

The Christian And War

A Study That Attempts To Answer
The Question: May A Christian
Scripturally Function As A Punitive
Agent Of The State?



May A Christian Scripturally Function As A Punitive Agent Of The State?

In answering this question, the Pacifist/Anti-War position responds with an emphatic “No!” The My-Country-Right-Or-Wrong position of unrestrained patriotism answers with an unqualified “Yes!” However, it has been my experience that simple answers rarely, if ever, do justice to complex questions. Therefore, the answer I will give is a bit more complex than usual. Even so, it is, I pray, an honest, informative and Scriptural answer. Whether it is or not, is a decision you’ll have to make for yourself.



The Study Is Divided Into Three Parts

I. An Introduction

II. The State's Role

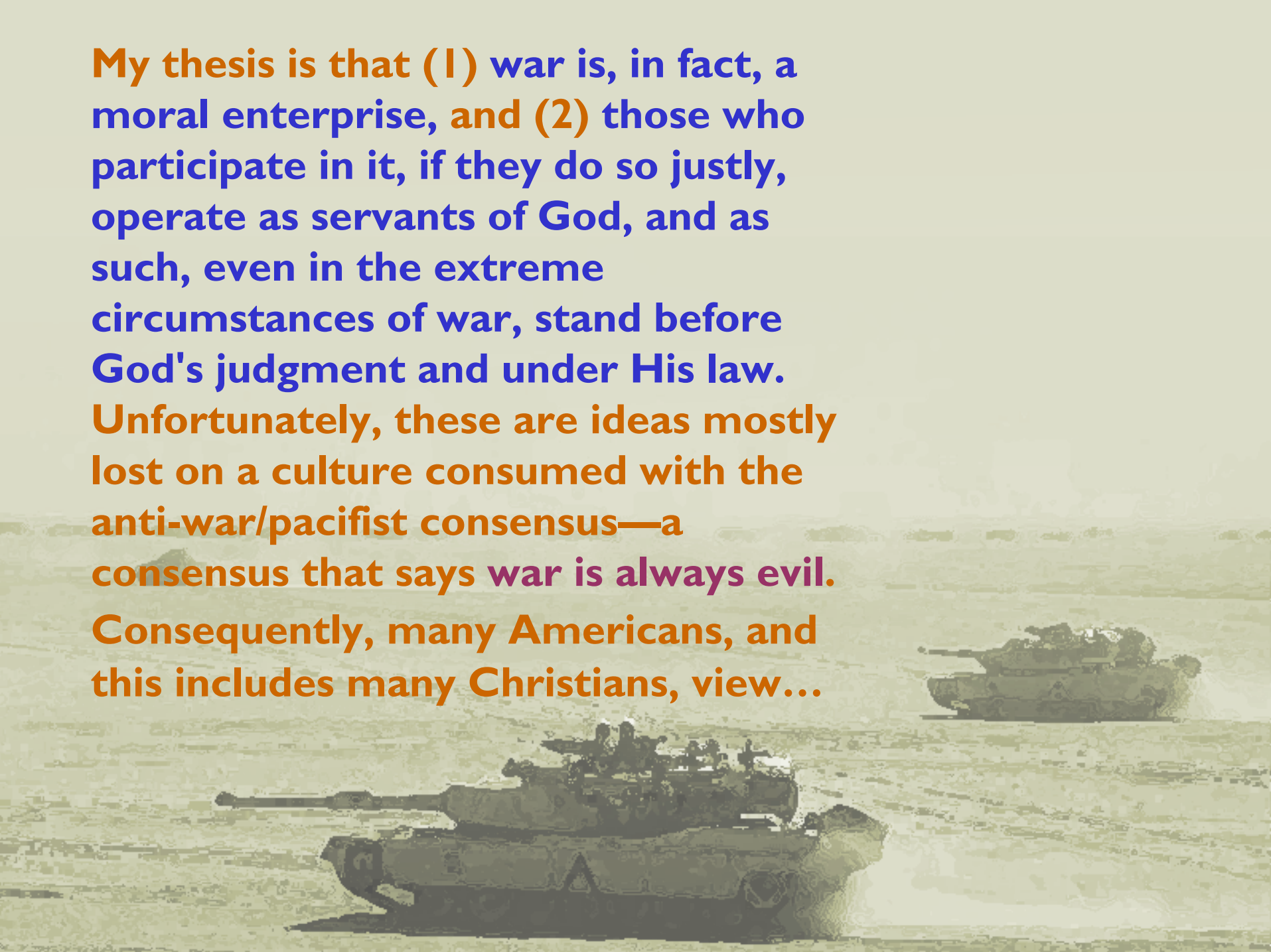
III. The Christian's Role



An Introduction



My thesis is that (1) war is, in fact, a moral enterprise, and (2) those who participate in it, if they do so justly, operate as servants of God, and as such, even in the extreme circumstances of war, stand before God's judgment and under His law. Unfortunately, these are ideas mostly lost on a culture consumed with the anti-war/pacifist consensus—a consensus that says war is always evil. Consequently, many Americans, and this includes many Christians, view...



war as a conflagration of raw savagery to which no moral code applies. In other words, many believe that “**War is hell,**” as Union General William Tecumseh Sherman said in his attempt to justify the targeting of civilians in the Civil War siege and bombardment of Atlanta and his subsequent scorched-earth “march to the sea.” “**War is cruelty. You cannot refine it,**” is what he told Atlanta officials in September 1864. He arrested factory workers who had made Confederate uniforms and...



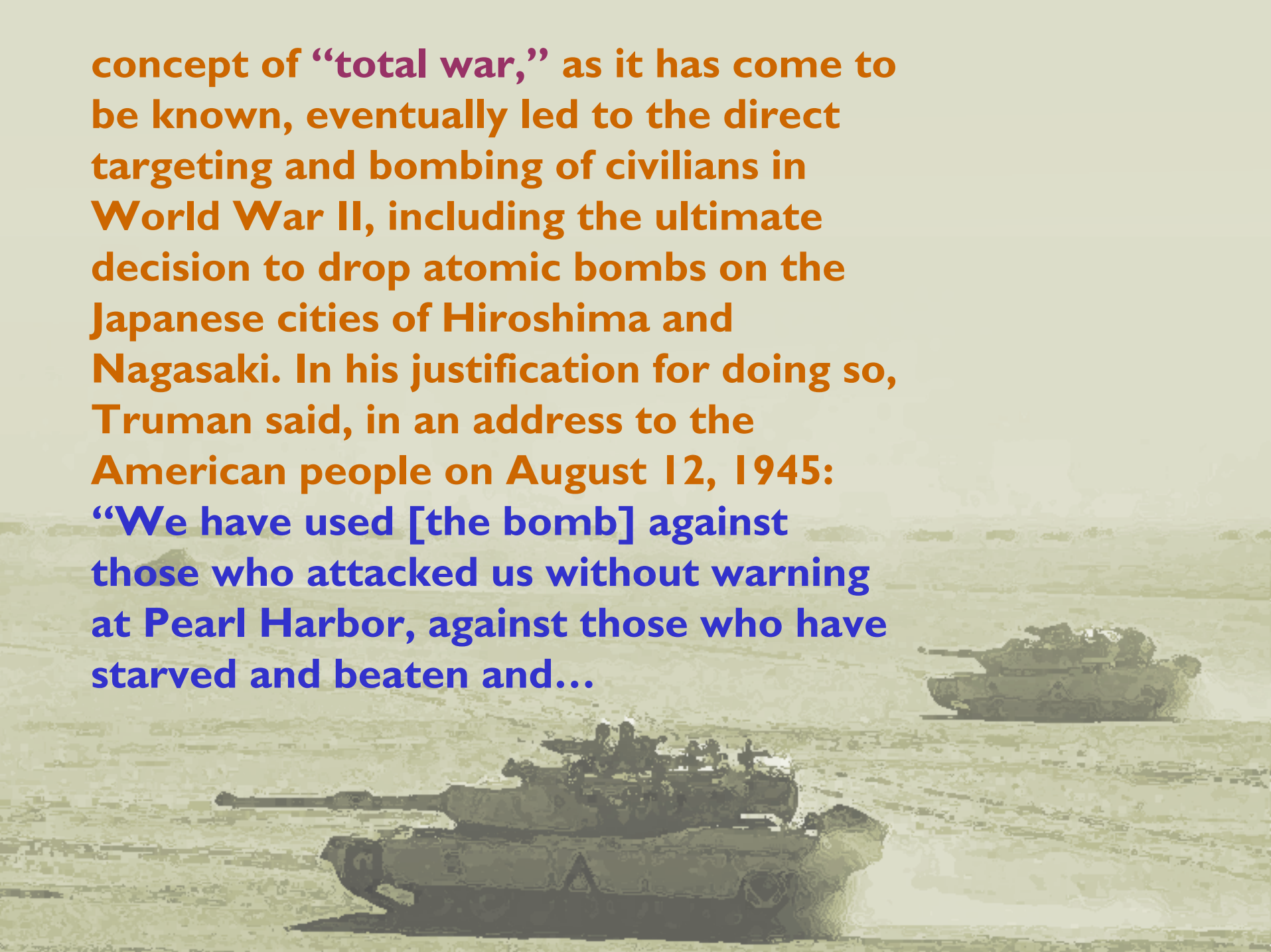
sent those women north as prisoners. In October, after his supply train was fired upon, Sherman ordered his men to “burn 10 or 12 houses of known secessionists, kill a few at random, and let them know it will be repeated every time a train is fired upon.” Sherman was, for sure, a military innovator, consciously going against the *Instructions for the Government of Armies of the United States in the Field* (General Orders No. 100). That document at the Civil War's start reiterated a long-standing...



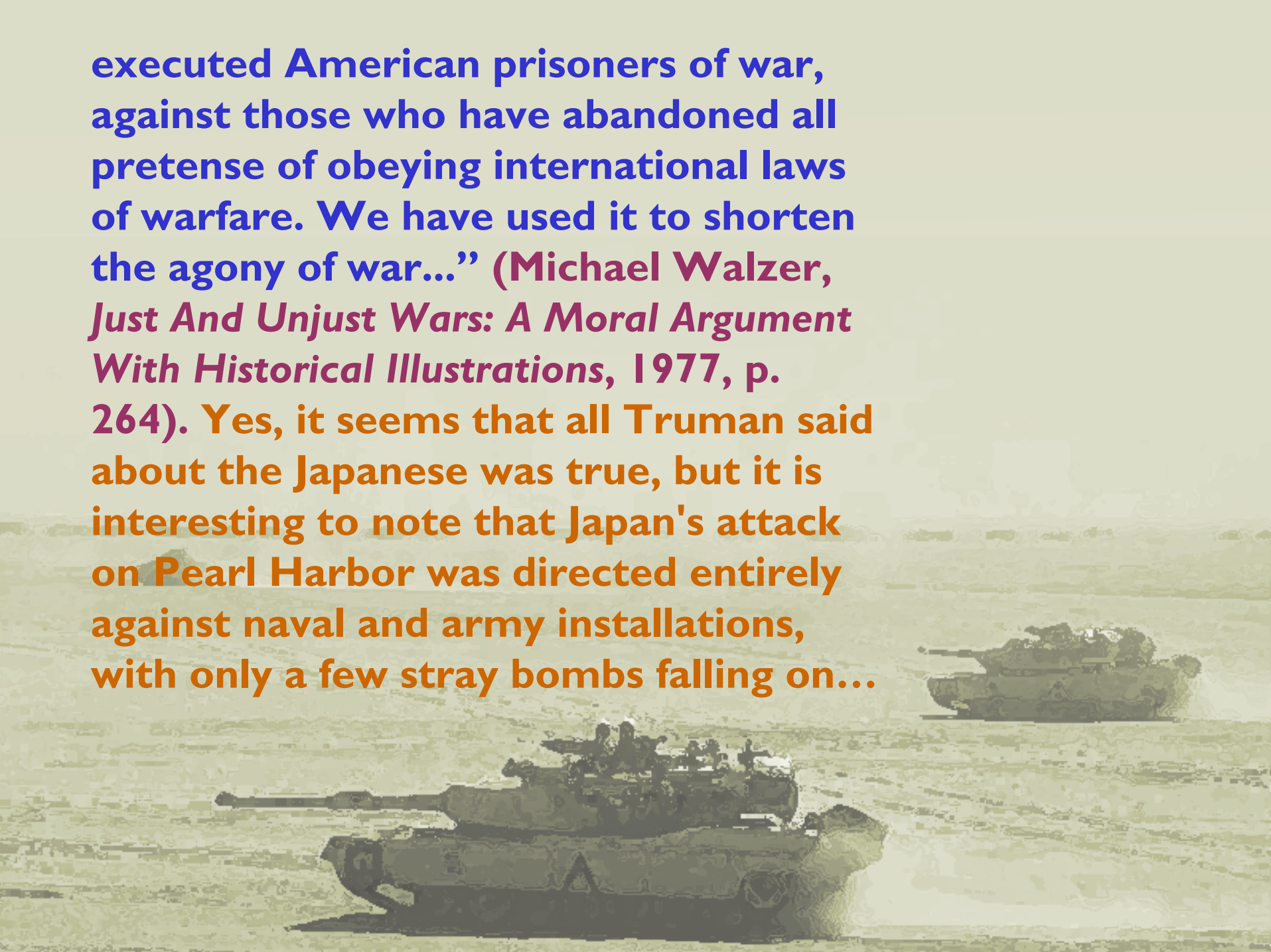
policy distinguishing “between the private individual belonging to a hostile country and the hostile country itself, with its men in arms ... the unarmed citizen is to be spared in person, property, and honor.” **But Sherman** had written in 1862 that those who opposed the destruction of civilian property were captive to “an old idea.” Many today, like Sherman, see war as an evil, albeit a “necessary evil,” that must, at times, be engaged in so worse evils are not inflicted. **The General's...**



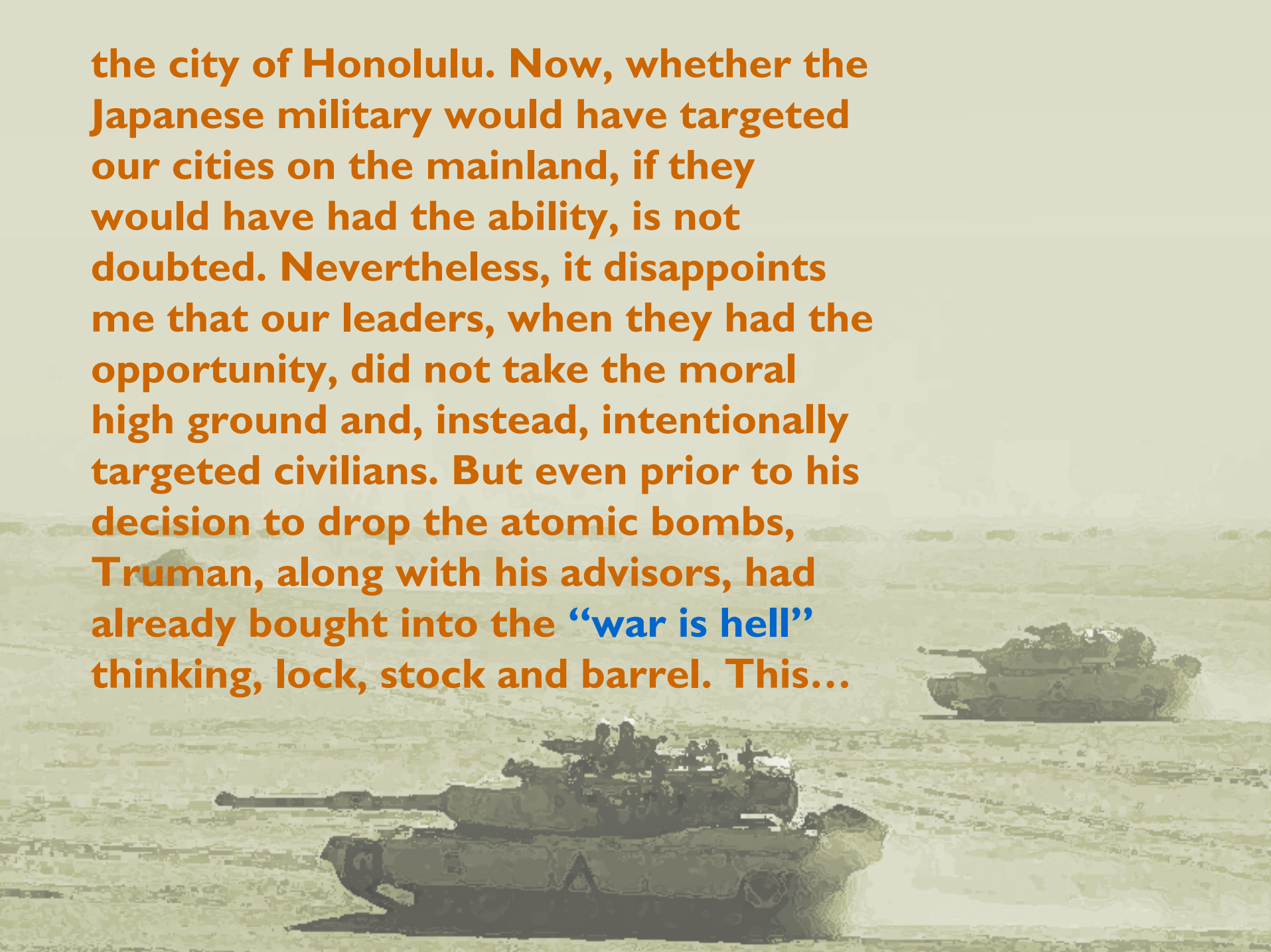
concept of “total war,” as it has come to be known, eventually led to the direct targeting and bombing of civilians in World War II, including the ultimate decision to drop atomic bombs on the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. In his justification for doing so, Truman said, in an address to the American people on August 12, 1945: “We have used [the bomb] against those who attacked us without warning at Pearl Harbor, against those who have starved and beaten and...



executed American prisoners of war, against those who have abandoned all pretense of obeying international laws of warfare. We have used it to shorten the agony of war..." (Michael Walzer, *Just And Unjust Wars: A Moral Argument With Historical Illustrations*, 1977, p. 264). Yes, it seems that all Truman said about the Japanese was true, but it is interesting to note that Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor was directed entirely against naval and army installations, with only a few stray bombs falling on...



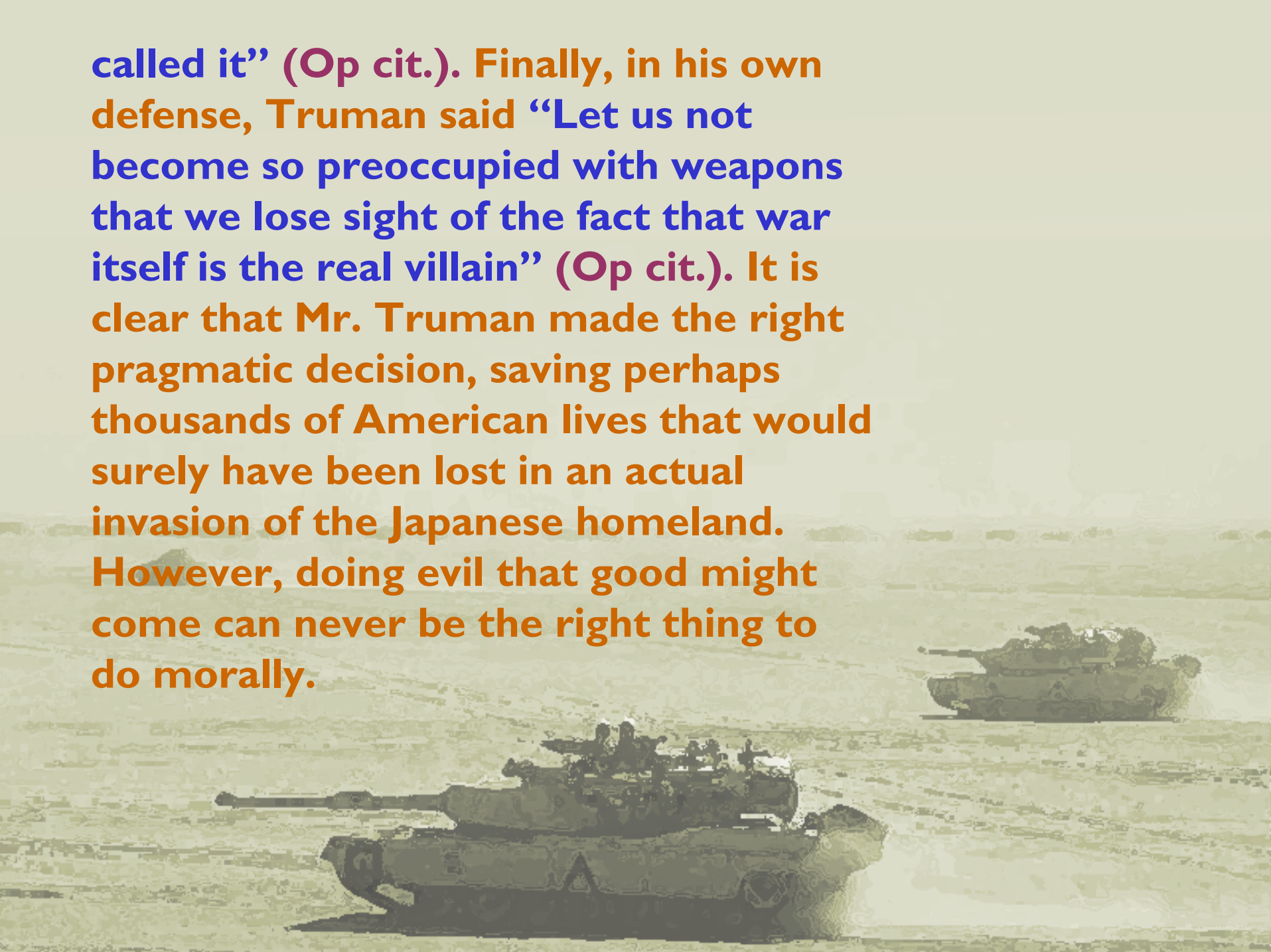
the city of Honolulu. Now, whether the Japanese military would have targeted our cities on the mainland, if they would have had the ability, is not doubted. Nevertheless, it disappoints me that our leaders, when they had the opportunity, did not take the moral high ground and, instead, intentionally targeted civilians. But even prior to his decision to drop the atomic bombs, Truman, along with his advisors, had already bought into the “war is hell” thinking, lock, stock and barrel. This...



is evidenced by the March 1945 fire-bombing of Tokyo in which incendiary bombs set off a firestorm that killed an estimated 100,000 people. As James Byrnes, Truman's good friend and Secretary of State, said, “...war remains what General Sherman said it was” (Ibid., p. 265). And Arthur Compton, who was chief scientific advisor to the government, confirmed this when he said “...one realizes that in whatever manner it is fought, war is precisely what General Sherman...

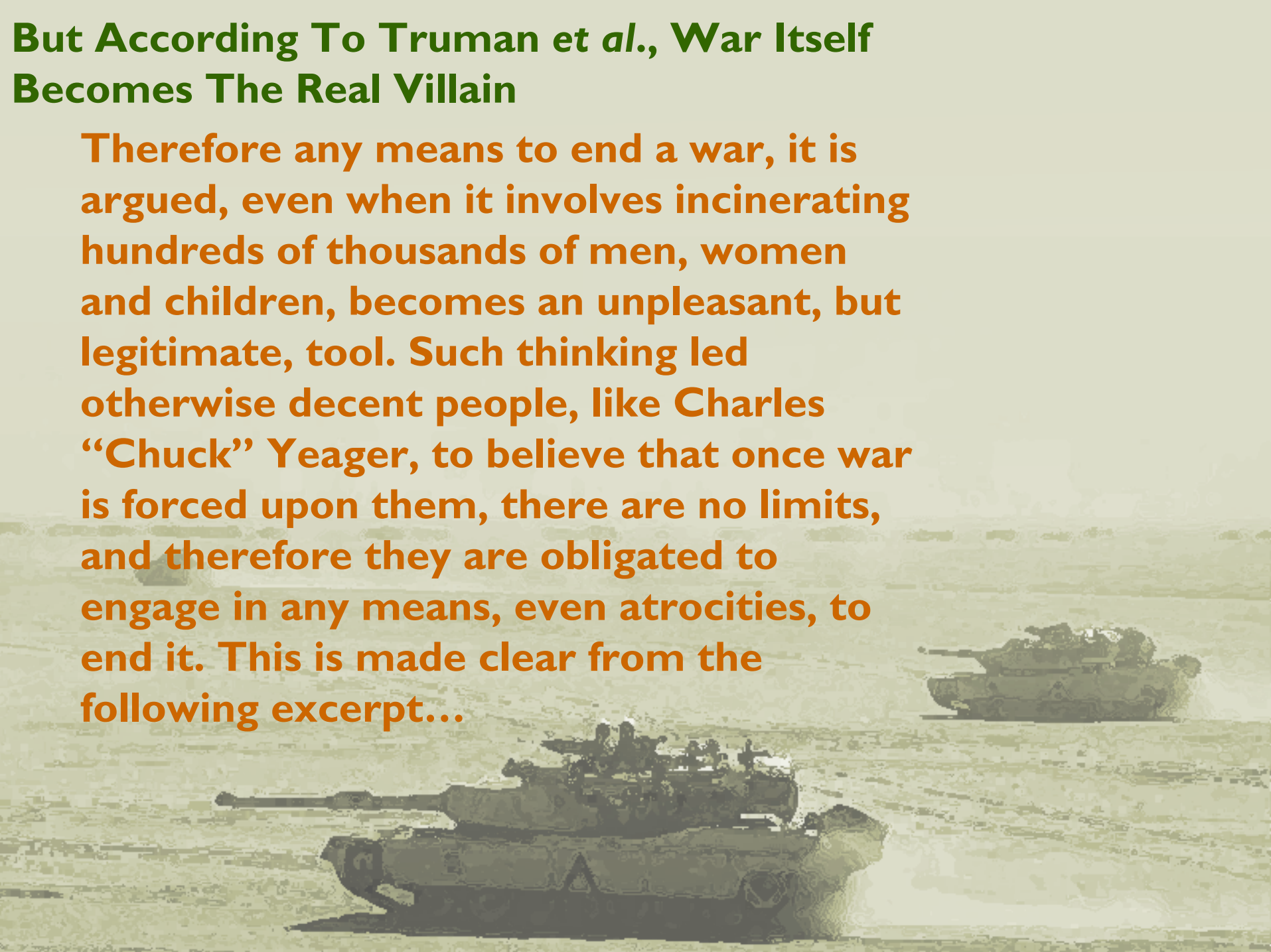


called it” (Op cit.). Finally, in his own defense, Truman said “Let us not become so preoccupied with weapons that we lose sight of the fact that war itself is the real villain” (Op cit.). It is clear that Mr. Truman made the right pragmatic decision, saving perhaps thousands of American lives that would surely have been lost in an actual invasion of the Japanese homeland. However, doing evil that good might come can never be the right thing to do morally.



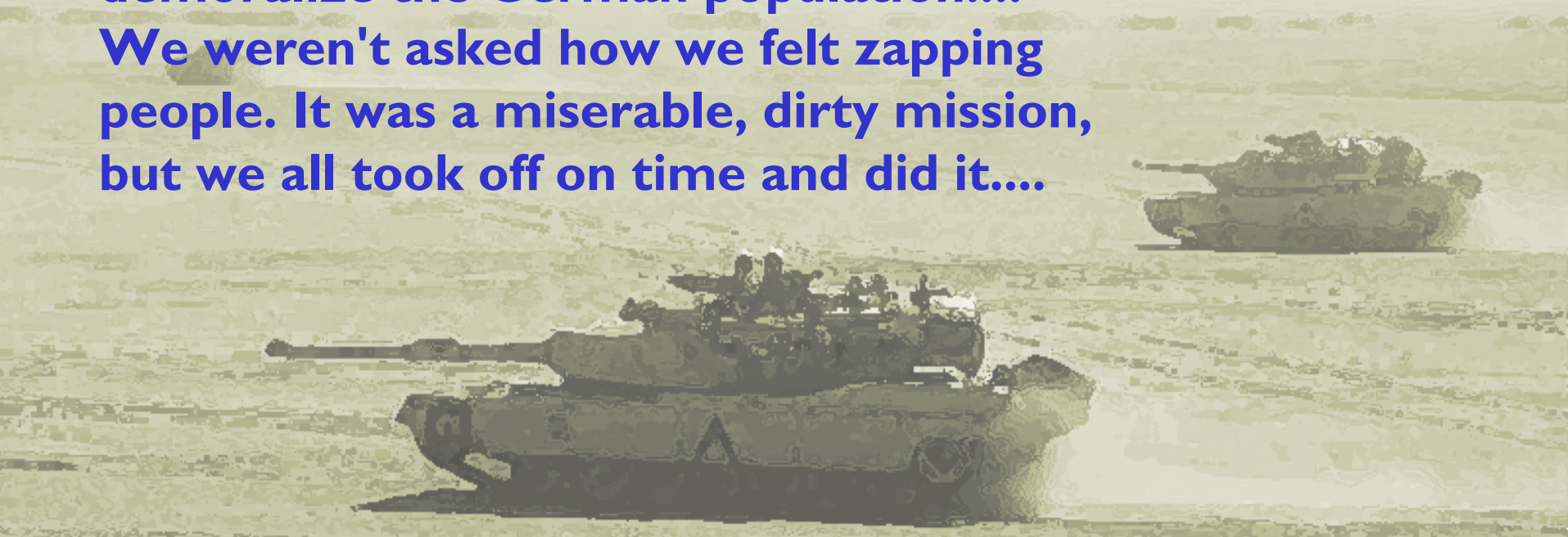
But According To Truman *et al.*, War Itself Becomes The Real Villain

Therefore any means to end a war, it is argued, even when it involves incinerating hundreds of thousands of men, women and children, becomes an unpleasant, but legitimate, tool. Such thinking led otherwise decent people, like Charles “Chuck” Yeager, to believe that once war is forced upon them, there are no limits, and therefore they are obligated to engage in any means, even atrocities, to end it. This is made clear from the following excerpt...



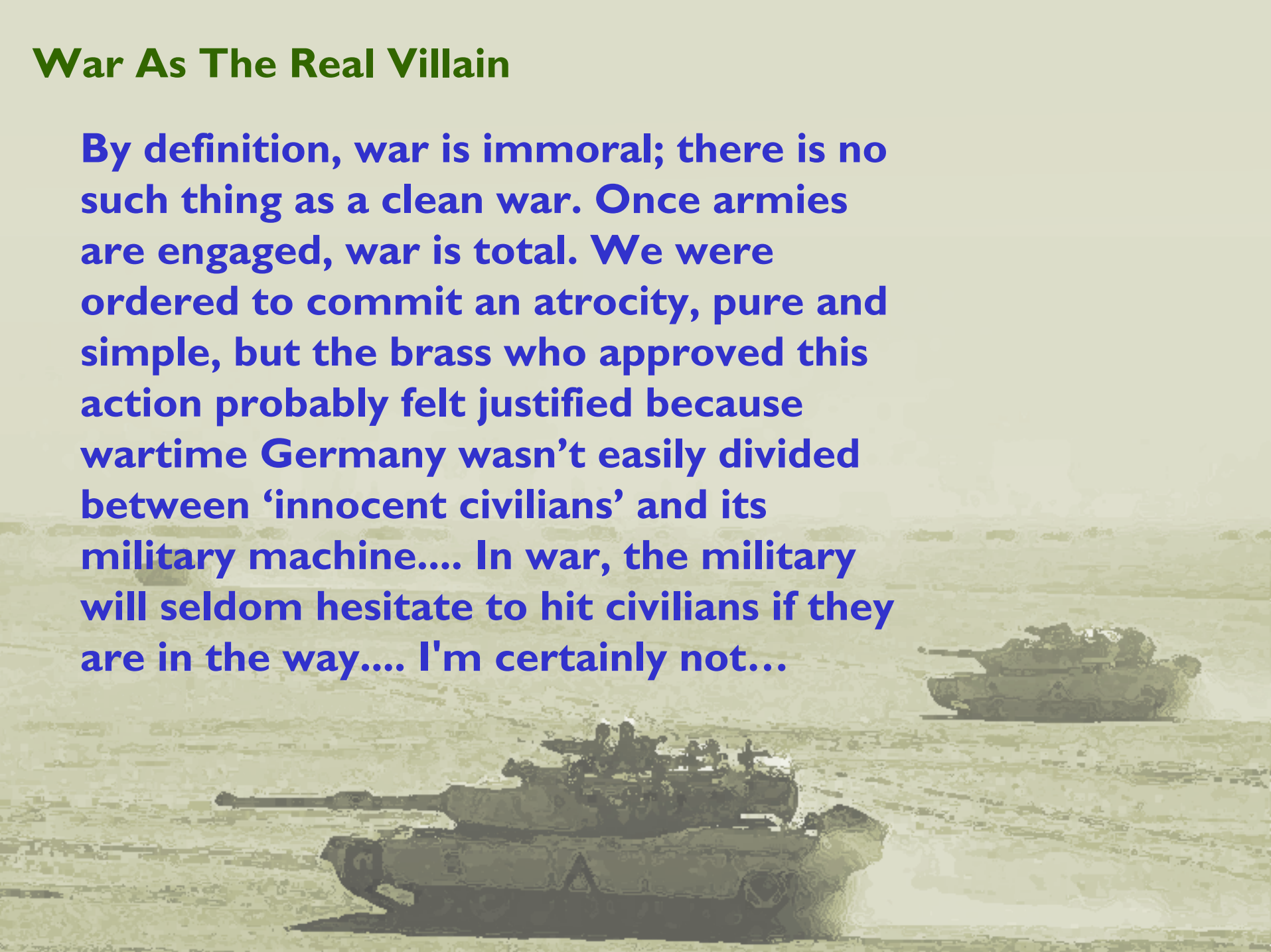
War As The Real Villain

from Yeager's biography in which he describes a disturbing mission he was ordered to fly in World War II: “Our seventy-five Mustangs were assigned an area fifty miles by fifty miles inside Germany and ordered to strafe anything that moved. The object was to demoralize the German population.... We weren't asked how we felt zapping people. It was a miserable, dirty mission, but we all took off on time and did it....



War As The Real Villain

By definition, war is immoral; there is no such thing as a clean war. Once armies are engaged, war is total. We were ordered to commit an atrocity, pure and simple, but the brass who approved this action probably felt justified because wartime Germany wasn't easily divided between 'innocent civilians' and its military machine.... In war, the military will seldom hesitate to hit civilians if they are in the way.... I'm certainly not...



War As The Real Villain

proud of that particular strafing mission against civilians. But it is there, on the record and in my memory” (Chuck Yeager and Leo Janos, *Yeager*, 1985, p. 63). Unfortunately, this kind of thinking did not stop with World War II. In defense of our nuclear strategy during the Cold War, General Omar Bradley argued that “war itself is immoral,” and therefore in retaliation for attacks on our cities, it would be both moral and...



War As The Real Villain

militarily useful to attack enemy cities (cf. Robert W. Tucker, *The Just War*, 1960, p. 59, note 52). And in response to the question of whether he had opposed the hydrogen bomb on moral grounds during hearings on J. Robert Oppenheimer, George Kenna, the former ambassador to what was then called the Soviet Union and a prominent Sovietologist, responded, “...I didn't consider that. After all, we are dealing...



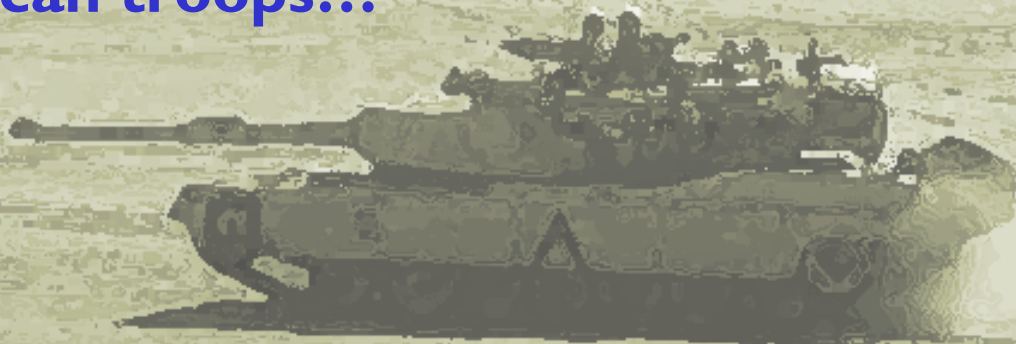
War As The Real Villain

with weapons here, and when you are dealing with weapons you are dealing with things that kill people, and I don't think the considerations of morality are relevant” (Ibid., p. 77, note 70).



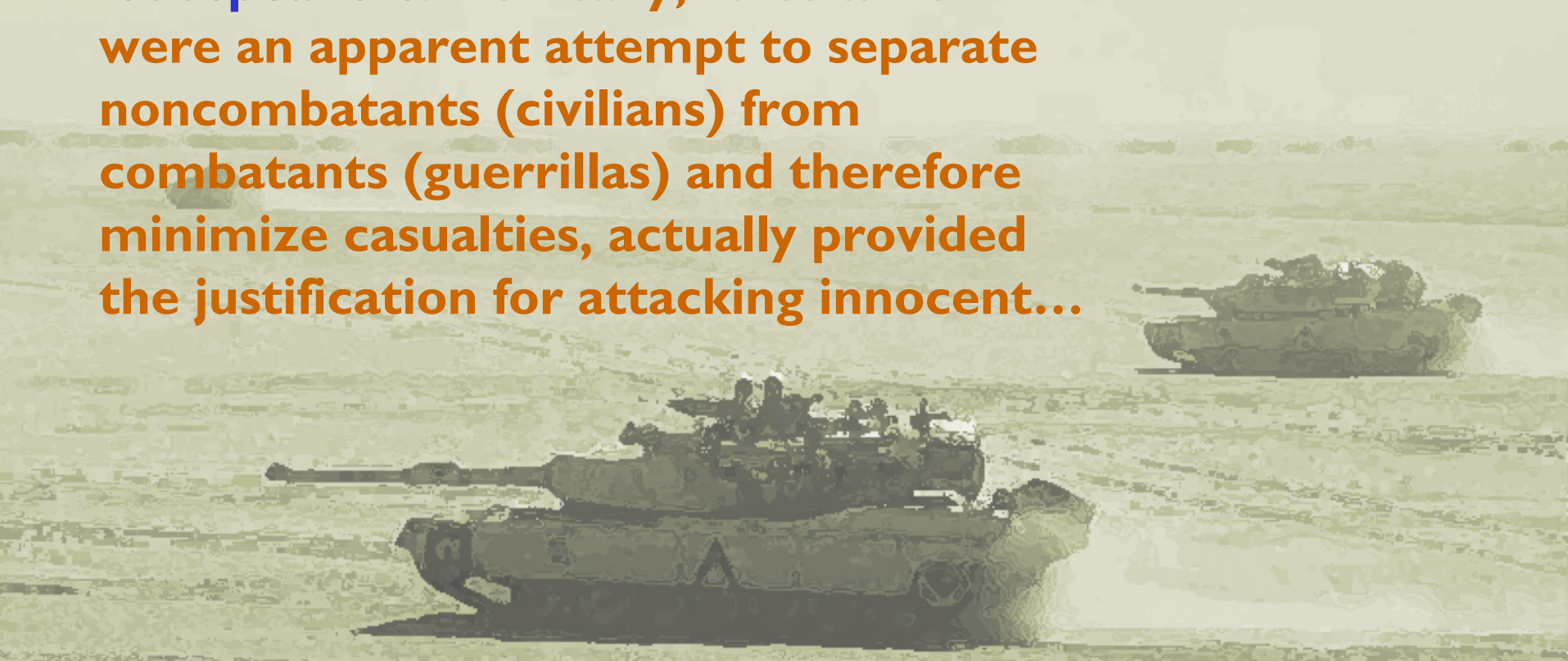
Such Thinking Precipitated The “Search & Destroy” Missions Of The Vietnam War

Looking back on it now, it should not come as a surprise that such thinking led ultimately to the “search and destroy” tactics used by our military during the Vietnam War—tactics that caused our returning soldiers to be referred to by some as “baby killers.” As painful as these charges are, they were not totally unfounded. The “rules of engagement” in Vietnam were: (1) A village could be bombed or shelled without warning if American troops...



Such Thinking Precipitated The “Search & Destroy” Missions Of The Vietnam War

had received fire from within it; and (2) Any village known to be “hostile” could be bombed or shelled if its inhabitants were warned in advance, either by the dropping of leaflets or by helicopter loudspeakers. Ironically, rules which were an apparent attempt to separate noncombatants (civilians) from combatants (guerrillas) and therefore minimize casualties, actually provided the justification for attacking innocent...



