note that since the record does not reveal that the jailer was told to continue his duties, our brother Thrasher assumes that he ceased to perform the acts of that office.

Again, let me state that I find it very significant that despite very wonderful opportunities, we have no record of any punitive agent being required to quit that work, and no indication in the entire Bible that it would be sinful to continue in the work.

Since sin is the transgression of the law (1 John 3:4) and since there is no law against a Christian serving as a punitive agent for the civil government, I conclude that it is not sinful for a Christian to do so. Furthermore, since a Christian may do that which is not sinful, I conclude that the Christian is authorized by God to serve as a punitive agent of the civil government.

I made it clear in the opening remarks of the first article that I believe “If the civil government oversteps the boundary of Divine authority, the Christian could not participate.” I restate that premise here in response to the observation on the Philippian jailer that “this reasoning would prove that it was right for him to continue in all functions of his office,” including the persecuting of Christians.

No. Since the civil government is “for the punishment of evil-doers, and for the praise of them that do well” (1 Pet. 2:14), it has no authority to persecute Christians. It does have the authority to punish Christians if they be evildoers (1 Peter 4:15; Rom, 13:4).

Actually, Paul and Silas were not being persecuted because they were Christians but because they were accused of breaking the Roman law by disturbing the peace and teaching unlawful customs (Acts 16:20-21). The jailer faithfully fulfilled his charge. In all probability he didn’t

even know what crimes they were accused of. To say “we learn that part of the jailer’s responsibility had been to chastise Christians and put them in stocks” is to proceed far, far beyond what the passage teaches.

Bro. Thrasher would more properly fulfill the purpose of the negative if he replied to my arguments rather than make his own affirmative arguments and reply to them. I didn’t argue and I don’t believe that authority to continue as a sword bearer would mean “that it was right for him to use the sword for all purposes for which he had believed it sanctioned before his conversion.” I don’t know who he’s quoting here but it certainly isn’t me.

The argument on suicide is hardly worthy of comment. In the first place we’re not told whether the jailer thought suicide was wrong or right. People don’t necessarily believe a thing is right just because they practice it or intend to practice it!

My second argument is brushed aside with an ipse dixit and a sweep of the hand. In the last paragraph of that argument I said, “Since the Christian may perform that which is not sinful, he may therefore fill the office and perform the duties of the civil government.”

I stand by that and suggest that bro. Thrasher meet the argument in his final negative. He’s begging the question by asserting that the Christian is not the authorized punitive agent. The very basis of his whole objection is derived from pure assumption.

In like manner, my argument three is bypassed and its logical import is ignored. If no moral law is transgressed, and no positive law is transgressed, then no sin is involved. If no sin is involved, then the Christian may participate. To demand a positive law which permits him to participate is as ludicrous as demanding a law which would specifically authorize him to be a member of a civic club or a P.T.A.

Brother Thrasher has missed the boat completely in his “clarification” of the third argument. He says that God sometimes overrules moral law by positive laws and thus he seeks to reconcile what is obviously, in his thinking, a contradiction.

God says on the one hand, “Thou shalt not kill.” This is moral law says brother Thrasher. (I agree.) But then God legislated positive laws which permitted the breaking of moral laws according to my fellow disputant.

How much more simple this problem becomes when we simply accept the apparent. All taking of life is not included in the “killing” of Exodus 20:13. The authorized punitive agent (civil government composed of individuals) does not murder when the duties of this office are carried out.

As To The Reply To My Questions

1. No one is defending the Christians’ license to take personal vengeance, or the authority of any other individual to do so. Using brother Thrasher’s logic we could reason that no individual has the right to take vengeance, but governments are composed of individuals, thus no government has the right to take vengeance.

Again he assumes the point at issue, that it’s contrary to New Testament teaching for a Christian to serve as a legislator, judge, or executioner.

2. No comment.

3. We have already shown the fallacy of brother Thrasher's teaching on Romans 13.

Brother Thrasher's Questions

We necessarily infer from all the principles we have established that the scriptures authorize a Christian's acting as a punitive agent of the civil government.

Questions For Brother Thrasher

1. Must a Christian forego every individual activity which is not authorized by direct command, approved example, or necessary implication?
2. Is there a distinction in Rom. 13 between the individual and the civil government?
3. If not, may the individual (not a Christian) take vengeance? If so, may the individual take vengeance as an agent of the civil government?



Thrasher's Second Negative

In continuing the discussion of this important question, I invite your attention to the proposition that brother Green is affirming: "The Scriptures **authorize** the Christian's acting as a punitive agent of the civil government." As I pointed out in the first negative article, for a practice to be **authorized** by the Scriptures, it must be established in at least one of three ways: 1) express command, 2) approved example, or 3) necessary implication. Brother Green replies by saying that "every authorized individual action of the Christian is not necessarily expressed in Command, Approved Example, or Necessary Implication." I disagree. Scriptural authorization for any practice, individual or otherwise, can only be established by express command, approved example, or necessary implication. Certainly scriptural principles must be considered; however, such principles are embodied in, and based upon, express commands, approved examples, and necessary implications of Scripture.

Many activities of the individual are authorized by **generic** rather than **specific** authority. For example, participation in athletics is authorized generically by the scriptural instruction that "bodily exercise is profitable for a little" (1 Timothy 4:8, R.V.). Thus, the Christian may play baseball, basketball, golf, etc., as long as he does not violate any other scriptural principle in so doing. Whatever we do must be done in the name (by the authority) of Jesus Christ (Col. 3:17). Therefore, the issue under discussion is this: May a Christian intentionally kill another individual while acting as an agent of the civil government? I do not believe that the Scriptures authorize him to do so. It is brother Green's obligation to prove that the Christian may act in such capacity.

Brother Green appeals to prejudice by saying: “The basic question here is: do you, brother Thrasher, have the right to brand a Christian as an unfaithful brother if he happens to be a policeman or soldier.” Brother Green seems to be confused about who is in the affirmative on this proposition! I am only denying that “the Scriptures authorize” what you are supposed to be affirming. The question here is: Do you, brother Green, have the right to teach young Christians that they may take up weapons of carnal warfare in order to willingly and conscientiously kill their fellowmen? Your affirmation states that you have that right. Now, why haven’t you proved it by the Scriptures?

Romans 13

Our brother says that my principal fallacy is my “misconstruction of Romans 13.” He agrees that if my argument on Romans 13 is true, then his “first argument falls.” Brother Green says, “There is a distinction between the Christian and the civil government because the Christian is an individual and there is a distinction between individuals and the civil government.”

Please notice that he argues “**There is a distinction between individuals and the civil government.**” However, in his first article he argued that “Christians may serve as the civil government” (Argument 1, Point 2, Paragraph 10). Thus, in his first article there was no distinction between the **civil government** and those **Christians** who served “**as the civil government.**” Now, in his second affirmative he says, “there is a distinction”! Which time is our brother right?

