

Letter to a Soldier

July 25, 2002

Dear Julie,

Thank you for your letter today. It was a joy to hear from you. Thank you for the encouragement! I am praying for you and your fellow soldiers. The church is praying as well. This Sunday is our outdoor service and we'll pray for you together.

Concerning the issue of killing ... in a sense, it's good to hear that this bothers you so much. It means that God is alive in you and that you have a "soft heart" toward what is right and true ... and that is very good! If it didn't bother you at all ... I would be very worried about you.

I always remember my dad saying that when he was in the service, they were taught to take prisoners of war whenever possible - not to just kill for the sake of killing. At other times though, it was necessary to kill in order to defend oneself or to stand up against evil aggression.

Romans, chapter 13 has some very helpful words in this regard: *Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. ... For he [government] is God's servant to do you good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword for nothing. He is God's servant, an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer.*

In light of this, Martin Luther said that one of the main purposes of the state (government) was to set limits on human sin and its consequences. Without the state, sin would lead to chaos and destruction. Therefore, the state can take up arms when circumstances and justice so demand.

It is wrong for a Christian (or anyone) to kill in the sense of murder (in anger, personally murdering someone or by taking justice into your own hands, instead of letting the "state" bring forth punishment). But a Christian CAN in good conscience be a soldier and even kill when necessary - as God's agent on earth to bring forth justice and defend the defenseless. To do so is NOT a sin.

As a soldier, you are God's instrument to bring calm and peace to our world. Without police and soldiers like yourself, evil would go unchecked in our world. There would be few consequences to sin and we would ultimately all live (or die) in fear and chaos. God is using you to defend the rest of us who otherwise would be quite "defenseless" against the evil of other powers and nations. You are defending innocent life.

Remember, it's important to separate your role as an INDIVIDUAL from your role as a SOLDIER. As an individual person, you are never to just go ahead and murder someone. That's what the 5th commandment is addressing. But in your role as a soldier, in order to defend what is right and curb evil in the world, you may be called to kill. (And as an effective soldier, you must be trained to do so.) As a soldier, you are part of the government, through which God works for our good, maintaining a sense of order in the world so that we can live in relative peace and safety. (That's what Romans 13:1-7 is referring to.)

I thank God (and you) that you and others are there to watch over me and keep me, my family, my church, my city, and my country (as well as, much of the world) safe from harm!

Pastor Jim Rademaker

In loving memory of Julie Knuijt

Sept. 25, 1984 - Feb. 20, 2003