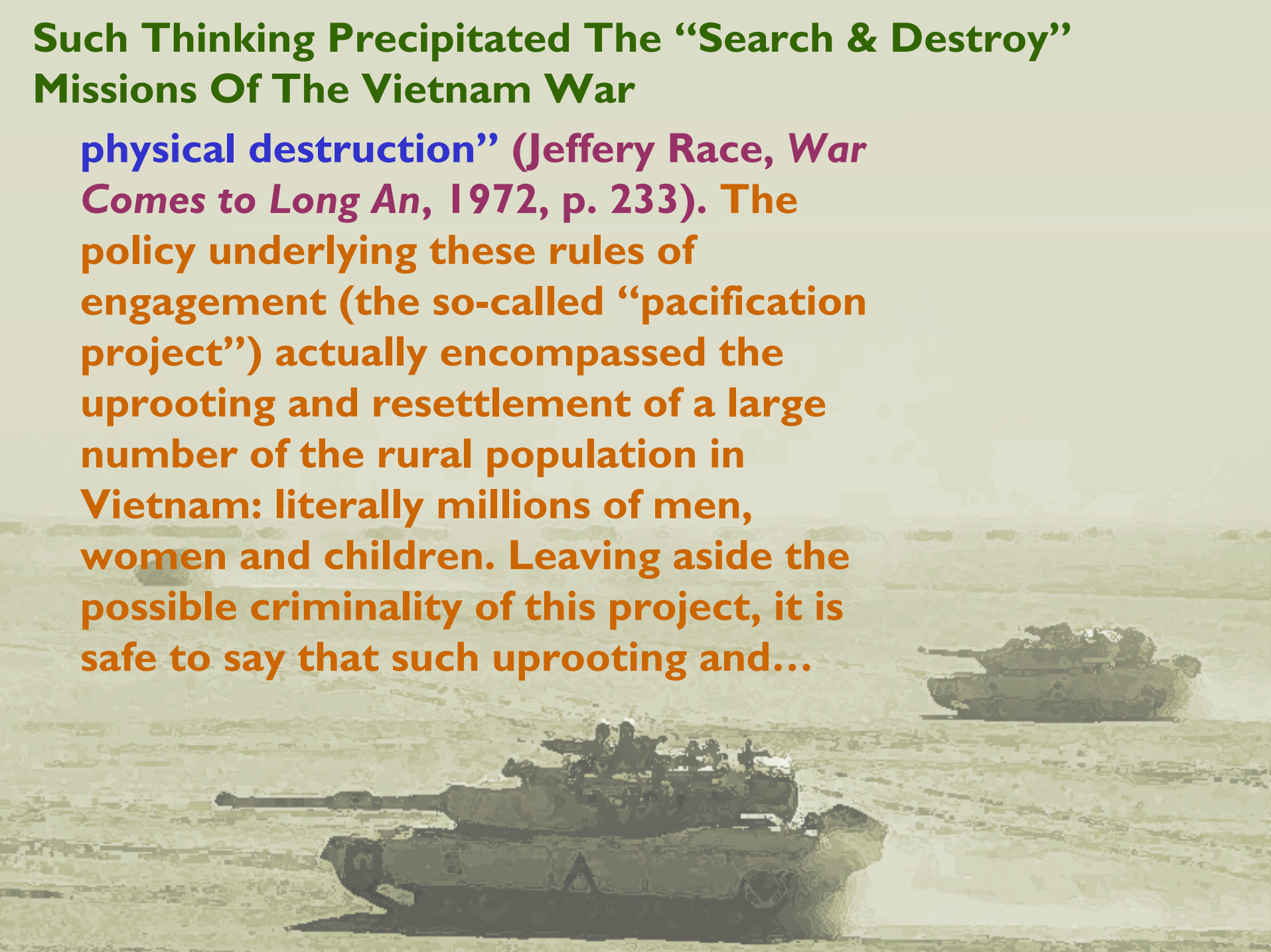
Such Thinking Precipitated The “Search & Destroy” Missions Of The Vietnam War

men, women and children, as evidenced by the following incident which was much too typical in Vietnam—so typical, in fact, that it must have happened hundreds and hundreds of times: “An American unit moving along Route 18 [in Long An province] received small arms fire from a village, and in reply the tactical commander called for artillery and air strikes on the village itself, resulting in heavy civilian casualties and extensive...



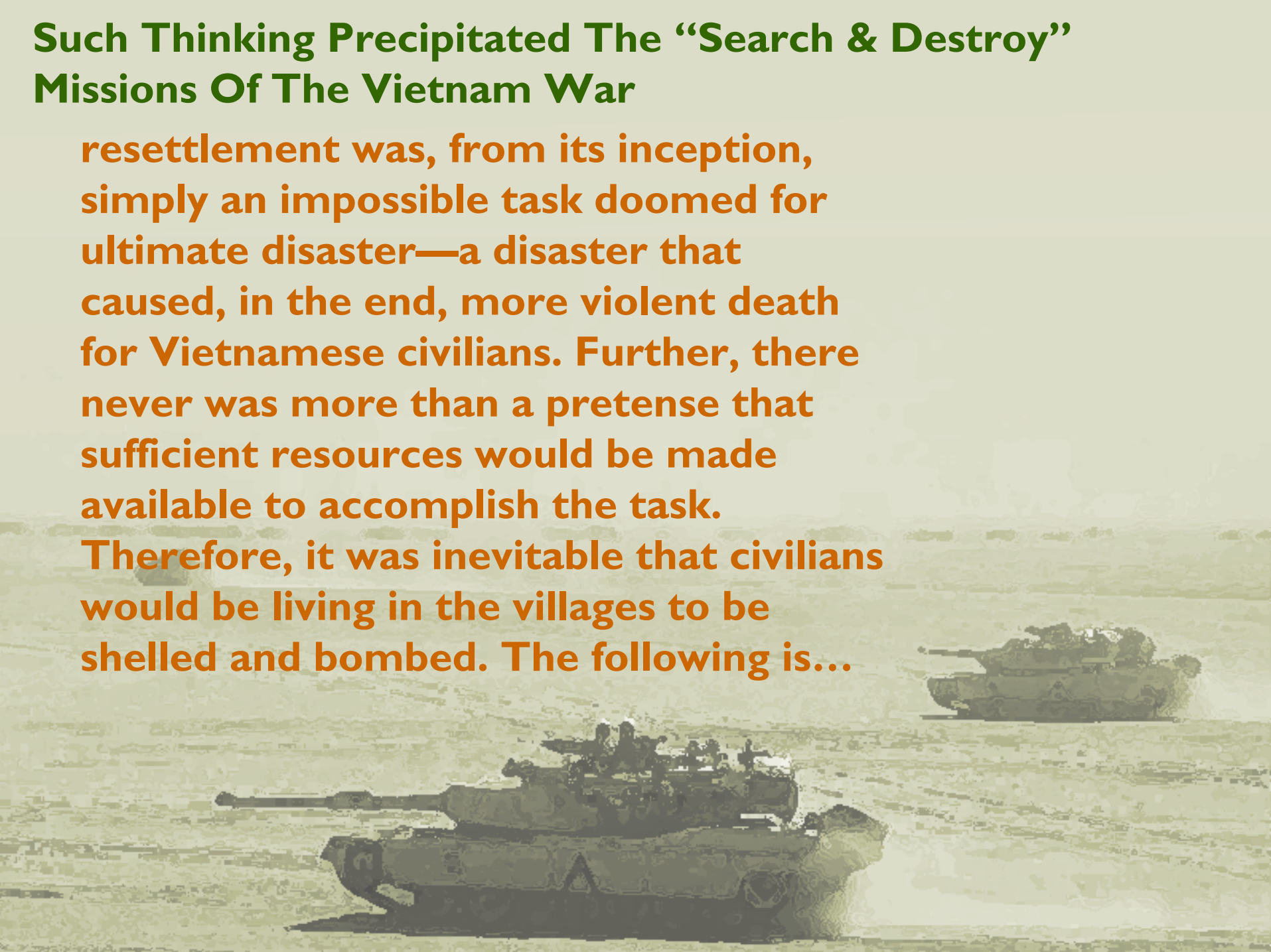
Such Thinking Precipitated The “Search & Destroy” Missions Of The Vietnam War

physical destruction” (Jeffery Race, *War Comes to Long An*, 1972, p. 233). The policy underlying these rules of engagement (the so-called “pacification project”) actually encompassed the uprooting and resettlement of a large number of the rural population in Vietnam: literally millions of men, women and children. Leaving aside the possible criminality of this project, it is safe to say that such uprooting and...



Such Thinking Precipitated The “Search & Destroy” Missions Of The Vietnam War

resettlement was, from its inception, simply an impossible task doomed for ultimate disaster—a disaster that caused, in the end, more violent death for Vietnamese civilians. Further, there never was more than a pretense that sufficient resources would be made available to accomplish the task. Therefore, it was inevitable that civilians would be living in the villages to be shelled and bombed. The following is...



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an example of what happened: “In August 1967, during Operation Benton, the ‘pacification’ camps became so full that Army units were ordered not to ‘generate’ any more refugees. The Army complied. But search and destroy operations continued. Only now the peasants were not warned before an air-strike was called on their village. They were killed in their villages because there was no room for them in the swamped...”



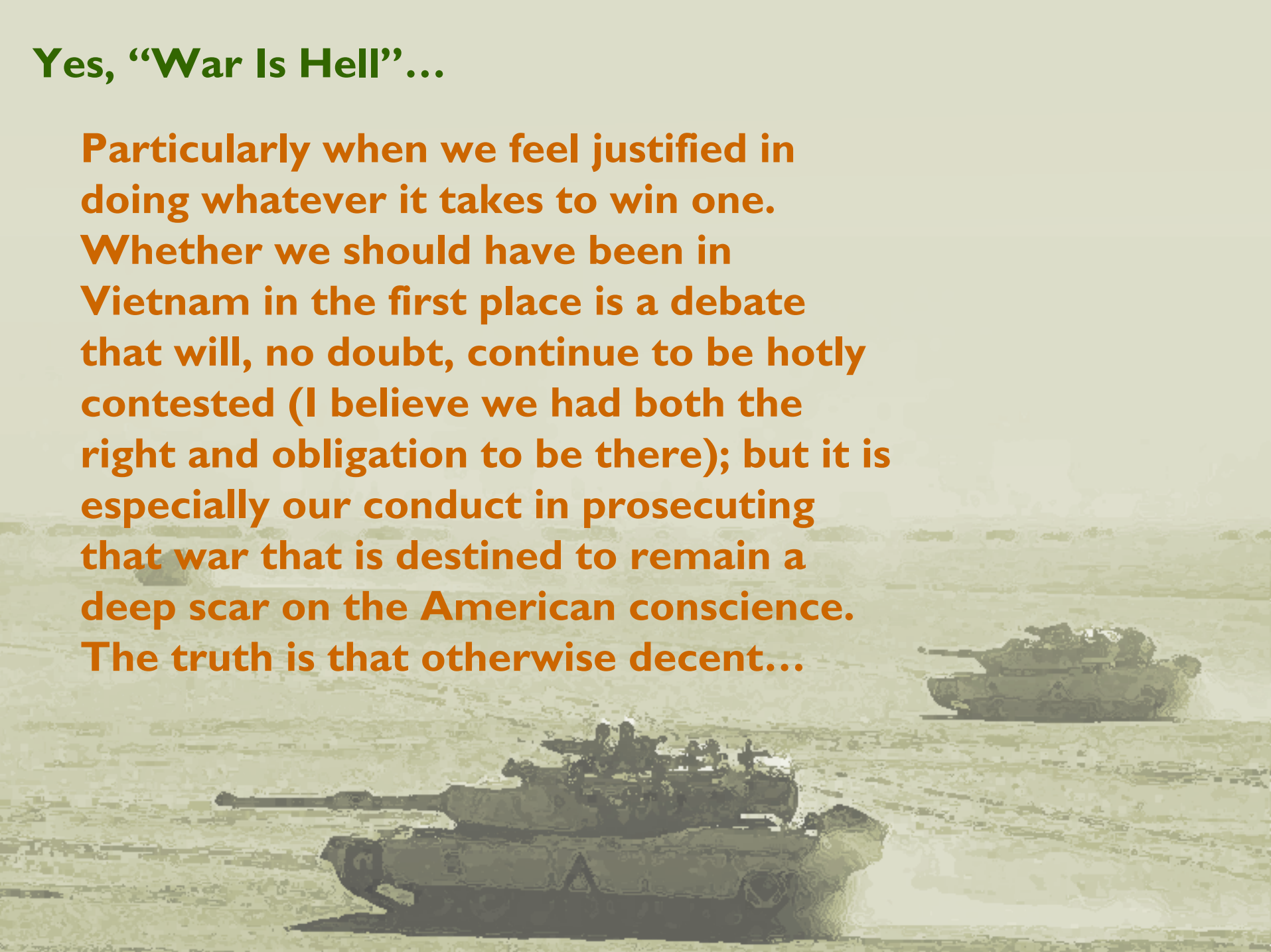
Such Thinking Precipitated The “Search & Destroy” Missions Of The Vietnam War

pacification camps” (Orville and Jonathan Shell, letter to *The New York Times*, Nov. 26, 1969; quoted in Noam Chomsky, *At War With Asia*, 1970, pp. 292-293).



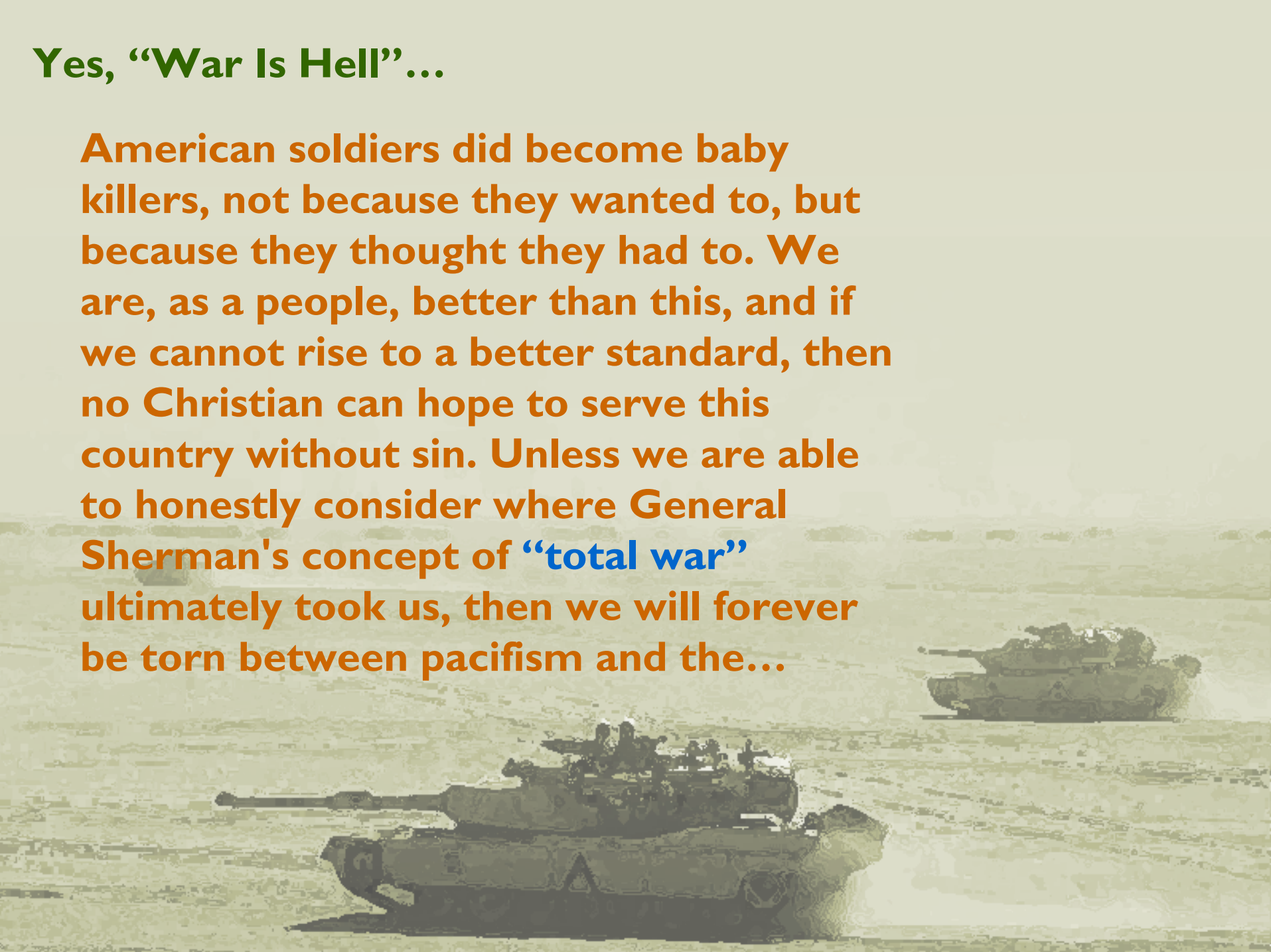
Yes, “War Is Hell”...

Particularly when we feel justified in doing whatever it takes to win one. Whether we should have been in Vietnam in the first place is a debate that will, no doubt, continue to be hotly contested (I believe we had both the right and obligation to be there); but it is especially our conduct in prosecuting that war that is destined to remain a deep scar on the American conscience. The truth is that otherwise decent...



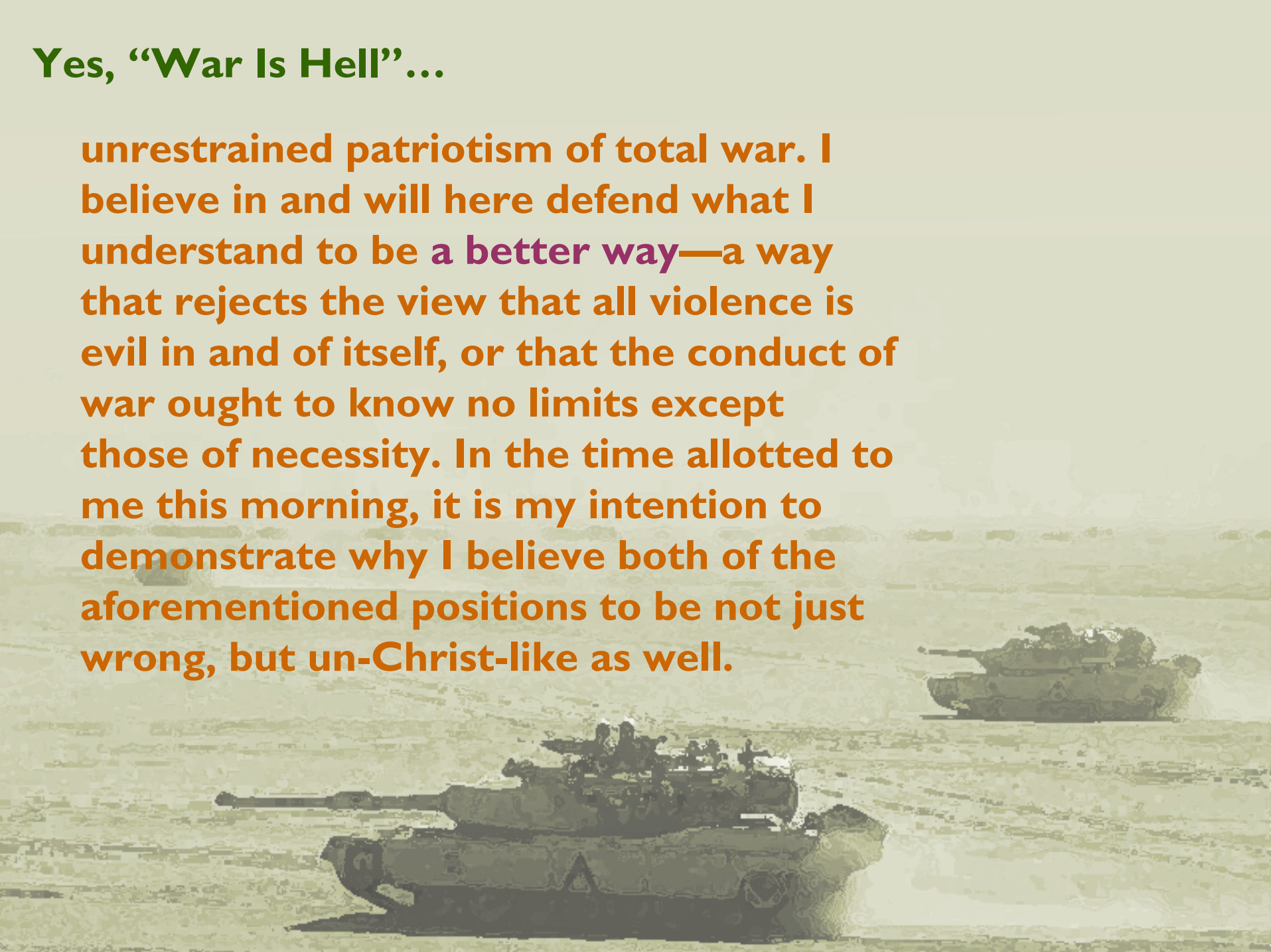
Yes, “War Is Hell”...

American soldiers did become baby killers, not because they wanted to, but because they thought they had to. We are, as a people, better than this, and if we cannot rise to a better standard, then no Christian can hope to serve this country without sin. Unless we are able to honestly consider where General Sherman's concept of “total war” ultimately took us, then we will forever be torn between pacifism and the...



Yes, “War Is Hell”...

unrestrained patriotism of total war. I believe in and will here defend what I understand to be a better way—a way that rejects the view that all violence is evil in and of itself, or that the conduct of war ought to know no limits except those of necessity. In the time allotted to me this morning, it is my intention to demonstrate why I believe both of the aforementioned positions to be not just wrong, but un-Christ-like as well.



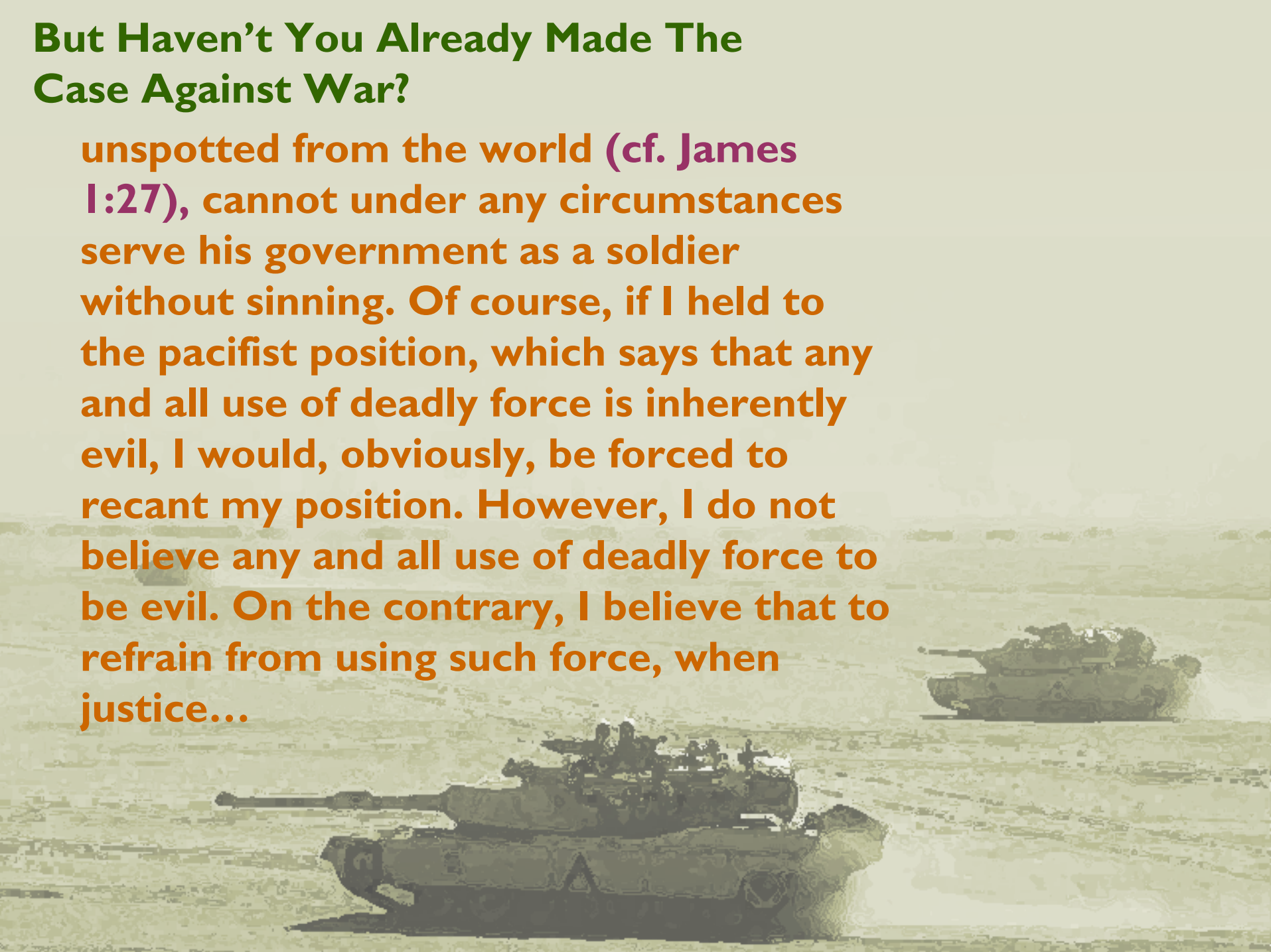
But Haven't You Already Made The Case Against War?

No doubt, pacifists will think that, arguing as I have, I have already surrendered my position, providing *prima facie* evidence for why a Christian cannot, under any circumstances, participate in war; namely, that even among the best of governments there are a multitude of sinful acts that prove, conclusively, the “falleness” of all civil governments. Therefore, the argument goes, a Christian, who is obligated to keep himself...



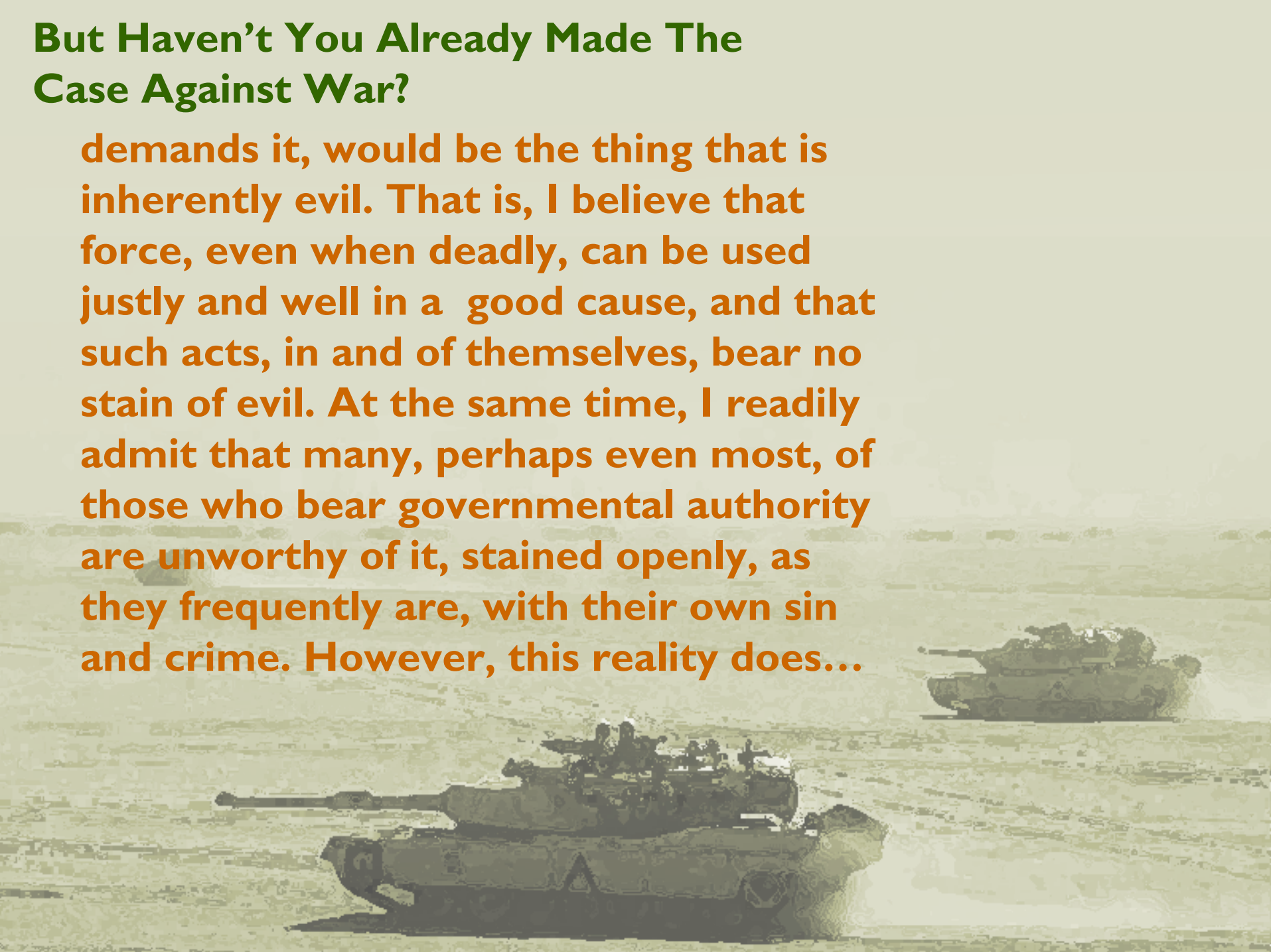
But Haven't You Already Made The Case Against War?

unspotted from the world (cf. James 1:27), cannot under any circumstances serve his government as a soldier without sinning. Of course, if I held to the pacifist position, which says that any and all use of deadly force is inherently evil, I would, obviously, be forced to recant my position. However, I do not believe any and all use of deadly force to be evil. On the contrary, I believe that to refrain from using such force, when justice...



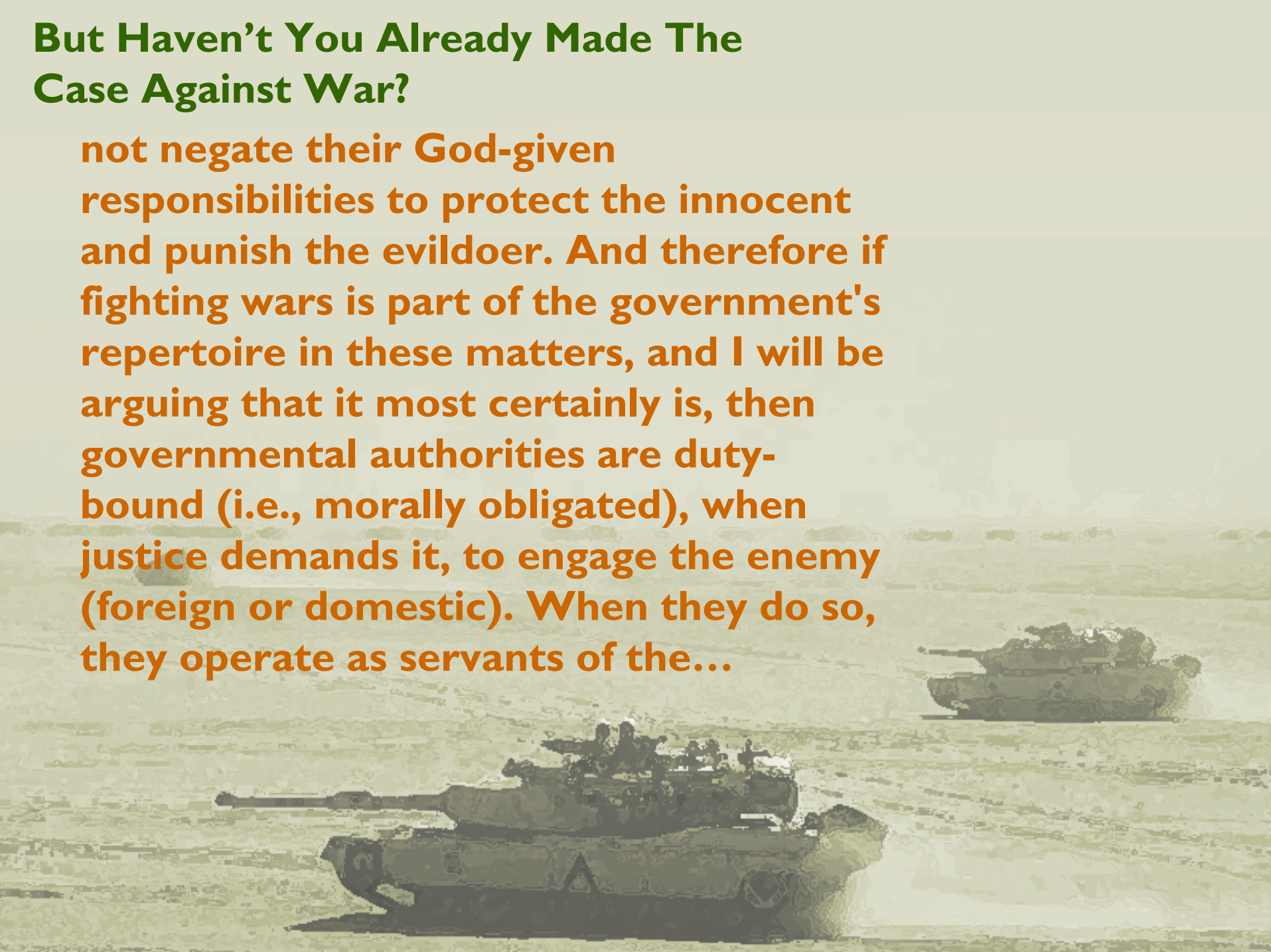
But Haven't You Already Made The Case Against War?

demands it, would be the thing that is inherently evil. That is, I believe that force, even when deadly, can be used justly and well in a good cause, and that such acts, in and of themselves, bear no stain of evil. At the same time, I readily admit that many, perhaps even most, of those who bear governmental authority are unworthy of it, stained openly, as they frequently are, with their own sin and crime. However, this reality does...



But Haven't You Already Made The Case Against War?

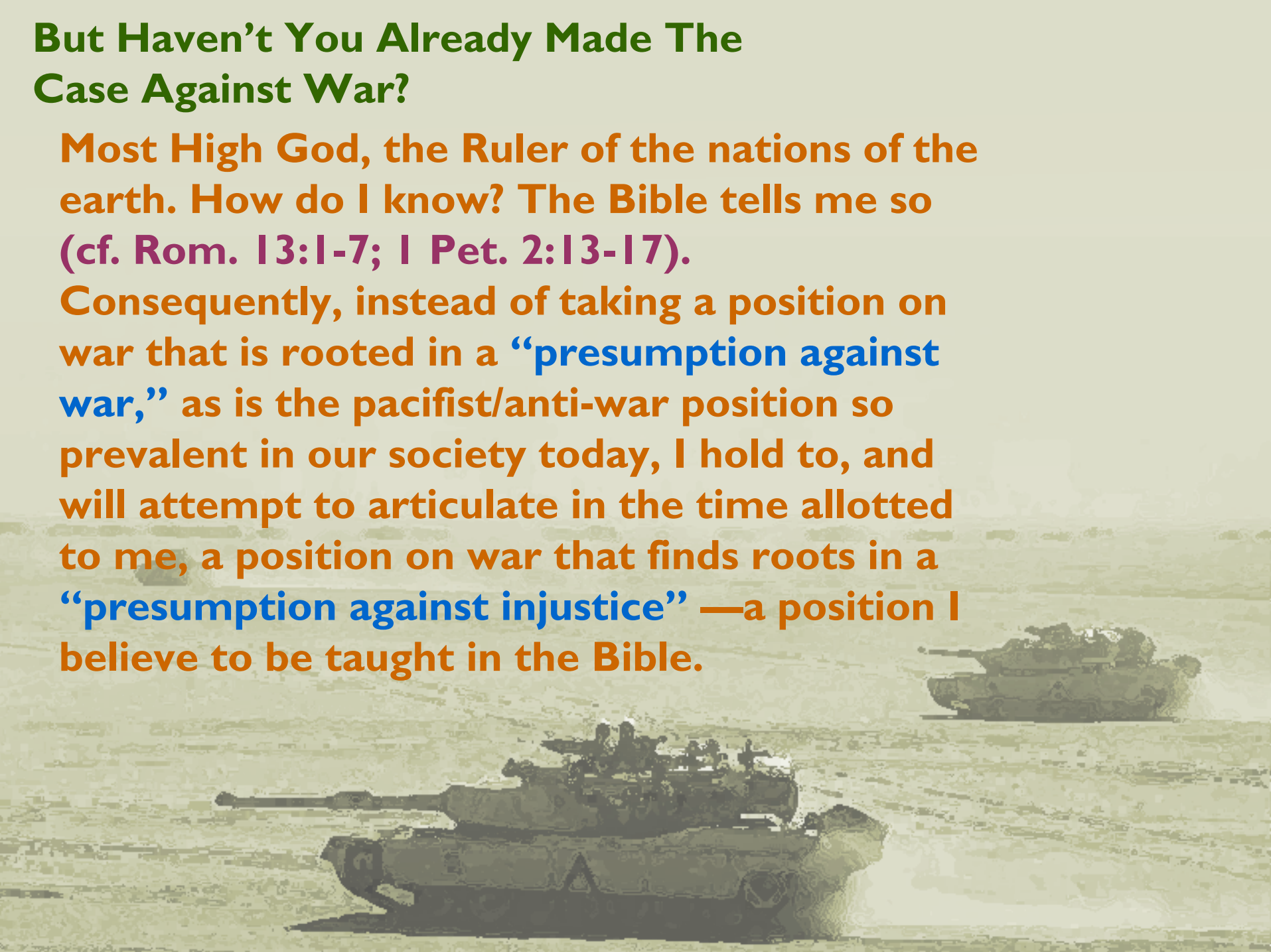
not negate their God-given responsibilities to protect the innocent and punish the evildoer. And therefore if fighting wars is part of the government's repertoire in these matters, and I will be arguing that it most certainly is, then governmental authorities are duty-bound (i.e., morally obligated), when justice demands it, to engage the enemy (foreign or domestic). When they do so, they operate as servants of the...



But Haven't You Already Made The Case Against War?

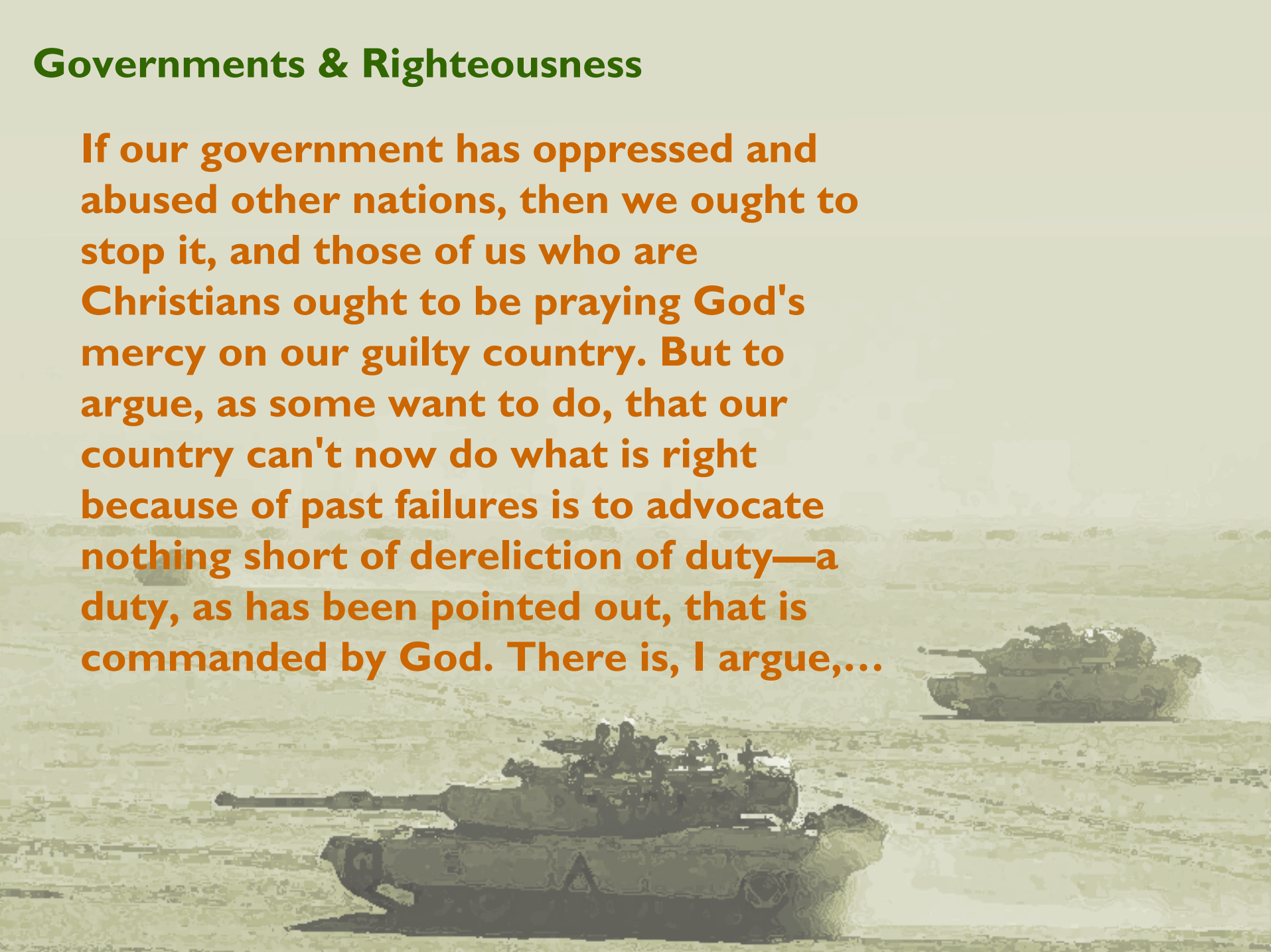
Most High God, the Ruler of the nations of the earth. How do I know? The Bible tells me so (cf. Rom. 13:1-7; 1 Pet. 2:13-17).