The book of Romans was addressed to the “saints” in Rome (Romans 1:7), and those are the individuals to whom Paul is speaking when he says: “Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers” (Romans 13:1). He was instructing Christians as to how they needed to conduct themselves in relation to their fellowmen (Cf. Romans 12:1-13:1ff), They were forbidden to take vengeance upon any person, but to leave that to God (Romans 12:19). In that context he introduces the agent of God’s vengeance—the civil government, which He has appointed as “a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil” (Romans 13:14). Please observe that Paul has already described the proper behavior of the child of God (chapter 12), and in keeping with these requirements of foregoing vengeance, he then reveals God’s provision for punishing evil. There is a complete distinction presented in this passage (Romans 12:1-13:14) between the **civil government** and the **Christian**, because one exists as God’s ordained agent of vengeance (Romans 13:1-4), and the other has no part in it (Romans 12:17-21). When one tries to make the Christian an agent of vengeance, he has destroyed this separation of purpose that God intended, and he violates the principles for which the apostle pleads.

With reference to brother Green’s attempt to parallel Romans 13 with Hebrews 13, I ask, “Where are those ‘other passages which teach’ what you are affirming (i.e., that a Christian may act as a punitive agent of the civil government)?” Those “other passages” are exactly what we want to see!

Our brother seems to think that Erastus (Romans 16:23) is “one sure example” of what his proposition demands. Does that verse (or any other) mention anything about his “acting as a punitive agent of the civil government”? **Not one word is said about his taking vengeance upon anyone!** Brother Green, is this the closest you can come to finding a Christian who served

as a punitive agent of the government?

Cornelius

Brother Green admits that his argument about Cornelius was “wholly based upon the silence of the scriptures.” Certainly then, Cornelius is not an example of a Christian who functioned as a punitive agent of the government, since the Scriptures do not say anything about his life after he became a Christian. So Cornelius does not help my opponent at all!

However, he says, “we should not overlook the fact that bro. Thrasher’s affirmation that Cornelius did sever his military connections is also based upon the silence of the scriptures.” Brother Green needs to go back and read what I said about Cornelius! I made **no** statement to the effect that “Cornelius did sever his military connections”! I do not know what Cornelius did after he became a Christian, since the Bible is silent on the subject. However, I do know that he could not have participated in killing, while at the same time remaining faithful unto God because the Bible makes this very evident (Matthew 5:21-22; 5:43-44; Romans 12:17-21; etc.).

The Philippian Jailer

The same general observations made with reference to Cornelius are true also in the case of the jailer. Brother Green says, “Our brother Thrasher assumes that he ceased to perform the acts of that office.” Once again he needs to read what I said about the jailer. I do not know whether or not the jailer “ceased to perform the acts of that office,” since the Bible does not say. I have not made an affirmative argument upon either the Philippian jailer or Cornelius; however, my opponent did, and he has admitted that those arguments were based upon the **silence of the Scriptures**. Therefore, they offer no proof for his proposition.

I am surprised at my brother. He states: “I find it very significant that despite very wonderful opportunities, we have no record of any punitive agent being required to quit that work.” He is beginning to sound very much like those who argue that “the Scriptures authorize” the use of instrumental music in worship. Since such instruments had been used in worship previously, they “find it very significant that despite very wonderful opportunities, we have no record of” anyone’s “being required to **quit**” using it! That is not the kind of evidence demanded by the proposition!

Brother Green remarks: “I didn’t argue and I don’t believe that authority to continue as a sword bearer would mean ‘that it was right for him [the jailer, TNT] to use the sword for all purposes for which he had believed it sanctioned before his conversion.’” My point was based upon brother Green’s argument from the silence of the Scriptures. If the jailer could continue to use the sword to punish evildoers (since the record does not say he was told to cease that activity), why not reason that he could also continue to use it in any other way (since he was not told to quit those either!)? In other words, he must prove his affirmation from what the Bible **says**, rather than from what it **does not say**.

Comments Concerning Argument Two

Brother Green thinks that I did not reply sufficiently to his second argument. As I said in my first negative, his logic is based upon the “**authorized punitive agent.**”

So his conclusion that “the authorized office and duties of the civil government do not entail sin” proves nothing whatsoever about the Christian, since **he has not proved that the Christian is authorized by God to serve as a punitive agent of the civil government!** Brother Green, this is exactly what you are supposed to be **proving** (not **assuming**, as you have done in your articles)! If he can prove this one point, then he will not need to do anything else in this debate.

My opponent says, “Since the Christian may perform that which is not sinful, he may therefore fill the office and perform the duties of the civil government.” Certainly the Christian may do anything that is not sinful **for him**; however, that is precisely my point. It is sinful for a Christian to become an agent of vengeance (Romans 12:19)! He is prohibited by God from performing those duties relating to legislating, judging, or executing such punishment. That is what God ordained civil government to do, and I am firmly convinced that He will overrule in these matters so as to provide for the welfare of His children (Romans 8:28; 12:19; 13:3; 1 Peter 2:13-14).

Comments Concerning Argument Three

Brother Green’s third argument is defective, as far as this proposition is concerned, in the same way as his second argument. My comments on the second apply to this one also. His conclusion that “no moral law is transgressed when civil government acts as God’s punitive agent” does not prove anything about the **Christian’s** relation thereto. When will our brother recognize that this discussion is not about what the civil government may do—we want to know what the **Christian** may scripturally do!

Concerning the violation of moral and positive laws, God has given positive laws which forbid the Christian to become an agent of vengeance (e.g., Matthew 5:43-44; Romans 12:14, 17-21). He has given positive laws authorizing civil government to punish evildoers (Romans 13:3-4; 1 Peter 2:13-14). One who is an authorized punitive agent (by positive law) is not subject to punishment under moral law, since he is acting in that capacity as a result of Divine authority (Romans 13:1-4).

Answers To Brother Green’s Questions

1. Every activity in the life of the Christian must be authorized (either generically or specifically) by the teaching of Scripture (Col. 3:17; 2 Tim. 3:16-17; 2 Peter 1:3; 2 Cor. 5:7 and Rom. 10:17). Such authorization may be stated as principles derived from express commands, approved examples, or necessary implications of Scripture.

2. The distinction in Romans 13 is between the individual **Christian** and the civil government (Romans 12:1-13:1ff).

3. The individual (not a Christian) may take vengeance **while acting as an authorized agent of the civil government** in fulfilling its responsibility as stated in Romans 13:1-4 and 1 Peter 2:13-14.

Brother Green's "Answers" To My Questions

I had expected my opponent at least to make an effort to answer the questions that were presented in the first negative. However, he made absolutely no attempt to do so. Please read those questions asked in that article.

Our brother has not given an **express command** authorizing the Christian to act as a punitive agent of the civil government. Why??? He knows that none can be found in the Bible, for he stated in his first article, "I am not affirming the Christian's obligation, but his authority." He says that it is authorized, but not commanded. Hence, it is not authorized by express command.

