

Am I a Responsible Parent If I Go to War or Support War?

Reverend Mark E. Sell

Senior Editor of Academic and Professional Books

“Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long upon the land which the LORD your God is giving you.” Exodus 20:13 NKJV

“Thus He distinguishes father and mother above all other persons on earth, and places them next to himself.” (Martin Luther, Fourth Commandment Explanation, Large Catechism [Theodore G. Tappert, *The Book of Concord* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1959)], pg 379)

Parents have an enormous responsibility given to them by God. God has made parents second only to Himself in terms of earthly authority. God calls us to protect our children, to provide for them, to raise them to be just and good citizens. As Christian parents, we are called to raise our children in God’s Word, to bring them to church to be baptized, to prepare them for the Lord’s Supper, and to teach them daily to repent of their sin and receive forgiveness. Through us and how we raise them, our children have their first glimpse of God.

As loving parents, we struggle with war, its emotions, hurts, and fears. For those who serve in the military, the primary question may be if it is right to fight. Who will take care of my children if I die in battle? For those not active in the armed forces, the question may be one of support. Can I support a military campaign in which my child might die or in which I might eventually be called to fight?

Christians who are soldiers or who are parents of soldiers face the ultimate tension between the two kingdoms in which we live—the civil realm and the churchly realm. We are called to serve our country, our spouses and children, our neighbors. We also are called as Christians to bring the reality of sin to light so there might be forgiveness. Christians may sacrifice their lives for the confession of faith. But when a Christian soldier is called to kill and may in turn be killed to achieve order and justice, that soldier stands at a crossroads. It may seem contradictory to leave the family one is called to provide for and protect to face death. But the call to be a soldier is a call from God to support the Fourth Commandment. In his Large Catechism, Martin Luther explains this reality:

The same may be said of obedience to the civil government, which, as we have said, is to be classed with the estate of fatherhood, the most comprehensive of all relations. In this case a man is father not of a single family, but of as many people as he has inhabitants, citizens, or subjects. Through civil rulers, as through our own parents, God gives us food, house and home, protection and security. Therefore, since they bear this name and title with all honor as their chief glory, it is our duty to honor and magnify them as the most precious treasure and jewel on earth. (Tappert, pg 150)

When Christians choose the vocation of soldier, we do so on behalf of parents who have authority on earth from God. The military serves the same primary purpose as parenthood: to bring order and protection to the community. When a government uses its military to maintain

order in the world, it functions like a father who uses discipline and punishment to maintain order in the home. Therefore, a parent who fights in a just war is a faithful parent.

Faithful parents learn quickly that parenting is all about sacrifice. Each day we sacrifice many things for our children and for our spouses. Each day we live according to several callings in our lives: parent, spouse, child, sibling, employee, etc. The call to be a soldier may be one of these. Even as we pray for wisdom to balance these callings, we understand that the family enables us to undertake these various callings. We see this especially as the broader “civil” family unites to support one another in times of war. Faithful Christians are faithful parents when they are faithful soldiers in a just war.

The same biblical issue addresses parents who must send their children off to fight in a just war. It is not easy for parents to watch as their children face death. However, the Fourth Commandment calls all parents to do just that. Whether parents die for their children or children die for their parents and in support of God’s ministers (Romans 13), parents continue to sacrifice for the good of their children and for the good of society.

Christian parents are different from all other parents. We grasp, through faith, the necessity of sacrifice in this sinful world. Sacrifice is the *crossroad* of true Christianity. God Himself, our heavenly Father, offered the perfect sacrifice to achieve eternal order, protection, justice, and peace. The God-man, Jesus Christ, was the perfect warrior who was killed for the sins of the whole world. The cross teaches us victory though the world sees defeat. When we face war in this world, the outcome is unknown. But Jesus faced the wrath of God because of our sins. He faced the excruciating death of eternal damnation that was the punishment we deserved. He faced Satan. Jesus devastatingly defeated sin, death, and the devil. Thanks to Christ, we do not face the ravages of war against the devil and death. Instead, Christ takes the spoils of His victory and freely gives them to us in simple faith. We can only receive forgiveness and the victory—and say thanks.

As Christian parents, we cling each day to the promises and to the victory that God gave to us in Baptism. In the holy water of salvation, Christ marked us as victors. He chose us to live forever. At the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, the water of Baptism became our salvation, our hope, and our death and resurrection. When we took our children to the holy altar of eternity to receive the cleansing waters of Baptism, Christ took our children into death and raised them into eternity. Thus as they live out their lives in their daily vocations, even as soldiers, we know that forgiveness and mercy belongs to them. We know that they live the baptized life, immersed in forgiveness. Therefore, death has been swallowed up in life. Because we have this victory, we can pray with Jesus: “Not my will, but Your will be done, O God.”

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