Consequently, instead of taking a position on war that is rooted in a “presumption against war,” as is the pacifist/anti-war position so prevalent in our society today, I hold to, and will attempt to articulate in the time allotted to me, a position on war that finds roots in a “presumption against injustice” —a position I believe to be taught in the Bible.



Governments & Righteousness

If our government has oppressed and abused other nations, then we ought to stop it, and those of us who are Christians ought to be praying God's mercy on our guilty country. But to argue, as some want to do, that our country can't now do what is right because of past failures is to advocate nothing short of dereliction of duty—a duty, as has been pointed out, that is commanded by God. There is, I argue,...



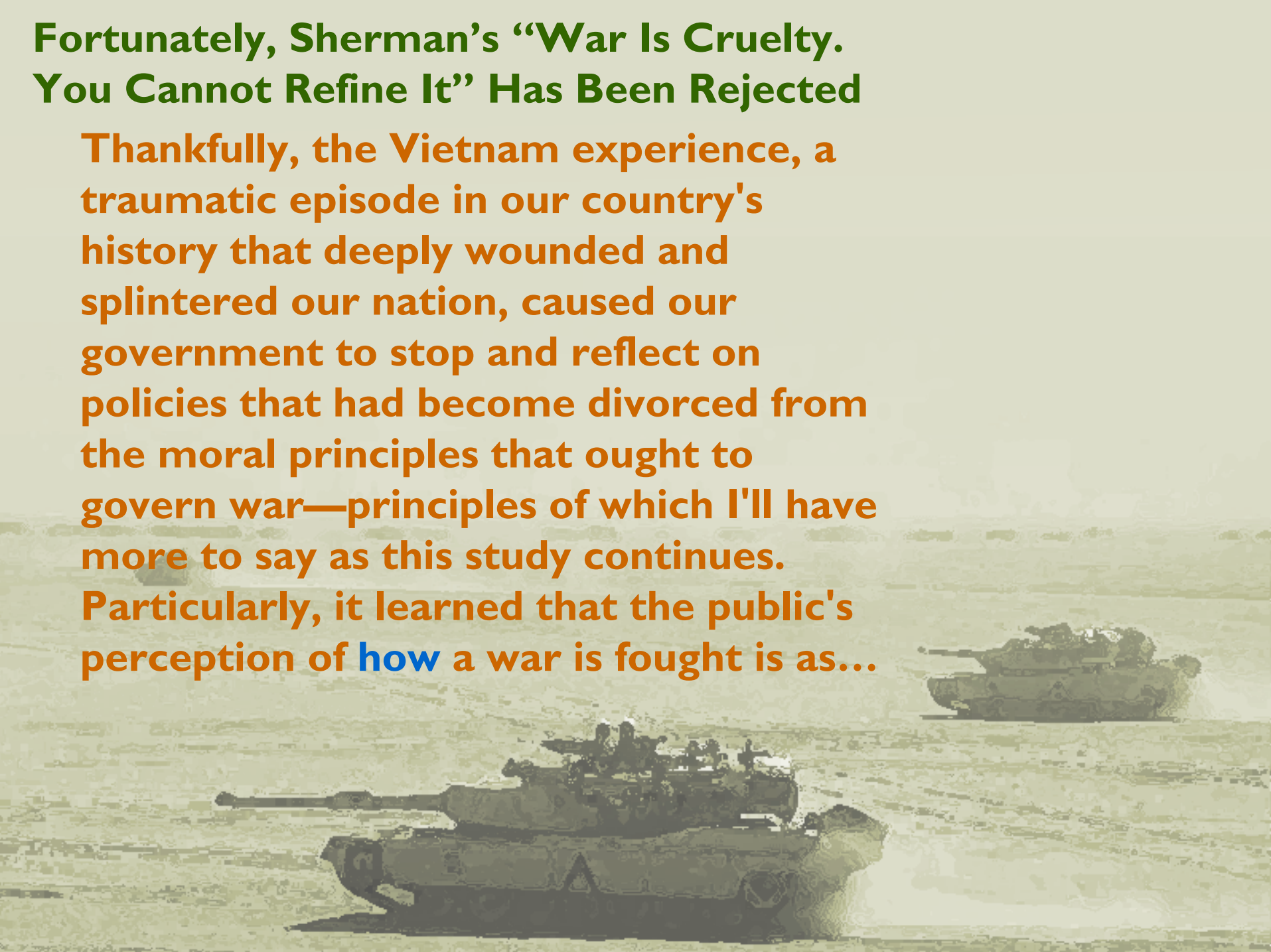
Governments & Righteousness

no coherent Biblical relationship between the acknowledgment of past sins and the refusal of present duty. In other words, any government that today fails to safeguard its citizens because of past crimes will only be adding to its catalog of sins and, as such, will clearly be in neglect of its God-given responsibilities (cf. Romans 13:1-7).



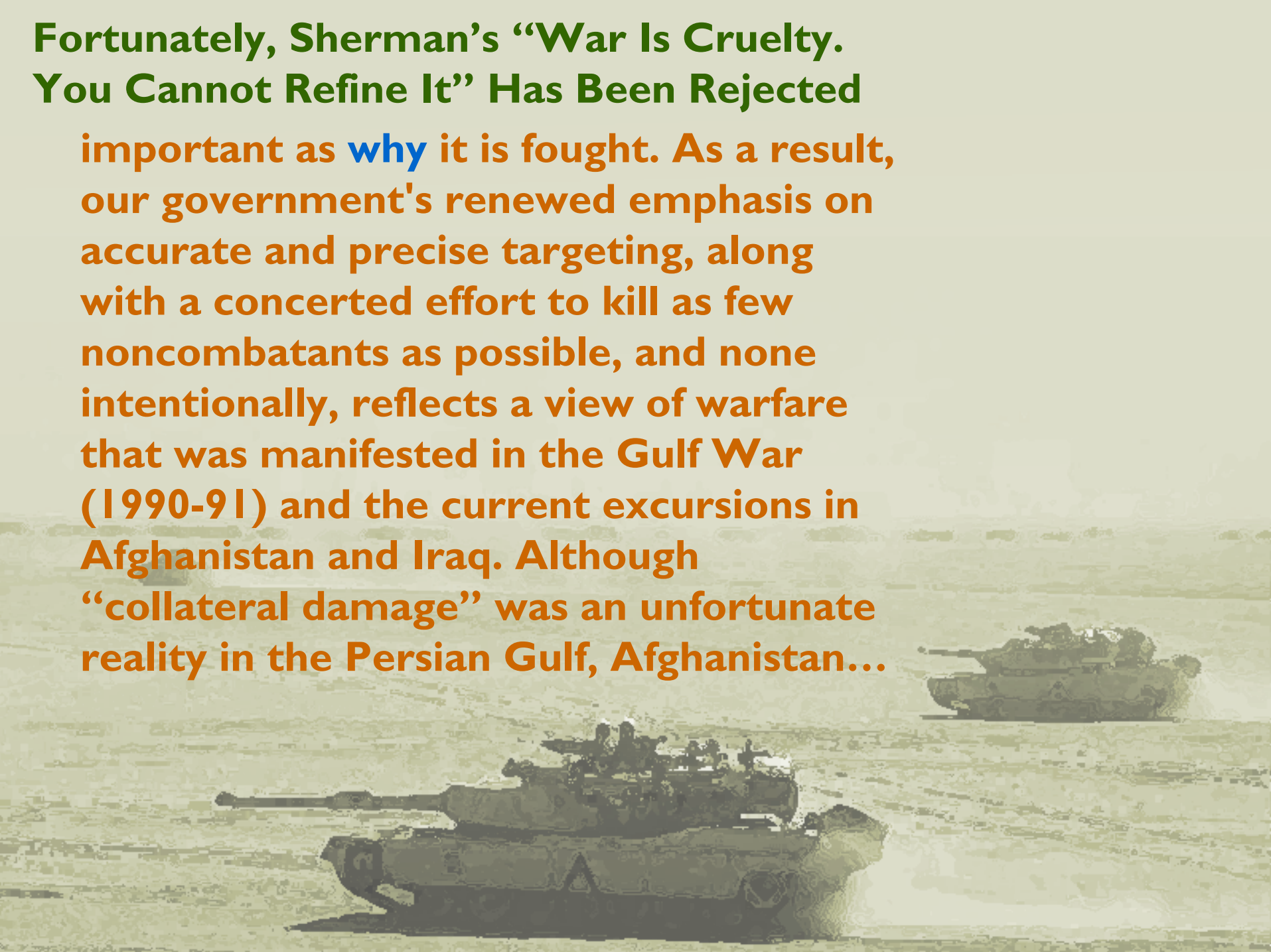
Fortunately, Sherman's "War Is Cruelty. You Cannot Refine It" Has Been Rejected

Thankfully, the Vietnam experience, a traumatic episode in our country's history that deeply wounded and splintered our nation, caused our government to stop and reflect on policies that had become divorced from the moral principles that ought to govern war—principles of which I'll have more to say as this study continues. Particularly, it learned that the public's perception of **how** a war is fought is as...



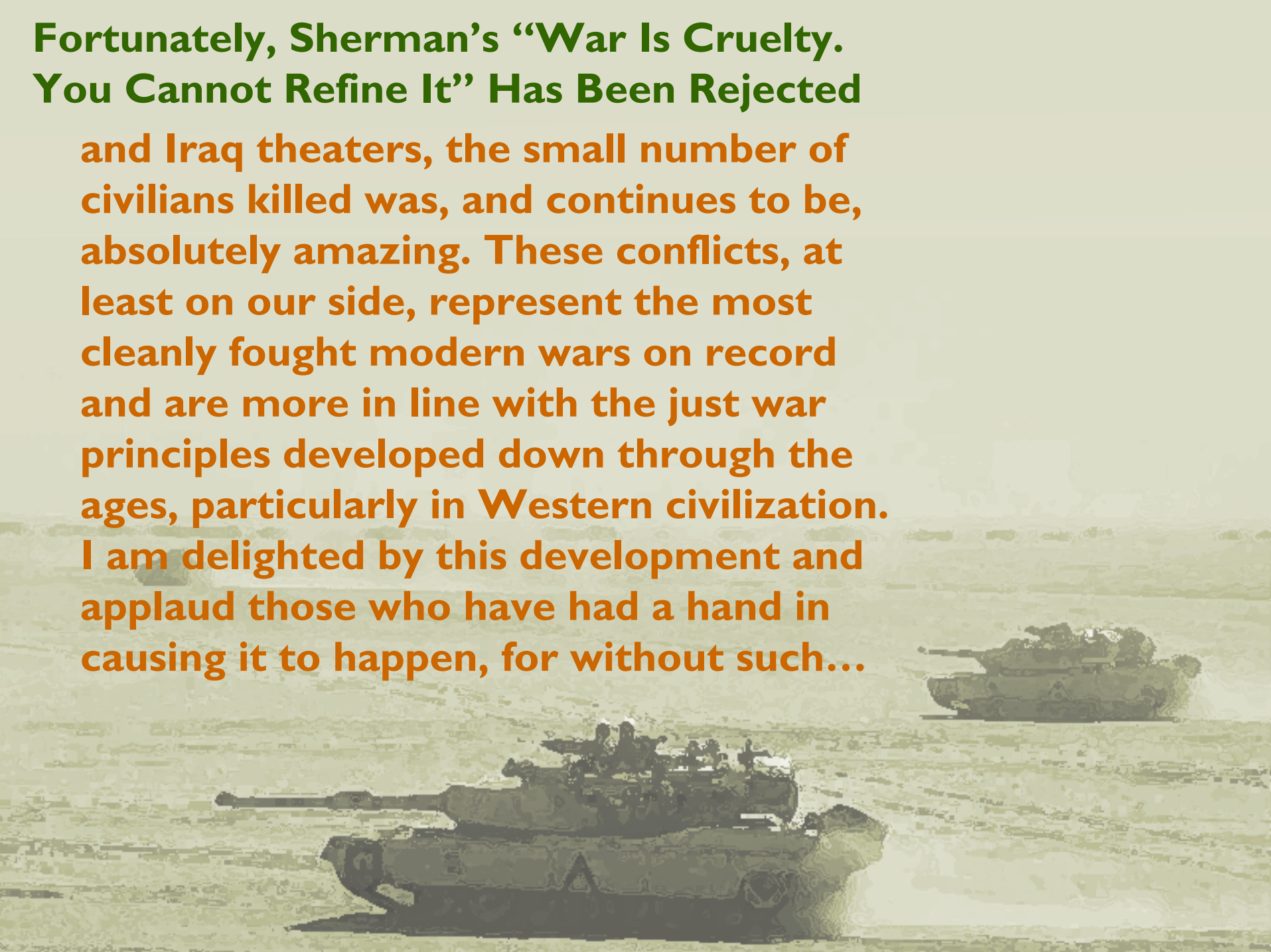
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important as **why** it is fought. As a result, our government's renewed emphasis on accurate and precise targeting, along with a concerted effort to kill as few noncombatants as possible, and none intentionally, reflects a view of warfare that was manifested in the Gulf War (1990-91) and the current excursions in Afghanistan and Iraq. Although "collateral damage" was an unfortunate reality in the Persian Gulf, Afghanistan...



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and Iraq theaters, the small number of civilians killed was, and continues to be, absolutely amazing. These conflicts, at least on our side, represent the most cleanly fought modern wars on record and are more in line with the just war principles developed down through the ages, particularly in Western civilization. I am delighted by this development and applaud those who have had a hand in causing it to happen, for without such...



Fortunately, Sherman's "War Is Cruelty. You Cannot Refine It" Has Been Rejected

an emerging consensus, I think there
could be little hope of God's continued
bountiful blessings upon our country, for
"Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is
a reproach to any people" (Proverbs
14:34).



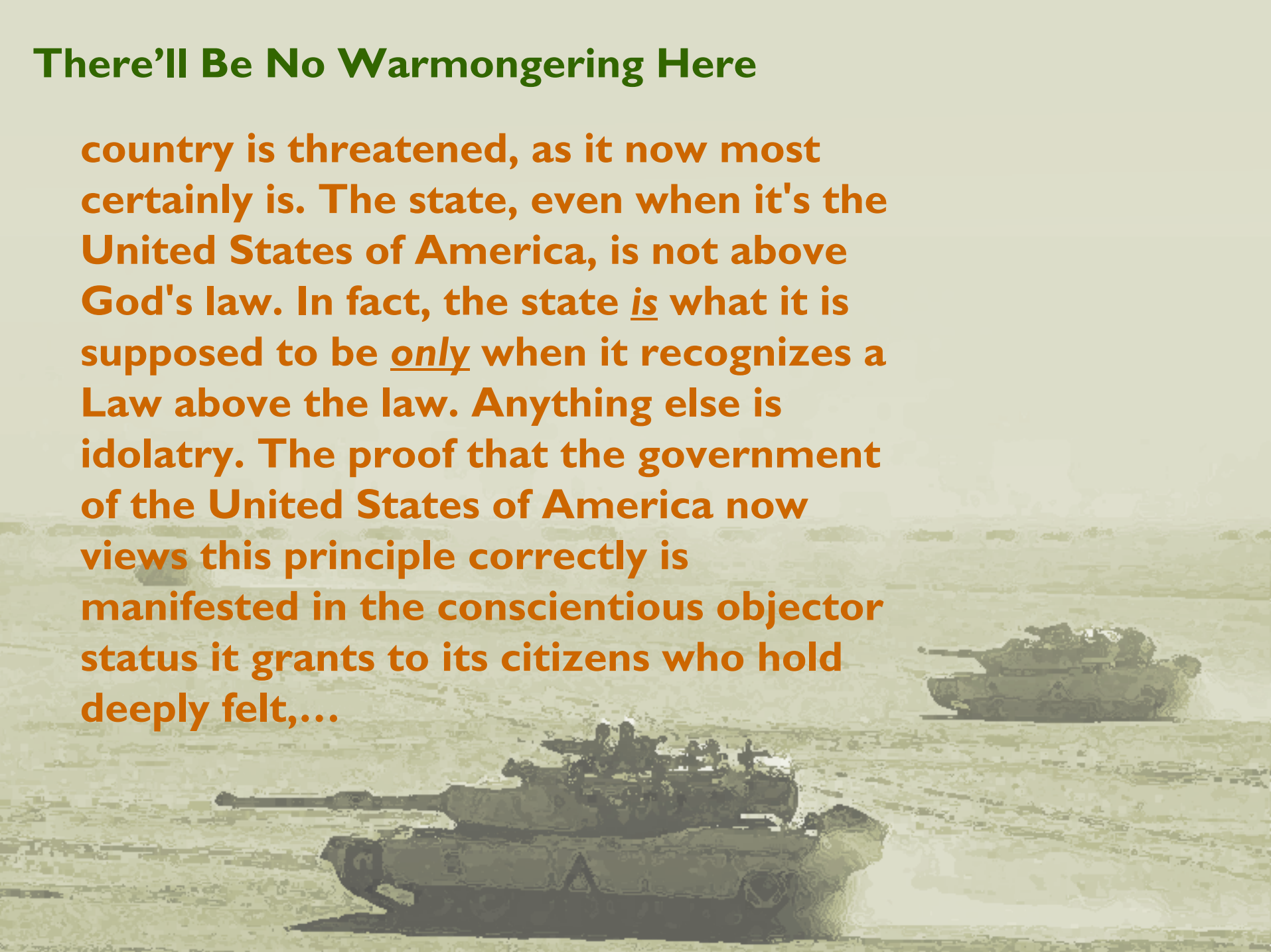
There'll Be No Warmongering Here

I am not a warmonger, and I will take umbrage to anyone who says I am. War must always be the last resort. If justice can be accomplished any other way, then war is not warranted. Further, it should be clear from what I've said so far that I will not attempt to justify the evils that are all too frequently manifested in war. Nor will I defend, or in anyway attempt to excuse, the unrestrained patriotism that always manifests itself when our...



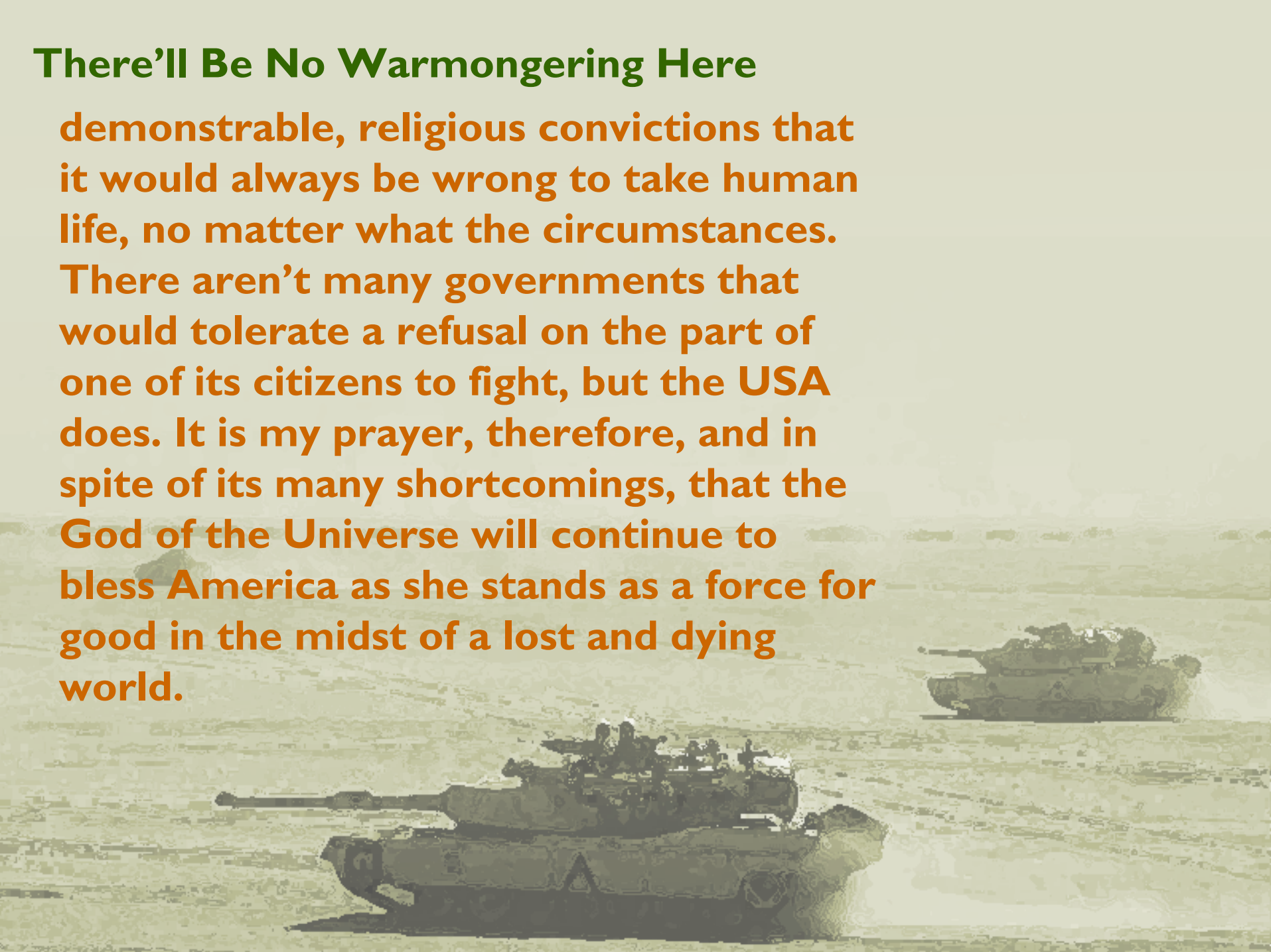
There'll Be No Warmongering Here

country is threatened, as it now most certainly is. The state, even when it's the United States of America, is not above God's law. In fact, the state is what it is supposed to be only when it recognizes a Law above the law. Anything else is idolatry. The proof that the government of the United States of America now views this principle correctly is manifested in the conscientious objector status it grants to its citizens who hold deeply felt,...



There'll Be No Warmongering Here

demonstrable, religious convictions that it would always be wrong to take human life, no matter what the circumstances. There aren't many governments that would tolerate a refusal on the part of one of its citizens to fight, but the USA does. It is my prayer, therefore, and in spite of its many shortcomings, that the God of the Universe will continue to bless America as she stands as a force for good in the midst of a lost and dying world.



In Closing

In closing this introduction, I realize I haven't touched every nook and cranny of this issue. Even so, I hope I have whetted your appetite for a study of this most difficult and fundamentally important subject. It is to that study that I now direct your thoughtful attention.

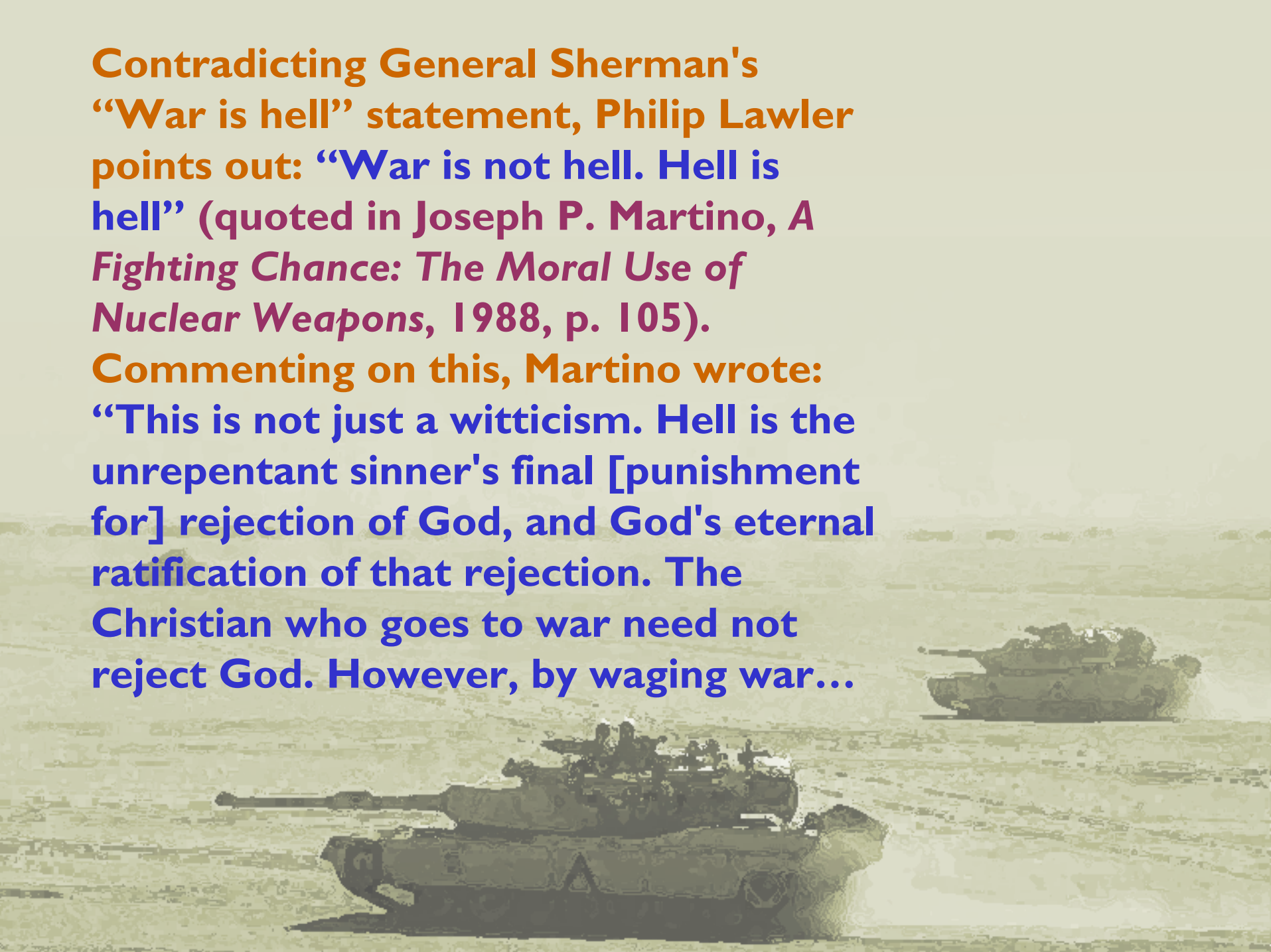


The State's Role



Contradicting General Sherman's
“War is hell” statement, Philip Lawler
points out: “War is not hell. Hell is
hell” (quoted in Joseph P. Martino, *A*
Fighting Chance: The Moral Use of
Nuclear Weapons, 1988, p. 105).

Commenting on this, Martino wrote:
“This is not just a witticism. Hell is the
unrepentant sinner's final [punishment
for] rejection of God, and God's eternal
ratification of that rejection. The
Christian who goes to war need not
reject God. However, by waging war...



unjustly, he can do precisely that. War can become, then, not hell itself but the road to hell” (Ibid.). Admittedly, the “war question,” as it is sometimes called, is fraught with dangers. I'll be addressing some of these in this study. But before this can be done, the question of the State's right to wage war must be addressed. There are Christians who believe there is no such thing as a just war, and they are convinced that a Christian cannot participate in war-fighting without...



sinning. Romans 13:9 and 1 John 3:15, which command love and prohibit hate (and both in connection with murder and other such vices), have been cited by some as a refutation of all wars. In this part of our study, I will try to demonstrate why such “proof-texting” is wrong.



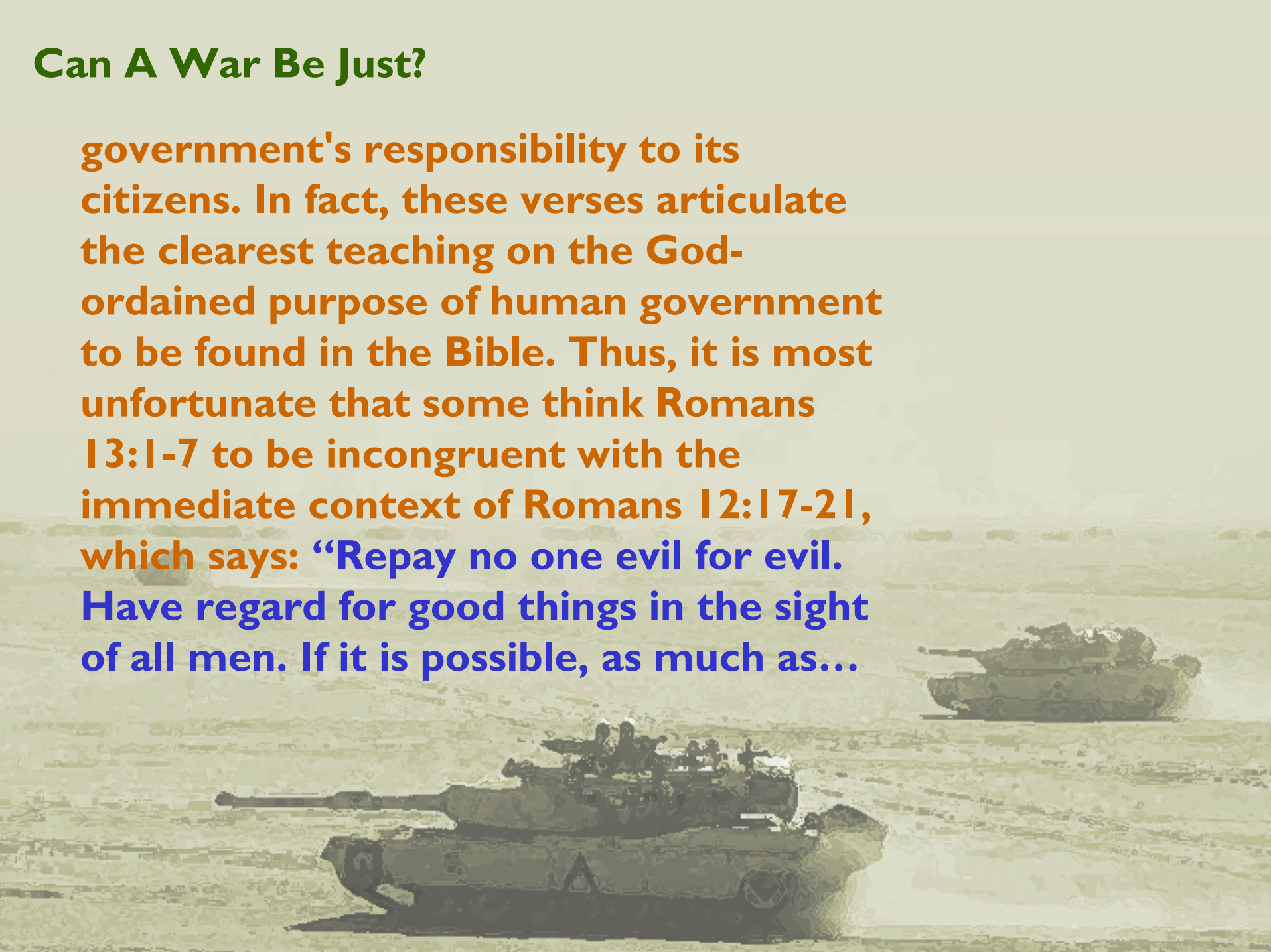
Can A War Be Just?

Yes, it can. How do I know? The Bible tells me so. In Romans 13:1-7, we have an inspired apostle's teaching on “conscientious citizenship,” as some have described it, and I believe this is an apt description of what we find in these verses. But there is another side to this coin. While making it clear that citizens are obligated to submit to governing authorities, Paul gives us valuable and essential information concerning the...



Can A War Be Just?

government's responsibility to its citizens. In fact, these verses articulate the clearest teaching on the God-ordained purpose of human government to be found in the Bible. Thus, it is most unfortunate that some think Romans 13:1-7 to be incongruent with the immediate context of Romans 12:17-21, which says: “Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men. If it is possible, as much as...



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depends on you, live peaceably with all men. Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, 'Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,' says the Lord. Therefore 'If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him a drink; for in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head.' Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good" (NKJV). The incongruists are wrong. Romans 13:1-7 explains...



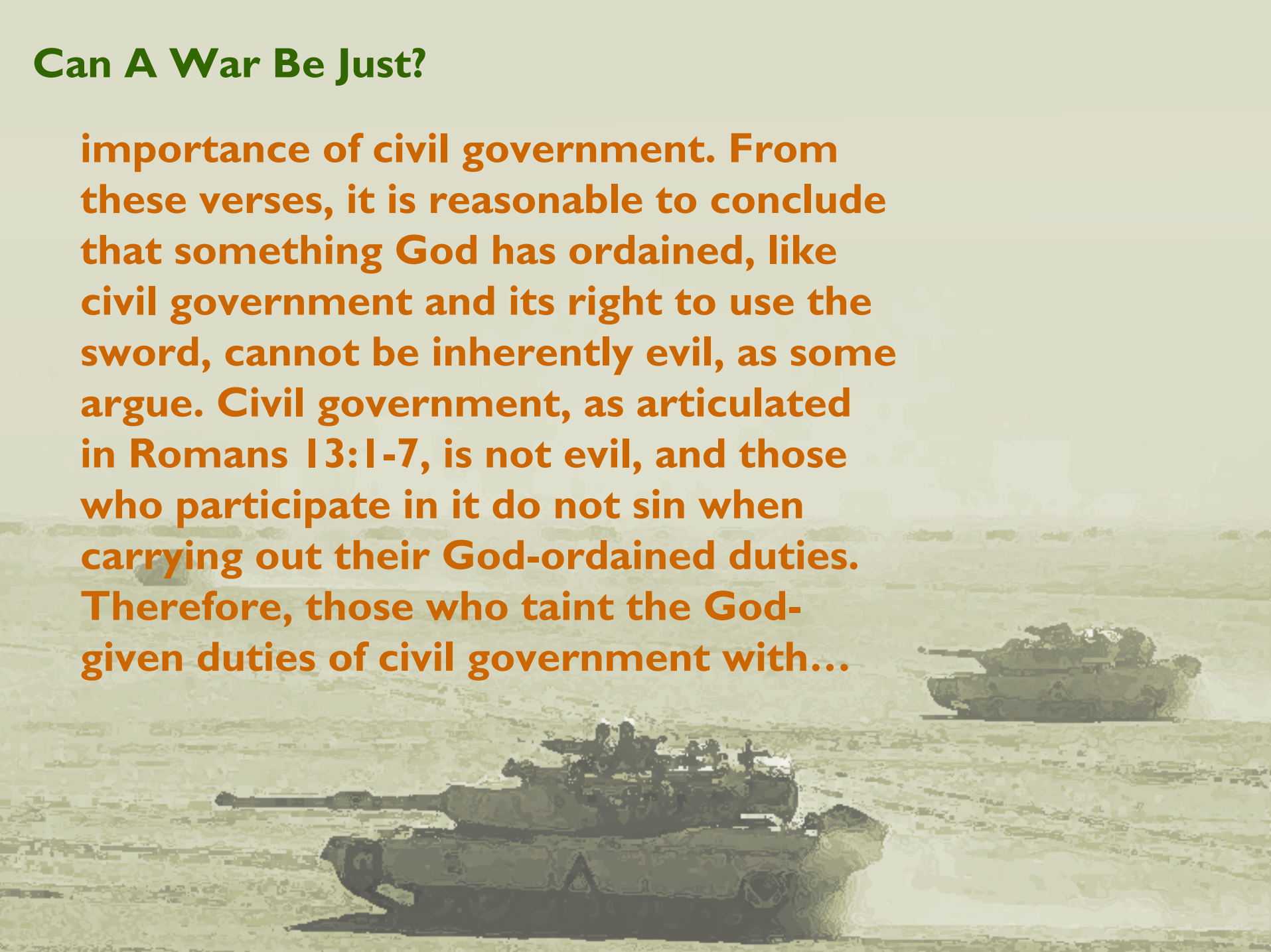
Can A War Be Just?

(amplifies might be a better word) that while Christians are prohibited from executing personal vengeance, God has established civil government to be His earthly agent to see that such vengeance (i.e., justice) is meted out. Therefore, to teach Romans 12:17-21 without mentioning Romans 13:1-7 leaves not just a false impression as to what it means to be a Christian, but it fosters a lack of appreciation for the ministerial...



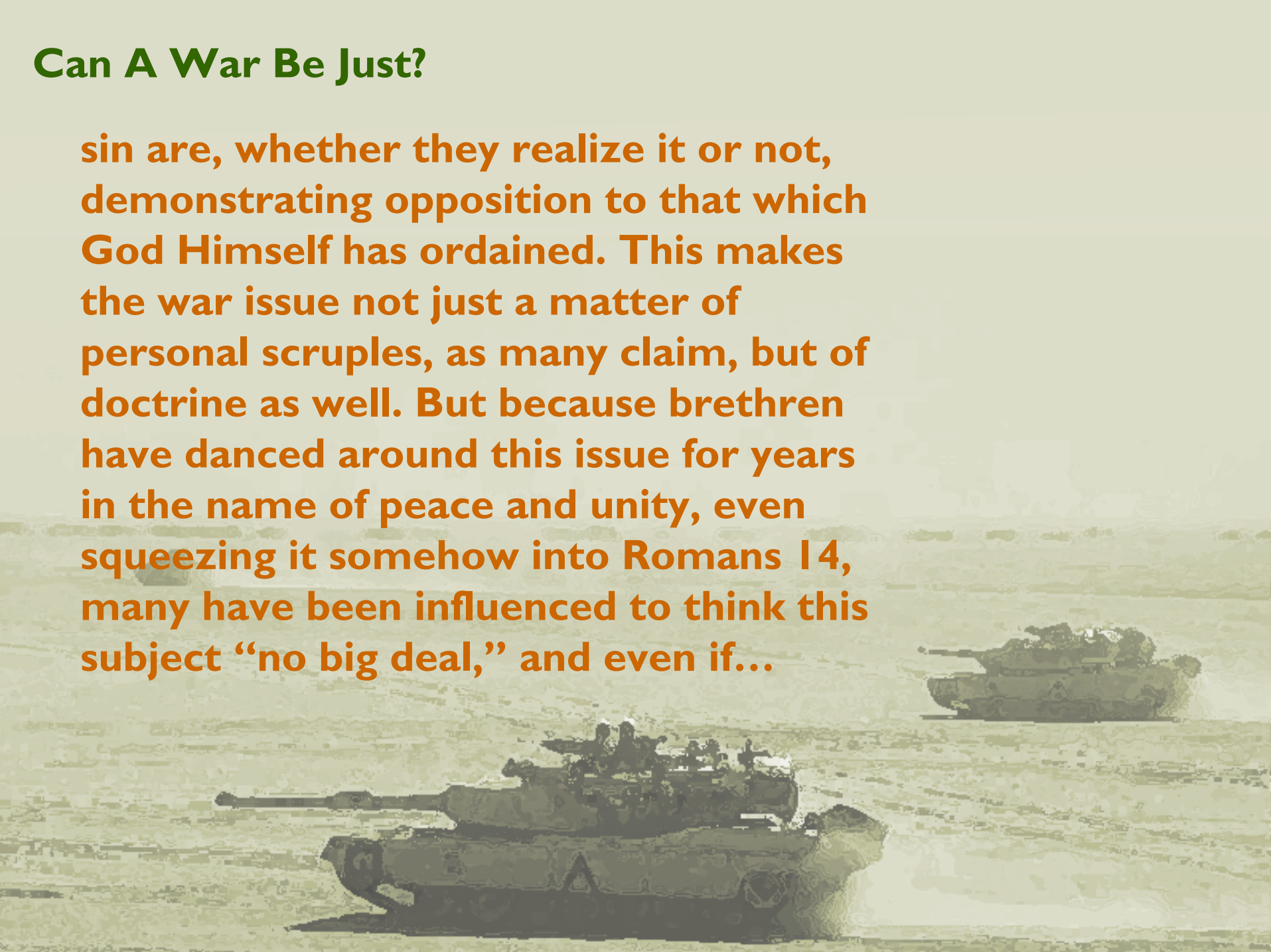
Can A War Be Just?

importance of civil government. From these verses, it is reasonable to conclude that something God has ordained, like civil government and its right to use the sword, cannot be inherently evil, as some argue. Civil government, as articulated in Romans 13:1-7, is not evil, and those who participate in it do not sin when carrying out their God-ordained duties. Therefore, those who taint the God-given duties of civil government with...



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sin are, whether they realize it or not, demonstrating opposition to that which God Himself has ordained. This makes the war issue not just a matter of personal scruples, as many claim, but of doctrine as well. But because brethren have danced around this issue for years in the name of peace and unity, even squeezing it somehow into Romans 14, many have been influenced to think this subject “no big deal,” and even if...



Can A War Be Just?

it is, it's something which falls solely within the realm of personal ethics, and is, therefore, not something that should divide the church. This is evidenced by the writings of Moses Lard, a distinguished voice among 19th century disciples of Christ: “To illustrate what I mean: it is held to be doubtful whether a Christian man can go to war according to the New Testament. For myself I am candid to think he can not. But others,...



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let me allow, with equal candor, think differently. Suppose now, we as a people, were equally divided on the point.

Neither party could certainly force the other to accept its view. The difference should be held as a difference of opinion, and hence should be made a matter of forbearance. But should either party attempt to compel the other to accept its view, and in case of failure should separate, I should not hesitate to...