Brother Green has introduced two men whom he thinks are **approved examples** of Christians who acted as punitive agents; however, he admits that these are "wholly based upon the silence of the scriptures." Hence, they are not examples for what he is contending at all.

With reference to the Scriptures authorizing his affirmative by **necessary implication**, I would like to see some of the "established principles" from which he "necessarily infers that the scriptures authorize a Christian's acting as a punitive agent of the civil government." No such principles have been scripturally established by my opponent.

Let us be careful to uphold the pure and simple teachings of the Bible in every phase of our lives: "whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God" (1 Corinthians 10:31).

End of the First Proposition

Second Proposition

"The Scriptures forbid the Christian's acting as a punitive agent of the civil government."

Affirm:	Thomas N. Thrasher
Deny:	Ken Green

Thrasher's First Affirmative

It is a pleasure for me to affirm the proposition that is before us, which I believe with all of my heart to be the truth of God. "The Scriptures" are the sixty-six books of the Bible, the Old and New Testaments; "forbid" means to prohibit or exclude; "the Christian" is the obedient disciple of Christ; "acting as" means serving in the capacity of; "a punitive agent" is one who is authorized to execute punishment; "civil government" is organized human government.

I want to stress again that we are discussing the **Christian's** responsibility. I do not deny that civil government, through its authorized agents, is to punish evildoers (Romans 13:4; 1 Peter 2:13-14). However, I affirm that the Christian is not the agent that God has authorized to execute this vengeance (Romans 12:19). Let us proceed to prove that this is true.

Romans 12:1 - 13:14

We have already discussed these verses in detail in my negative articles. Paul points out the Christian's responsibility in his relationship to God (12:1-2), his brethren (12:3-13), persecutors (12:14-21), civil authorities (13:1-7), and the law (13:8-14). In all such relationships, the child of God is guided by a consistent application of the principle of love for God and his fellowmen. None of these relationships conflicts with another. The position which brother Green is advocating involves the Christian in such conflicts, as we shall discuss momentarily.

Romans 13 enumerates obligations which the Christian has toward the "powers that be"—"Wherefore ye must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but for conscience sake.... Render therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honor to whom honor" (verses 5, 7). The Christian must be in subjection to the civil government; however, his obligation is limited, in that obedience to God must come first (Acts 5:29). There are certain things that the Christian owes the government: taxes (Romans 13:7),

honor (1 Peter 2:17), prayers (1 Timothy 2:1-2), and subjection (Romans 13:5). In turn, the government owes the Christian protection and defense (Romans 13:3-4; Acts 23:23-24).

The government does not owe the Christian taxes or prayer, neither does the Christian owe the government protection or defense. Brother Green apparently believes that the Christian does owe the government these things. If so, where do the Scriptures speak of such?

The Christian's Warfare

If Christians may engage in warfare in this world, for what may they fight? The apostle Paul answers the question: "For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh: (for the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds" (2 Corinthians 10:3-4); "For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. Wherefore take unto you the whole armor of God ..." (Ephesians 6:12-17). The only warfare sanctioned for the Christian is the spiritual warfare to which Paul refers: "Fight the good fight of faith" (1 Timothy 6:12; 1:18-19; 2 Timothy 2:3-14). What are the weapons which Christians are to use? Certainly not guns, or knives, or bombs; but "the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God" (Ephesians 6:17; Hebrews 4:12).

Jesus makes abundantly clear in his statement to Pilate recorded in John 18:36, "My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight..." What greater cause could there have been for the servants of Christ to fight than in defending the Just One from ruthless men? Yet Jesus emphasized that His servants should not fight (with carnal weapons, Matthew 26:51-52). Since the Christian is forbidden to use such weapons, as the Scriptures cited prove, then he may not employ them as a punitive agent of the civil government.

Christian Against Christian

If it is scriptural and right that a Christian fight for his country, then it is also right for Christians in other countries to do the same. This position inevitably leads to the situation where Christians in one nation fight and kill Christians in other nations. Yet, the New Testament repeatedly stresses the attitude and practice that we must have with regard to our brethren: "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another" (John 13:35); "Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love" (Romans 12:10); "Let brotherly love continue" (Hebrews 13:1); "And this commandment have we from him, that he who loveth God love his brother also" (1 John 4:21).

Despite such passages which show the love that we ought to have for brethren in Christ, some brethren would encourage us to fight and kill other children of God on the battlefields of the world, flagrantly violating these verses of Scripture. Perhaps there are some sincere people who have enough imagination to picture a faithful Christian being "kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love," while shooting him down with a gun. Now, if brother Green's position in this debate is correct, there should be no conflict in this action. Perhaps our brother will explain his reasoning on this point. Personally, I cannot fathom such "logic"!

The Great Commission

Jesus has presented his disciples with a noble commission: “Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature” (Mark 16:15). Matthew’s account says, “Go ye therefore, and teach all nations” (Matthew 28:19). When we consider the primary responsibility of Christians toward alien sinners throughout the entire world, it is summarized in the words of Jesus in the Great Commission.

I am sure that brother Green will agree that men and women are lost without having heard, believed, and obeyed the gospel of Christ. Keeping this in mind, where is there any indication in the Bible that a Christian ought to kill any person while acting as a punitive agent of the civil government, knowing that he is preventing that person from ever having opportunity to be taught the truth and be saved? Brother Green, please tell us: Should a Christian act as an executioner or soldier in killing a person who is an alien sinner, who has not had opportunity to hear the gospel, and who would thus be eternally condemned to a burning hell? I do not believe that any Christian should serve in any such capacity, because Jesus has never authorized His children to become punitive agents of the civil government in exacting any kind of vengeance (Romans 12:19 - 13:6). Any action of this nature on the part of a Christian is, I honestly believe, inconsistent with the principle of the Great Commission.

The Sermon On the Mount

Jesus said, “Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth: But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also...” (Matthew 5:38-42). Although there have been some misunderstandings concerning Jesus’ teaching in these verses, I believe that the principle involved is very simple: His disciples were not to become agents of executing vengeance, such as was permitted under the Old Testament law. This principle harmonizes completely with other passages in the New Testament (Romans 12:17, 19).

God’s moral law has always been against the killing of man by man. In the Patriarchal Dispensation, it was expressed by saying, “Whoso sheddeth man’s blood, by man shall his blood be shed” (Genesis 9:5-6). In the Mosaic Age, the words of the Ten Commandments expressed the moral law: “Thou shalt not kill” (Exodus 20:13). We observe that in each of these periods of God’s dealing with men, there was a law against the intentional taking of human life. God provided a penalty for violation of His law. For example, “So ye shall not pollute the land wherein ye are: for blood it defileth the land: and the land cannot be cleansed of the blood that is shed therein, but by the blood of him that shed it” (Numbers 35:33). As in other cases where there is a penalty for violation of God’s law, God has also provided for an administrator of His vengeance: the avenger of blood (Deuteronomy 19:4-21; Leviticus 25:48-49). Please observe this statement relating to the taking of vengeance under the Mosaic law: “And he that killeth any man shall surely be put to death... And if a man cause a blemish in his neighbor: as he hath done, so shall it be done to him; Breach for breach, eye for eye, tooth for tooth: as he hath caused a blemish in a man, so shall it be done to him...” (Leviticus 24:17-22). Thus, God has given a law against killing; He has provided a penalty for its violation; and He has specified an administrator to execute His vengeance.

