

Pacifism or Non-resistance

Historically, Mennonites have considered themselves to be a peace loving people. Today however, more and more Mennonites are using the term pacifism rather than non-resistance. In this article we want to consider the difference between these two views.

Pacifism

Pacifism can be defined as opposition to war or violence as a means of settling disputes.

The pacifist has no conscience against defending himself. His conscience is only against using violent means of defense.

Pacifism is not the Biblical doctrine of non-resistance. Pacifists do resist evil men — not only resist but apply pressure, racial and political, to gain their end. Although they stop short of violence, through their non violent effort they sometimes induce violent reactions in others.

Pacifists do not always act Christian. They do not pass the law of James 3:17-18. Pacifists are not peace-makers unless they make peace on their own terms.

Probably the world's best know pacifist was Mahatma Ghandi. He was a civil rights activist from India. He fought for Indian rights, first in Africa, then in his own country during the British rule.

The difference between Ghandi and other activists, was that the other activists used terrorism to gain their end, whereas Ghandi used strictly non violent means to gain his end. He would go on a hunger strike and starve himself until the government gave in and let him have his way.

Non-resistance

Daniel Kauffman states: “Non-resistance is an outward manifestation of the peace of God within the soul, and is the peace of God applied to our relation with our fellowman.”

The Bible basis for non-resistance is found in Matthew 5:38-44 and Romans 12:17-21. The words of Jesus, that “*Ye resist not evil,*” does not mean that we should not resist Satan. “*Resist the devil, and he will flee from you*” (James 4:7). We are in a spiritual warfare, not carnal (Corinthians 10:4).

Biblical non-resistance means that the Christian offers no physical resistance to evil men. Jesus said we should “*pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you.*”

Stephen's martyrdom in Acts 7, would be an account of true Biblical non-resistance. Another vivid example of non-resistance was Dirk Willems, an Anabaptist martyr. And above all, our blessed Saviour, Jesus Christ, was our perfect example of non-resistance.

The Error of Pacifism

1. Pacifists will become involved in peace marches to force the government to conform to their wishes. The non-resistant believer will not tell the government how to rule their affairs. He may plead for an exemption, if the government would make requirements of us which would violate Bible principles.

2. Pacifists will defend themselves in a lawsuit. Non-resistant Christians may negotiate but not resist evil men.

3. Pacifists call police to have the thief arrested. The Christian can notify the police that there is a thief on the loose, but not press any charges.

4. Pacifists think in terms of affecting peace among nations. The non-resistant Christian thinks in terms of individual peace with God.

5. Pacifists blur the line of separation between church and state. Non-resistant Christians keep the line of separation between church and state clear.

6. Pacifists work through civil government and unregenerated men to achieve their goals. The non-resistant Christian, with the Lord of the Church, works through the church and regenerated men for the furtherance of the Gospel.

7. Pacifists aim to establish new racial order based on better ethics and the will of men. The non-resistant Christian feels his responsibility to live in this world as the salt and light of the world.

8. Pacifists will offer the service of his hands to improve living conditions in our community, without any concern for evangelizing the lost. Non-resistant Christians will give a cup of cold water in the name of Christ with the ultimate goal of winning souls for Jesus.

9. We can clearly see that Biblical non-resistance and pacifism are conflicting positions. They are based on diverse premises, guided by different philosophies, goals, and objects and engage in different methods to achieve their goals.

Conclusion

Non-resistance is a Biblical doctrine. Non-resistance is personal, peaceable, and non-political. It is the doctrine taught and exemplified by Christ, by His disciples, and His faithful followers today.

Pacifists major on peace being the unifying factor and not faith. Once peace supersedes other important Biblical doctrines faith will be lost. How foolish to force peace upon a wicked world when they need a change of heart. What the world needs is faith in the Lord Jesus. Then they will have peace and be able to live peaceably

“When a man’s ways please the Lord, he maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him” (Proverbs 16:7).

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