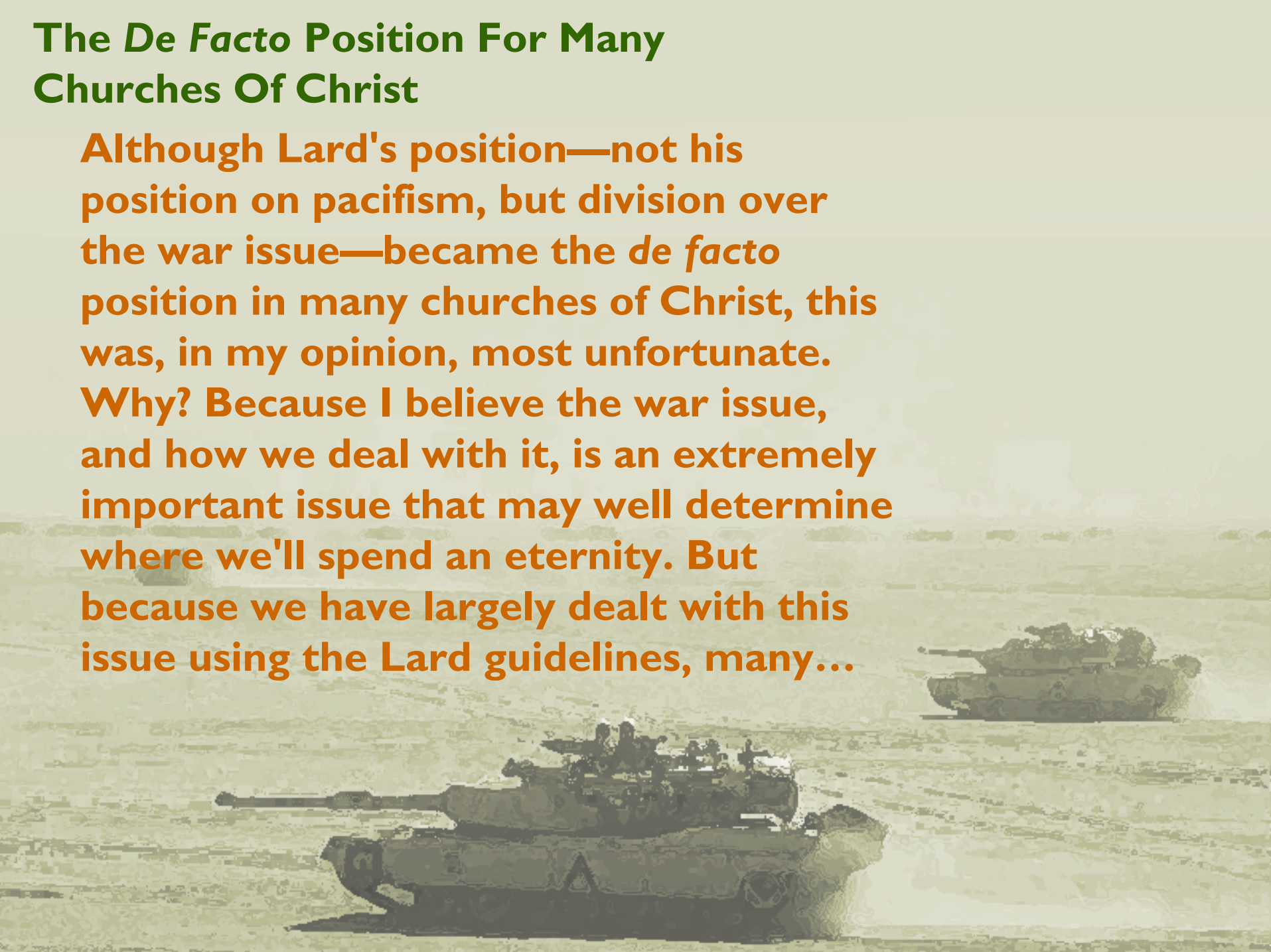
Can A War Be Just?

regard the separating party as a faction,
and hence as condemned by the New
Testament” (“Can We Divide?,” *Lard's
Quarterly* III, April 1866, pp. 331-332).



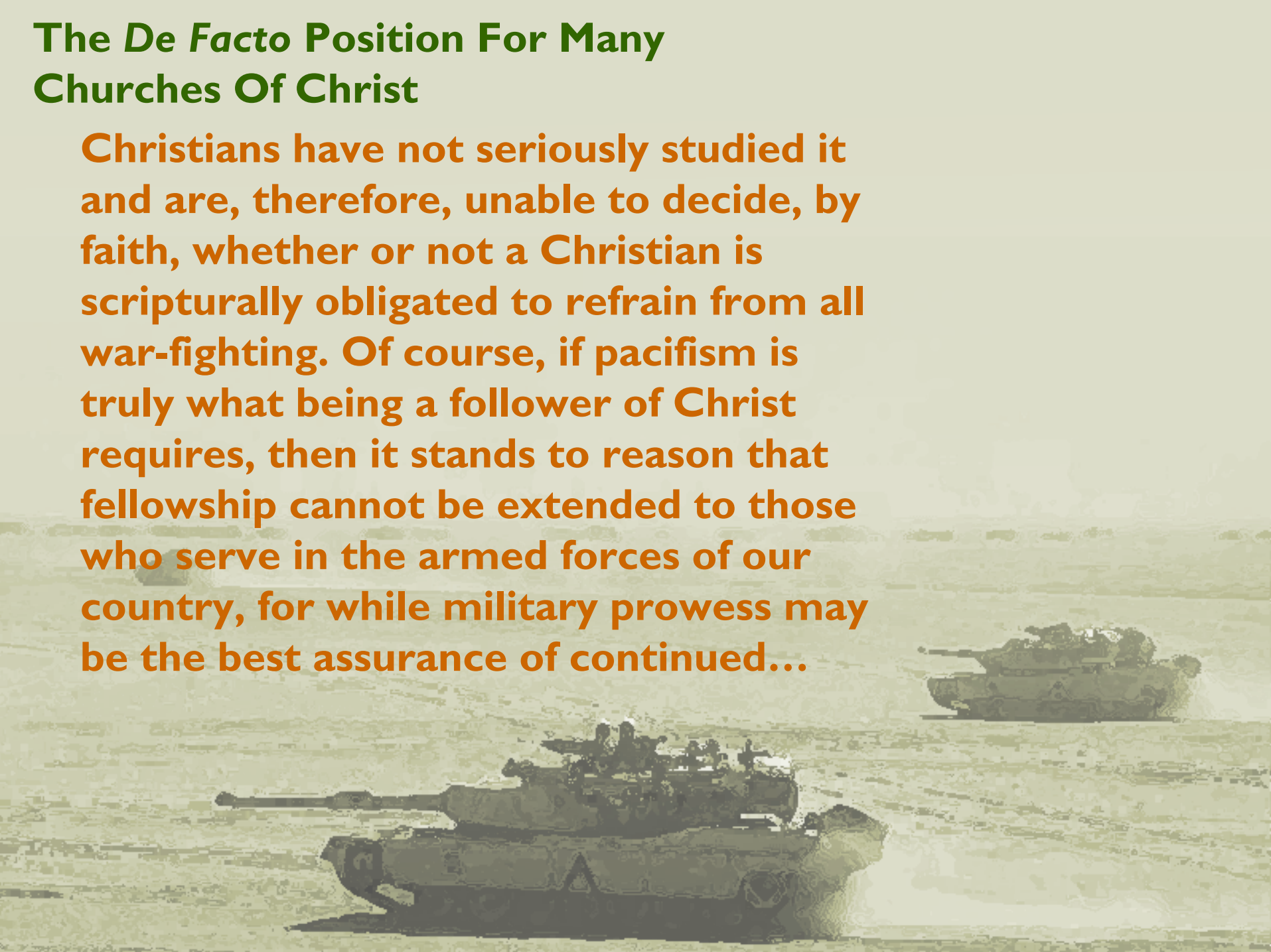
The *De Facto* Position For Many Churches Of Christ

Although Lard's position—not his position on pacifism, but division over the war issue—became the *de facto* position in many churches of Christ, this was, in my opinion, most unfortunate. Why? Because I believe the war issue, and how we deal with it, is an extremely important issue that may well determine where we'll spend an eternity. But because we have largely dealt with this issue using the Lard guidelines, many...



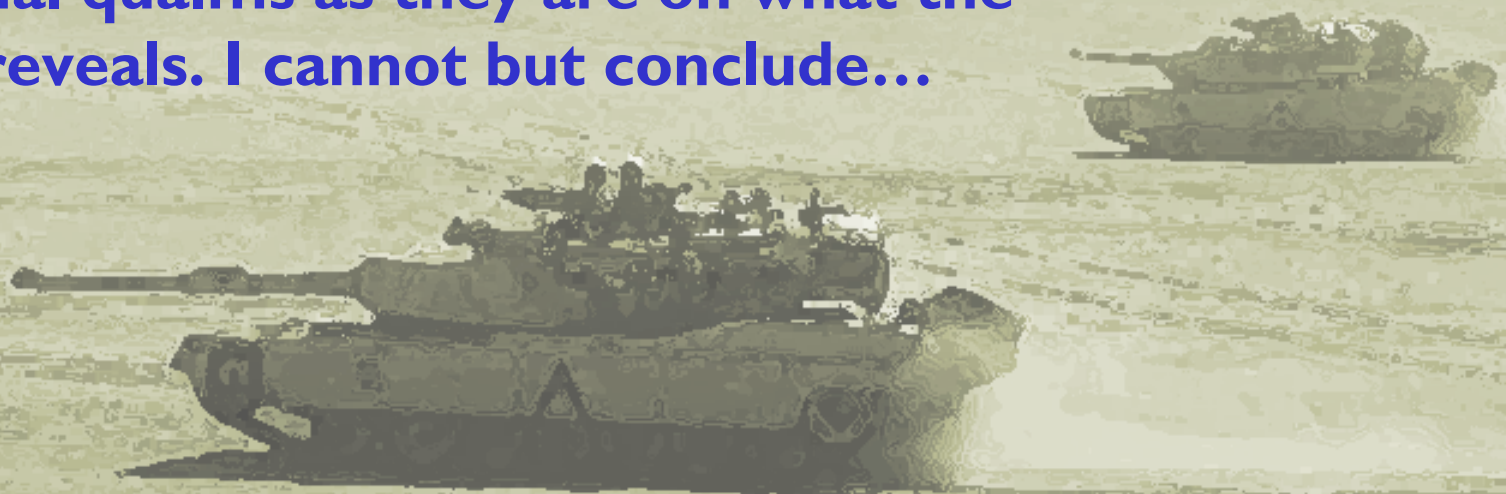
The *De Facto* Position For Many Churches Of Christ

Christians have not seriously studied it and are, therefore, unable to decide, by faith, whether or not a Christian is scripturally obligated to refrain from all war-fighting. Of course, if pacifism is truly what being a follower of Christ requires, then it stands to reason that fellowship cannot be extended to those who serve in the armed forces of our country, for while military prowess may be the best assurance of continued...



The *De Facto* Position For Many Churches Of Christ

peace, it is clear that those who serve in the armed forces of our country are not pacifists. Just such a view has been expressed by a co-author of a recent debate on this subject: “It should be noted that issues I am debating [have] always been a matter of faith with me ever since I became a Christian. That is, my beliefs are not so much based on personal qualms as they are on what the Bible reveals. I cannot but conclude...



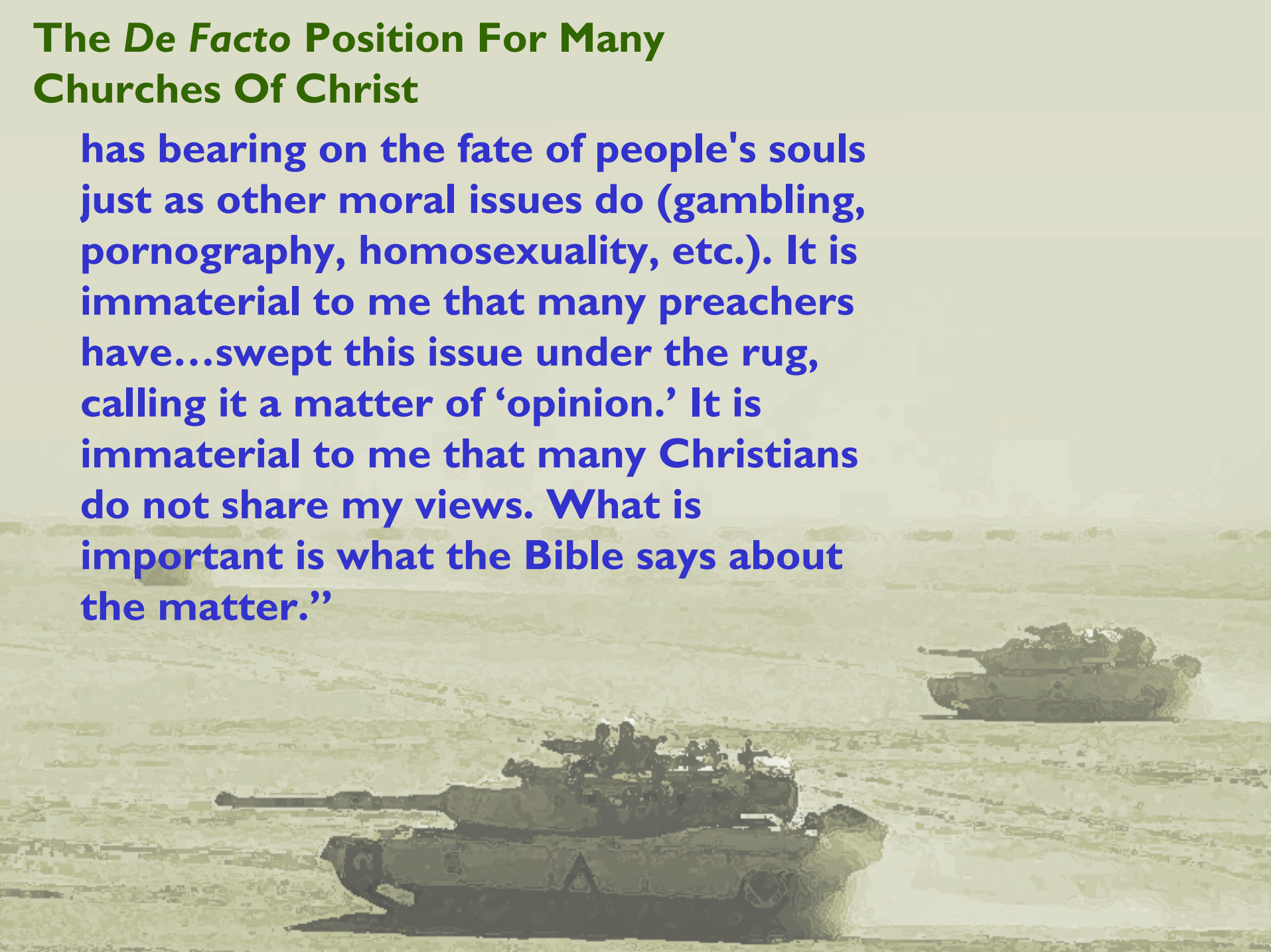
The *De Facto* Position For Many Churches Of Christ

that those who take my opponent's views on 'just warfare,' etc. are out of harmony with what God expects of [H]is people. Some may say that since my scruples do not concern the collective activity of Christians (such as using instrumental music in worship services would), I should be able to extend fellowship to those that disagree with me on the 'civil government' issue. I beg to differ. To me, this is a moral issue that...



The *De Facto* Position For Many Churches Of Christ

has bearing on the fate of people's souls just as other moral issues do (gambling, pornography, homosexuality, etc.). It is immaterial to me that many preachers have...swept this issue under the rug, calling it a matter of 'opinion.' It is immaterial to me that many Christians do not share my views. What is important is what the Bible says about the matter.”



Integrity Demands Obedience To Conscience

I'm convinced this brother is just trying to do what he believes the Bible requires of him. Nevertheless, he and I are on divergent paths, and so much so that if we were in the same congregation we'd have serious issues of fellowship to contend with. However, although our divergent views ultimately produce questions of fellowship, fellowship, *per se*, is not the issue before us. Such can always be hashed out later, if the need arises. At issue now is what the Bible...



Integrity Demands Obedience To Conscience

teaches on the government's and Christian's role in war. Furthermore, I wish to make it clear that as long as a pacifist is content to have fellowship with me, I would not advocate, nor would I ever initiate, withdrawing from him. Yes, I believe the pacifist is wrong and needs to change his position, and I will be praying for just that. I even hope this study will advance just such an end.



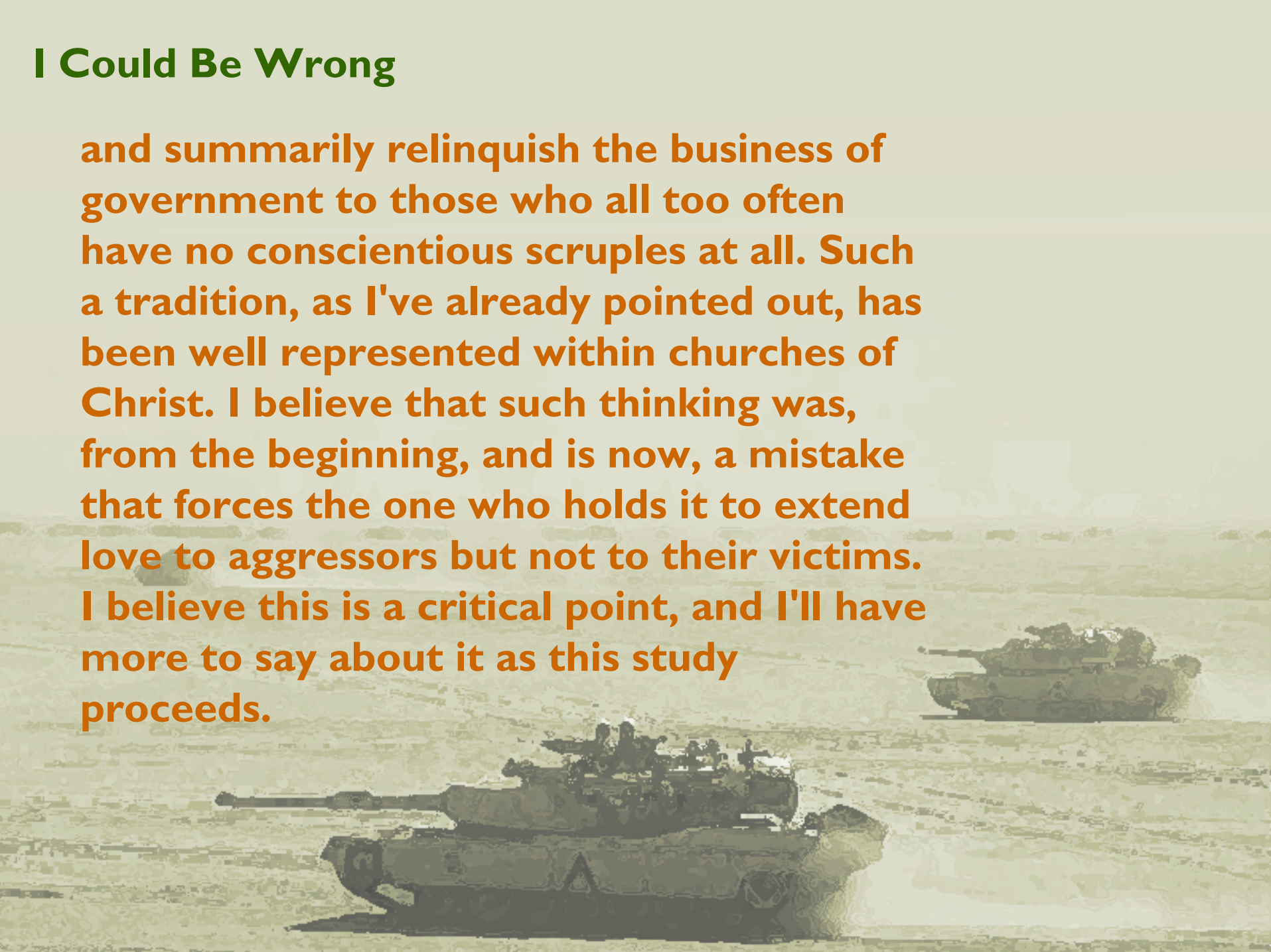
I Could Be Wrong

Although I don't think so, I admit that I could be wrong and in need of repentance myself. If I am, I would appreciate very much being corrected. Consequently, I look forward to hearing any opposing views. Furthermore, although I am optimistic that good can be accomplished by a study such as this, I also remain convinced there will always be Christians who—struggling with the complexities of what it means to be a true follower of Christ—will simply opt out of history...



I Could Be Wrong

and summarily relinquish the business of government to those who all too often have no conscientious scruples at all. Such a tradition, as I've already pointed out, has been well represented within churches of Christ. I believe that such thinking was, from the beginning, and is now, a mistake that forces the one who holds it to extend love to aggressors but not to their victims. I believe this is a critical point, and I'll have more to say about it as this study proceeds.



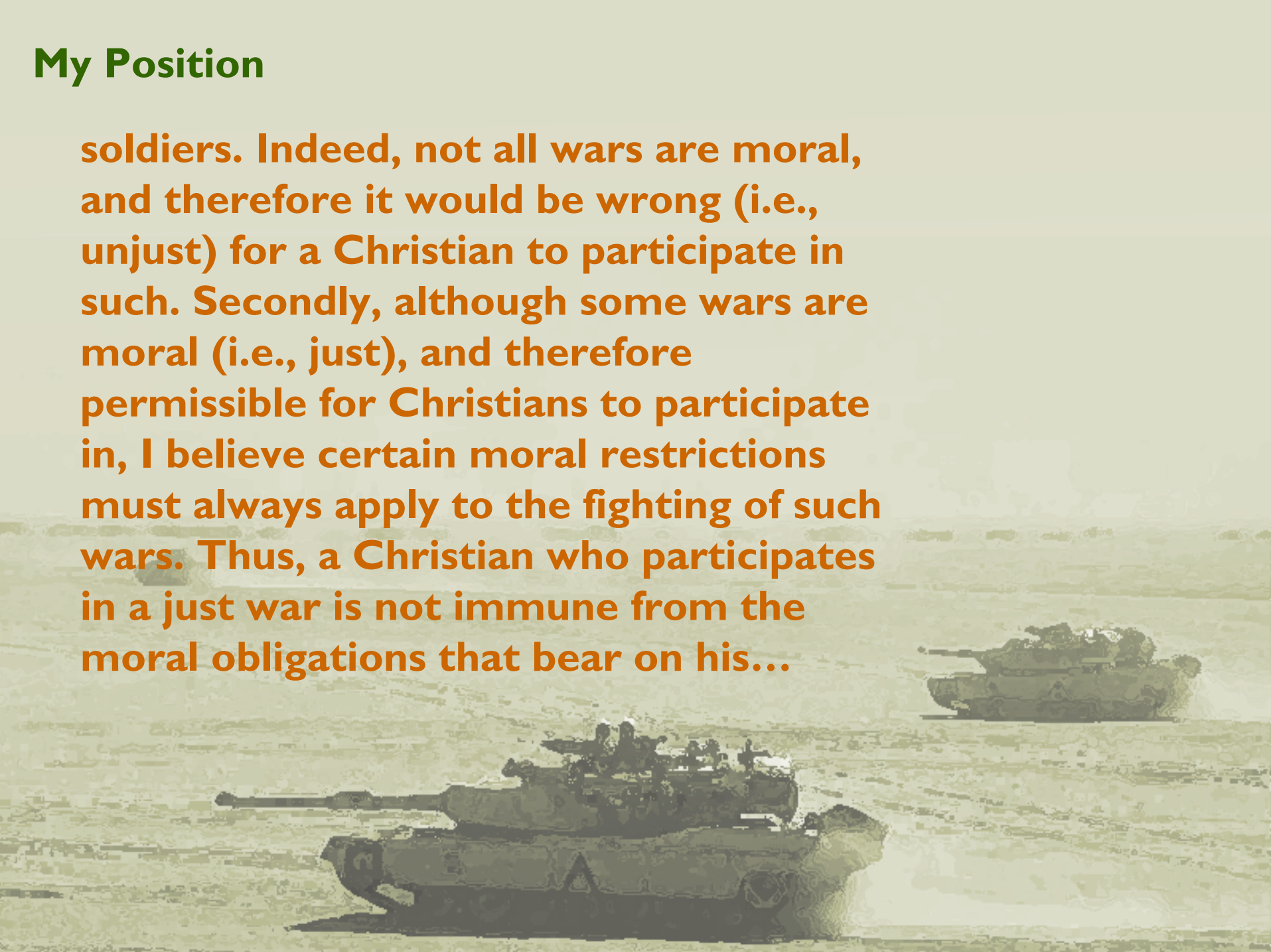
My Position

I would be overjoyed if every government official was a Christian. And if every policeman and soldier was a Christian, is there anyone who would not think we'd be much better off? However, in affirming a Christian's right (and sometimes duty) to participate in the use of armed force, whether as a policeman or soldier, I do not intend to defend, nor excuse, all that professed Christians have done as policemen or...



My Position

soldiers. Indeed, not all wars are moral, and therefore it would be wrong (i.e., unjust) for a Christian to participate in such. Secondly, although some wars are moral (i.e., just), and therefore permissible for Christians to participate in, I believe certain moral restrictions must always apply to the fighting of such wars. Thus, a Christian who participates in a just war is not immune from the moral obligations that bear on his...



My Position

conduct. I tried to make this clear in the introduction, and I mention it here again only because pacifists all too often misunderstand my position, preferring to identify it as one that justifies killing anyone my government mandates. This may be a correct description of one who believes it is always right to participate in war (i.e., “activism”), but for me, a selective conscientious objector (i.e., “selectivism”), I categorically deny...



My Position

that mine is such a position. Selectivism rests uneasily between the activism that shouts, “My country, right or wrong!” and the pacifism that would permit a Hitler, a Pol Pot, or a Saddam Hussein to commit genocide without lifting a weapon in resistance. Having reiterated this, it is now time to explore the state’s right and obligation to use the sword.



But Before Doing So, Let's Review The Three Different Positions Taken On War:

✓ **Pacifism:** War Is Always Wrong.

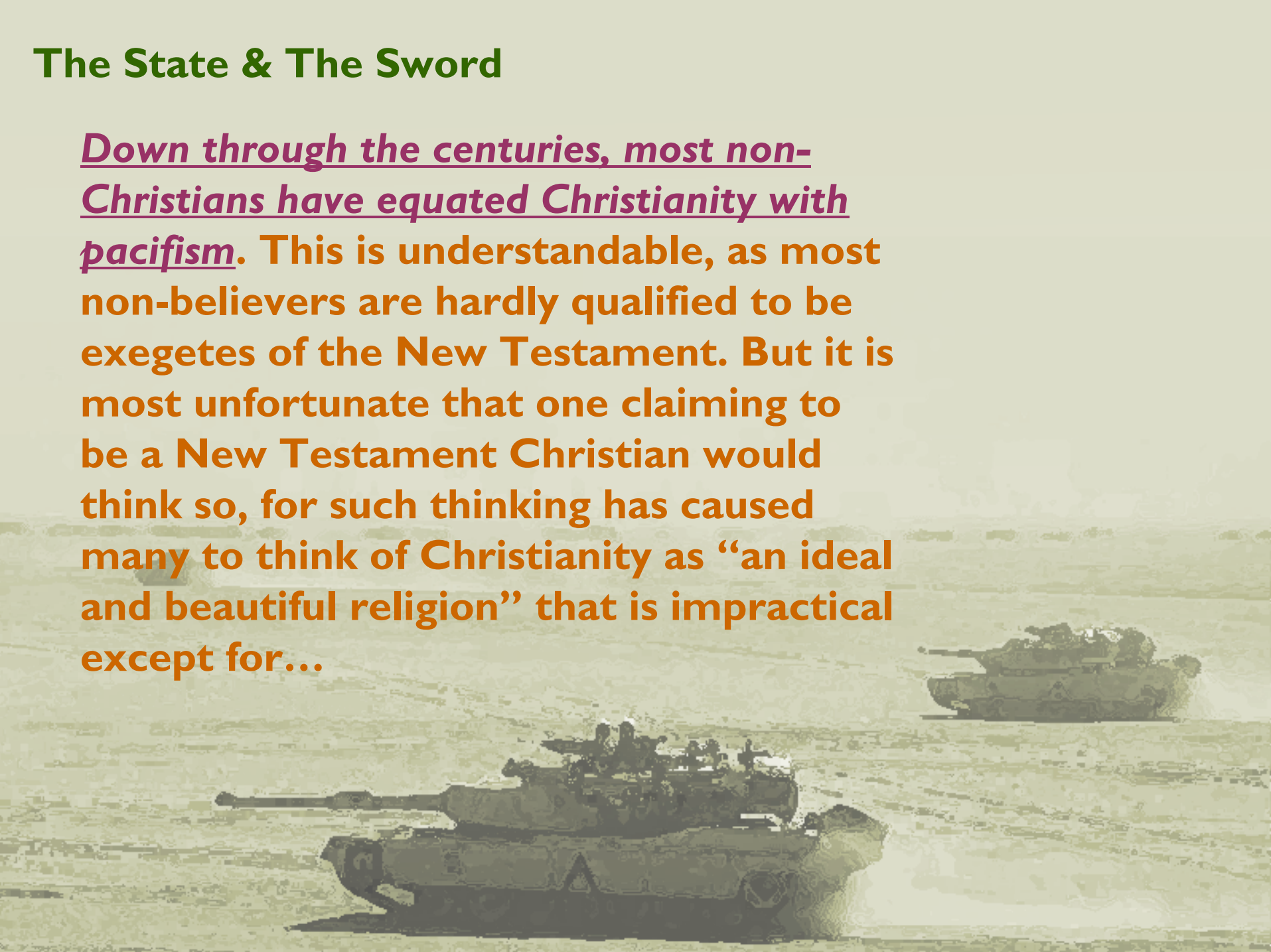
✓ **Activism:** War Is Always Right.

✓ **Selectivism:** Some Wars Are Just.



The State & The Sword

Down through the centuries, most non-Christians have equated Christianity with pacifism. This is understandable, as most non-believers are hardly qualified to be exegetes of the New Testament. But it is most unfortunate that one claiming to be a New Testament Christian would think so, for such thinking has caused many to think of Christianity as “an ideal and beautiful religion” that is impractical except for...



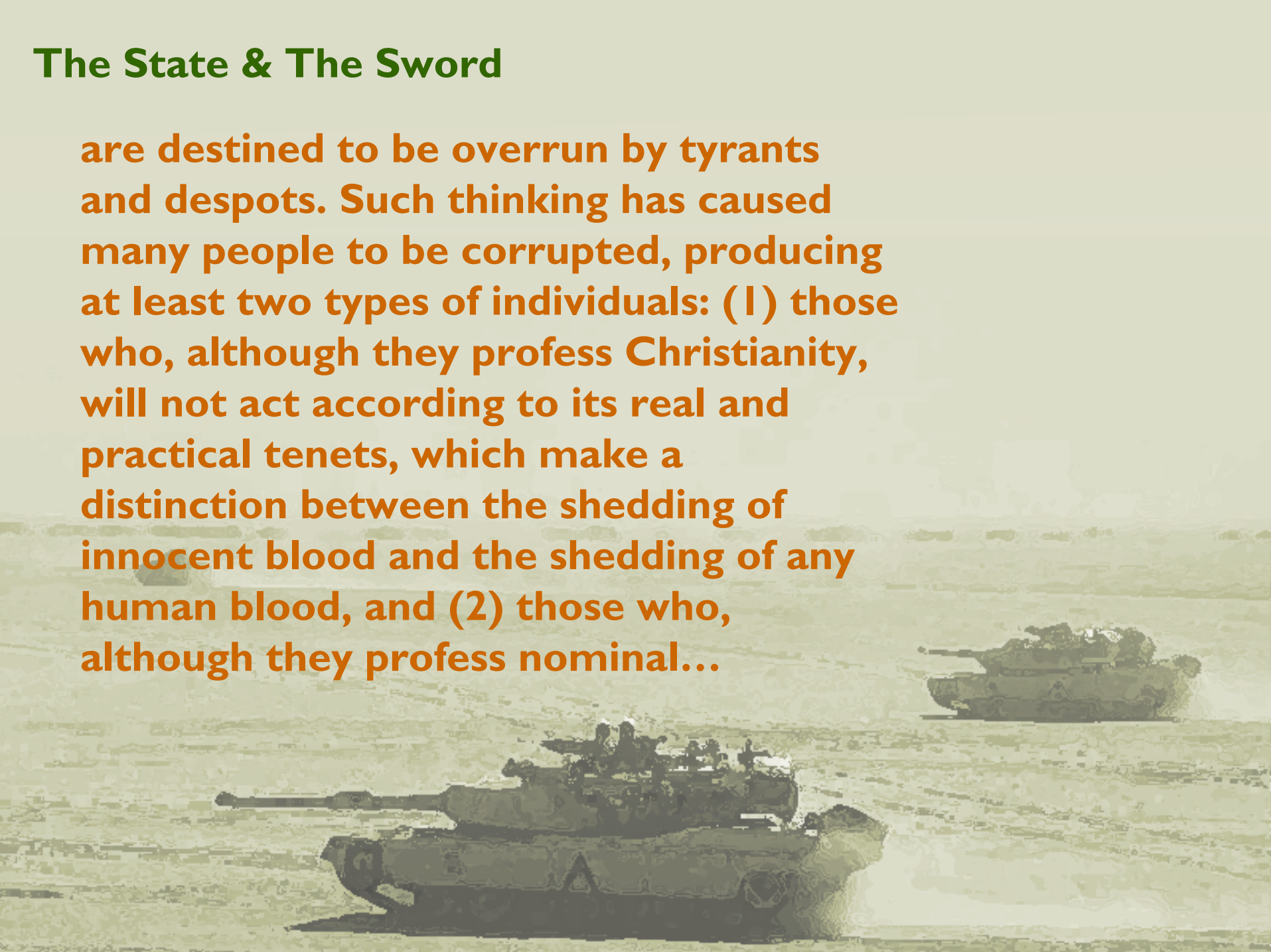
The State & The Sword

a few rare individuals (viz., pacifists). This false image leads to high-sounding principles that are, after all is said and done, impossible to keep in practice. The world is fallen and full of evil, therefore Jesus, many think, demands that which is impossible. Consequently, these think, unless the “impossibilism” of Christ is replaced with the “possibilism” of politics (for politics, if it is anything, is certainly the art of the possible), then civilizations...



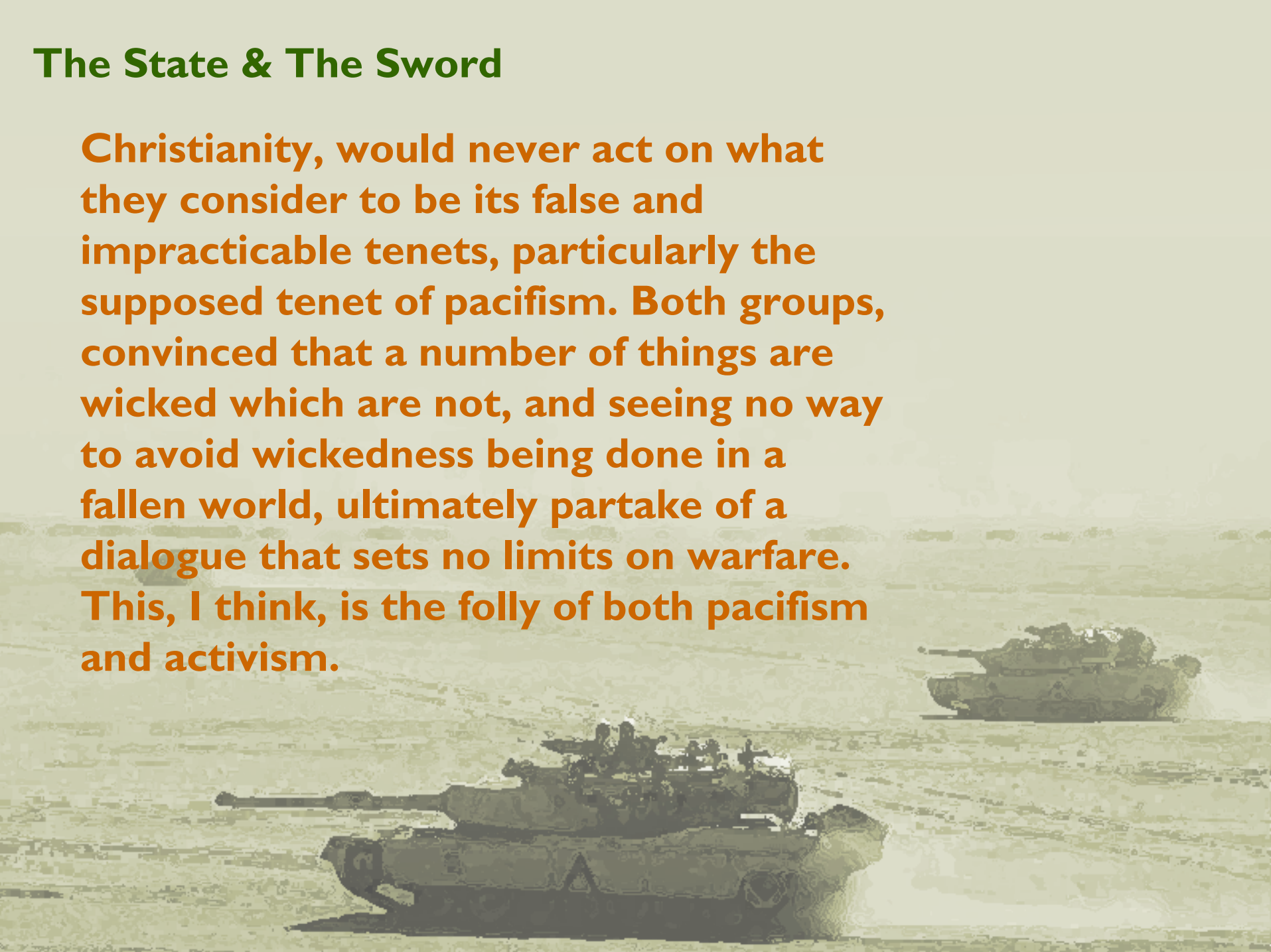
The State & The Sword

are destined to be overrun by tyrants and despots. Such thinking has caused many people to be corrupted, producing at least two types of individuals: (1) those who, although they profess Christianity, will not act according to its real and practical tenets, which make a distinction between the shedding of innocent blood and the shedding of any human blood, and (2) those who, although they profess nominal...



The State & The Sword

Christianity, would never act on what they consider to be its false and impracticable tenets, particularly the supposed tenet of pacifism. Both groups, convinced that a number of things are wicked which are not, and seeing no way to avoid wickedness being done in a fallen world, ultimately partake of a dialogue that sets no limits on warfare. This, I think, is the folly of both pacifism and activism.



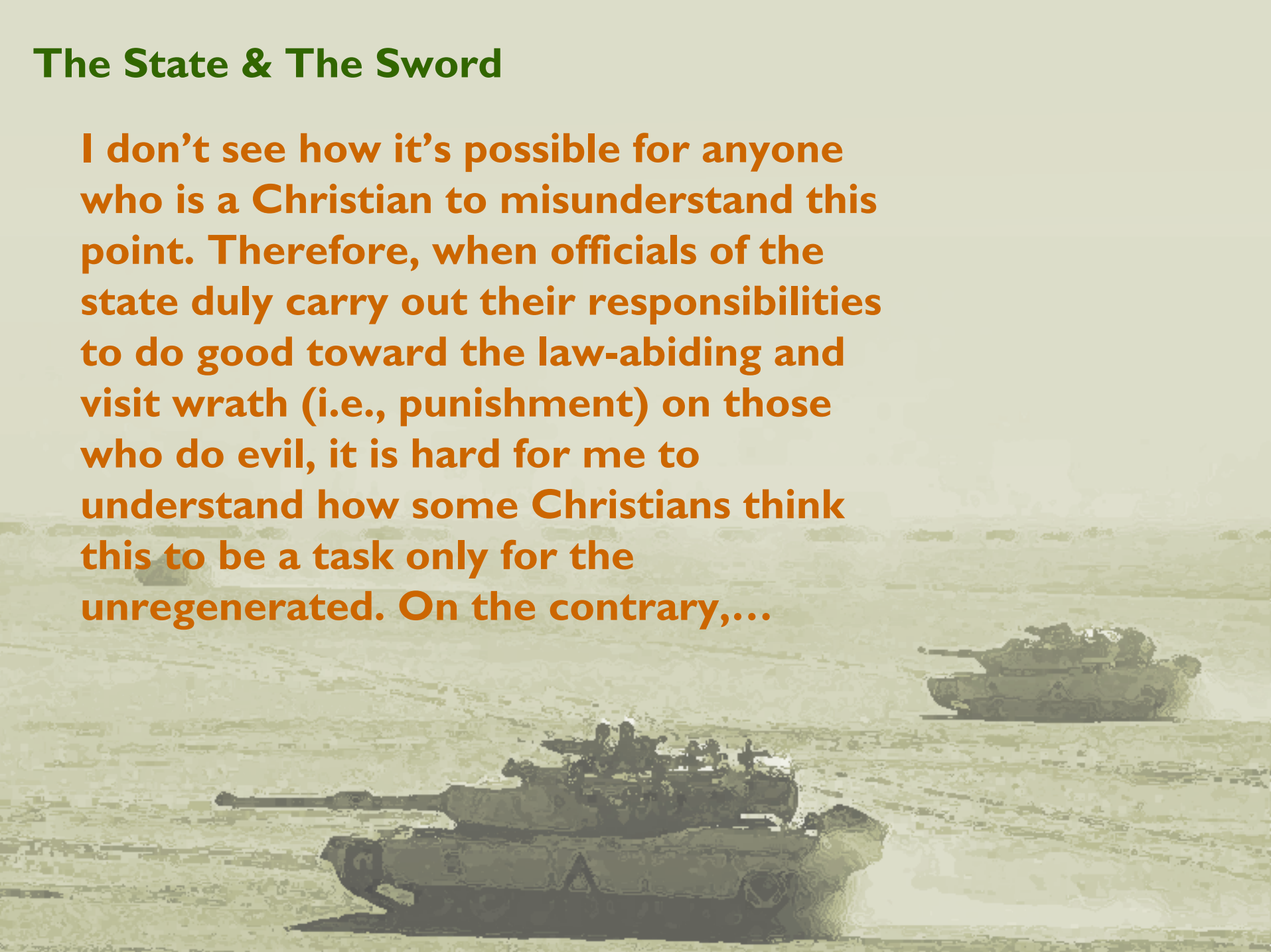
The State & The Sword

However, New Testament Christianity, contrary to the false image of “pacifistic Christianity,” is quite practical. Because it is, God has given the state the awesome responsibility of using the sword to restrain, punish and, when necessary, kill evildoers (cf. Romans 13:1-7). Why? Because, although the Bible prohibits individuals from exercising revenge or vengeance (cf. Romans 12:17-21), civil government was ordained by God for this very purpose (cf. Romans 13:4).