When we turn back to the Sermon on the Mount, we should immediately observe that the reference is made by Jesus to this exacting of vengeance under the Mosaic Law (Matthew 5:38; Leviticus 24:20; Deuteronomy 19:21). However, instead of stating that His disciples may avenge evil as was provided for under the law of Moses, he specifically prohibited such action: “resist not evil” (Matthew 5:39). In forbidding His children from becoming agents of vengeance, has God left them without protection or defense? Certainly not. This is where the civil government comes into His plan as one “sent by him for the punishment of evildoers, and for the praise of them that do well” (1 Peter 2:13-14). I am emphasizing again that **the Christian is not God’s authorized agent for carrying out His vengeance upon evildoers today. He has ordained civil government for that purpose!**

God’s Providential Care

The Bible teaches that God provides for the welfare of His children. “And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are called according to His purpose” (Romans 8:28). There can be no doubt in the heart of a faithful servant of the Lord who looks after us, that He will provide anything that we need in this world as long as we are willing to “seek first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness” (Matthew 6:30-33). One might ask: What connection does this have with the question of whether or not a Christian may act as a punitive agent of the civil government? It is simply this: Brethren often seem to lack faith that our heavenly Father will protect us from evil men, and we think that we must take up weapons in order to protect ourselves.

However, I believe that God knew what he was doing when He spoke through the apostle these words: “Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord” (Romans 12:19). And He proceeded in the next chapter to identify His ordained agent of vengeance (the civil government): “the minister of God to thee for good,” but also “the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil” (verse four). Can there be any doubt in our minds that God will do what He said? If so, I think we ought to read and believe the words spoken by our Lord in Matthew 6:25-33.

I hope that brother Green will produce the authority for “the Christian’s acting as a punitive agent of the civil government.”

Questions For Brother Green

1. Since you believe that a Christian may be faithful to God even though he bears weapons as a soldier in a country’s armed forces, by what authority may a faithful Christian kill another faithful Christian in an enemy country’s army?

2. By what authority may a Christian kill a sincere, conscientious, morally upright non-Christian in an enemy country, knowing that such action will result in that person’s being lost eternally in hell?

3. Who is an “evil-doer”?

Green's First Negative

Let us now take Bro. Thrasher's arguments in order and determine if he has proved his proposition.

Romans 12:1 - 13:14

Brother Thrasher has assumed throughout the debate, that there is an unbridgeable chasm between the civil government and the Christian. It has been demonstrated that no such distinction exists.

We have referred to some Christians of whom mention is made in the New Testament who were serving in the civil government without apostolic rebuke. These examples should suffice to show the fallacy of this argument.

I agree that the Christian owes the government taxes, honor, prayers, and subjection. I agree that the subjection has limitations. Brother Thrasher and I do not agree upon what those limitations are.

We agree that the government owes the Christian protection and defense. I believe that we disagree as to why the government owes the Christian such. It is not because he is a Christian, but because he is a citizen.

When Paul appealed to the Roman government for protection and/or defense (Acts 16:37-38; 22:25; 23:23; 25:11), he didn't do so on the basis his heavenly citizenship, but his Roman citizenship.

The government, therefore, owes its citizens protection and defense. But who is the government? In the final analysis it is the citizens themselves. They collectively provide for their own defense and for the common good through their taxes and population.

Does Romans 12:17-19 prohibit discipline and enforcement of law? Is a parent guilty of transgressing this if he controls and corrects his children by physical force? Is he thereby recompensing evil for evil, being overcome by evil, and avenging himself? Obviously not, for such discipline is required by God on the part of parents (Eph. 6:14; Heb. 12:7-8).

Similarly, discipline and law enforcement are required in the realm of civil government. Romans 13:1-5 identifies civil government as God's instrument of chastisement upon those who require such discipline. Brother Thrasher has not yet explained to us how a man may be, by virtue of the same office and act, both a minister of God for good and a sinner. God does not give laws and then license men to violate them.

The Christian's Warfare

I have no argument with the thesis that the Christian's warfare is spiritual. I do take issue with the use of these passages in an attempt to prove the proposition under discussion. They have absolutely nothing to do with the Christian's civil citizenship. The fact that we are members of the Kingdom of Christ does not prove that we have no citizenship upon this earth. The fact that our weapons and warfare are not carnal in advancing the Kingdom of Christ does not prove that a Christian may not be a punitive agent of the civil government.

That Jesus makes Brother Thrasher's proposition "abundantly clear" in John 18:36, I deny. Rather than proving the proposition, this passage disproves it. The disciples were not to fight for the deliverance of Christ because his kingdom is not a worldly one. But if His kingdom were of a worldly nature, then they would have fought. This was axiomatic. Jesus thus recognized the necessity of citizens of a worldly kingdom fighting for protection and defense.

Therefore, since we are members of worldly kingdoms or nations, as well as a spiritual kingdom, it sometimes becomes necessary to use carnal weapons in the defense of our homes, freedoms and national boundaries. We cannot use carnal weapons to advance spiritual causes. But neither can godless aggressors and national enemies be stopped with the spiritual sword. The passage works both ways.

"The employment of physical force in its proper sphere, and in the manner prescribed by God's authority, is good and necessary. The methods employed in a material realm are not rendered null and void, because they are not to be used in a spiritual realm. Force has no place in Christ's kingdom, because citizenship there is spiritual and voluntary. It would vitiate every act of worship and service. There is no virtue in doing what we are compelled to do. But a Christian can and is even commanded to operate in other realms than the church" (Foy Wallace, Jr., *The Christian and The Government*, p. 3).

Christian Against Christian

This argument is an emotional play that tends to draw people aside from the real issue. Our brother does not believe that it is any worse to take the life of a Christian than it is to take the life of an alien.

The basic premise of this argument is faulty. Because in a given situation it may be right for Christians to fight for their country, it is not necessarily right that Christians in other countries do the same. This would depend entirely upon the cause being advanced. I do not believe that fighting a murderer would make me a murderer, whether he has obeyed the gospel or not. I do not believe that Christians may engage in any and every war.

The possibility of doing physical harm to, or even taking the life, if necessary, of a fellow Christian is not truly germane to the question under discussion. If it became necessary for me to protect myself, or another, from an aggressor, whether he had been baptized would not be a consideration and my actions would not disprove my love for him.

I am to love others as I love myself (Matt. 22:39). If I, for some reason, attacked, or unlawfully entered the home of another, I would not consider it a lack of love on his part if he

physically and even violently resisted me.

We all have heard or read of people who have confessed of capital crimes long after the possibility of apprehension. They gave themselves over to punishment, in some cases death, not because they did not love themselves, but because of a sense of guilt and justice.

God's justice does not oppose His love. Neither does justice in this world conflict with true love. It may conflict with shallow sentimentality, and often does, but not with real love.

The Great Commission

One almost gets the impression that Brother Thrasher is more concerned about the salvation of evildoers than God is. After all, it is God who gives civil government the prerogative of taking what only He can give, life. Don't you imagine that God recognized that alien sinners who were executed without opportunity to hear the gospel would be eternally condemned to a burning hell? Whether a Christian or someone else does the executing does not matter so far as the future destiny of the condemned man is concerned. It isn't at all hard for me to conceive of a punitive agent of the civil government who is a Christian, trying to win a condemned man to Christ, and then, at the pre-appointed moment, fulfilling his duty to the state. The New Testament teaches that he's a minister of God for good in so doing.

If the condemned man were won to Christ, such would not change the picture whatsoever as far as the civil government. We are operating in two distinct areas of activity.

Sermon On the Mount

As Brother Thrasher says, there have been some misunderstandings concerning Jesus' teaching in these verses. I believe that he is among the misunderstanders.

His total argument in this debate has been that the civil government is God's authorized agent for carrying out his vengeance upon evildoers today (I agree) and that Christians cannot serve as or in the civil government (I disagree).

This argument is based upon pure assumption. Our brother needs to produce the scripture that teaches that only sinners are to administer civil government. We have examples in the Bible of the righteous as well as the wicked performing the duties of civil government including the work of the punitive agent. If, by this time, I have not demonstrated the complete fallacy of this argument and thus removed the premise upon which my opponent thinks he stands, then it would be futile to belabor the point further. I will let the reader judge.

Our Lord's admonition in Matt. 5:38-42 has nothing to do with the needs and activities of nations. Individual relationships are in view. As Brother McGarvey observed:

"This command which enjoins non-resistance, like most of the other precepts of this sermon, does not demand of us absolute, unqualified passivity at all times and under all circumstances... Absolute non-resistance may so far encourage crime as to become a sin... The example given, a

slap in the face, has been regarded as a gross insult in all ages, but is not an assault which imperils life... Self-preservation is a law of God giving rights which, under most circumstances, a Christian can claim. He may resist the robber, the assassin and all men of that ilk, and may protect his person and his possessions against the assaults of the violent and lawless. But when the honor of Christ and the salvation of man demands it, he should observe this commandment even unto the very letter... A man may strive for self-protection when life is threatened without any spirit of revenge.”

Here are some observations concerning this passage that I would like for Brother Thrasher to consider and comment upon:

1. A situation in which a third party is being victimized is not under consideration. One could not logically conclude from this scripture that it would be unlawful and therefore sinful to come to the aid of such a victim. Is there a scripture from which one could draw such an inference?

2. A slap on the cheek is an insult, not a threat to life and limb. To infer that we are prohibited from defending our lives and well-being by this statement is to proceed beyond the principle expressed.

3. V. 42 says, “Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away.”

Would this passage have to be literally applied by one who is employed by a bank? If Brother Thrasher answers that it is not the individual’s money being loaned in that circumstance, we will remind him that it is not the individual’s vengeance being executed when he is employed by the civil government as a punitive agent.

God’s Providential Care

I wonder how far our brother would go with this line of reasoning. Most of us have probably not placed as much emphasis upon God’s Providence as we should, but brother Thrasher has accepted a common error and a dangerous extreme in failing to consider man’s responsibility.

O. C. Lambert in his review of David Lipscomb’s *Civil Government* book said, in meeting this same argument:

“The Holiness, using this same reasoning, refuses to have a doctor for his wife or baby. The Primitive Baptist argues that we need not get a storm pit when the cyclone comes, and to do so is to distrust God. I have noticed that God will let a Christian die when he fails to have a doctor and take medicine... Though we are taught in the Bible that the Lord gives us our daily bread (Matt. 6:11) he would let us starve to death if we do nothing ourselves, and I am sure the man is not distrusting God who works for his daily bread.”

In every realm of activity, man must be active to receive “anything he needs in this world.”

Brother Thrasher's Questions

We have answered his first two questions in the article. As to Question 3, I would define an evildoer as anyone or any group who disturbs the good order and peaceable life that is essential for the well being of society.

Questions For Brother Thrasher

1. What passage in God's word teaches that only sinners are to administer civil government?

2. Do you believe and teach that all the statements of Christ in Matt. 5:38-42 should be literally applied in every situation? If not, what limitations should be understood?

3. Did Paul show distrust in God's providential care when he appealed to the authorities for protection (Acts 22:17-24; 25:11)?



Thrasher's Second Affirmative

As I appear in this final affirmation of the proposition, I do so with the sincere desire that all may understand the Truth more perfectly as a result of this discussion between brother Green and myself. The proposition reads as follows: "The Scriptures forbid the Christian's acting as a punitive agent of the civil government." Please give your careful attention as we study this question further, and comment upon the statements made by my opponent.

Brother Green says, "Brother Thrasher has assumed throughout the debate, that there is an unbridgeable chasm between the civil government and the Christian." No, brother Green. I have stated that there are reciprocal obligations involved in the relationship of the Christian and the civil government. For example, the Christian owes the government taxes (Romans 13:7), honor (1 Peter 2:17), prayers (1 Timothy 2:1-2), and subjection (Romans 13:5). Please observe that I gave scriptural evidence for each of these responsibilities. However, I have not found a verse in all of the Bible that authorizes the **Christian** to provide **defense** for the civil government by acting in the capacity of a punitive agent. In fact, neither has brother Green produced such a Scripture in this discussion. Furthermore, I also showed that the civil government, in turn, owes

the Christian protection and defense (Romans 13:3-4; Acts 23:23-24). The civil government does not owe the Christian taxes, subjection, or prayer, and the Christian does not owe the government protection or defense! My opponent's position is that the Christian does owe these things, though he has not proved it from the Bible.

My friend states: "We have referred to some Christians of whom mention is made in the New Testament who were serving in the civil government without apostolic rebuke." I suppose that my brother is referring to men such as Cornelius and the Philippian jailer, with whom we have dealt previously. If you will read my first negative speech, you will find my reply to brother Green's argument on these cases. He has not found even **one** instance where a **Christian** acted as a punitive agent of the civil government. Please remember that we are not discussing whether or not a Christian may act in other capacities related to the civil government (such as a school teacher, Post Office worker, etc.). Such matters are not included in this proposition. We are presently studying whether or not a Christian may participate as an agent of the civil government in punishing evildoers or engaging in carnal warfare. I have taken the position that a Christian may not act in such capacity, either to legislate, judge, or execute punishment as an agent of the government. Brother Green says that the Christian may, but he has not proved it from the Book of God.