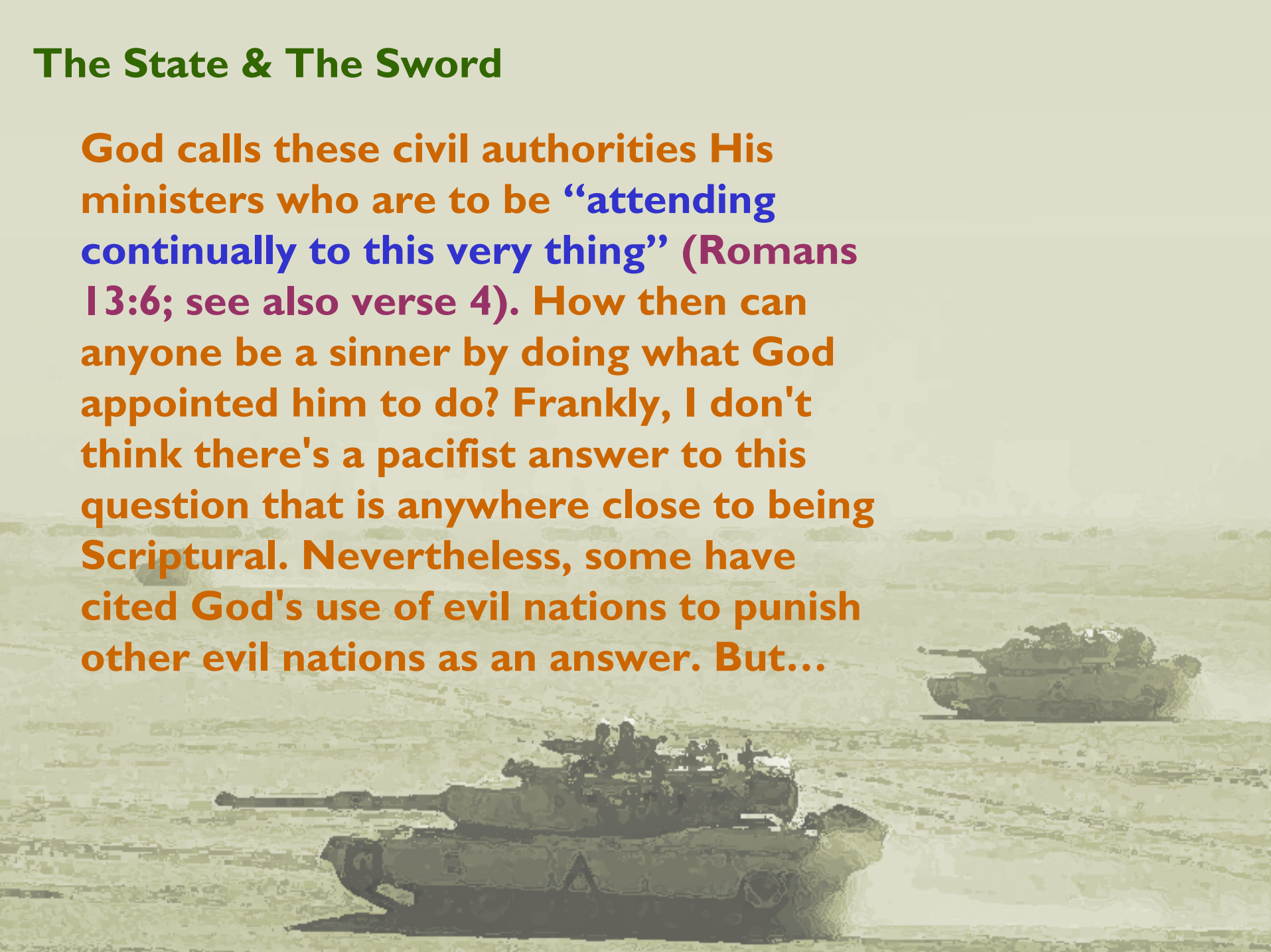
The State & The Sword

I don't see how it's possible for anyone who is a Christian to misunderstand this point. Therefore, when officials of the state duly carry out their responsibilities to do good toward the law-abiding and visit wrath (i.e., punishment) on those who do evil, it is hard for me to understand how some Christians think this to be a task only for the unregenerated. On the contrary,...



The State & The Sword

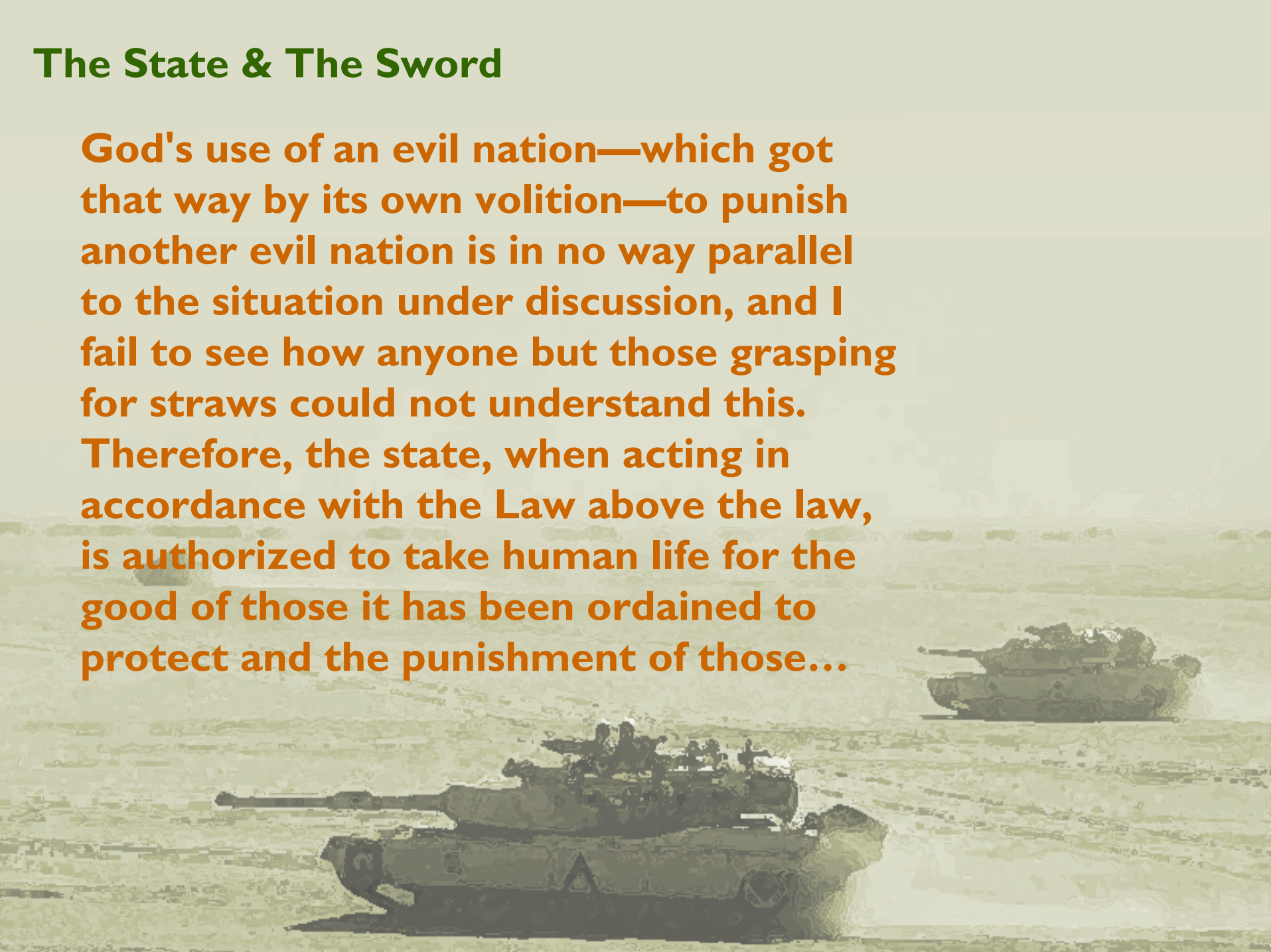
God calls these civil authorities His ministers who are to be “attending continually to this very thing” (Romans 13:6; see also verse 4). How then can anyone be a sinner by doing what God appointed him to do? Frankly, I don't think there's a pacifist answer to this question that is anywhere close to being Scriptural. Nevertheless, some have cited God's use of evil nations to punish other evil nations as an answer. But...



The State & The Sword

God's use of an evil nation—which got that way by its own volition—to punish another evil nation is in no way parallel to the situation under discussion, and I fail to see how anyone but those grasping for straws could not understand this.

Therefore, the state, when acting in accordance with the Law above the law, is authorized to take human life for the good of those it has been ordained to protect and the punishment of those...



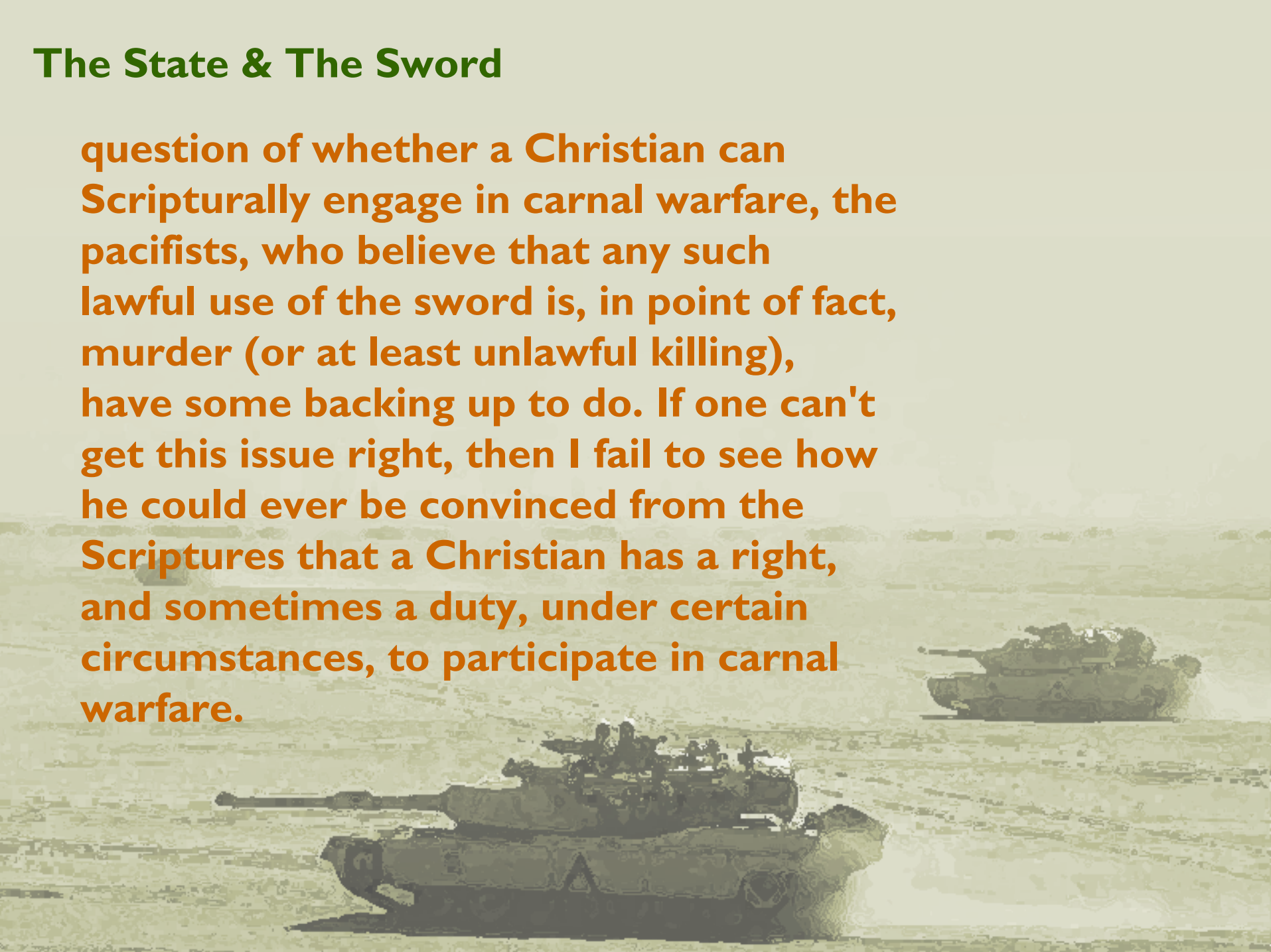
The State & The Sword

who do evil. Such God-ordained taking of life, although it may certainly be described as killing, is not, as some think, murder. Consequently, an official of the state cannot be sinning when he carries out this morally constituted duty, and those who so argue are clearly (and by this term I mean unequivocally) in violation of God's prohibition against calling good evil and evil good (cf. Isaiah 5:20). So, before we even get to the...



The State & The Sword

question of whether a Christian can Scripturally engage in carnal warfare, the pacifists, who believe that any such lawful use of the sword is, in point of fact, murder (or at least unlawful killing), have some backing up to do. If one can't get this issue right, then I fail to see how he could ever be convinced from the Scriptures that a Christian has a right, and sometimes a duty, under certain circumstances, to participate in carnal warfare.



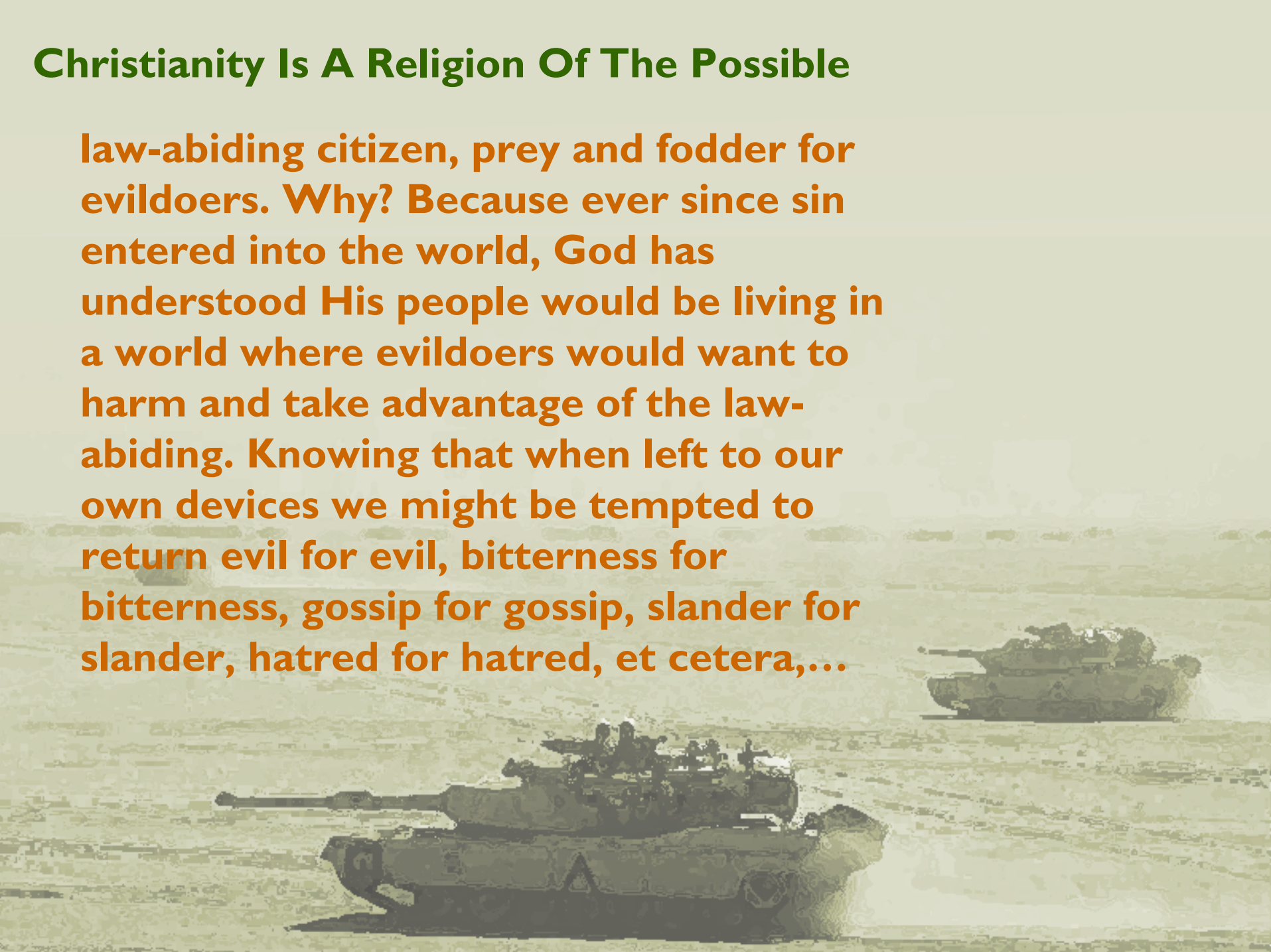
Christianity Is A Religion Of The Possible

God never calls upon Christians to do what is impossible, impractical or unlivable. In fact, one of the strongest proofs of the validity of Christianity is that we can live what we believe and believe what we live. As a Christian, I cannot take vengeance into my own hands (I'm speaking here as an individual). To do so would be a sin (cf. Romans 12:19). But such a moral code does not make me, as a Christian and...



Christianity Is A Religion Of The Possible

law-abiding citizen, prey and fodder for evildoers. Why? Because ever since sin entered into the world, God has understood His people would be living in a world where evildoers would want to harm and take advantage of the law-abiding. Knowing that when left to our own devices we might be tempted to return evil for evil, bitterness for bitterness, gossip for gossip, slander for slander, hatred for hatred, et cetera,...



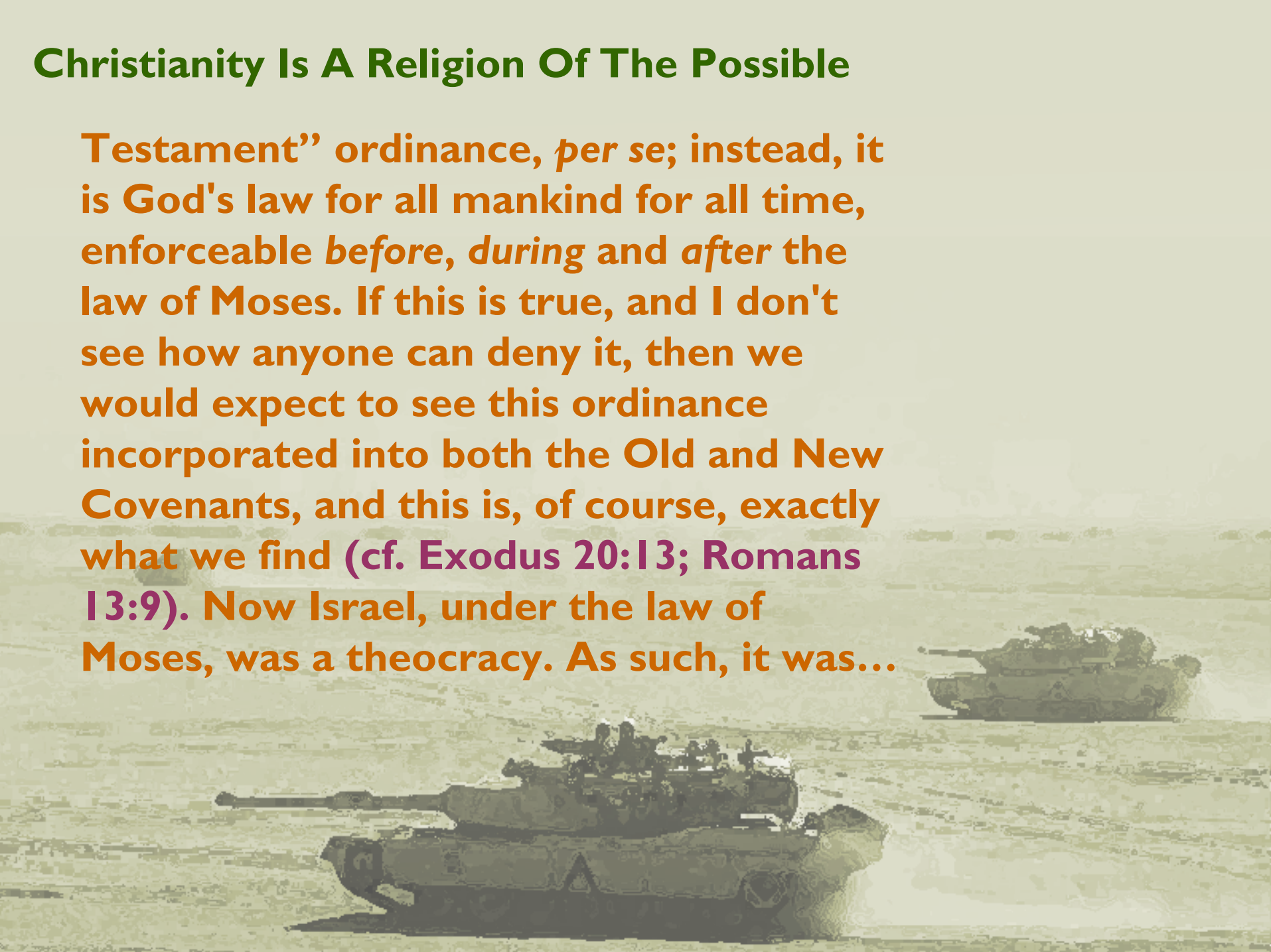
Christianity Is A Religion Of The Possible

God ordained civil government as a mechanical remedy against unrestrained evil. In doing so, He stated that anyone who sheds man's blood (i.e., commits murder) by man shall his blood be shed (i.e., would receive capital punishment, cf. Genesis 9:6). Notice, if you will, that this verse condemns the wrongful taking of human life as well as authorizes the rightful taking of human life. Further note that this verse is not an “Old...



Christianity Is A Religion Of The Possible

Testament” ordinance, *per se*; instead, it is God's law for all mankind for all time, enforceable *before, during* and *after* the law of Moses. If this is true, and I don't see how anyone can deny it, then we would expect to see this ordinance incorporated into both the Old and New Covenants, and this is, of course, exactly what we find (cf. Exodus 20:13; Romans 13:9). Now Israel, under the law of Moses, was a theocracy. As such, it was...



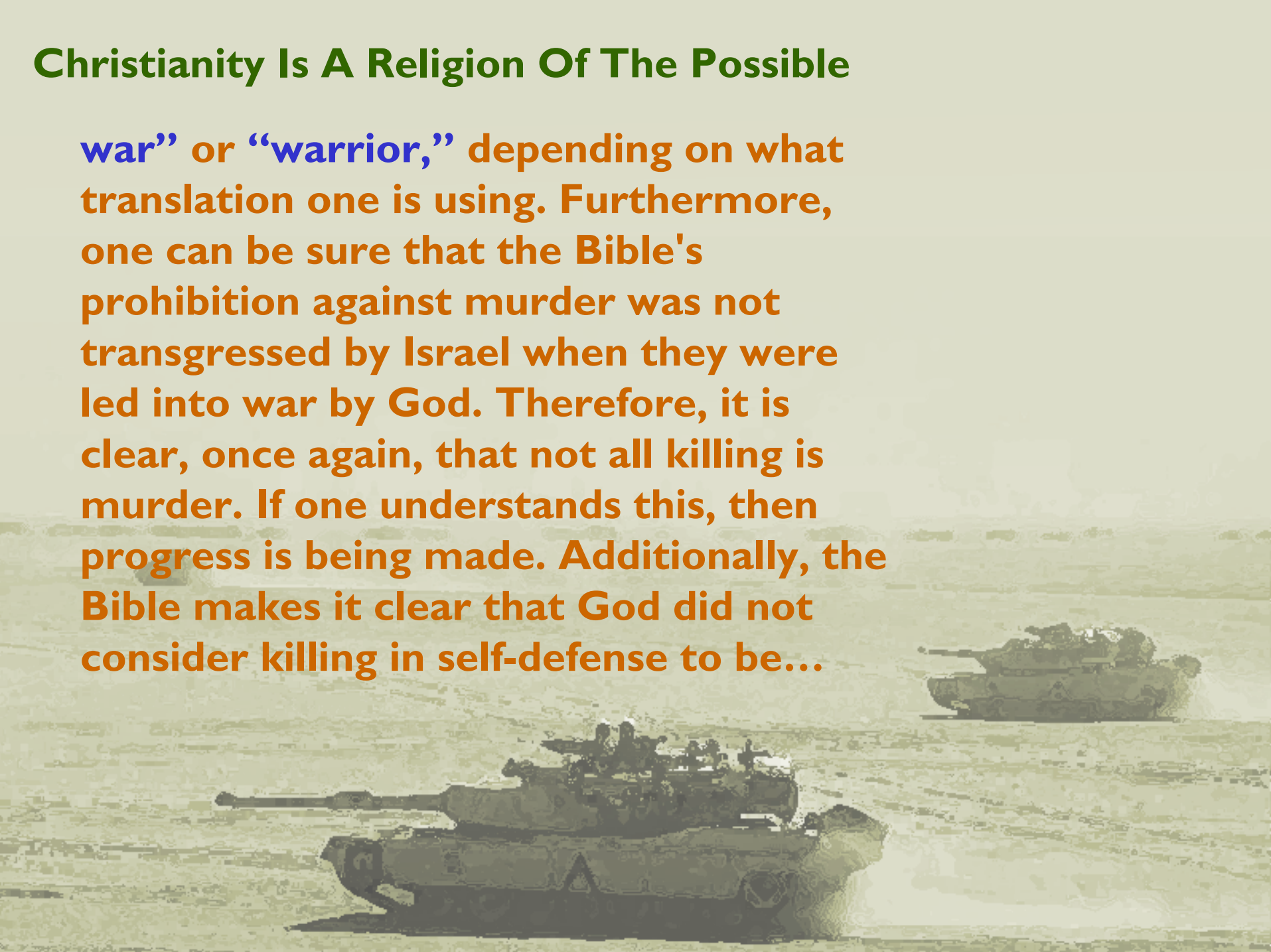
Christianity Is A Religion Of The Possible

at times directly guided into war by God. Although these occasions can be used to demonstrate that God is not anti-war, *per se*, nevertheless, the United States of America is not a theocracy. Therefore, I will concede that it can be argued that what applied uniquely to Israel as God's chosen instrument is not normative for any other nation. But in doing so, I will not give up the fact that Jehovah, according to Exodus 15:3, is a “man of...



Christianity Is A Religion Of The Possible

war” or “warrior,” depending on what translation one is using. Furthermore, one can be sure that the Bible's prohibition against murder was not transgressed by Israel when they were led into war by God. Therefore, it is clear, once again, that not all killing is murder. If one understands this, then progress is being made. Additionally, the Bible makes it clear that God did not consider killing in self-defense to be...



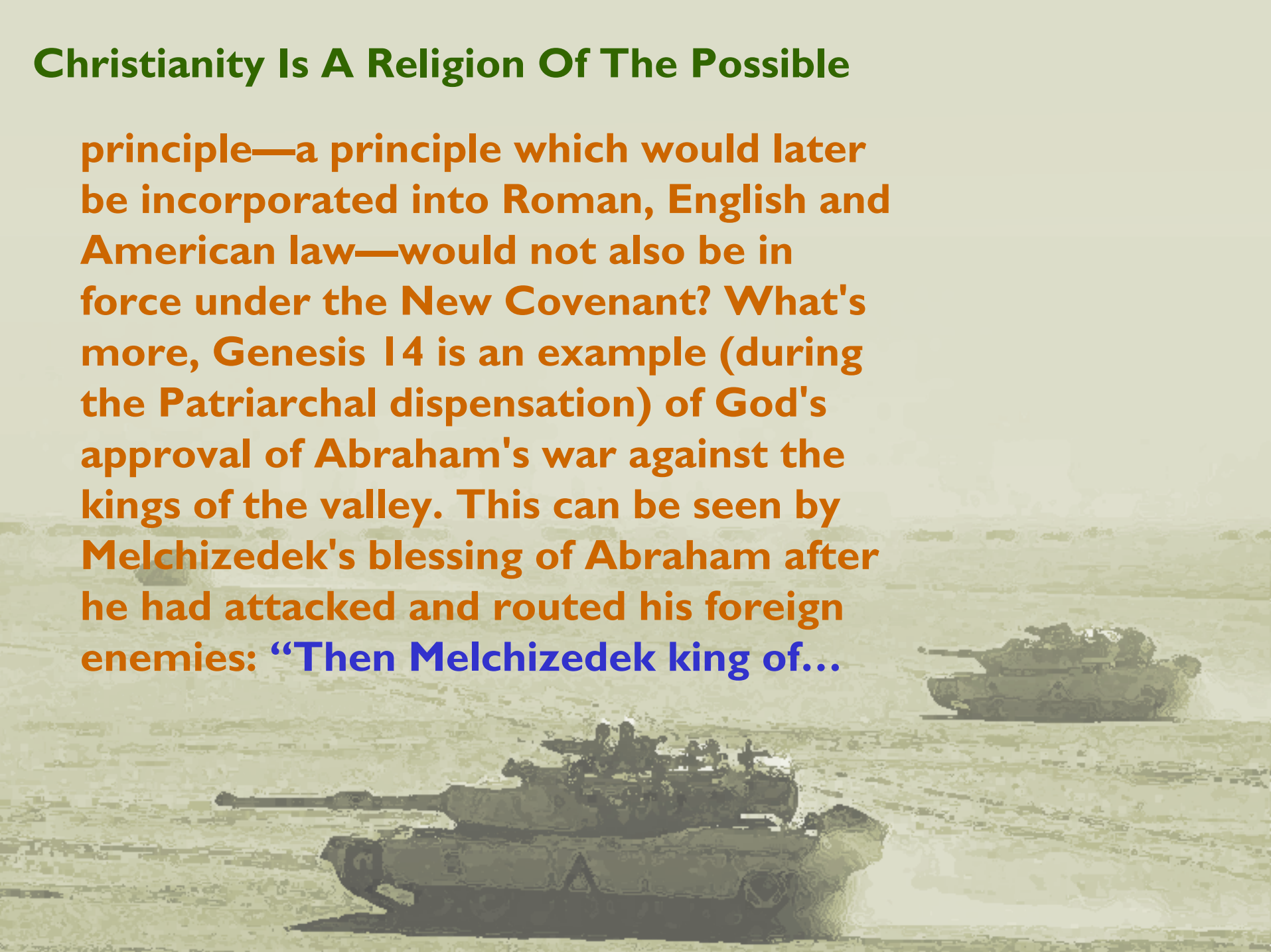
Christianity Is A Religion Of The Possible

murder. In Exodus 22:2, Moses said, “If the thief is found breaking in, and he is struck so that he dies, there shall be no guilt for his bloodshed.” Such rests upon the probability that those who break in at night (see the next verse) may very well have murderous intent, and that when discovered would, in order to escape, be predisposed to commit murder. Why then would anyone but a dyed-in-the-wool pacifist think that this...



Christianity Is A Religion Of The Possible

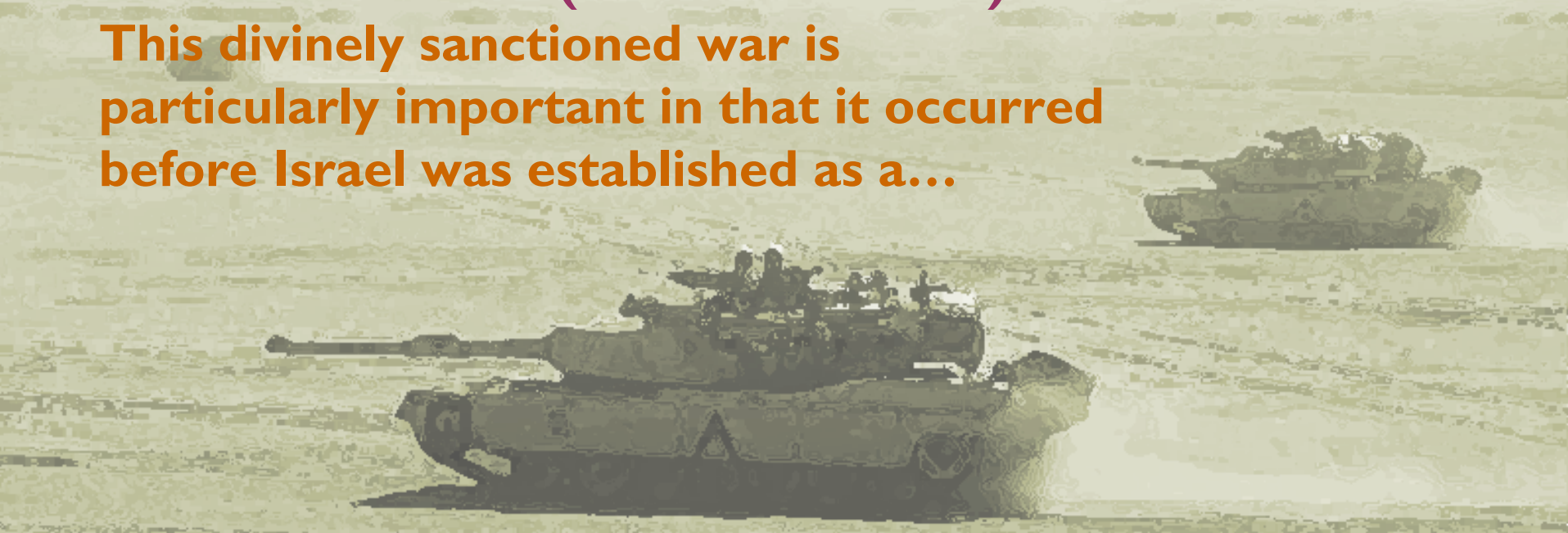
principle—a principle which would later be incorporated into Roman, English and American law—would not also be in force under the New Covenant? What's more, Genesis 14 is an example (during the Patriarchal dispensation) of God's approval of Abraham's war against the kings of the valley. This can be seen by Melchizedek's blessing of Abraham after he had attacked and routed his foreign enemies: “Then Melchizedek king of...



Christianity Is A Religion Of The Possible

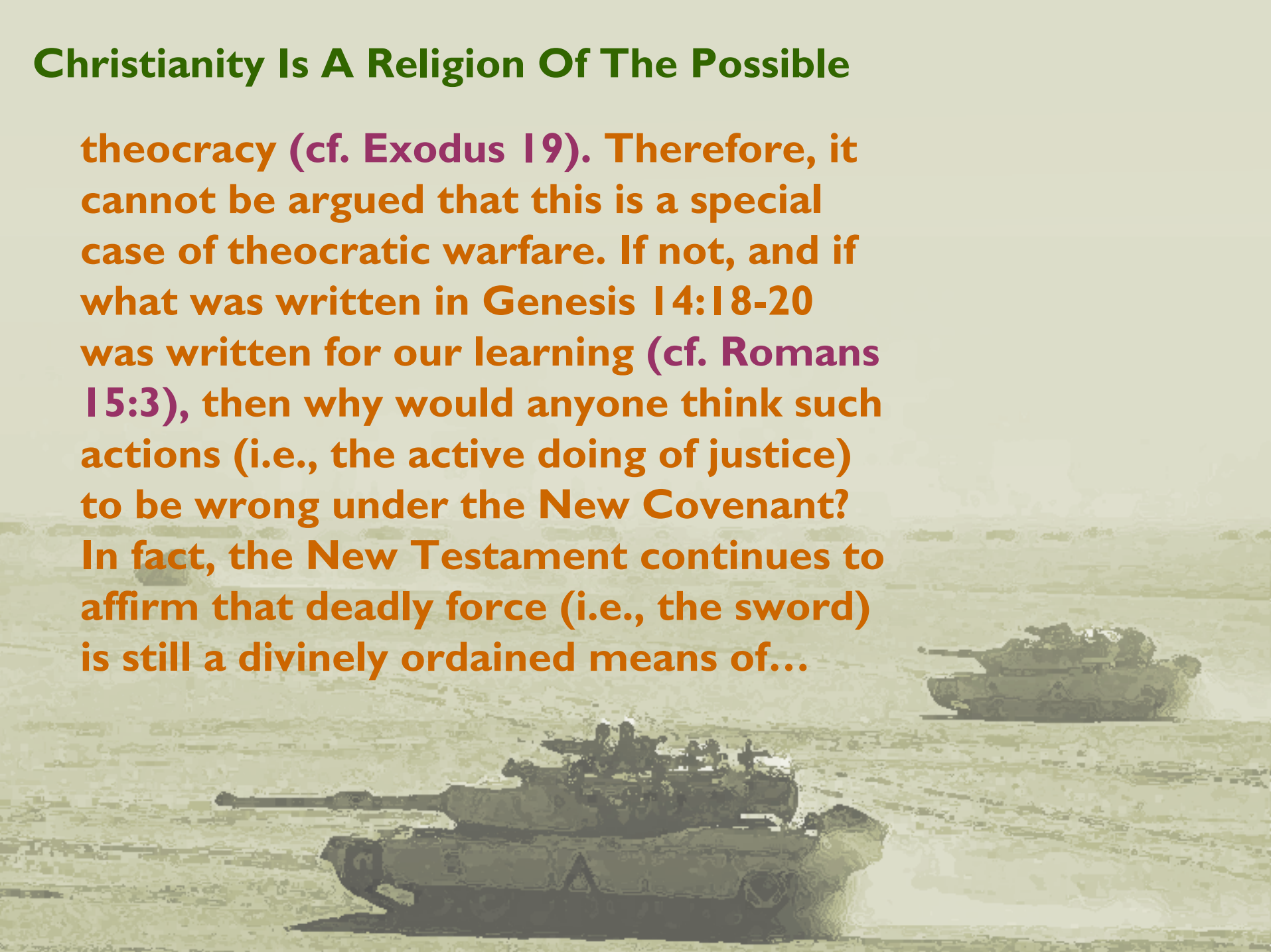
Salem brought out bread and wine; he was the priest of God Most High. And he blessed him and said: 'Blessed be Abram of God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth; and blessed be God Most High, Who has delivered your enemies into your hand.' And he [Abraham] gave him a tithe of all." (Genesis 14:18-20).

This divinely sanctioned war is particularly important in that it occurred before Israel was established as a...



Christianity Is A Religion Of The Possible

theocracy (cf. Exodus 19). Therefore, it cannot be argued that this is a special case of theocratic warfare. If not, and if what was written in Genesis 14:18-20 was written for our learning (cf. Romans 15:3), then why would anyone think such actions (i.e., the active doing of justice) to be wrong under the New Covenant? In fact, the New Testament continues to affirm that deadly force (i.e., the sword) is still a divinely ordained means of...



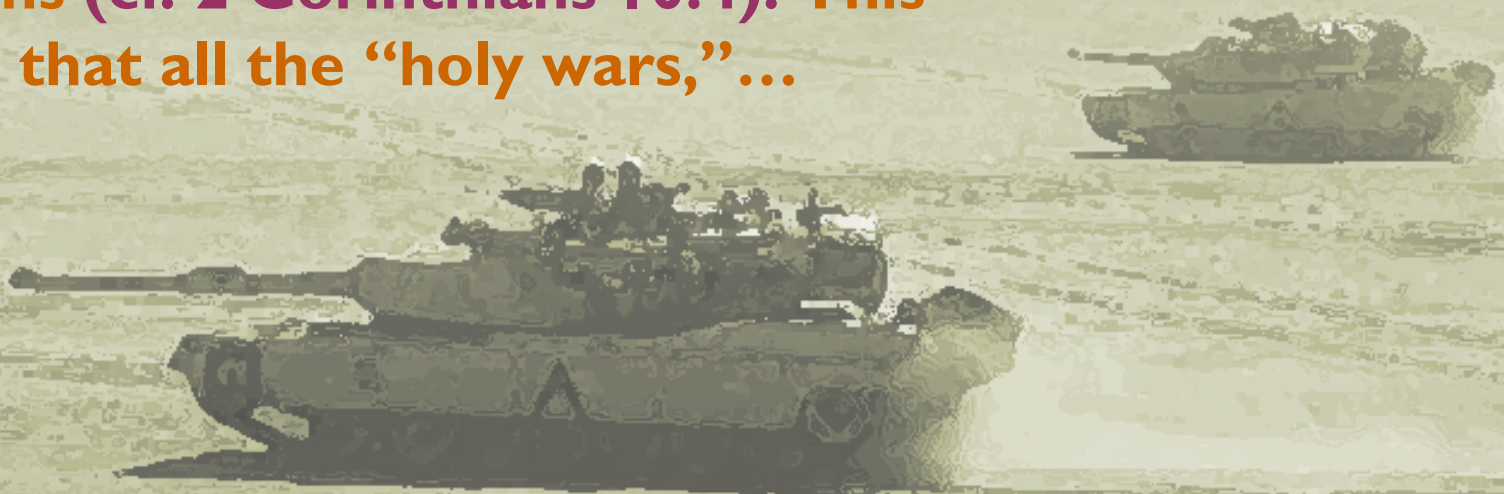
Christianity Is A Religion Of The Possible

executing human justice. Writing of the civil authorities, Paul said, “For he is God's minister to you for good. But if you do evil, be afraid; for he does not bear the sword in vain; for he is God's minister, an avenger to execute wrath on him who practices evil” (Romans 13:4).



N.T.'s Teaching On Separation Of Church & State

When it comes to the New Testament, the Lord made it clear there would be a separation between the **church** (viz., spiritual Israel) and the **state** (cf. Matthew 22:21). Under this system, the sword was granted to the state, not the church (cf. Romans 13:4). Therefore, Christians, engaged as we are in spiritual warfare, do not fight with carnal weapons (cf. 2 Corinthians 10:4). This means that all the “holy wars,”...



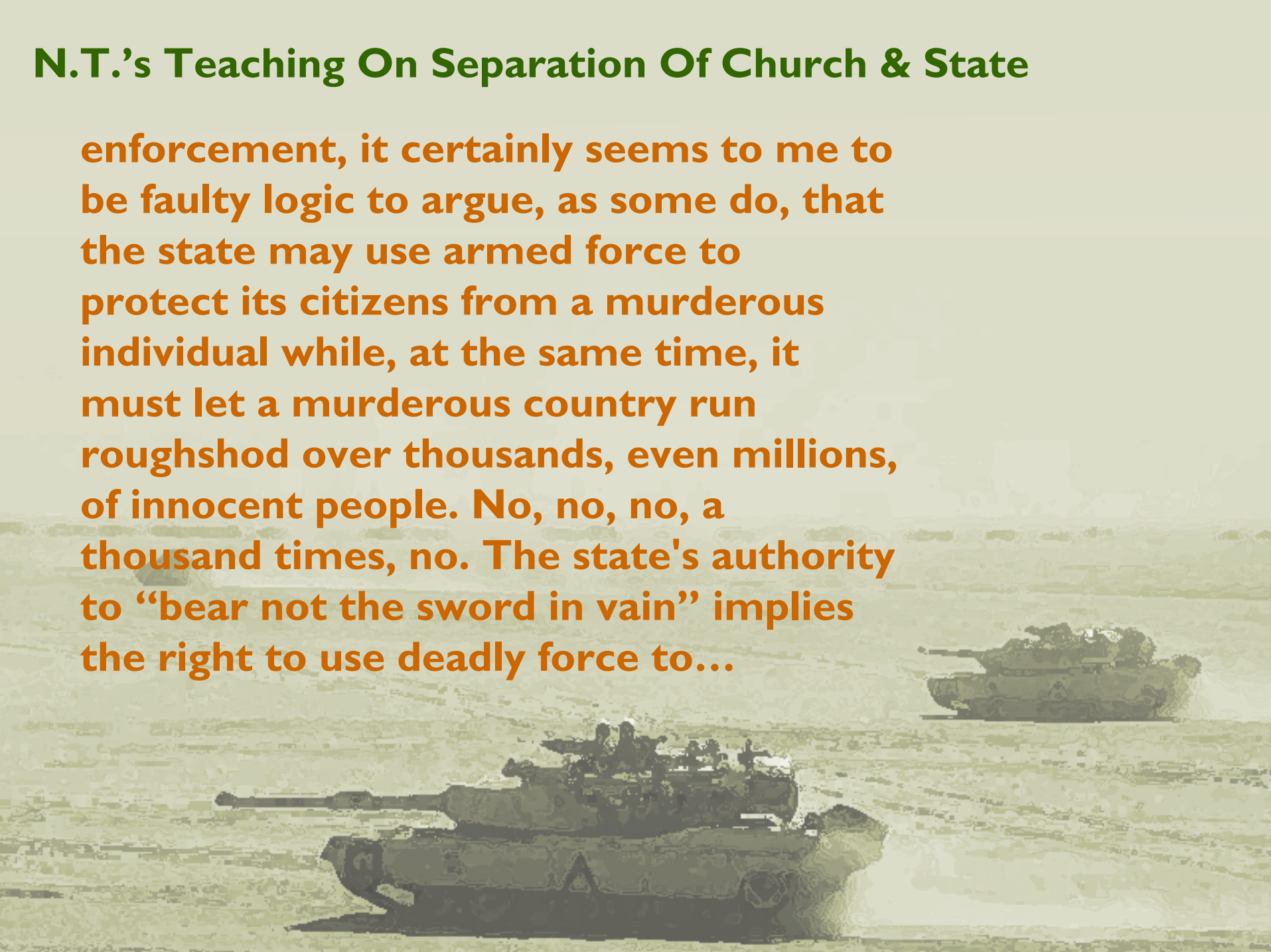
N.T.'s Teaching On Separation Of Church & State

past, present and future, were not, and cannot be, pleasing to God. The borders of God's kingdom are not advanced by armed force. On the other hand, the state is duly authorized by God to advance its cause by force of arms. In doing so, it is under obligation to defend its citizens from enemies (i.e., evildoers), both foreign and domestic. Although Romans 13:1-7 appears on the surface to deal specifically with domestic law...



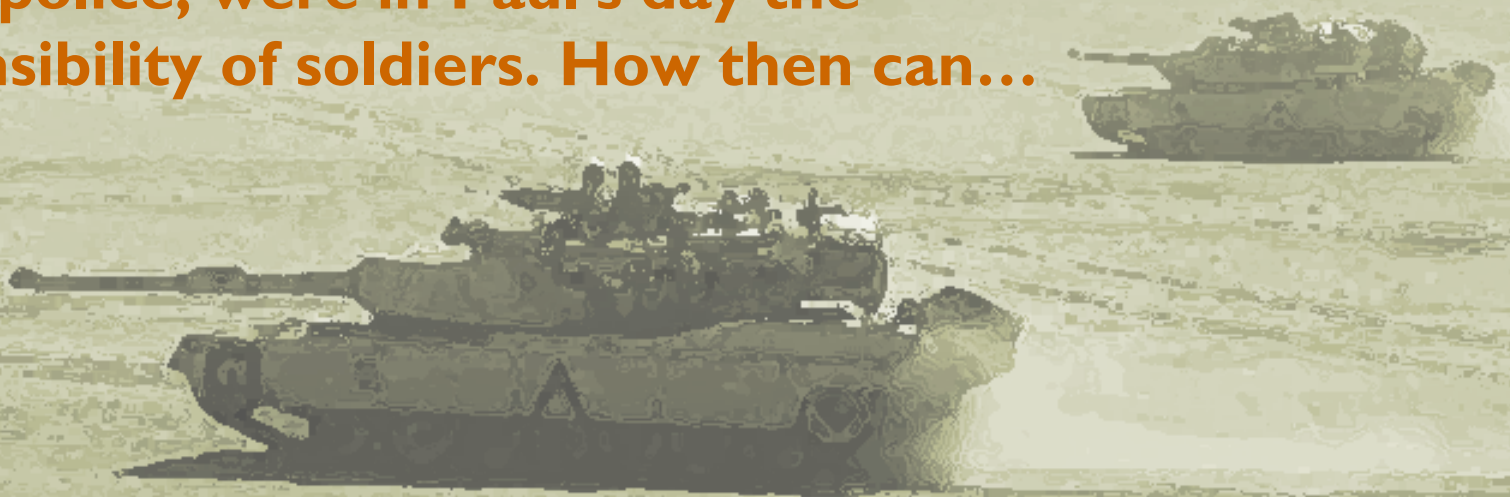
N.T.'s Teaching On Separation Of Church & State

enforcement, it certainly seems to me to be faulty logic to argue, as some do, that the state may use armed force to protect its citizens from a murderous individual while, at the same time, it must let a murderous country run roughshod over thousands, even millions, of innocent people. No, no, no, a thousand times, no. The state's authority to “bear not the sword in vain” implies the right to use deadly force to...



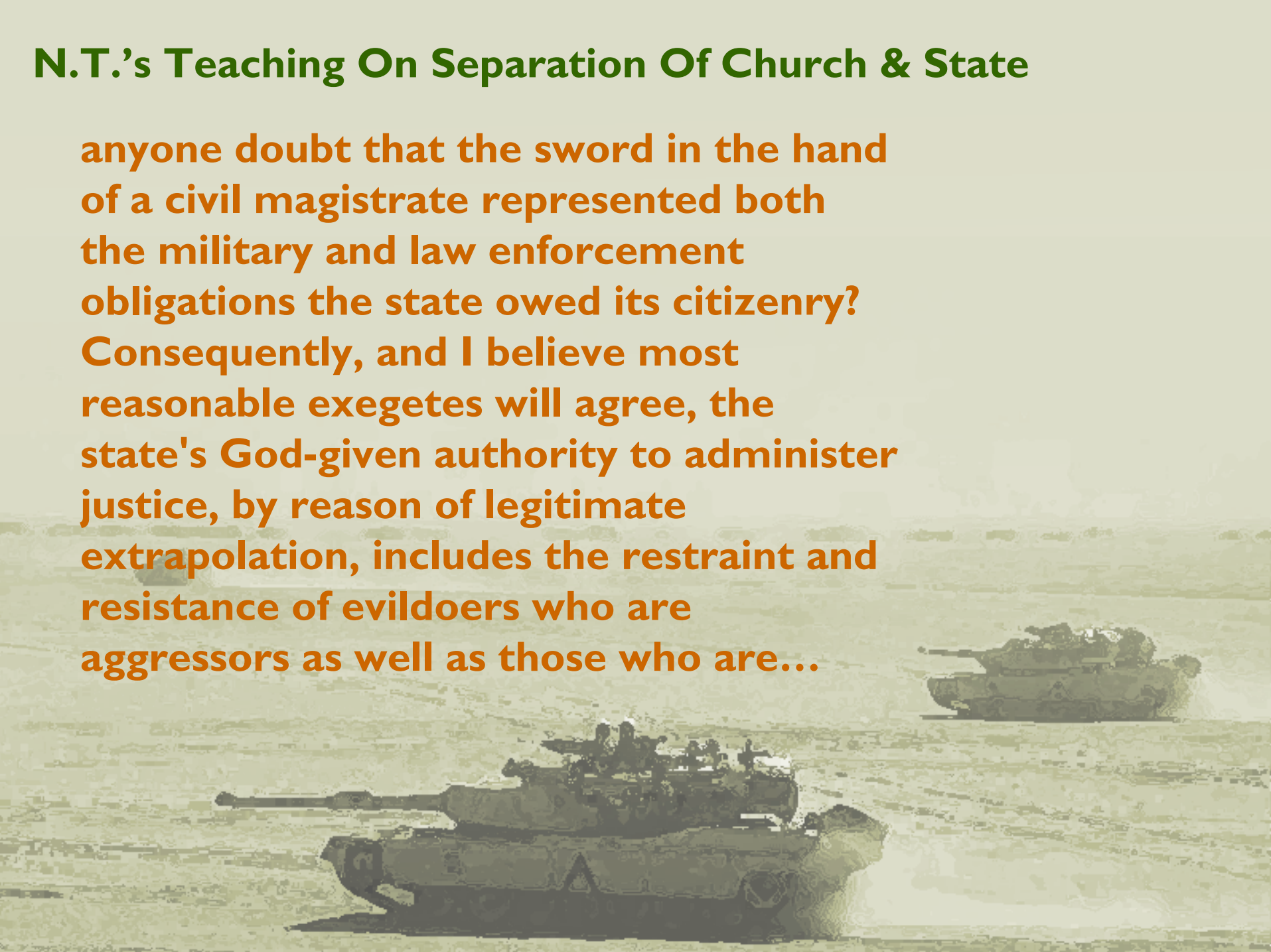
N.T.'s Teaching On Separation Of Church & State

restrain and punish evildoers, whether they be domestic or foreign. In fact, the distinction between soldier and policeman is a rather recent invention. It was the armed legions of Rome that fought its wars and kept the peace. The enforcement of law, the maintenance of order, and the protection of the innocent, which today are the province of the police, were in Paul's day the responsibility of soldiers. How then can...



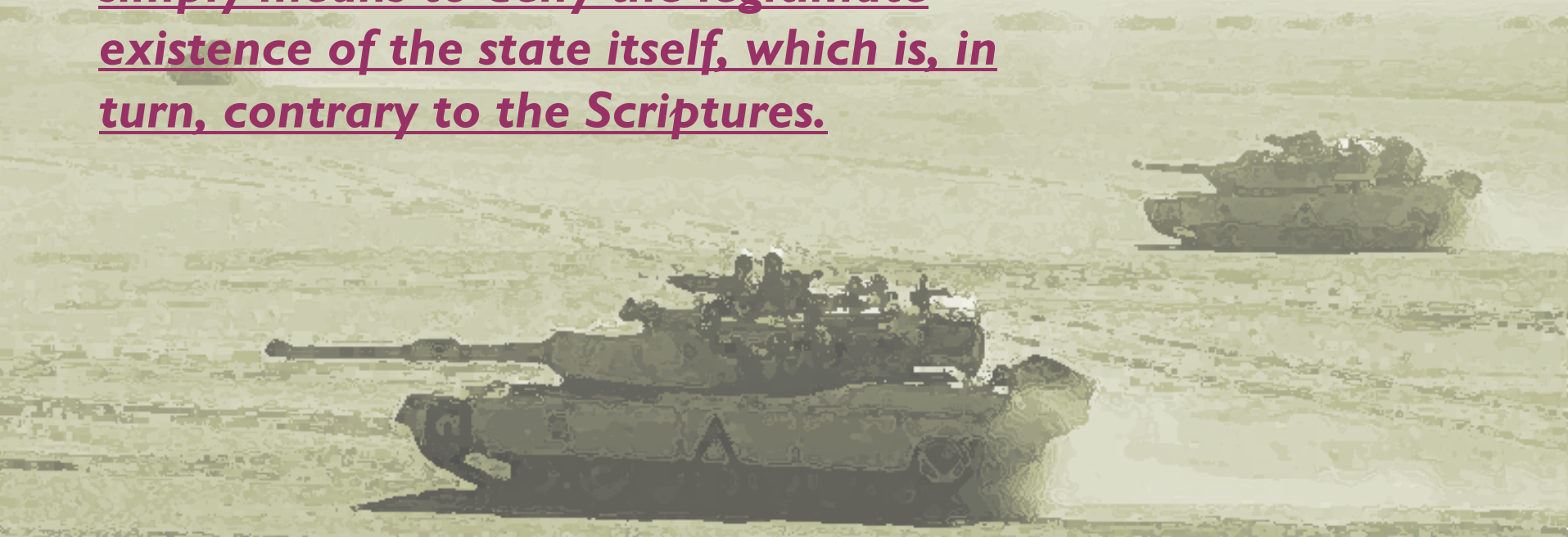
N.T.'s Teaching On Separation Of Church & State

anyone doubt that the sword in the hand of a civil magistrate represented both the military and law enforcement obligations the state owed its citizenry? Consequently, and I believe most reasonable exegetes will agree, the state's God-given authority to administer justice, by reason of legitimate extrapolation, includes the restraint and resistance of evildoers who are aggressors as well as those who are...



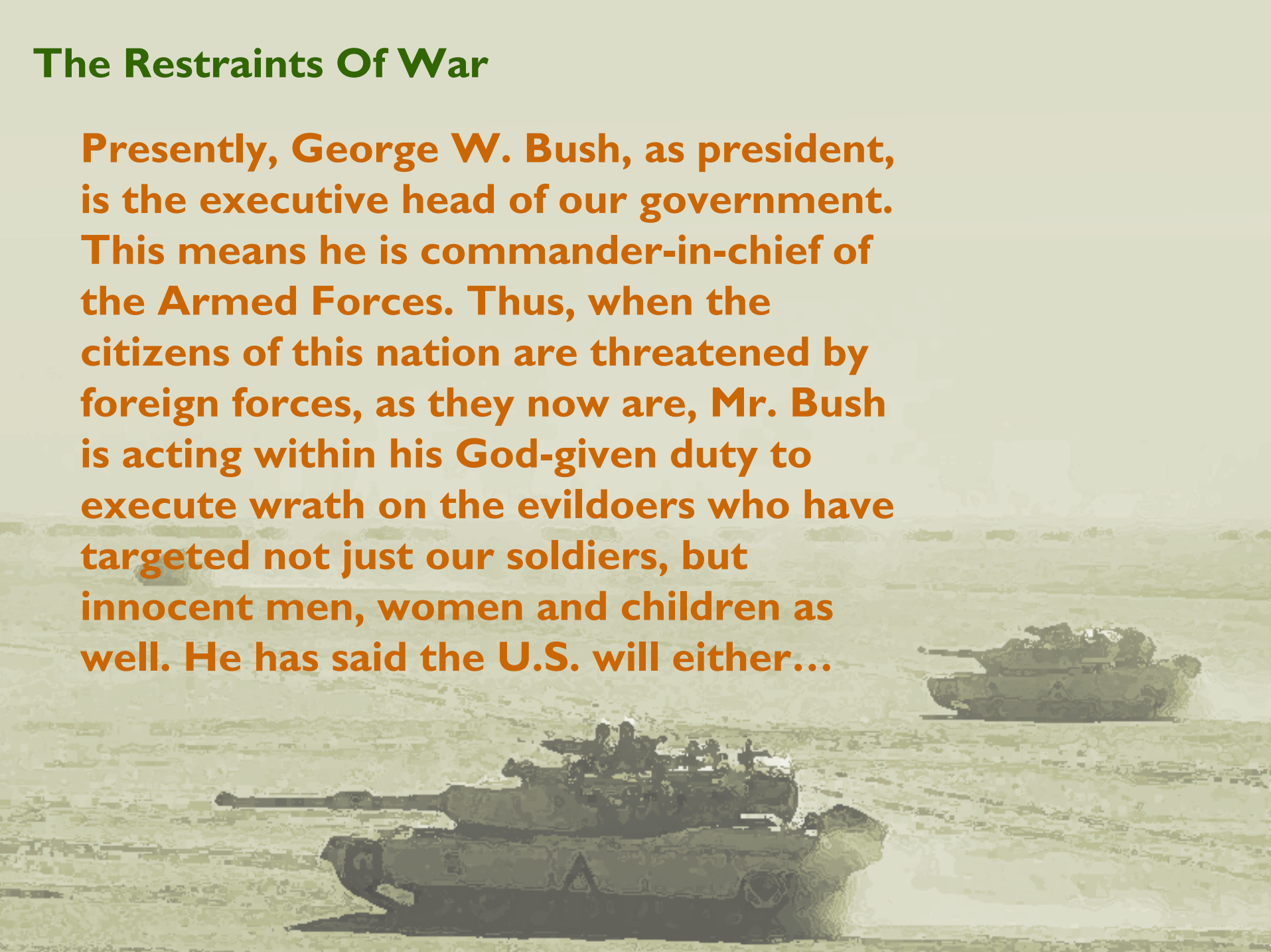
N.T.'s Teaching On Separation Of Church & State

criminals, and therefore requires the state to protect its citizens' rights when threatened from outside as well as from within. Furthermore, and this is a very important point, to deny, on moral grounds, the elementary right of the state to defend itself and its citizens by war simply means to deny the legitimate existence of the state itself, which is, in turn, contrary to the Scriptures.



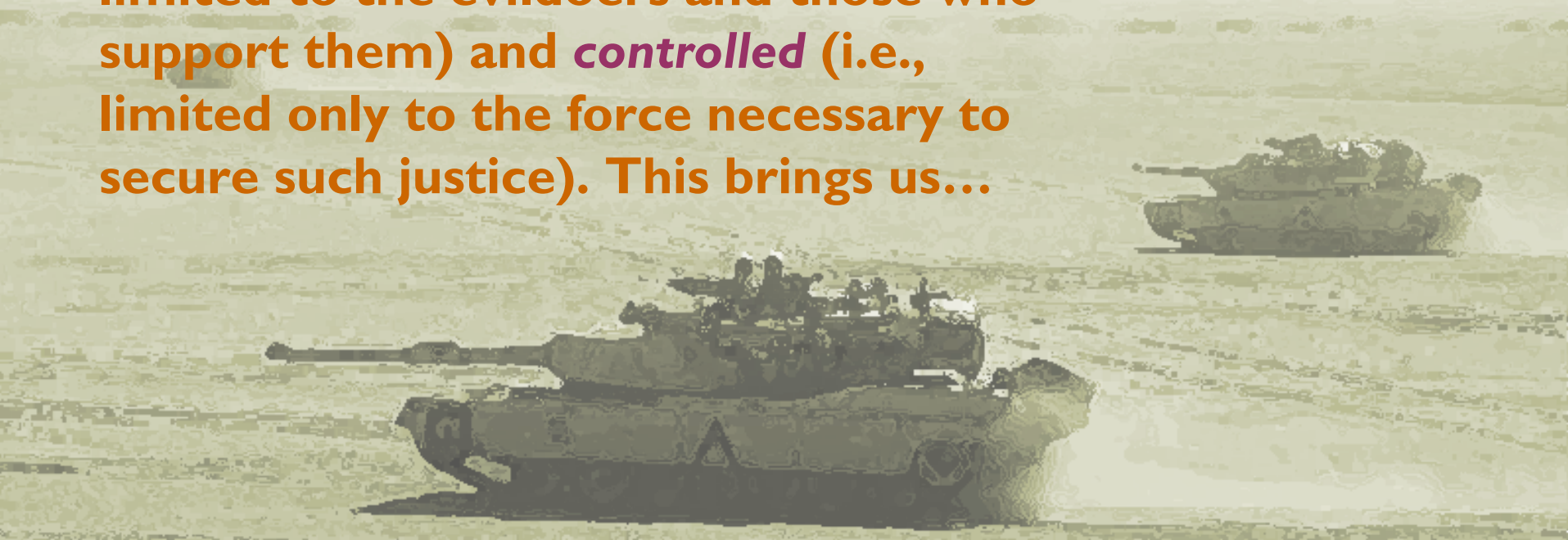
The Restraints Of War

Presently, George W. Bush, as president, is the executive head of our government. This means he is commander-in-chief of the Armed Forces. Thus, when the citizens of this nation are threatened by foreign forces, as they now are, Mr. Bush is acting within his God-given duty to execute wrath on the evildoers who have targeted not just our soldiers, but innocent men, women and children as well. He has said the U.S. will either...



The Restraints Of War

bring these aggressors to justice or justice to these aggressors. This is executive justice, and it is just the kind of justice in view in Romans 13:4. Such justice, whether in connection with crime, civil disorder, or international warfare, must be *discriminate* (i.e., limited to the evildoers and those who support them) and *controlled* (i.e., limited only to the force necessary to secure such justice). This brings us...



The Restraints Of War

necessarily to an examination of the just war tradition.



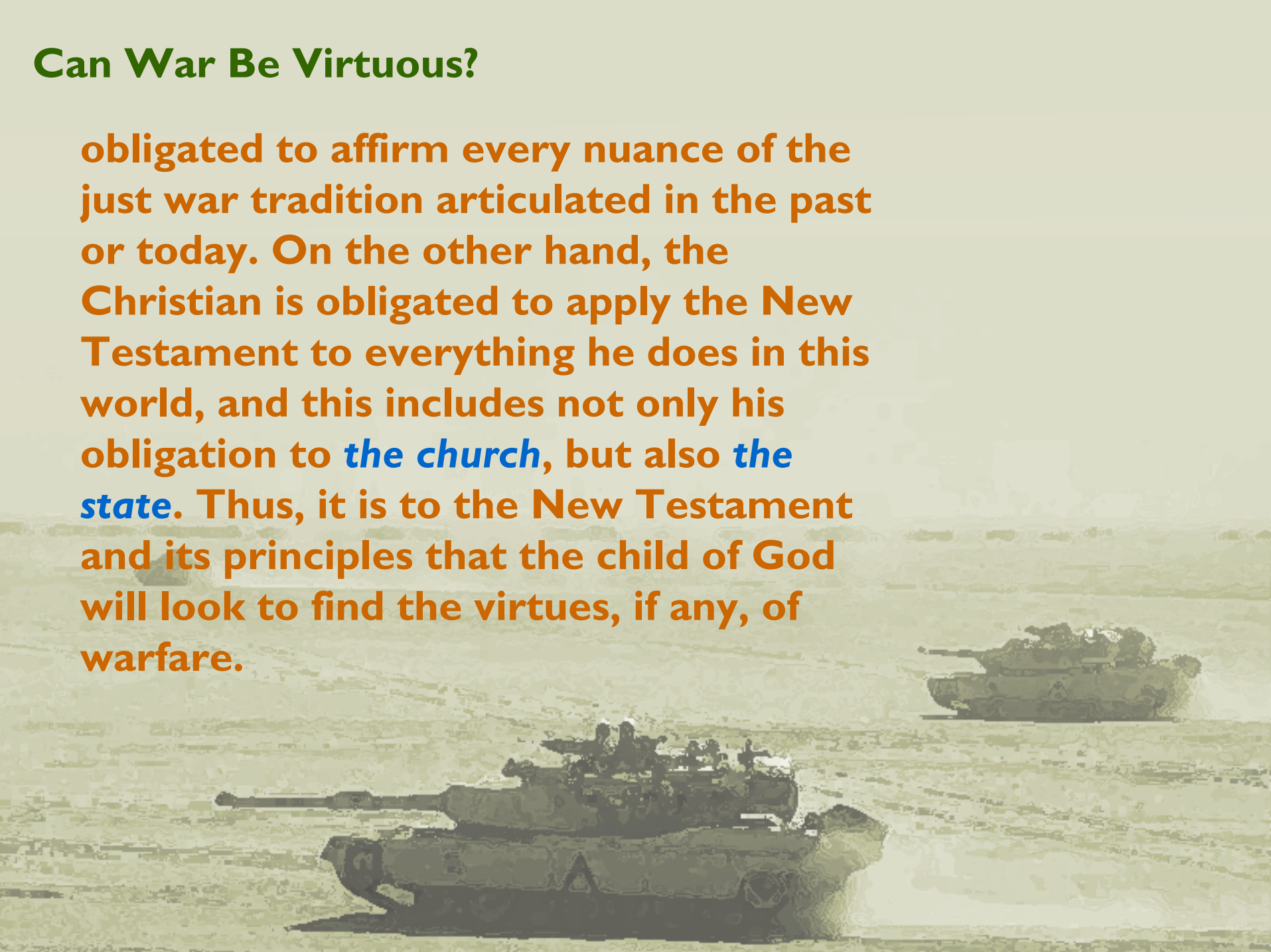
Can War Be Virtuous?

If it isn't, then it can't be a just war! The just war tradition that has developed in the West has been amplified by the works of Ambrose, Augustine, Aquinas, Luther, Zwingli, Calvin, et al., but if it is to have any real meaning for New Testament Christians, it must be because such a tradition is, first and foremost, grounded in the Bible. The think-sos of men can be interesting and even informative, but they are not authoritative. Hence, I do not feel...



Can War Be Virtuous?

obligated to affirm every nuance of the just war tradition articulated in the past or today. On the other hand, the Christian is obligated to apply the New Testament to everything he does in this world, and this includes not only his obligation to *the church*, but also *the state*. Thus, it is to the New Testament and its principles that the child of God will look to find the virtues, if any, of warfare.



Relationships of Life



The Church

Phil. 1:1
Acts 20:7
1 Cor. 16:1-2

The Community

1 Pet. 2:12
Col. 4:5
1 Cor. 10:31-33

The Government

Romans 13:1-8
1 Pet. 2:13-17

Business Enterprises

1 Thess. 4:11-12
1 Tim. 5:8
Col. 3:22-4:1

The Home

1 Pet. 3:1-7
Eph. 6:1-4
Col. 18-21

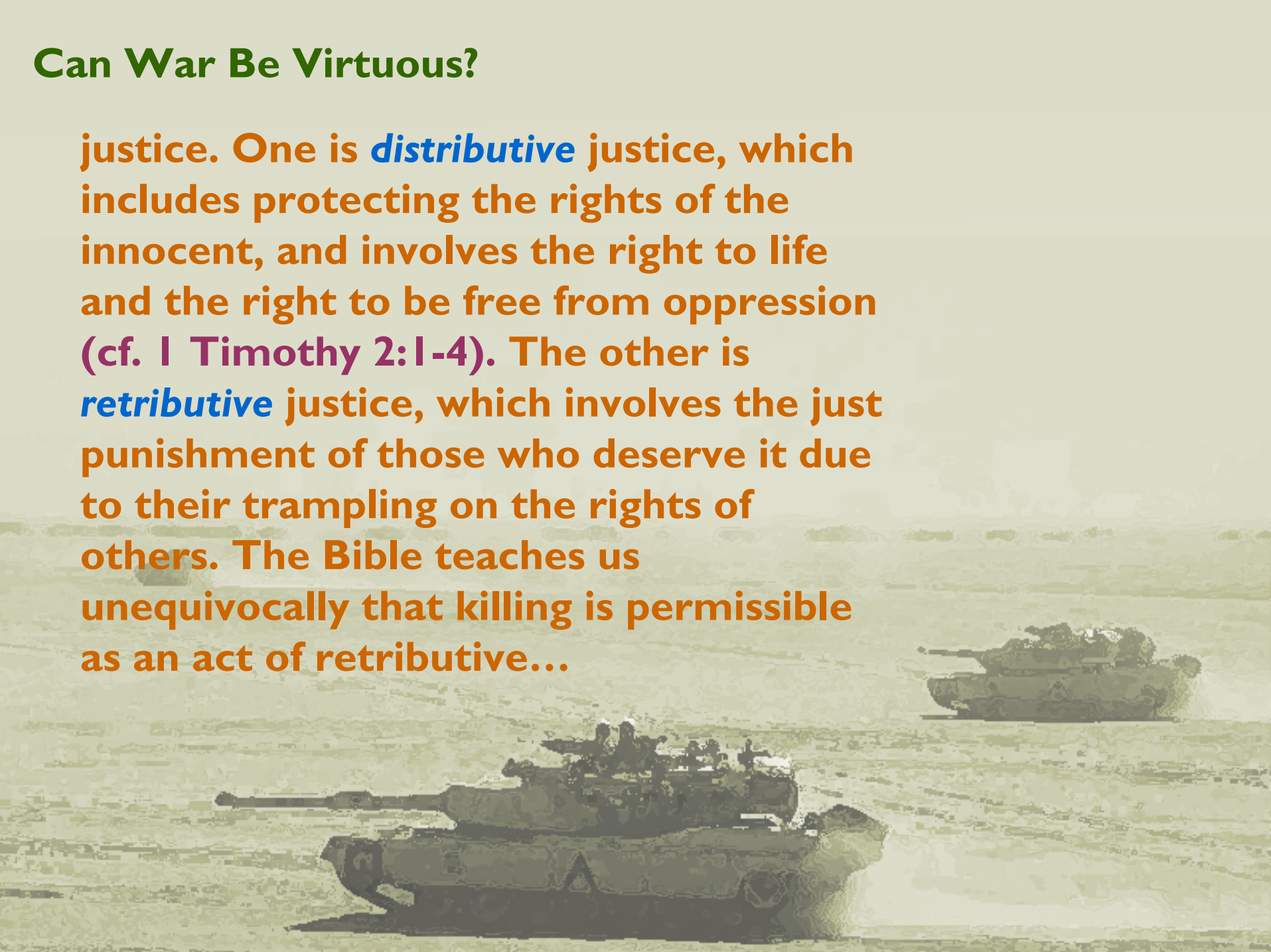
Can War Be Virtuous?

As I've tried to point out, a major key to understanding the just war tradition is to be found in the New Testament's teaching concerning the purpose of government (cf. Romans 13:1-7). As we learned, the main purpose of government is to promote, preserve and enforce justice, which Aristotle called “the just rendering to each man of his due.” By now it ought to be clear that there are two major aspects of...



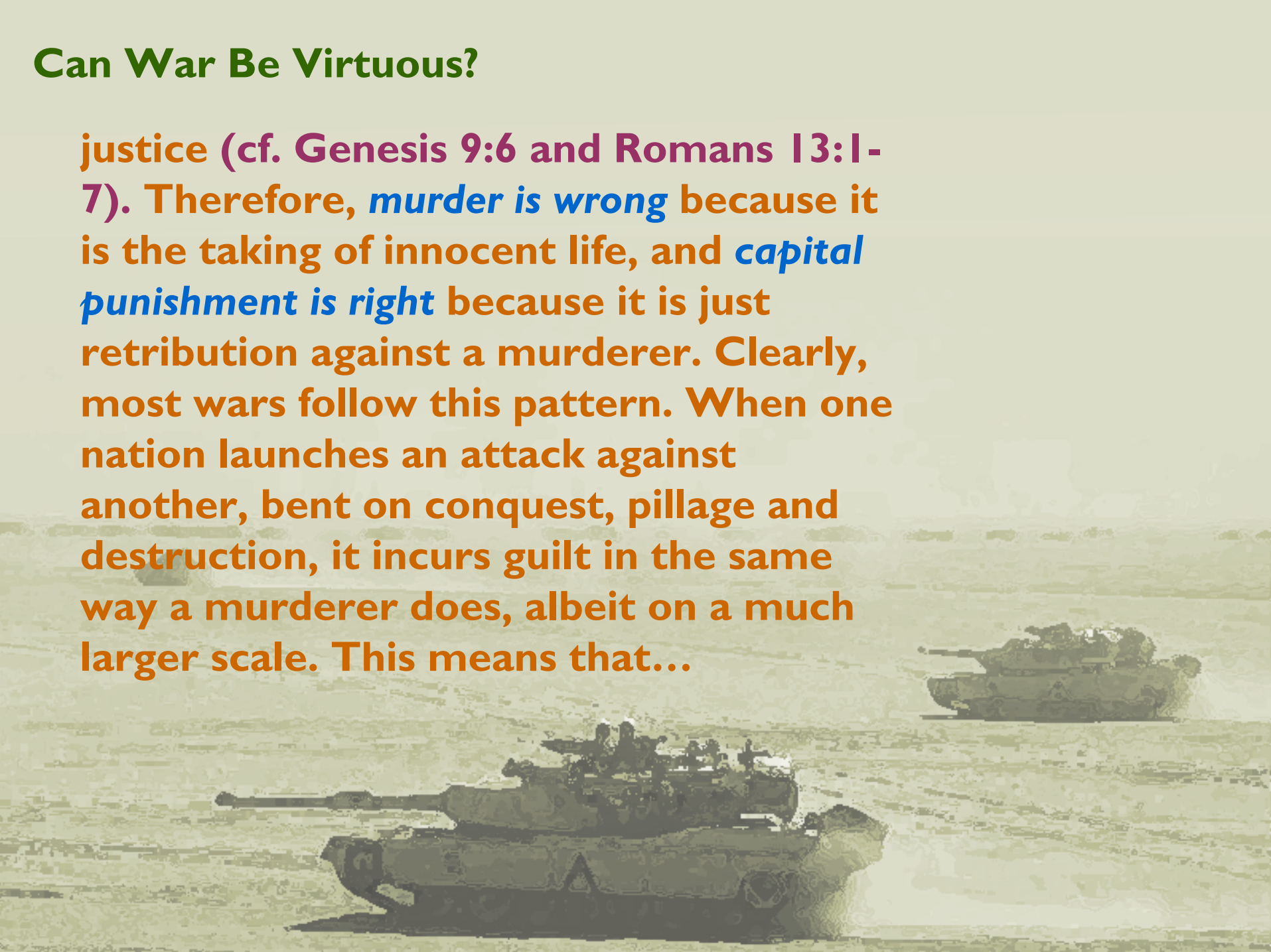
Can War Be Virtuous?

justice. One is **distributive** justice, which includes protecting the rights of the innocent, and involves the right to life and the right to be free from oppression (cf. 1 Timothy 2:1-4). The other is **retributive** justice, which involves the just punishment of those who deserve it due to their trampling on the rights of others. The Bible teaches us unequivocally that killing is permissible as an act of retributive...



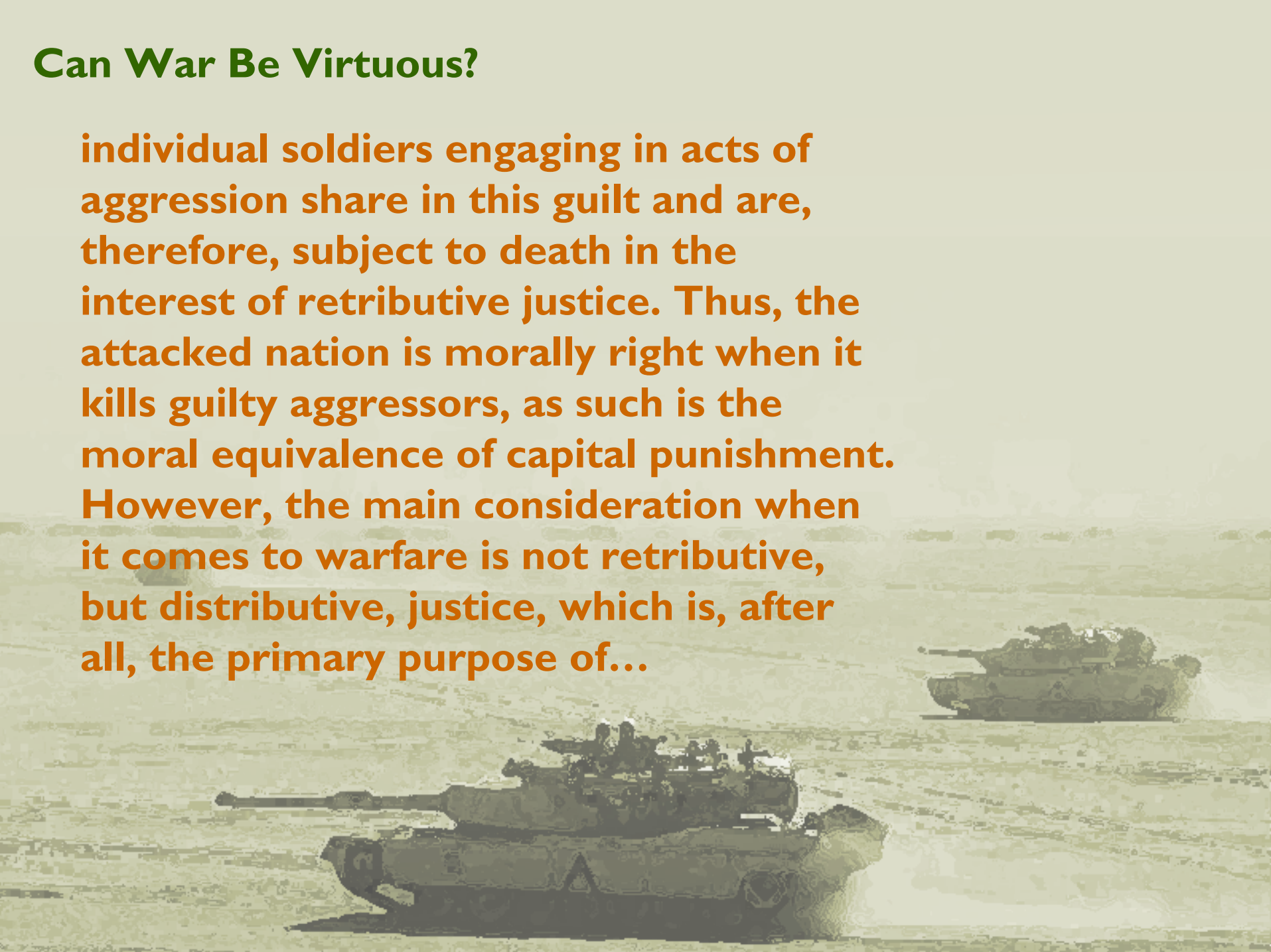
Can War Be Virtuous?

justice (cf. Genesis 9:6 and Romans 13:1-7). Therefore, *murder is wrong* because it is the taking of innocent life, and *capital punishment is right* because it is just retribution against a murderer. Clearly, most wars follow this pattern. When one nation launches an attack against another, bent on conquest, pillage and destruction, it incurs guilt in the same way a murderer does, albeit on a much larger scale. This means that...



Can War Be Virtuous?

individual soldiers engaging in acts of aggression share in this guilt and are, therefore, subject to death in the interest of retributive justice. Thus, the attacked nation is morally right when it kills guilty aggressors, as such is the moral equivalence of capital punishment. However, the main consideration when it comes to warfare is not retributive, but distributive, justice, which is, after all, the primary purpose of...



Can War Be Virtuous?