Brother Green asks, "Does Romans 12:17-19 prohibit discipline and enforcement of law? Is a parent guilty of transgressing this if he controls and corrects his children by physical force?" No. The Scriptures very clearly authorize (in fact, require) parents to correct their children (Ephesians 6:4; Hebrews 12:7-9).

This is the point that I am trying to get my friend to see. If brother Green could give scriptural proof that a Christian may execute punishment as an agent of the civil government, why doesn't he produce it? Notice, however, that if my brother's attempted parallel between a parent's correction of his child and a Christian's punishing people as an agent of the government is accurate, then Christians would be **required** (not simply permitted) to serve as a punitive agent of the civil government. Please understand the idea. Since parental discipline of children is **required** if one is to obey God's law, then (if the cases are parallel) each Christian would be **required** to execute punishment as a governmental agent. Since brother Green does not believe this, then he must recognize that parental discipline is not in the same category as governmental discipline.

In my previous speech, I introduced several passages to prove that the nature of the Christian's warfare is spiritual, not carnal. "For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh: (for the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds)"— 2 Corinthians 10:3-4. I pointed out that the only warfare sanctioned for the Christian is the spiritual warfare to which the apostle Paul refers when he says, "Fight the good fight of faith" (1 Timothy 6:12; 1:18-19; 2 Tim. 2:3-4). Now, since brother Green claims that the Christian may also fight with carnal weapons in earthly conflicts, the burden of proof is upon him. I have shown what **God's word** teaches about the Christian's warfare, let my brother show where the Bible teaches the Christian may do what **he** asserts.

Relative to this matter of the Christian's warfare, I introduced the words of the Lord in John 18:36, "My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight." Jesus very plainly teaches that His servants do not fight with carnal weapons (Cf.

Matthew 26:51-52). Why not? Because those who are in His kingdom are not **of the world**—His servants are **in** the world, but not **of** the world. Paul taught likewise in Romans 12:2, “And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.” There is an obvious contrast between the nature of Christ’s kingdom and the nature of worldly kingdoms. Those who are **of the world** often fight in carnal wars, but the servants of Christ are not **of the world**; therefore, the servants of Christ do not fight with carnal weapons (2 Corinthians 10:3-4; John 18:36).

With reference to the fact that carnal warfare often pits Christian against Christian (an obvious example being the Civil War in this country during the 1860’s), brother Green responds, “Our brother does not believe that it is any worse to take the life of a Christian than it is to take the life of an alien.” I have not said that I do. However, I have cited several New Testament verses demonstrating a Christian’s attitude toward his brethren, and not one verse in all of the Bible even hints that one Christian may kill or injure another Christian under any circumstances as an agent of the civil government.

That this is a serious problem for those who advocate the Christian’s right to engage in carnal warfare is admitted by some who hold that position: “If warfare is permissible, it is unavoidable today that Christians will kill other Christians. This is especially true in push-button warfare, when missiles are sent against cities filled with noncombatants. Yet, Christians prove they are children of God by the love which they express toward each other (John 13:34-35; 1 John 3:10, 14-16; 4:7, 11-12, 20-21).” (Allen Isbell, *War and Conscience*, page 19). Although brother Green seems to think the issue of Christian against Christian “is not germane to the question under discussion,” Isbell admits, “This is, probably, the most troublesome problem confronting the Christian who engages in war” (page 20). I would like for my opponent to produce one Scripture authorizing a Christian to kill or injure another Christian under any conditions, while acting as an agent of the civil government. Please notice whether or not he does it.

Previously I have shown that the primary responsibility of Christians toward alien sinners is that of teaching them the gospel of Christ (Matthew 28:19-20; Mark 16:15-16). Since people are lost without having heard, believed, and obeyed the gospel, a Christian, acting as an agent of the government, must not take the life of an individual. However, many times innocent people have been killed in warfare without having heard the word of God, perhaps due to the failure of Christians to recognize their obligation according to the Great Commission, and who enter into the affairs of war intent on taking the lives of their enemies. I ask in all sincerity: Where does God’s word teach that the Christian should become involved in such action?

My opponent says, “One almost gets the impression that brother Thrasher is more concerned about the salvation of evildoers than God is.” No, I am simply trying to emphasize the Christian’s responsibility toward the sinner. It is interesting to note that brother Green did not cite a single scriptural reference in his comments on this argument. Strange indeed that he claims “the Scriptures authorize the Christian’s acting as a punitive agent of the civil government” in taking the lives of other individuals, yet he does not present any Scripture to prove it! His only real effort to reply is his statement that “we are operating in two distinct areas of activity.” In other words, he says that the Christian sometimes acts as a Christian in fulfilling his obligation to teach God’s word, and at other times he fulfills his obligation to the government in executing vengeance. This is a basic fallacy in my brother’s position. The Christian never

ceases to be a Christian no matter what relationship he sustains—towards God, brethren, family, friends, enemies, or civil government.

In all of these relationships, he must first obey God (Acts 5:29). There have been instances in which the government has required people to steal and destroy (sabotage), lie and commit adultery (in connection with espionage), as well as kill. If a Christian could do one of these as an agent of the government in warfare, why couldn't he also do the others?

The injunctions against these sins are frequently encountered as one reads God's Book, and any Christian who intentionally violates such prohibitions is guilty of sin (Galatians 5:19-21; 1 Corinthians 6:9-10; Revelation 21:8; etc.). The mere fact that one may be acting with the approval of the civil government does not change this.

When a Christian executes vengeance as an agent of the government, brother Green claims that "he's a minister of God for good in so doing." Scripture please, brother Green! The apostle Paul says, "For **rulers** are not a terror to good works, but to the evil.... For **he** [ruler, civil government] is the minister of God to **thee** [those addressed, Christians] for good. But if **thou** do that which is evil, be afraid; for **he** beareth not the sword in vain: for **he** is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil. Wherefore **ye** must needs be subject for **they** are God's ministers, attending continually upon this very thing" (Romans 13:3-6). Observe the clear distinction between the **civil government** (God's authorized minister to execute vengeance, verse four) and the **Christian**, whom God has forbidden to take vengeance (Romans 12:17, 19). In spite of this, brother Green has contended from the beginning of this debate that "God authorizes Christians to serve **as civil governments**" (emphasis mine). However, he has not produced proof that a Christian may act in any such capacity as an executor of vengeance. This is the very point of contention between us in this discussion.

Our brother asserts, "We have examples in the Bible of the righteous as well as the wicked performing the duties of civil government including the work of the punitive agent." What are those examples, my friend? You have mentioned that some under the Old Testament law acted as punitive agents; however, I have showed that such examples prove nothing with reference to what the **Christian** may scripturally do. You have referred to the cases of Cornelius and the Jailer, but in neither case does the Bible mention their acting as punitive agents after becoming Christians. You have implied that others served in various capacities in government, yet not a single instance has been given where a Christian acted as an agent of the civil government to **punish** anyone! This is the issue! If there are "examples" for your contention, they have not been introduced into this discussion.

In reply to my argument relating to Jesus' instruction in the Sermon on the Mount, brother Green states: "Our Lord's admonition in Matthew 5:38-42 has nothing to do with the needs and activities of nations. Individual relationships are in view." Certainly Jesus is speaking of individual action—and that is what the proposition involves! What is "**the Christian**" (an individual) to do? To say that Matthew 5 does not relate to the proposition because it deals with the individual is nonsense. With reference to the quotation from brother McGarvey, I will simply mention that we are discussing what the Bible teaches, not what brother McGarvey believed.

However, I would like to cite the words of McGarvey as they pertain to the exact matter that brother Green and I are discussing: "If the demon of war is let lose in the land, I shall proclaim to

my brethren the peaceable commandments of my Savior, and strain every nerve to prevent them from joining any sort of military company, or making any warlike preparations at all. I know that this course will be unpopular with men of the world... But I would rather, ten thousand times, be killed for refusing to fight, than to fall in battle, or to come home victorious with the blood of my brethren on my hands” (from *The Life and Times of Benjamin Franklin*, pp. 286-287). These words are based upon the scriptural principles I have contended for in this discussing.

Brother Green did not deal with my argument relative to the Lord’s words in the Sermon on the Mount as contrasted with the provision for executing vengeance under the Mosaic dispensation. “And he that killeth any man shall surely be put to death... And if a man cause a blemish in his neighbor: as he hath done, so shall it be done to him: Breach for breach, eye for eye, tooth for tooth: as he hath caused a blemish in a man, so shall it be done to him.” (Leviticus 24:17-22). Thus, vengeance was to be carried out in the Old Testament period; however, not just anyone could do it—only the divinely authorized agent of vengeance (Deuteronomy 19:4-21; Leviticus 25:48-49). Similarly, God has authorized an agent of vengeance today; however, the Christian is expressly prohibited from exacting vengeance (Matthew 5:38-39; Romans 12:17-21). Who, then, is to execute vengeance? God has ordained that “rulers” (civil government) do it (Romans 13:3-4; 1 Peter 2:13-14).

Concerning the matter of God’s providential care, I pointed out that the Christian should be content to do what God has said, and (if he does) God will provide for his children’s needs. I made no reference whatsoever to just “sitting back and doing nothing,” and God would take care of us. I certainly agree with brother Green that “man must be active to receive” what he needs. However, in the matter of the Christian’s action with regard to the civil government, God has told us to be subject to the rulers (Romans 13:5), honor them (1 Peter 2:17), pay taxes that are required of us (Romans 13:7), and pray for rulers (1 Timothy 2:1-2). I cannot read anywhere in God’s Book that a Christian is to “fight” or “kill” as an agent of the government. Therefore, I cannot act in that way. But as long as a Christian fulfills his responsibility to the government (in divinely approved ways), and keeps God’s law in other relationships as well, then I have no doubt about God’s providential care over him.

In responding to brother Green’s questions, I reply by noting again the distinctions between the Christian and the civil government with reference to executing vengeance. This has been stated clearly in my speeches. No scriptural evidence can be found for a Christian to execute vengeance as an agent of the government. Again, relative to the Christian’s taking vengeance and Jesus’ words in Matthew 5, the Lord plainly prohibits the Christian from executing vengeance as was permitted under the Law of Moses. To the third question, I reply negatively. Paul simply did what Romans 13 permits any Christian to do—appeal to the “rulers” for protection and defense. Civil government owes the Christian this. However, I hasten to emphasize that he did not take up weapons himself in his own defense, as brother Green’s position would say that he should do. Paul realized that this was not the Christian’s proper action (Romans 12:17 - 13:7).

There is no scriptural authority for “the Christian’s acting as a punitive agent of the civil government.” I encourage each person to investigate God’s truth for himself, and stand firmly for the position that harmonizes with the entire revelation of God.

Green's Second Negative

In my final article I will offer no new arguments except possibly counter arguments in reply to affirmative arguments posed by my opponent.

Brother Thrasher attempts to circumvent my charge that he “has assumed throughout the debate that there is an unbridgeable chasm between the civil government and the Christian” by restating his position that there are reciprocal obligations between the two.

I understand his position on this and it does not answer my charge. My point is that brother Thrasher has assumed that a Christian cannot participate as part of the civil government. He can only pay taxes, give honor, offer prayers and be subject to the government, according to my opponent.

If it can be demonstrated that no such gap exists, but that a Christian, as well as any other citizen, may be a part of the civil government, then brother Thrasher's major premise throughout this debate falls by the way.

He states, “Please remember that we are not discussing whether or not a Christian may act in other capacities related to the civil government (such as a school teacher, Post Office worker, etc.). Such matters are not included in this proposition.”

Must I remind our brother that he is the one who introduced this line of thought into the debate? In his first negative article he wrote: “Please notice carefully the clear distinction made in Romans 13:1-6 between **civil government** and the **Christian**. ‘Let every soul [**Christian**] be subject unto the higher powers [**civil government**], For rulers [**civil governments**] are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou [**Christian**] then not be afraid of the power [**civil government**]? Do that which is good and thou [**Christian**] shalt have praise of the same [**civil government**]; For **he** is the minister of God to **thee** for good. But if **thou** do that which is evil, be afraid; for **he** beareth not the sword in vain: for **he** is the minister of God . . . Wherefore **ye** must needs be subject . . . For, for this cause pay **ye** tribute also for **they** are God's ministers...’ If ‘God authorizes Christians to serve as civil governments,’ as brother Green claims, then why is such a clear difference made in Romans thirteen?”

Surely it is apparent to you who have patiently read our exchange to this point that brother Thrasher's principal argument has been that there is an unbridgeable chasm between the civil government and the Christian and thus no Christian can serve in the civil government.

This is his basic assumption. He has not established it from Rom. 13:1-6 any more than he could prove from Heb. 13:17 that no Christian can serve in the eldership. Yet the same kind of phraseology is employed in each of these passages.

Brother Thrasher's reply to my questions—“Does Romans 12:7-19 prohibit discipline and enforcement of law? Is a parent guilty of transgressing this if he controls and corrects his

children by physical force?”—earns the rank of a quibble. He argues that if there is really a parallel between “a parent’s correction of his child and a Christian’s punishing people as an agent of the government..., then Christians would be **required** (not simply permitted) to serve as punitive agents of the civil government.”

It’s an old ploy to attempt to discredit an argument by showing one or more particulars in which an analogy may not be parallel. This is never very difficult to do.