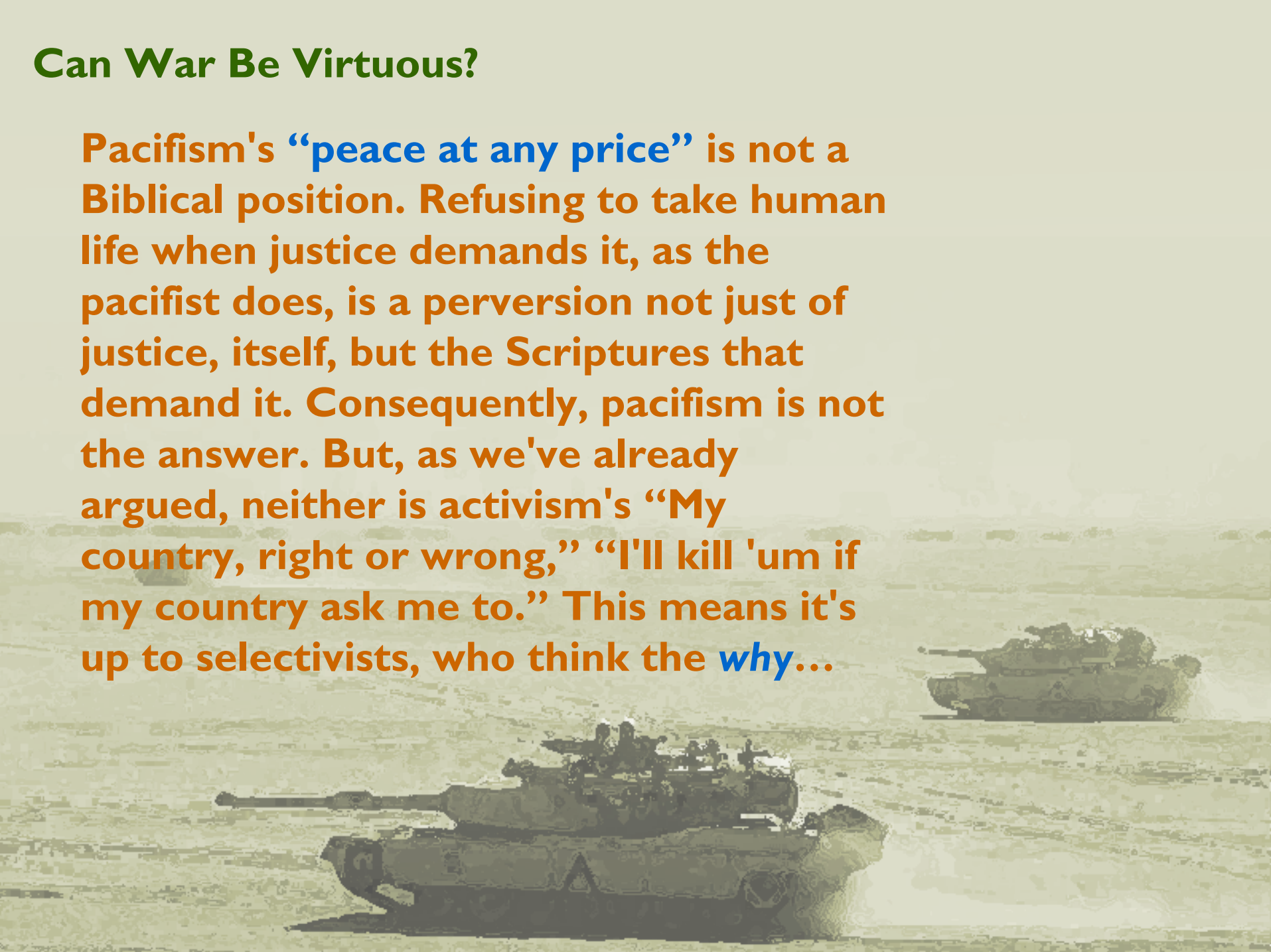
government ordained by God. A Romans
13 government (i.e., a God-fearing
government) will do its level best to
serve and protect its citizens.

Specifically, this involves providing them
with a just, free, and peaceable
environment. Such a government will
protect its citizens from acts of injustice,
whether committed by individual
criminals or aggressive nations, and the
justice God requires demands it. Thus,...



Can War Be Virtuous?

Pacifism's “peace at any price” is not a Biblical position. Refusing to take human life when justice demands it, as the pacifist does, is a perversion not just of justice, itself, but the Scriptures that demand it. Consequently, pacifism is not the answer. But, as we've already argued, neither is activism's “My country, right or wrong,” “I'll kill 'um if my country ask me to.” This means it's up to selectivists, who think the why...



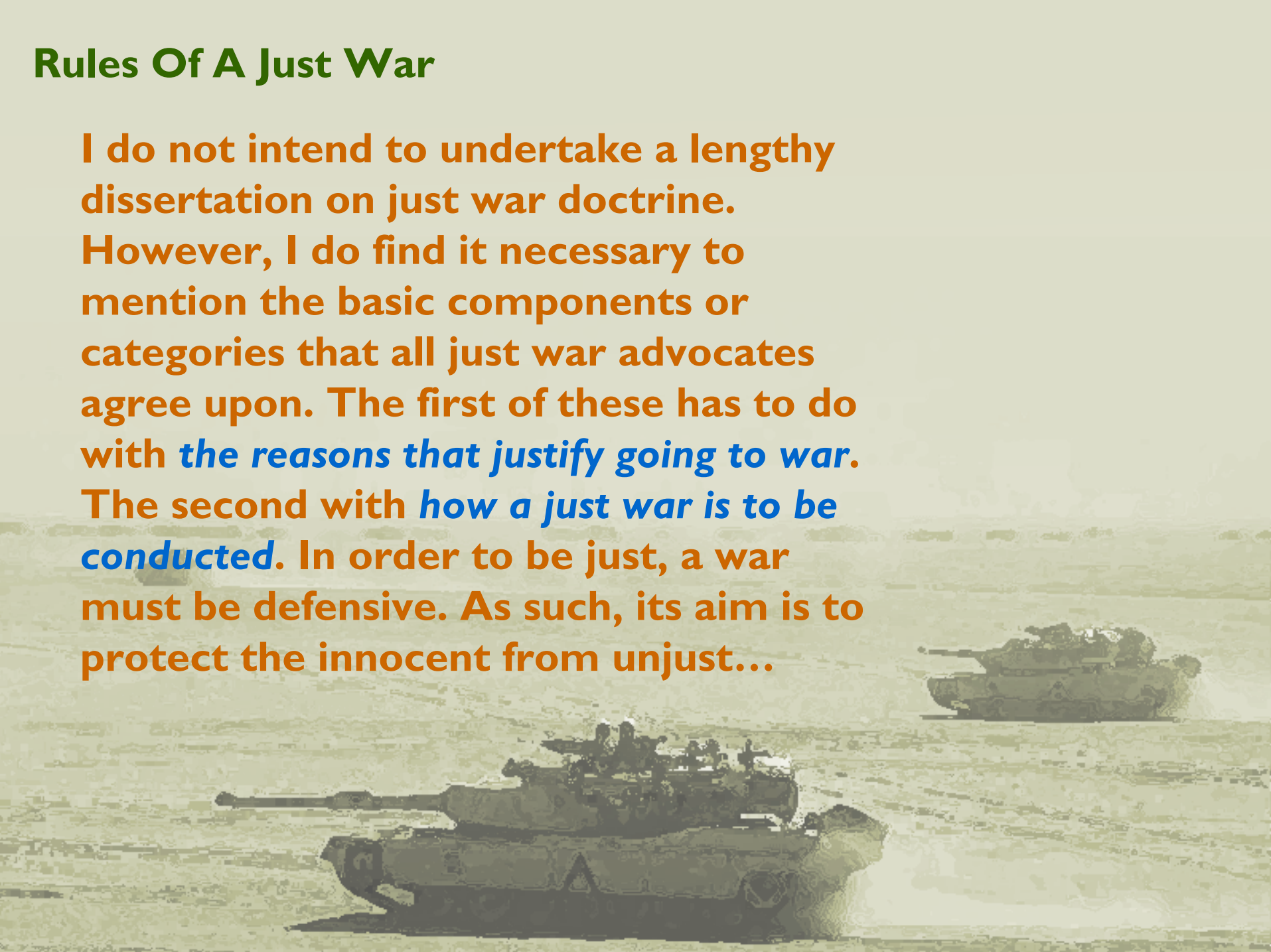
Can War Be Virtuous?

and **how** of war must be just, to set the ground work for appropriate war-fighting.



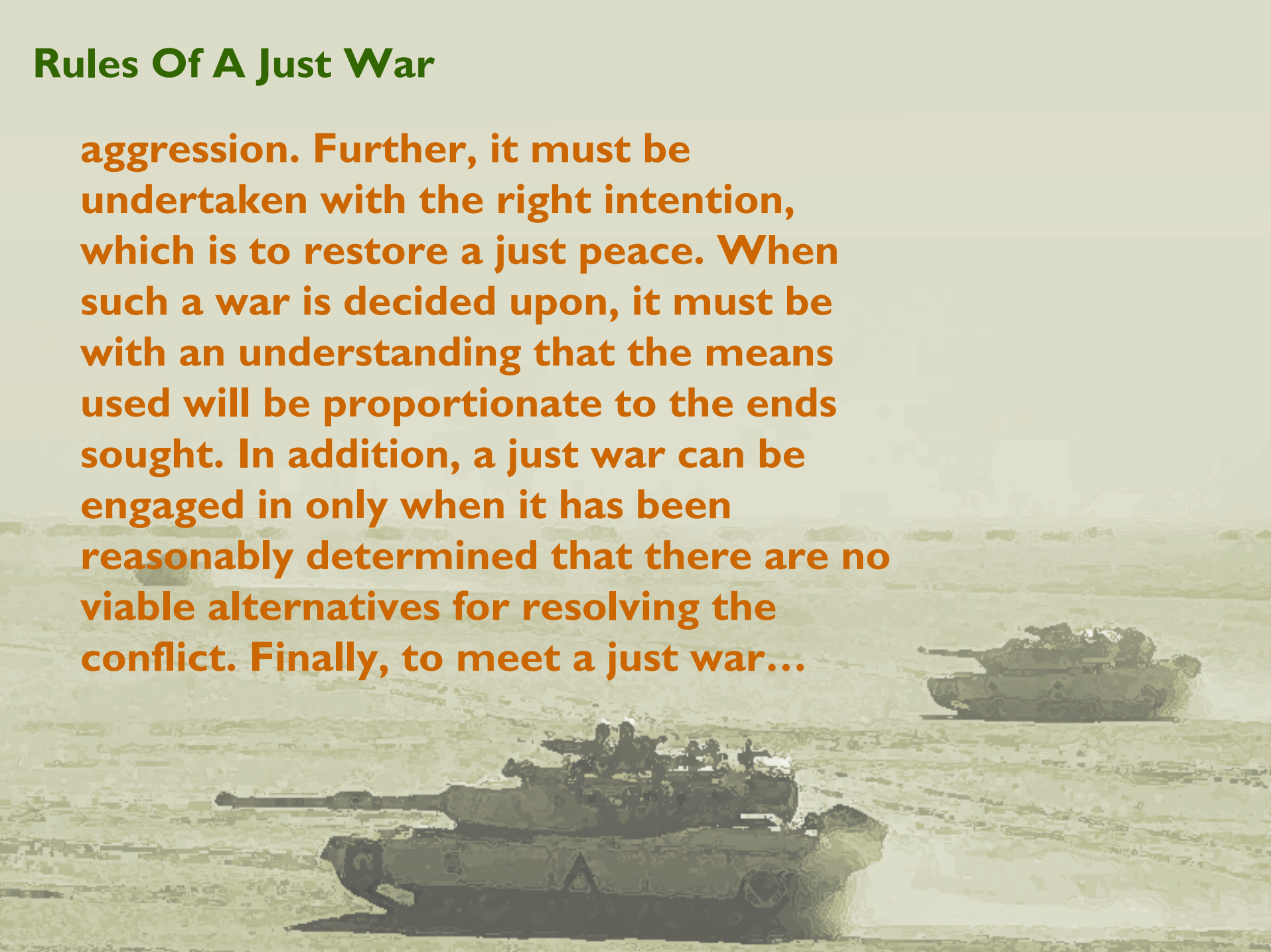
Rules Of A Just War

I do not intend to undertake a lengthy dissertation on just war doctrine. However, I do find it necessary to mention the basic components or categories that all just war advocates agree upon. The first of these has to do with *the reasons that justify going to war*. The second with *how a just war is to be conducted*. In order to be just, a war must be defensive. As such, its aim is to protect the innocent from unjust...



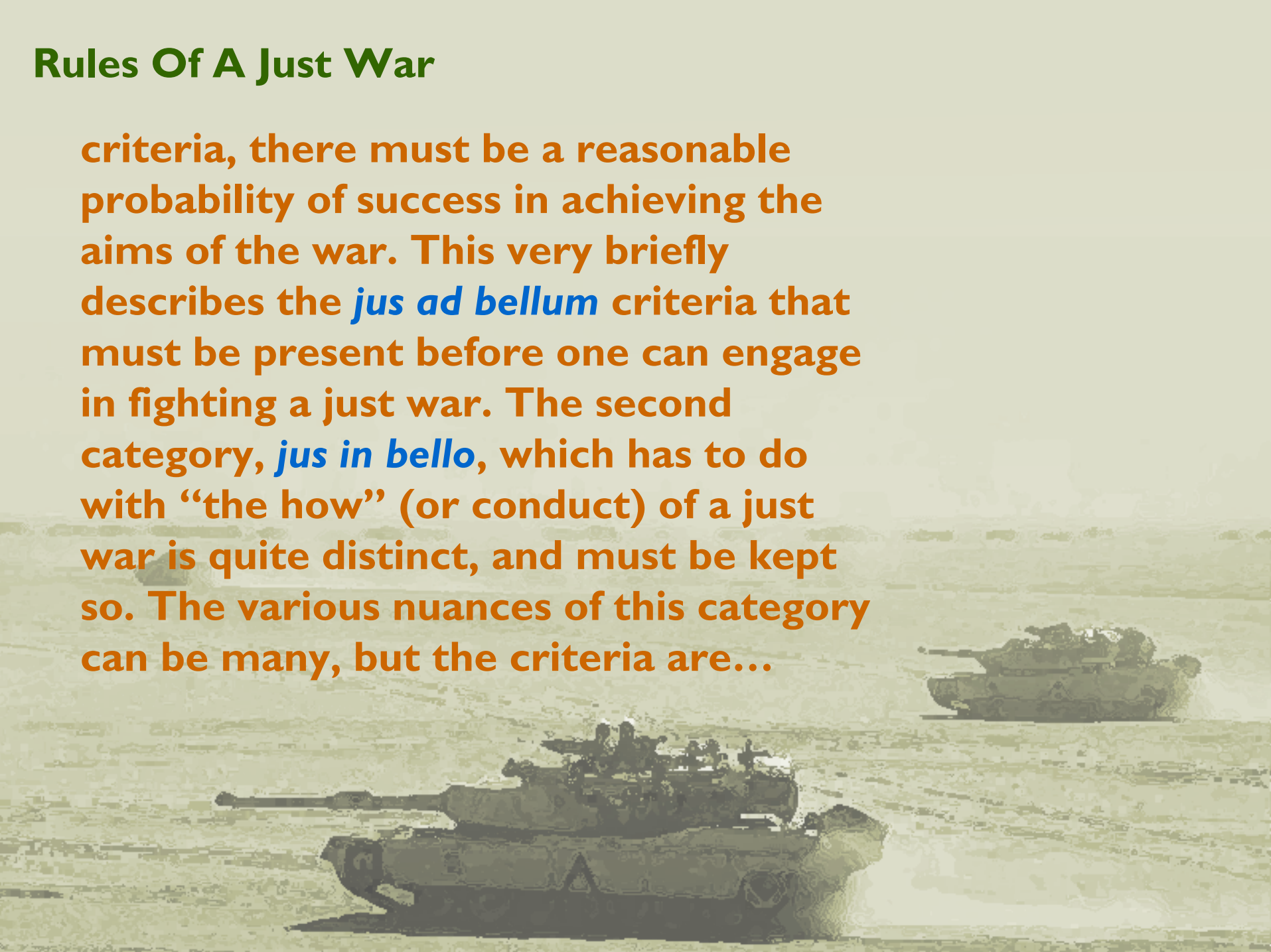
Rules Of A Just War

aggression. Further, it must be undertaken with the right intention, which is to restore a just peace. When such a war is decided upon, it must be with an understanding that the means used will be proportionate to the ends sought. In addition, a just war can be engaged in only when it has been reasonably determined that there are no viable alternatives for resolving the conflict. Finally, to meet a just war...



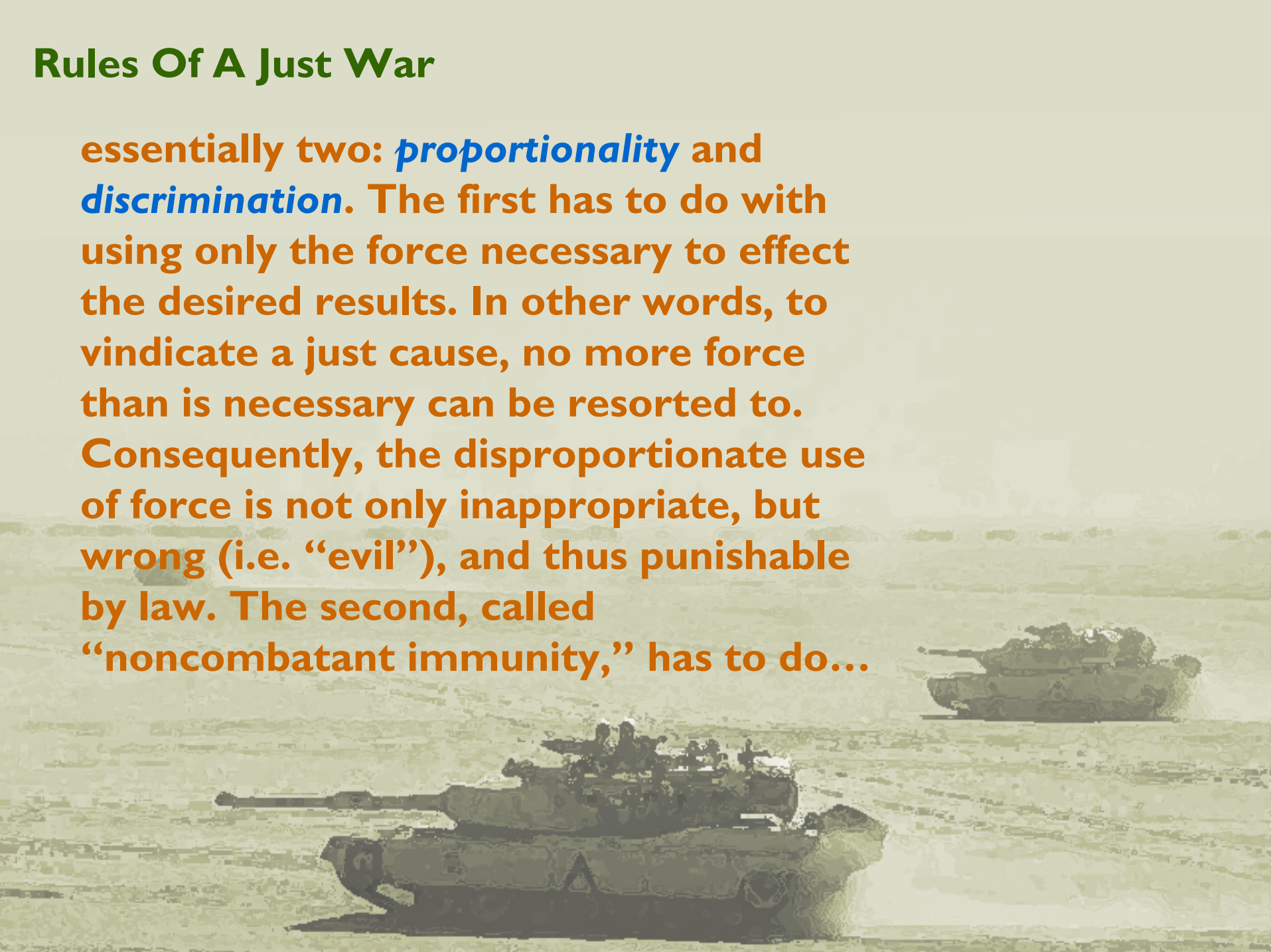
Rules Of A Just War

criteria, there must be a reasonable probability of success in achieving the aims of the war. This very briefly describes the *jus ad bellum* criteria that must be present before one can engage in fighting a just war. The second category, *jus in bello*, which has to do with “the how” (or conduct) of a just war is quite distinct, and must be kept so. The various nuances of this category can be many, but the criteria are...



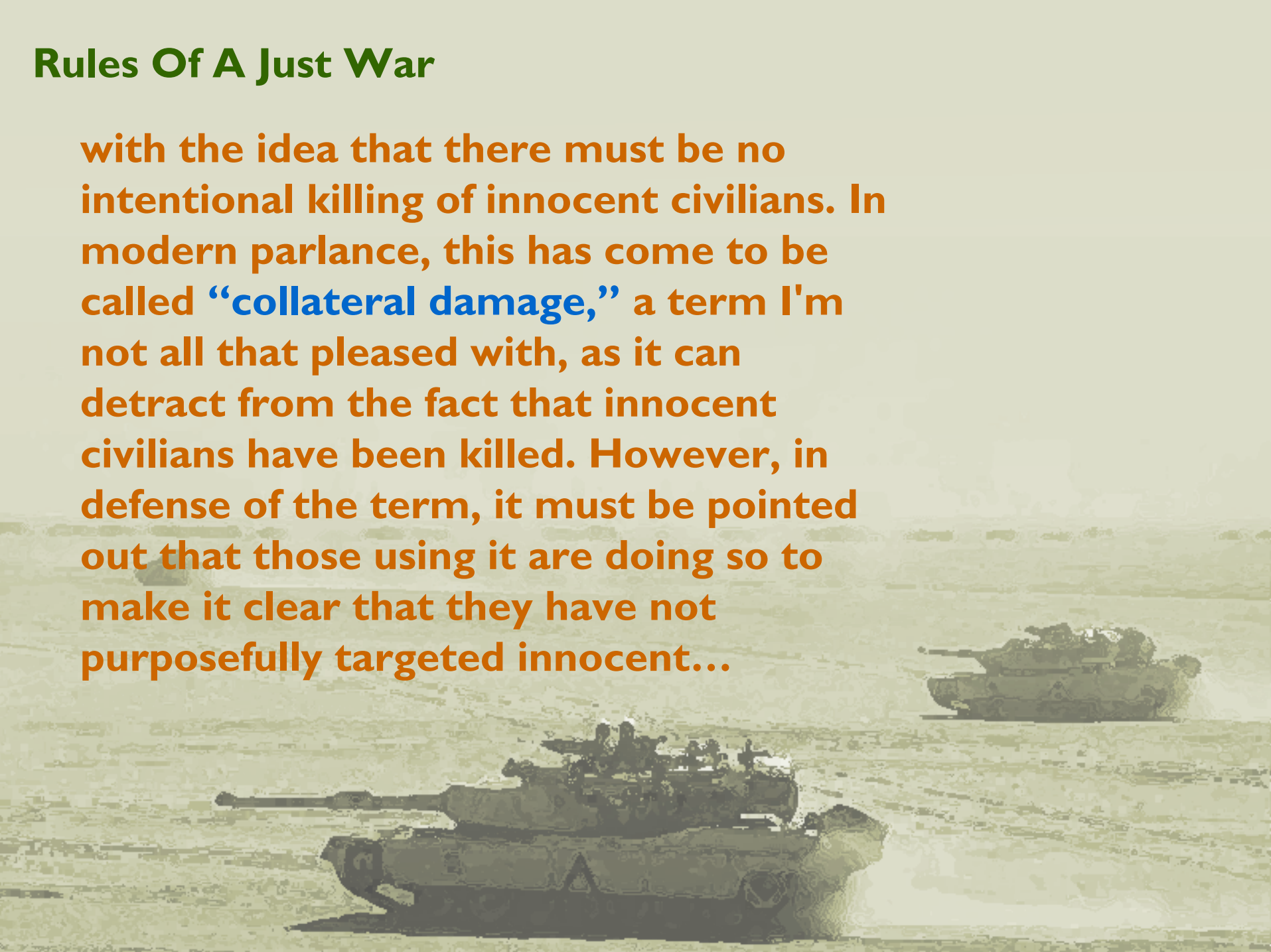
Rules Of A Just War

essentially two: *proportionality* and *discrimination*. The first has to do with using only the force necessary to effect the desired results. In other words, to vindicate a just cause, no more force than is necessary can be resorted to. Consequently, the disproportionate use of force is not only inappropriate, but wrong (i.e. “evil”), and thus punishable by law. The second, called “noncombatant immunity,” has to do...



Rules Of A Just War

with the idea that there must be no intentional killing of innocent civilians. In modern parlance, this has come to be called “collateral damage,” a term I'm not all that pleased with, as it can detract from the fact that innocent civilians have been killed. However, in defense of the term, it must be pointed out that those using it are doing so to make it clear that they have not purposefully targeted innocent...



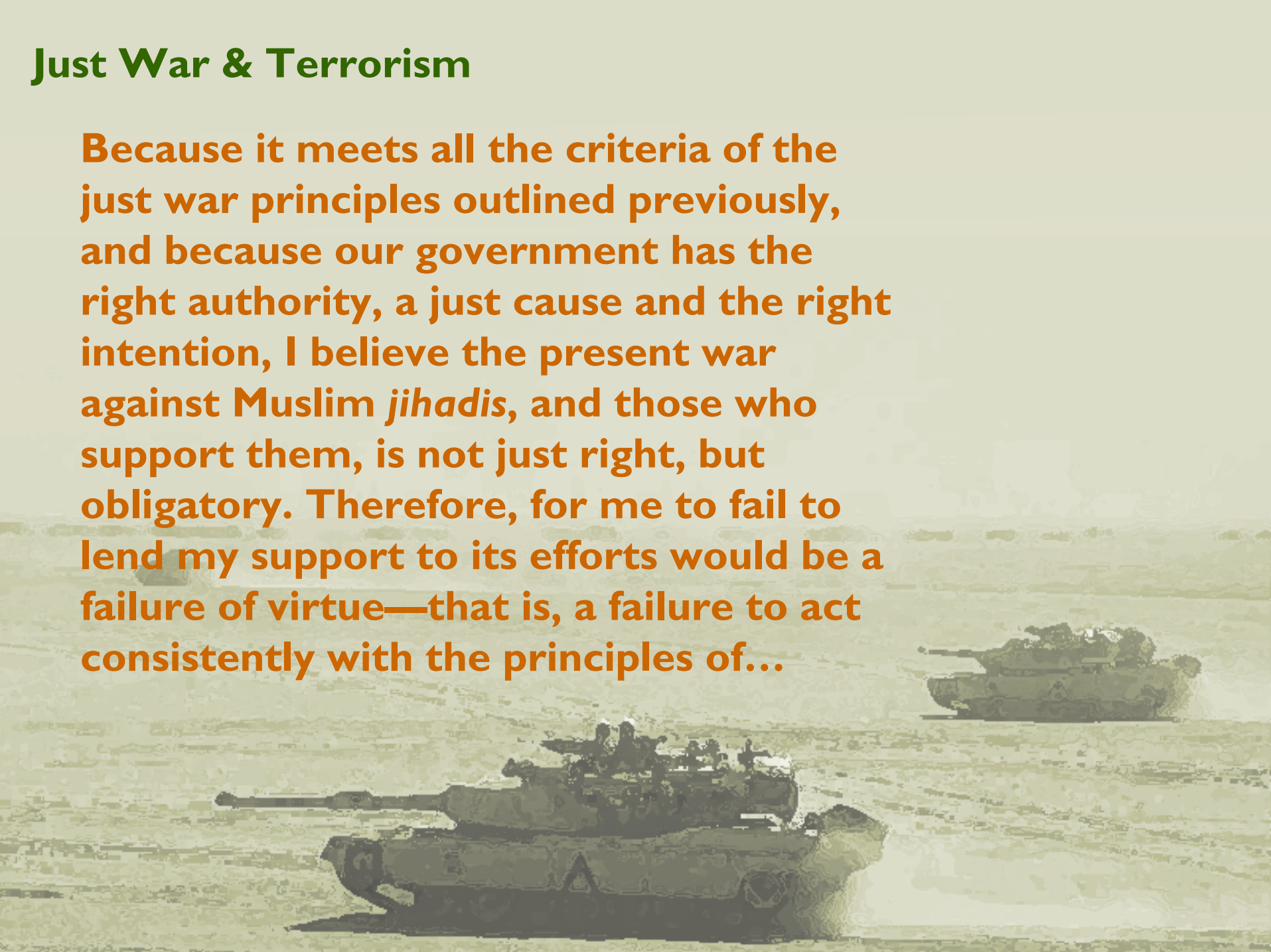
Rules Of A Just War

civilians, which is the exact opposite of what the September 11th, 2001 attacks on America did. This brings us to the current war on terrorism and the question of whether or not it meets just war criteria.



Just War & Terrorism

Because it meets all the criteria of the just war principles outlined previously, and because our government has the right authority, a just cause and the right intention, I believe the present war against Muslim *jihadis*, and those who support them, is not just right, but obligatory. Therefore, for me to fail to lend my support to its efforts would be a failure of virtue—that is, a failure to act consistently with the principles of...



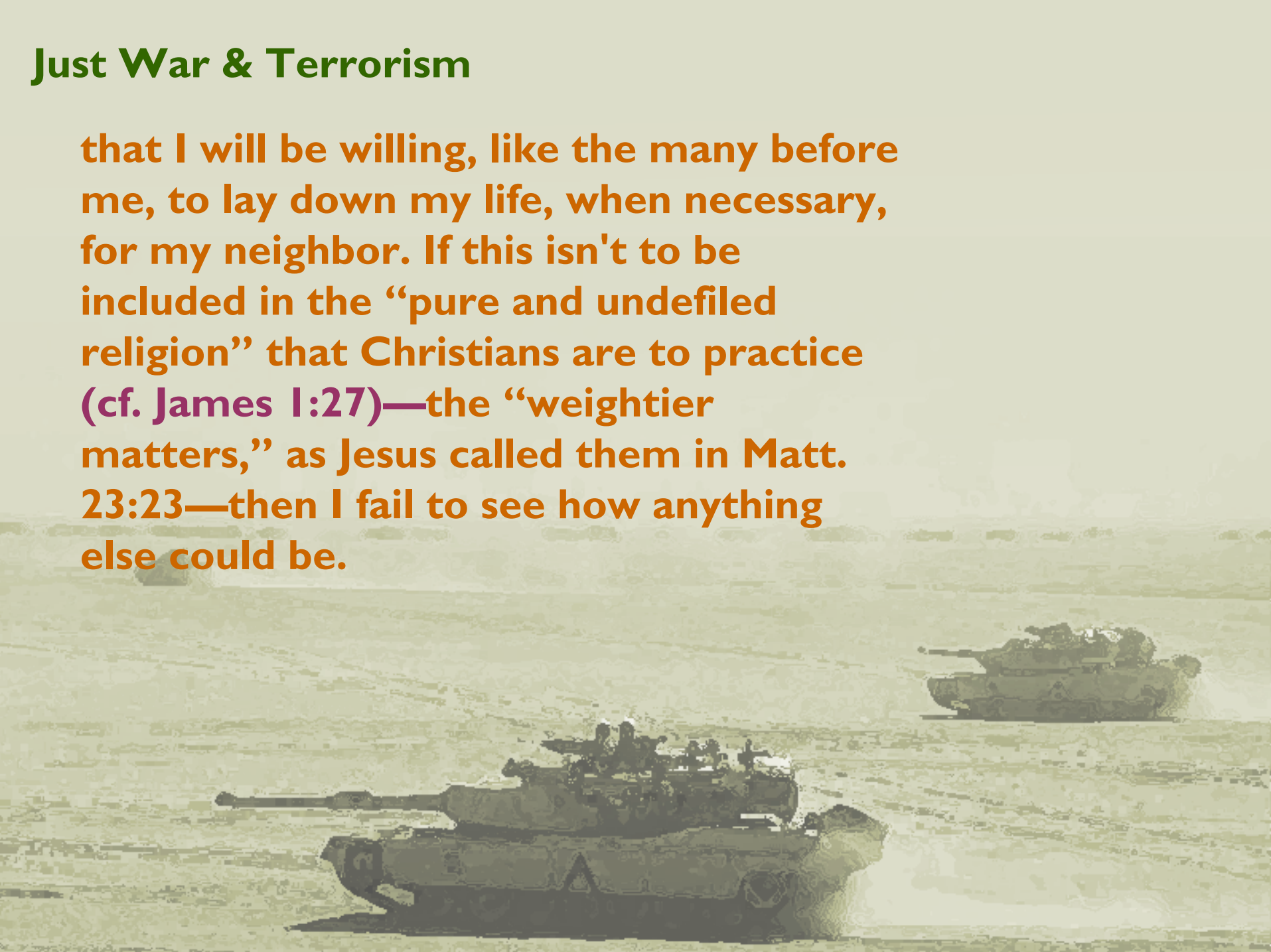
Just War & Terrorism

Righteousness and Justice taught in God's Word. Conjointly, I believe if I were to fail (as genuine pacifists must do) to lend my support to this war, I would be doing an evil thing, in that I would be failing to show charity (love) toward my neighbor and, thus, toward God (cf. Luke 10:27). Because charity forms the foundation for the “good works” I believe I was “created in Christ Jesus” to do (cf. Ephesians 2:10), I pray...



Just War & Terrorism

that I will be willing, like the many before me, to lay down my life, when necessary, for my neighbor. If this isn't to be included in the “pure and undefiled religion” that Christians are to practice (cf. James 1:27)—the “weightier matters,” as Jesus called them in Matt. 23:23—then I fail to see how anything else could be.



The Christian's Role



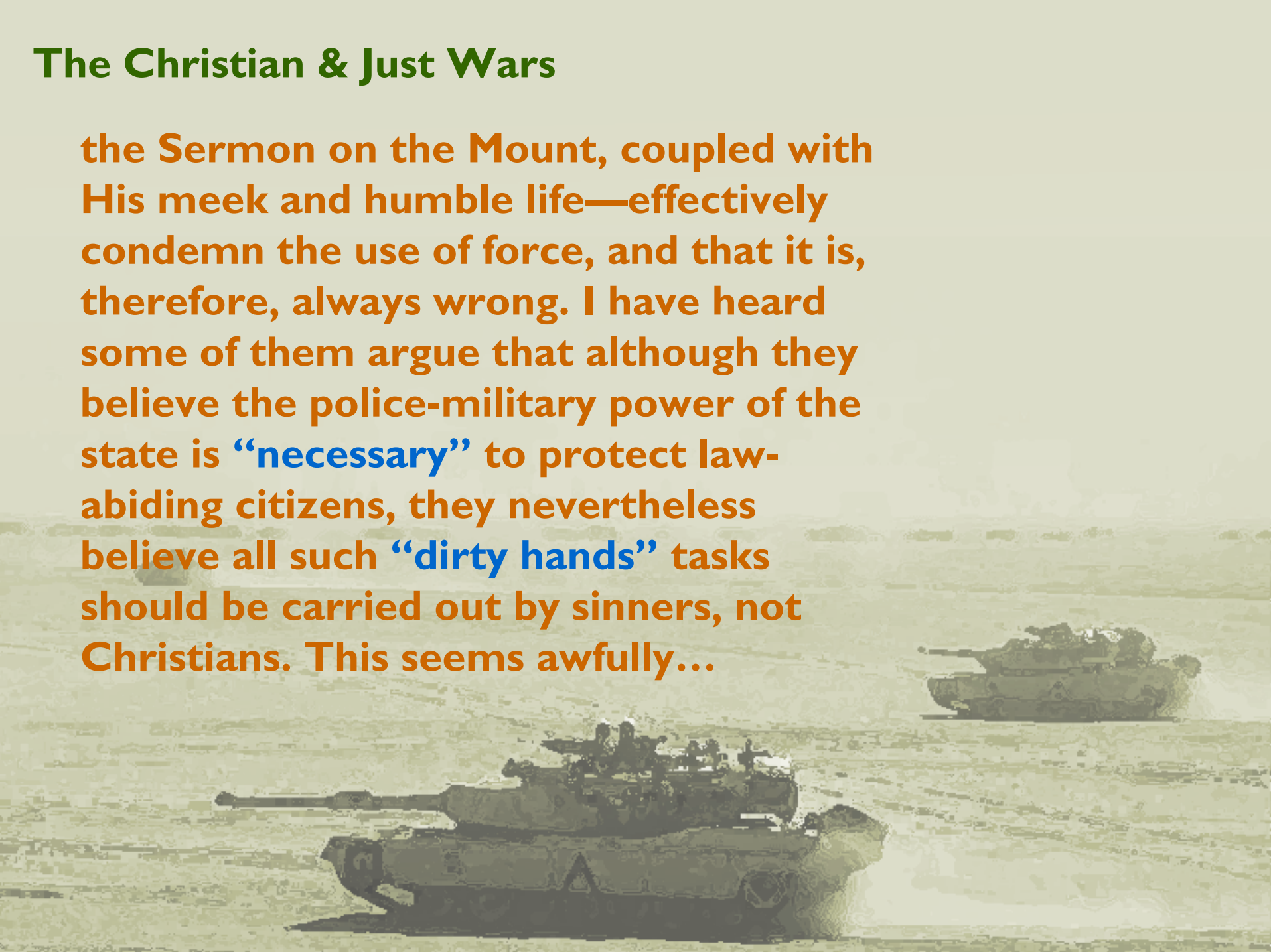
The Christian & Just Wars

Although Christians are prohibited from taking personal vengeance, God has provided a remedy to protect not just Christians, but all law-abiding citizens from those who would do them harm. This remedy is civil government. It is most unfortunate that pacifists, like the clergy of medieval days, think the religion of Christ somehow lifts them above time, place and people. They think Jesus' teachings—particularly those in...



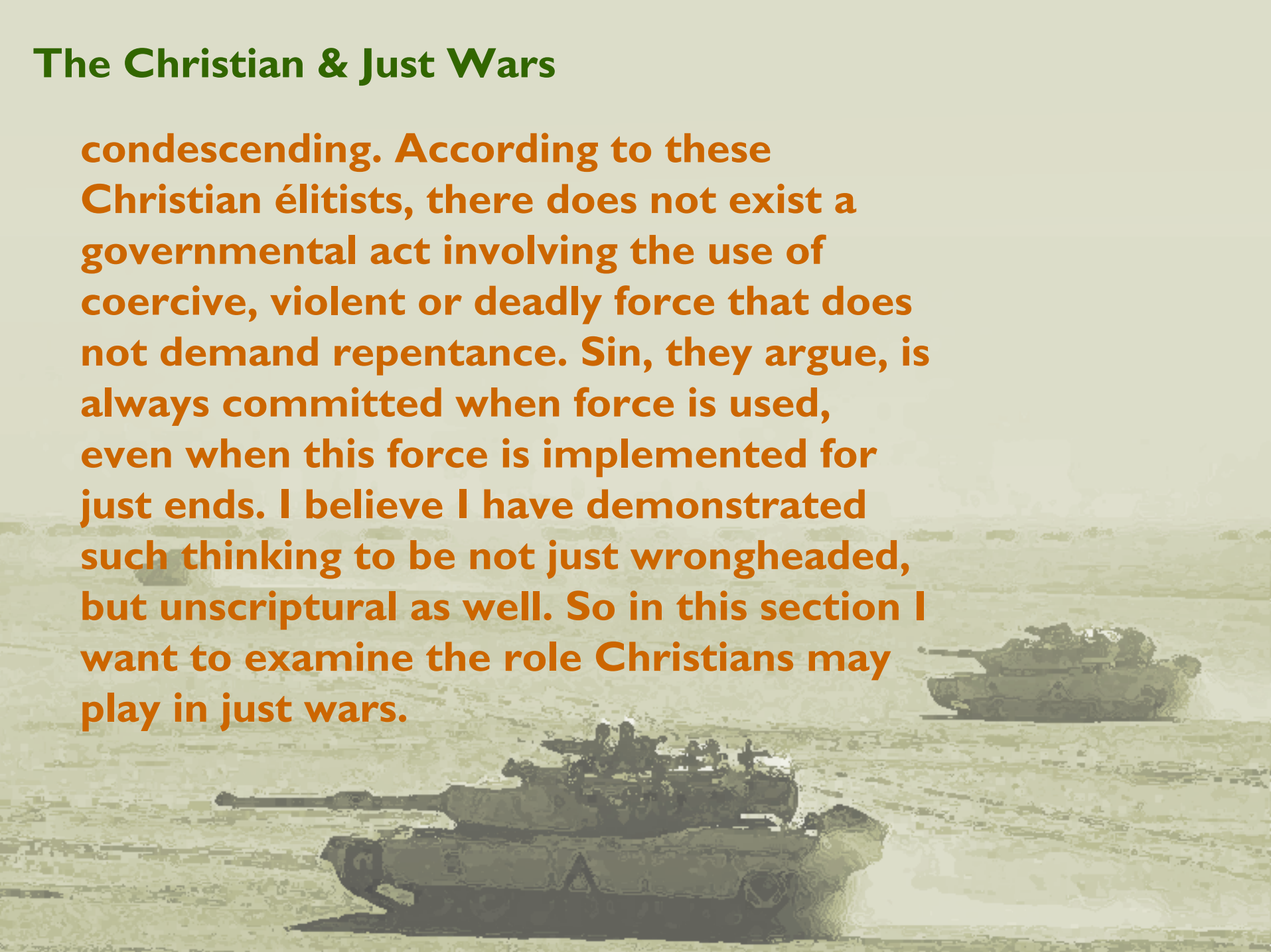
The Christian & Just Wars

the Sermon on the Mount, coupled with His meek and humble life—effectively condemn the use of force, and that it is, therefore, always wrong. I have heard some of them argue that although they believe the police-military power of the state is “**necessary**” to protect law-abiding citizens, they nevertheless believe all such “**dirty hands**” tasks should be carried out by sinners, not Christians. This seems awfully...