I’m not arguing that a parent’s correction of his child and a Christian’s punishing people as an agent of the government is parallel in every single point.

Certainly parents are required to correct and discipline their children. And this proves that Romans 12:17-19 does not prohibit discipline and enforcement of law in the family relationship. Romans 13:1-6 requires civil government to enforce law by physical force if necessary. This proves that Romans 12:17-19 does not prohibit discipline and enforcement of law in the government relationship.

Again brother Thrasher makes the argument that the Christian’s warfare is spiritual, not carnal. He has yet to face up to the fact that Christians are citizens of worldly nations or kingdoms as well as of the spiritual kingdom of Christ.

So again I must reply (he did not bother to answer this) that 2 Cor. 10:3-4; 1 Tim. 6:12; 1:18-19; 2 Tim. 2:3-4 and similar passages do not discuss the Christian’s responsibility as a citizen of an earthly government and do not prove that a Christian may not be a punitive agent of the civil government.

Brother Thrasher is employing the same kind of logic that Baptist preachers use when they rattle off a dozen scriptures on faith and conclude that since these say nothing about baptism, therefore baptism is not essential.

Since our Brother has given me the laboring oar by stating: “Now, since brother Green claims that the Christian may also fight with carnal weapons in earthly conflicts, the burden of proof is upon him.” I accept the burden and direct the reader’s attention again to John 18:36.

Jesus said that if His kingdom were a worldly one, then the disciples would have fought. Jesus recognized and never once called in question the right and the necessity of citizens of a worldly kingdom to fight for protection and defense.

The reader may judge as to why my opponent did not notice what was said along these lines in the last article.

Allen Isbell’s statement that “this [Christian against Christian, KG] is probably the most troublesome problem confronting the Christian who engages in war” may be true. But it is not troublesome from a logical point of view but only from an emotional viewpoint.

If the principles that I have expressed regarding the government’s responsibility to punish evildoers and the Christian’s right to participate in government are valid principles, then a Christian may punish such evildoers as a punitive agent of the government. If the evildoer is himself a Christian, this doesn’t modify the governments’ responsibility to punish him in any way. 1 Peter 4:15 indicates that Christians, as well as others, may suffer as murders, thieves,

evildoers or busybodies.

The real issue in this “Christian against Christian” argument is: Has the Christian committed deeds worthy of punishment. If so, then he deserves to be dealt with as any other criminal. The argument proves nothing so far as the proposition under discussion.

I am criticized for not citing “a single scriptural reference” in my comments on the “Great Commission” argument. Well, I believe in the Christian’s responsibility to fulfill the great commission just as strongly as my fellow disputant does. But the proposition has nothing to do with the great commission.

Brother Thrasher said, “His only real effort to reply is his statement that ‘We are operating in two distinct areas of activity.’”

No, if the reader will go back, he will find that I said more than that.

Words are put in my mouth when it is said, “In other words, he says that the Christian sometimes acts as a Christian in fulfilling his obligation to teach God’s word and at other times he fulfills his obligation to the government in executing vengeance. This is a basic fallacy in my brother’s position.”

No, brother Thrasher, I say no such thing. I agree with you that the Christian never ceases to be a Christian regardless of the relationship he sustains. But this doesn’t give one the liberty to use passages that speak of the spiritual kingdom and the way in which it is to be advanced and sustained and apply these to worldly kingdoms or nations.

Brother Thrasher overlooks the thrust of a statement when he takes one sentence out of its context and replies to it. He writes: “Our brother asserts, ‘We have examples in the Bible of the righteous as well as the wicked performing the duties of civil government including the work of the punitive agent.’ What are those examples, my friend?”

My complete statement was: “His total argument in this debate has been that the civil government is God’s authorized agent for carrying out his vengeance upon evildoers today (I agree) and that Christians cannot serve as or in the civil government (I disagree).

“This argument is based upon pure assumption. Our brother needs to produce the scripture that teaches that only sinners are to administer civil government. We have examples in the Bible of the righteous as well as the wicked performing the duties of civil government including the work of the punitive agent. If, by this time, I have not demonstrated the complete fallacy of this argument and thus removed the premise upon which my opponent thinks he stands, then it would be futile to belabor the point further. I will let the reader judge.”

I repeat, “Our brother needs to produce the scripture that teaches that only sinners are to administer civil government.” He is supposed to be in the affirmative in this proposition. I am well satisfied with my affirmative articles in the first proposition of this debate.

I did not quote from J. W. McGarvey because I felt that his words were authoritative, but because his words expressed my own understanding of Matt. 5:38-42. My opponent said, “I would like to cite the words of McGarvey as they pertain to the exact matter that brother Green and I are discussing.”

As a matter of fact, the exact matter under discussion when I quoted J.W. McGarvey was Matt. 5:38-42 in the Sermon on the Mount. I believe that his comments on those verses are valid. So far as his emotions and opinions regarding the Civil War, I concur with brother Thrasher that we are discussing what the Bible teaches, not what brother McGarvey believed.

If our brother found fault with McGarvey's comments on the passage under discussion, he would have more profitably used his space to refute those comments.

Brother Thrasher charges that I did not deal with his argument relative to the executing of vengeance under the Mosaic dispensation as contrasted with the executing of vengeance according to the Lord's words in the Sermon on the Mount. But I did deal with this. I pointed out:

1. That a situation in which a third party is being victimized is not under consideration in the Matt. 5 passage.

2. The slap on the cheek is not a threat to life and limb and this passage does not instruct us on the subject of defending our lives or the lives of others.

3. It is not the individual's vengeance being executed when one is employed by the civil government as a punitive agent any more than it is the individual's money being loaned when one is employed by a bank (Matt. 5:42).

I requested that Brother Thrasher consider and comment upon these matters. He may have considered them but he didn't comment upon them.

Jesus prohibited a personal spirit of retaliation. Nowhere did He prohibit civil government from exacting vengeance that is just. Brother Thrasher again reiterates his main argument that Christians cannot serve in the civil government. This is his main argument but he hasn't proved it.

Concerning God's providential care, the same line of argument is relied upon. "Man must be active to receive," brother Thrasher agrees, but this does not include the right of actively defending himself or his family against physical assault (I wonder if one could hire a lawyer and defend himself against a lawsuit or would he have to wait for the civil government to come to his defense.) or of being an agent of the government. He assumes what needs to be proved.

In brother Thrasher's replies to my questions, he did not name the scripture that teaches that only sinners are to administer civil government, yet this has been his major premise throughout our discussion. We demonstrated in our first affirmative article that God does authorize Christians to serve in civil government, that the punitive agent is a minister of God for good and that the same thing that makes one such a minister could not make him a sinner.

If acting as a punitive agent of the civil government is not sinful, it is not wrong for the Christian to do so.

It is my hope that this exchange between Brother Thrasher and myself will be helpful to those who read and study it. I encourage the reader to "search the scriptures" (Acts 17:11).

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