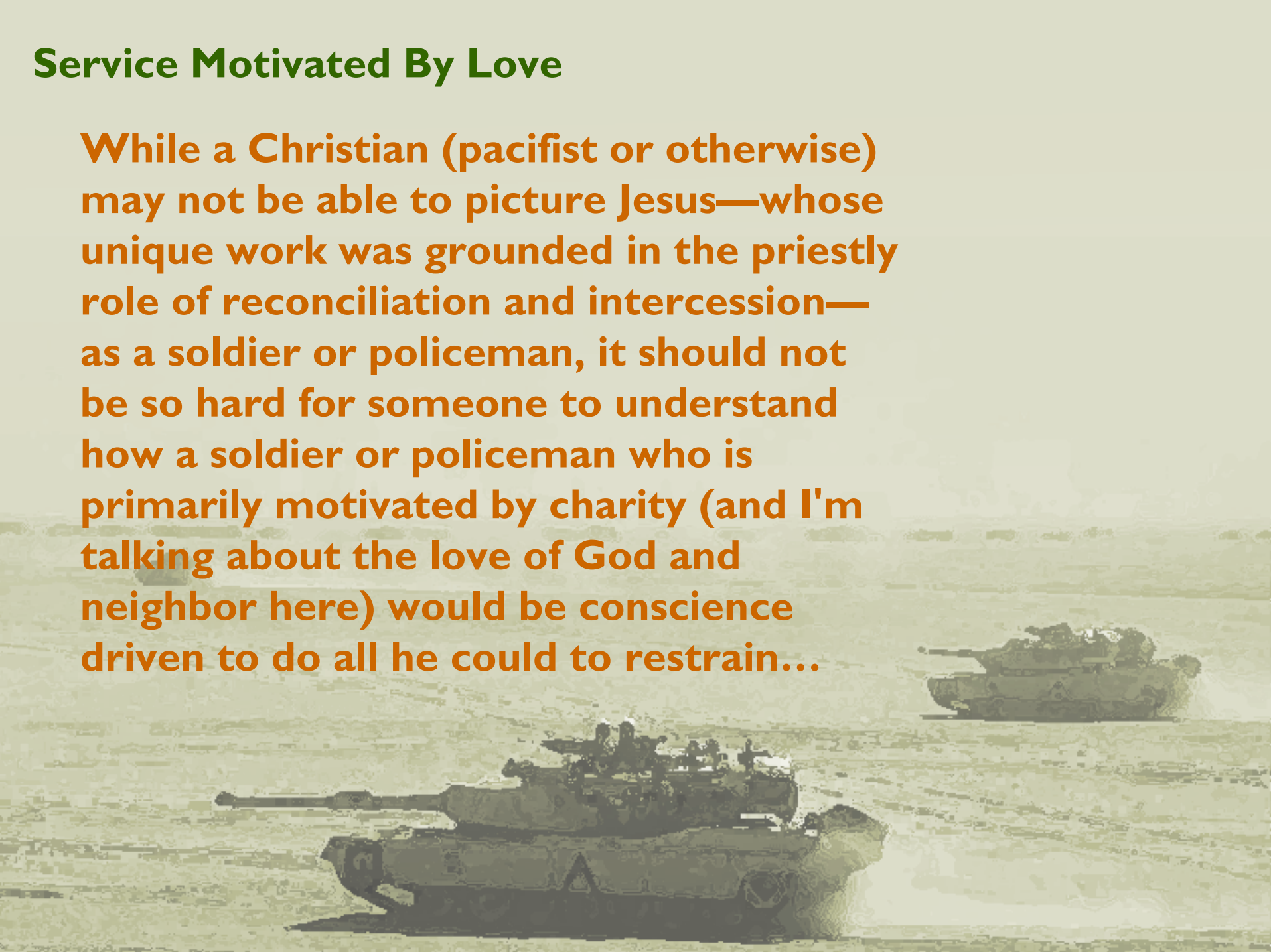
The Christian & Just Wars

condescending. According to these Christian élitists, there does not exist a governmental act involving the use of coercive, violent or deadly force that does not demand repentance. Sin, they argue, is always committed when force is used, even when this force is implemented for just ends. I believe I have demonstrated such thinking to be not just wrongheaded, but unscriptural as well. So in this section I want to examine the role Christians may play in just wars.



Service Motivated By Love

While a Christian (pacifist or otherwise) may not be able to picture Jesus—whose unique work was grounded in the priestly role of reconciliation and intercession—as a soldier or policeman, it should not be so hard for someone to understand how a soldier or policeman who is primarily motivated by charity (and I'm talking about the love of God and neighbor here) would be conscience driven to do all he could to restrain...



Service Motivated By Love

evil so that justice could be done. (In other words, the question is not, “What would Jesus do?” It is instead: “What would Jesus have me to do?”) Nevertheless, such strikes a discordant note for many Christians. “How,” they ask, “can force, deadly or otherwise, be loving?” In short, it can't unless it seeks to mimic God's use of force. This means, among other things, that the just use of force can never involve intrinsic evil (i.e., it cannot involve the...



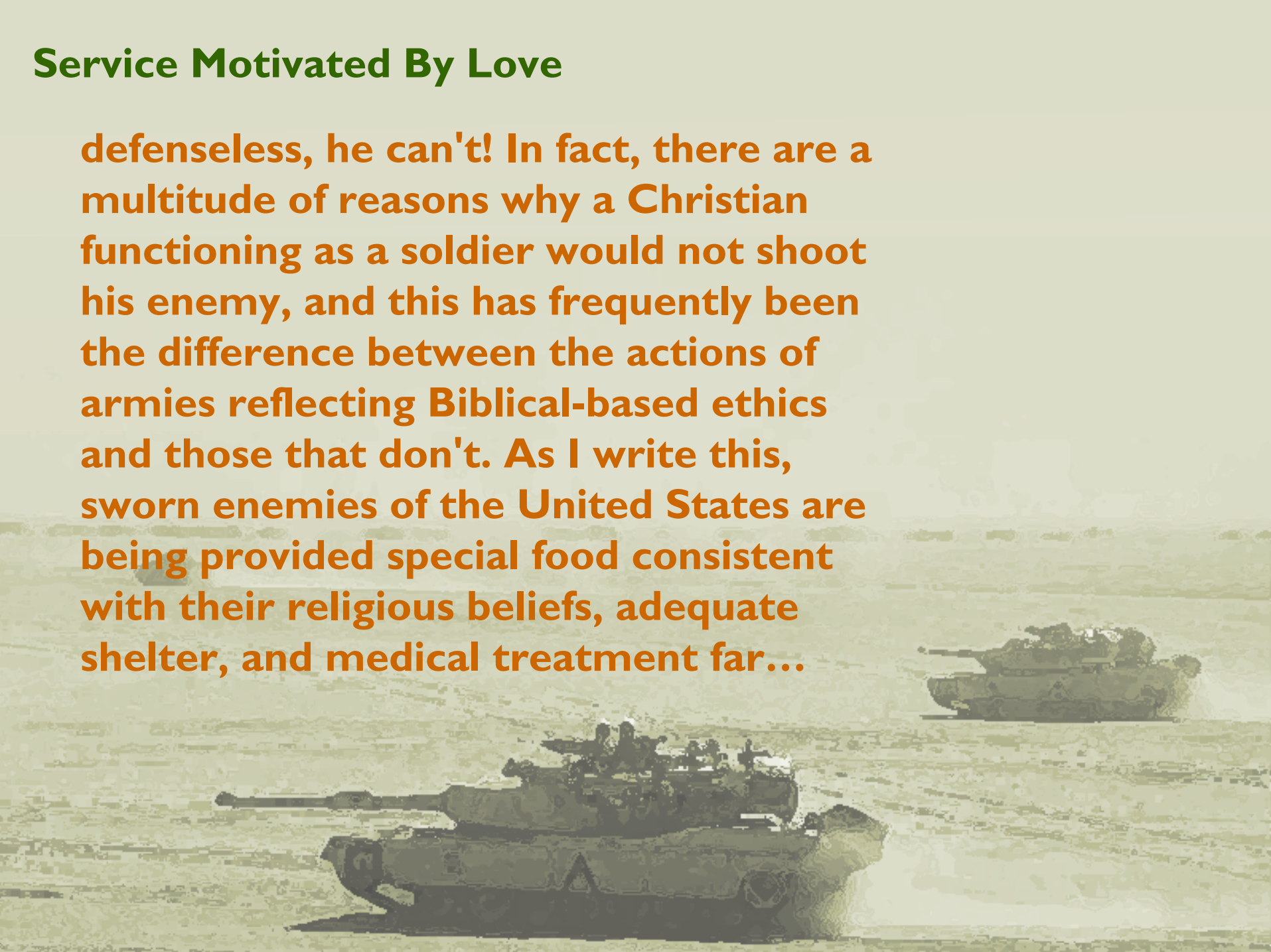
Service Motivated By Love

intentional killing of innocent people).
Armed force is charity, then, only when it seeks to resemble God's use of force. Pacifists frequently argue that the commandment to love one's enemies prohibits the Christian, as an official of government, from exercising deadly force. “After all,” they ask, “if one truly loves his enemy, how can he shoot him?” Well, when his enemy has surrendered, he can't! When his enemy is...



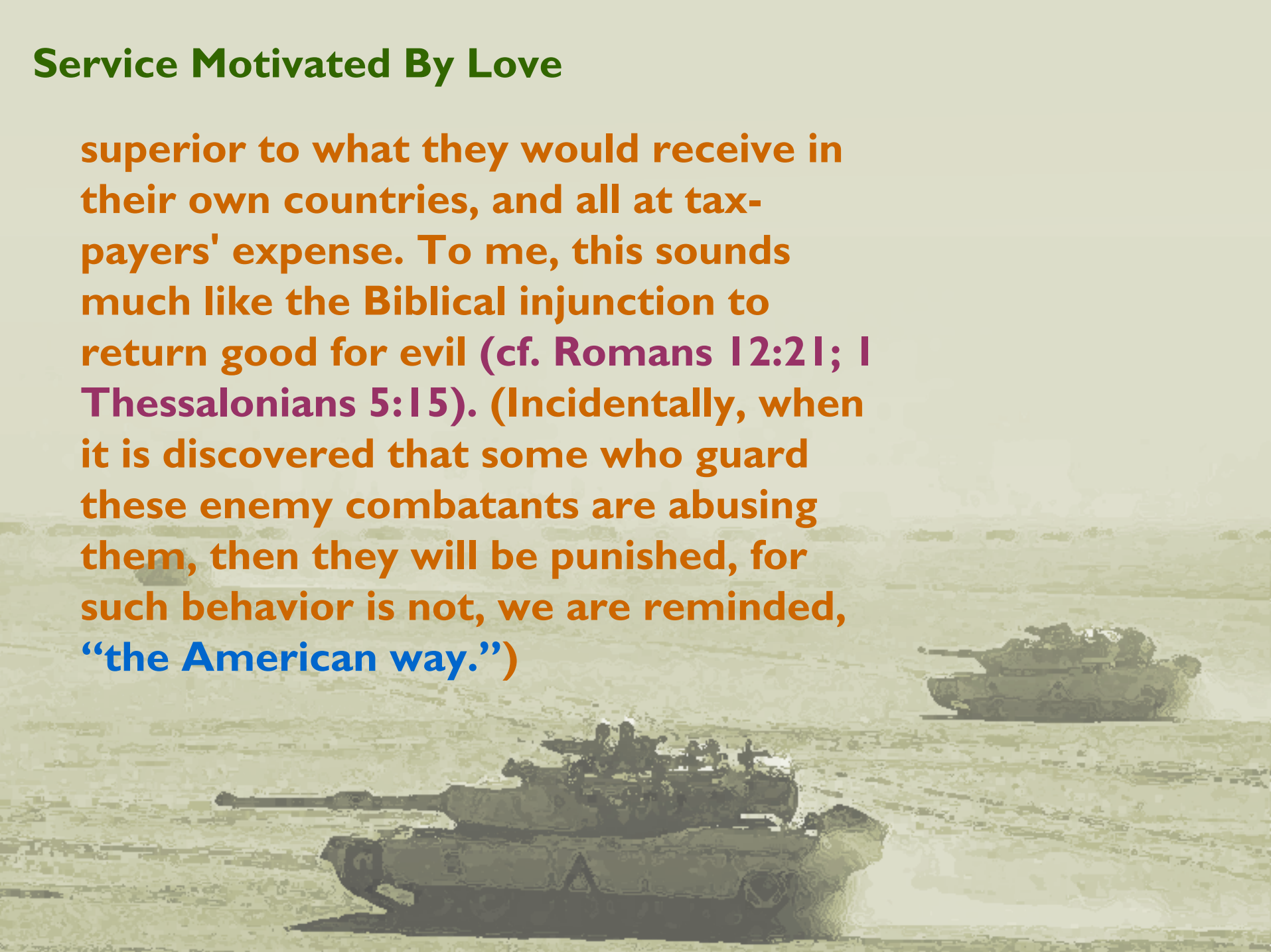
Service Motivated By Love

defenseless, he can't! In fact, there are a multitude of reasons why a Christian functioning as a soldier would not shoot his enemy, and this has frequently been the difference between the actions of armies reflecting Biblical-based ethics and those that don't. As I write this, sworn enemies of the United States are being provided special food consistent with their religious beliefs, adequate shelter, and medical treatment far...



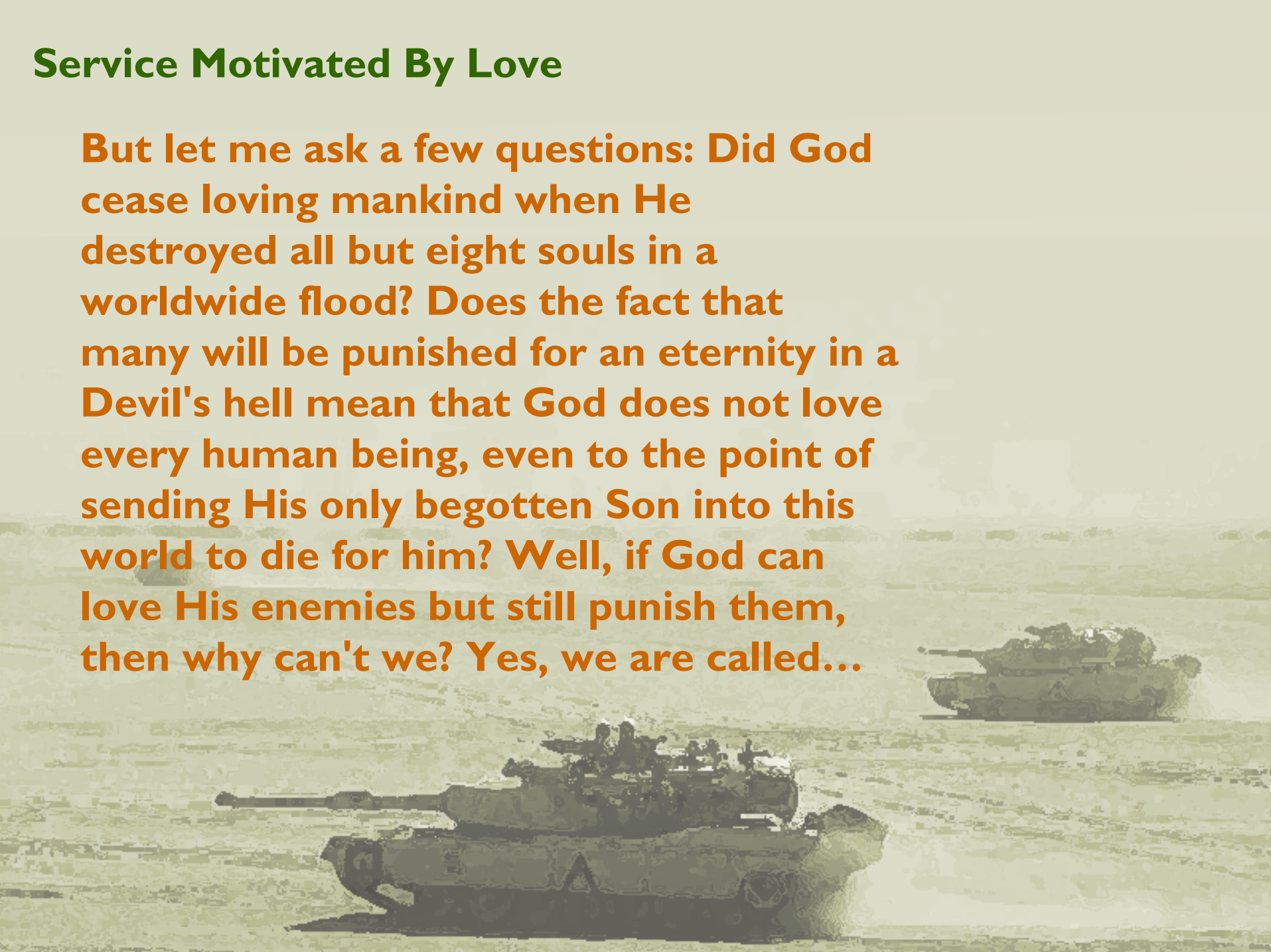
Service Motivated By Love

superior to what they would receive in their own countries, and all at taxpayers' expense. To me, this sounds much like the Biblical injunction to return good for evil (cf. Romans 12:21; 1 Thessalonians 5:15). (Incidentally, when it is discovered that some who guard these enemy combatants are abusing them, then they will be punished, for such behavior is not, we are reminded, “the American way.”)



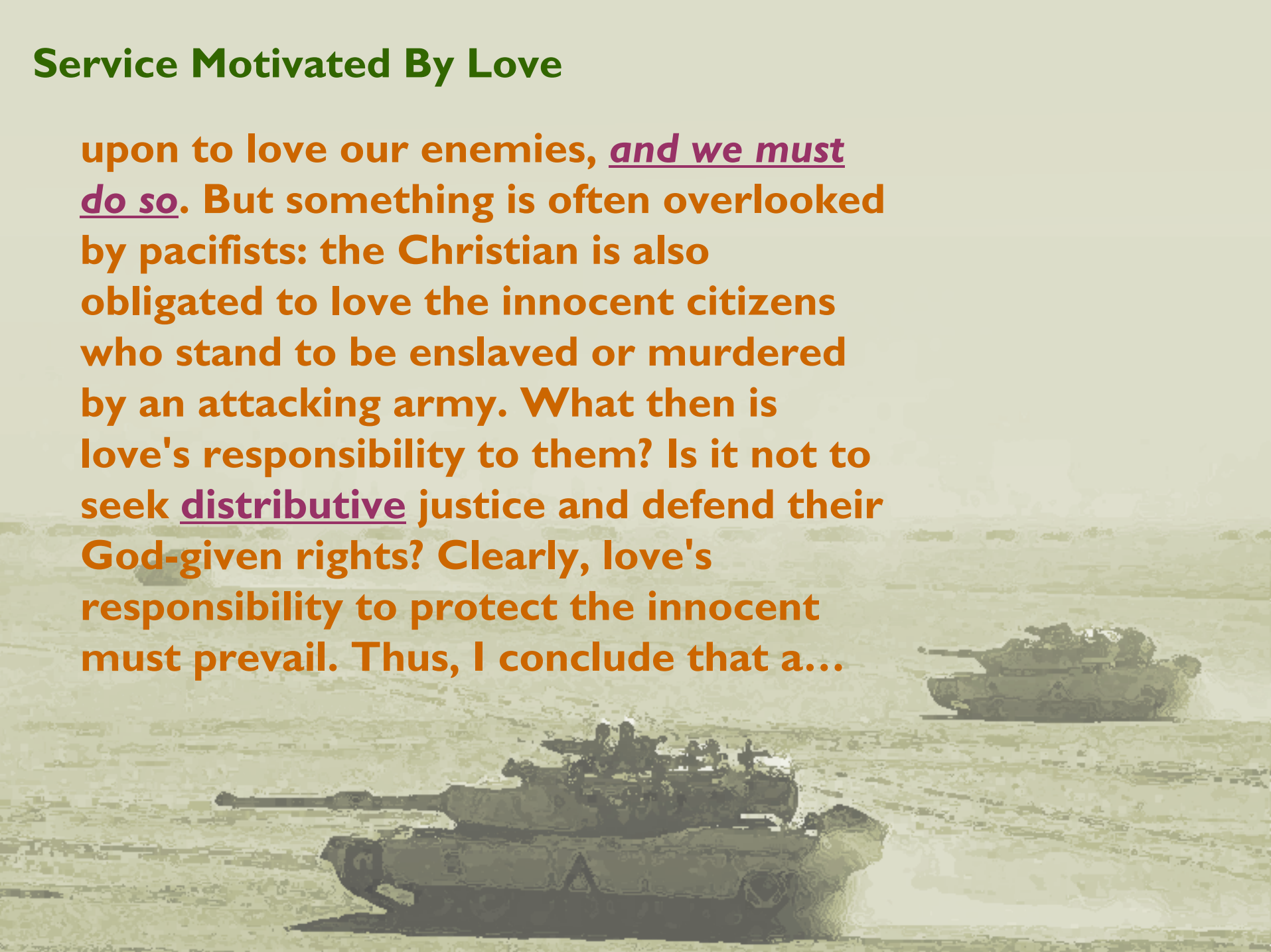
Service Motivated By Love

But let me ask a few questions: Did God cease loving mankind when He destroyed all but eight souls in a worldwide flood? Does the fact that many will be punished for an eternity in a Devil's hell mean that God does not love every human being, even to the point of sending His only begotten Son into this world to die for him? Well, if God can love His enemies but still punish them, then why can't we? Yes, we are called...



Service Motivated By Love

upon to love our enemies, and we must do so. But something is often overlooked by pacifists: the Christian is also obligated to love the innocent citizens who stand to be enslaved or murdered by an attacking army. What then is love's responsibility to them? Is it not to seek distributive justice and defend their God-given rights? Clearly, love's responsibility to protect the innocent must prevail. Thus, I conclude that a...



Service Motivated By Love

just war may be engaged in not only to see that justice is done, but to demonstrate love itself.



“Greater love
has no one
than this, than
to lay down
one’s life for
his friends.”

John 15:13



Service Motivated By Love

Contrary to the think-sos of pacifists, God does not believe in, nor does the Bible teach, “peace at any price.” Refusing to restrain an evildoer, or when necessary to take his life, when justice and love demand it, is a gross distortion of true religion: “The Lord saw it, and it displeased Him that there was no justice. He saw that there was no man, and wondered that there was no intercessor” (Isaiah 59:15b-16a).



We Must Not Call Good Evil

God has made it clear that He desires to restrain evil among His creatures. To do so, He has authorized the use, when necessary, of deadly force. This is, as we've learned, the primary purpose of God-ordained governments, and those who righteously attend such governments are called nothing less than ministers of God for good (cf. Romans 13:4,6; 1 Peter 2:14). With this in mind, it is important to note what God said...

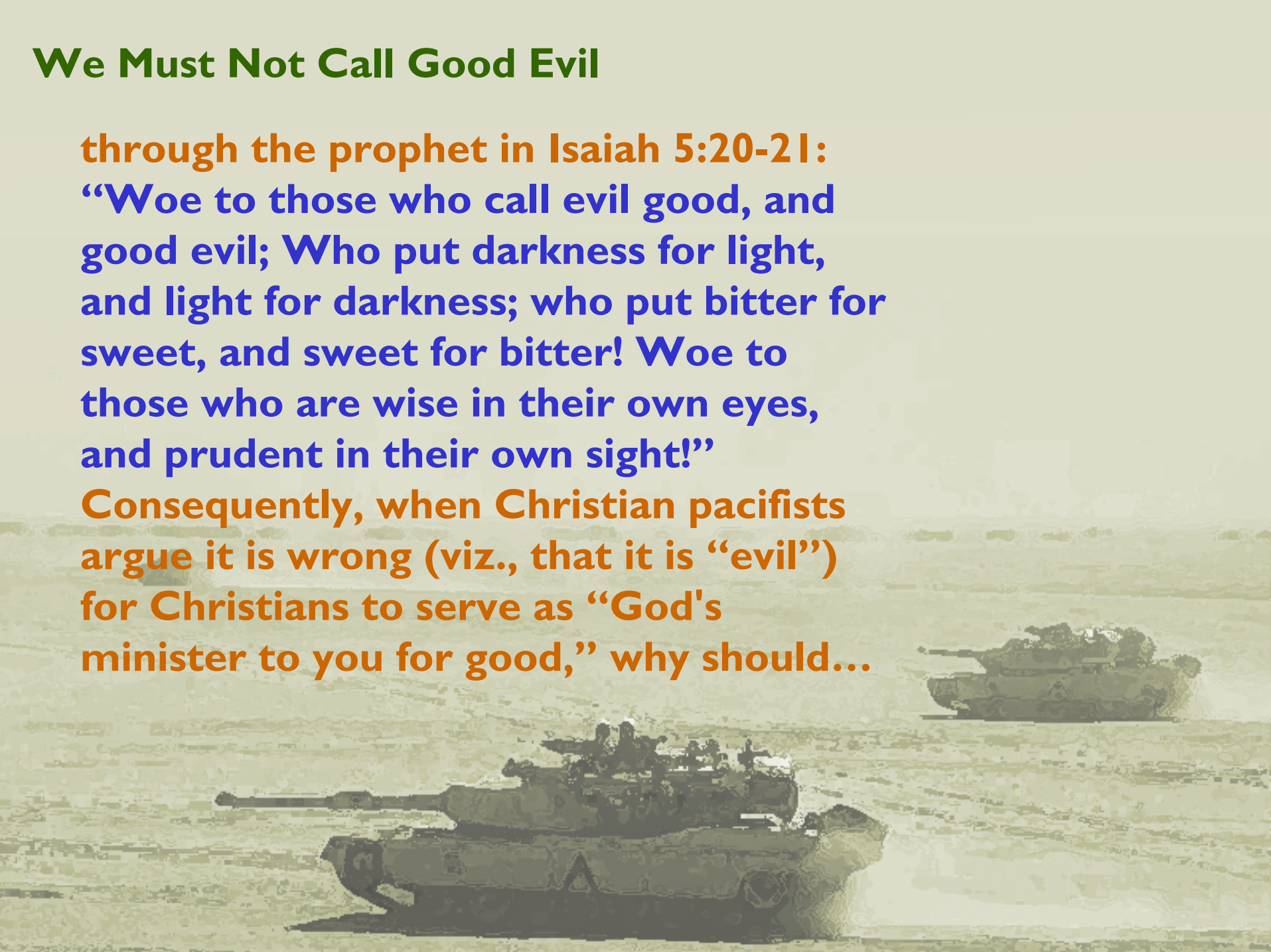


We Must Not Call Good Evil

through the prophet in Isaiah 5:20-21:

“Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil; Who put darkness for light, and light for darkness; who put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter! Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes, and prudent in their own sight!”

Consequently, when Christian pacifists argue it is wrong (viz., that it is “evil”) for Christians to serve as “God's minister to you for good,” why should...



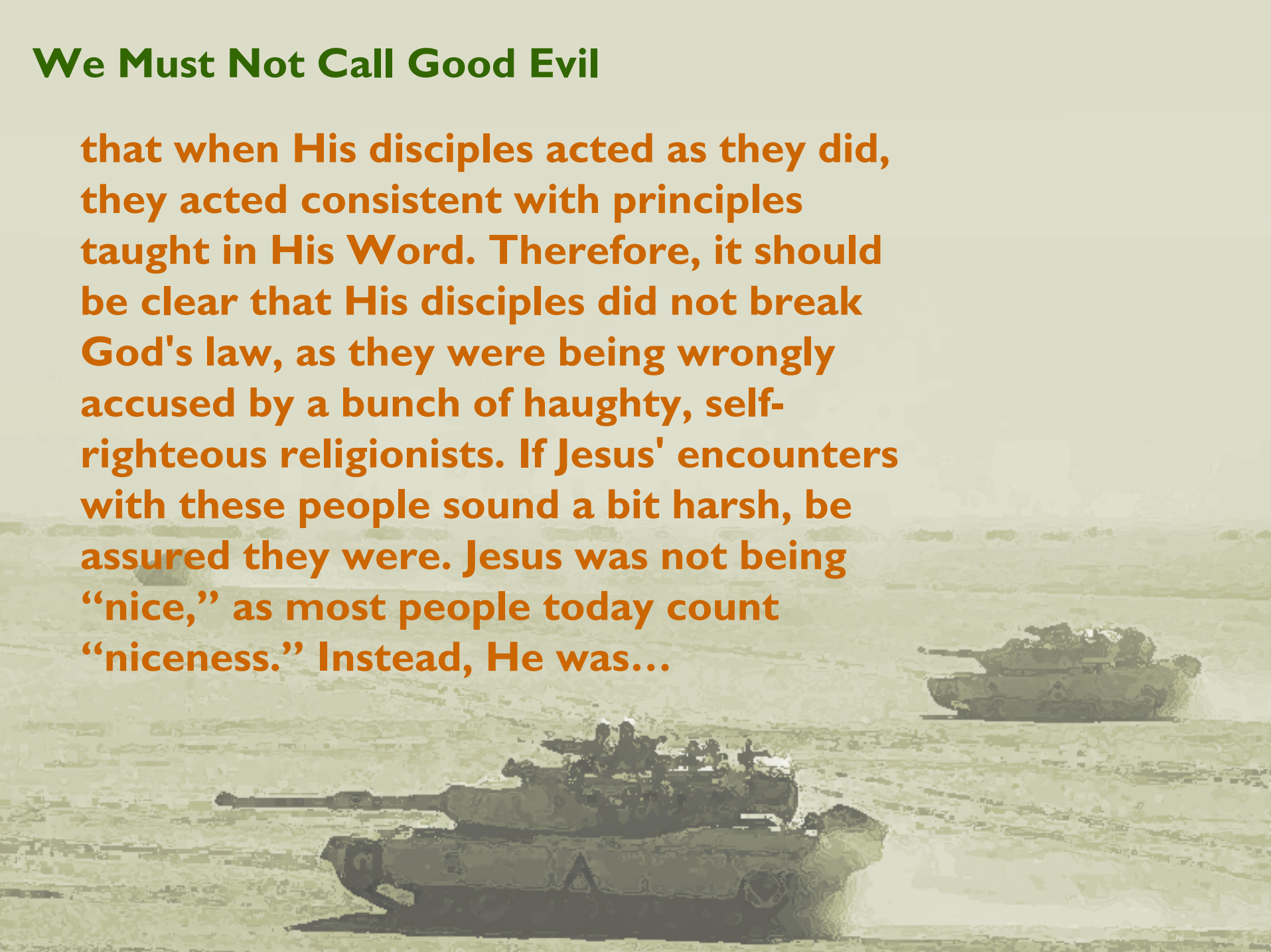
We Must Not Call Good Evil

they not see themselves under the condemnation of calling good evil, and evil good? But there is more. In Jesus' condemnation of those who were willing, as a result of their misinterpretation and misapplication of Scripture, to condemn the guiltless, He said, “But if you had known what this means, 'I desire mercy and not sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the guiltless” (Matthew 12:7). In other words, Jesus is saying...



We Must Not Call Good Evil

that when His disciples acted as they did, they acted consistent with principles taught in His Word. Therefore, it should be clear that His disciples did not break God's law, as they were being wrongly accused by a bunch of haughty, self-righteous religionists. If Jesus' encounters with these people sound a bit harsh, be assured they were. Jesus was not being “nice,” as most people today count “niceness.” Instead, He was...



We Must Not Call Good Evil

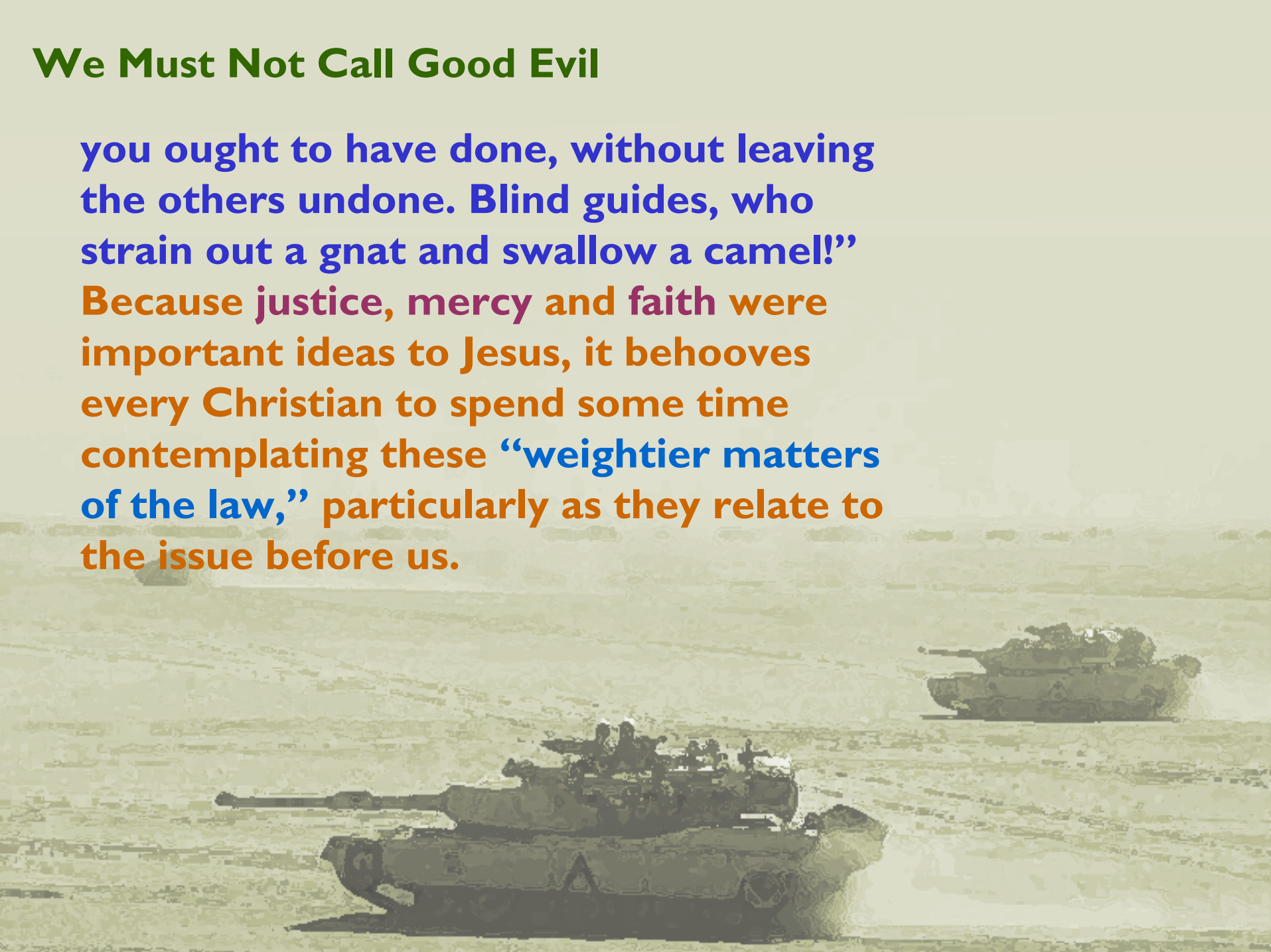
“contentious” about what He was saying, for He was addressing an issue that would ultimately determine where human beings created in His image would spend an eternity. He advanced this same theme in **Matthew 23:23-24**, where He said: “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith. These...



We Must Not Call Good Evil

you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone. Blind guides, who strain out a gnat and swallow a camel!”

Because justice, mercy and faith were important ideas to Jesus, it behooves every Christian to spend some time contemplating these “weightier matters of the law,” particularly as they relate to the issue before us.



The Weightier Matters

The Christian can be sure that the kind of “**faith**” Jesus was talking about in the previous passage is not merely mental assent. It is, instead, the saving faith manifested by works (cf. James 2:14-26)—works, I might add, of **mercy** and **justice**. In answering the question of whether or not a man can be saved by faith **alone**, James said it this way: “If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you says to...



The Weightier Matters

them, 'Depart in peace, be warmed and filled,' but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit? Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. But someone will say, 'You have faith, and I have works.' Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works" (James 2:15-18). Suppose, then, that a little old lady walking to the market is attacked by...



The Weightier Matters

thugs who have knocked her to the ground in an effort to steal her purse. Suppose that because that purse contains all the money she has, and because it's just enough to get her through another week, she is reluctant to let go of it. Suppose, in their efforts to make her let go of the purse, one of the thugs begins to kick her in the side, while yet another tries to break her arm to force her to let go. Now, suppose you are a witness to the...



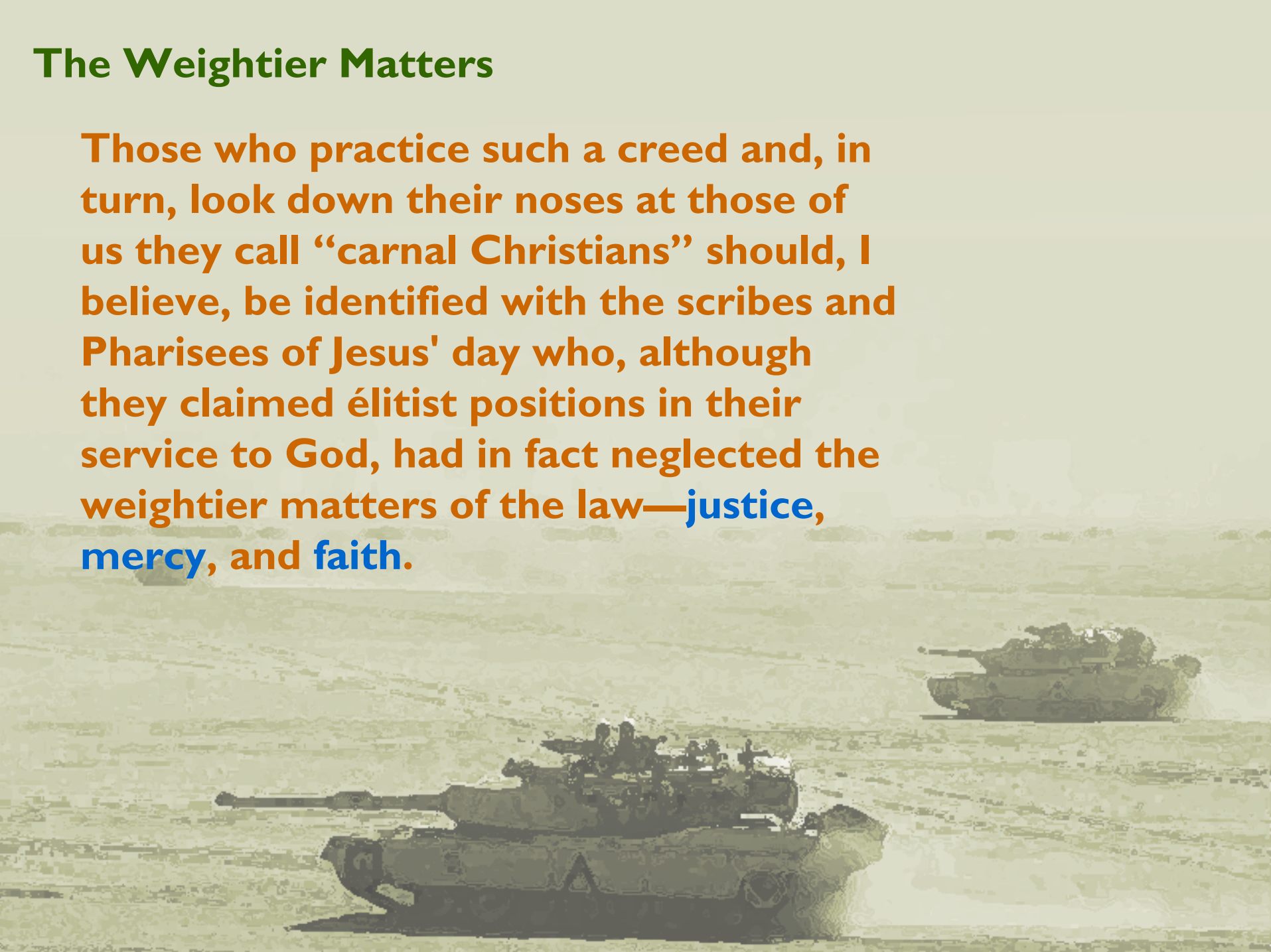
The Weightier Matters

whole thing. Do you mean to tell me that the principles of mercy and justice require you to do nothing more than yell for someone who is a “sinner anyway” to come and stop these vicious criminals? What kind of faith is this? And what kind of pathetic religion is it that would paint this old lady a sinner for resisting her attackers and who, in order to be helped, needs sinners (viz., the unrighteous servants of the government) to be called in order to do what is right?



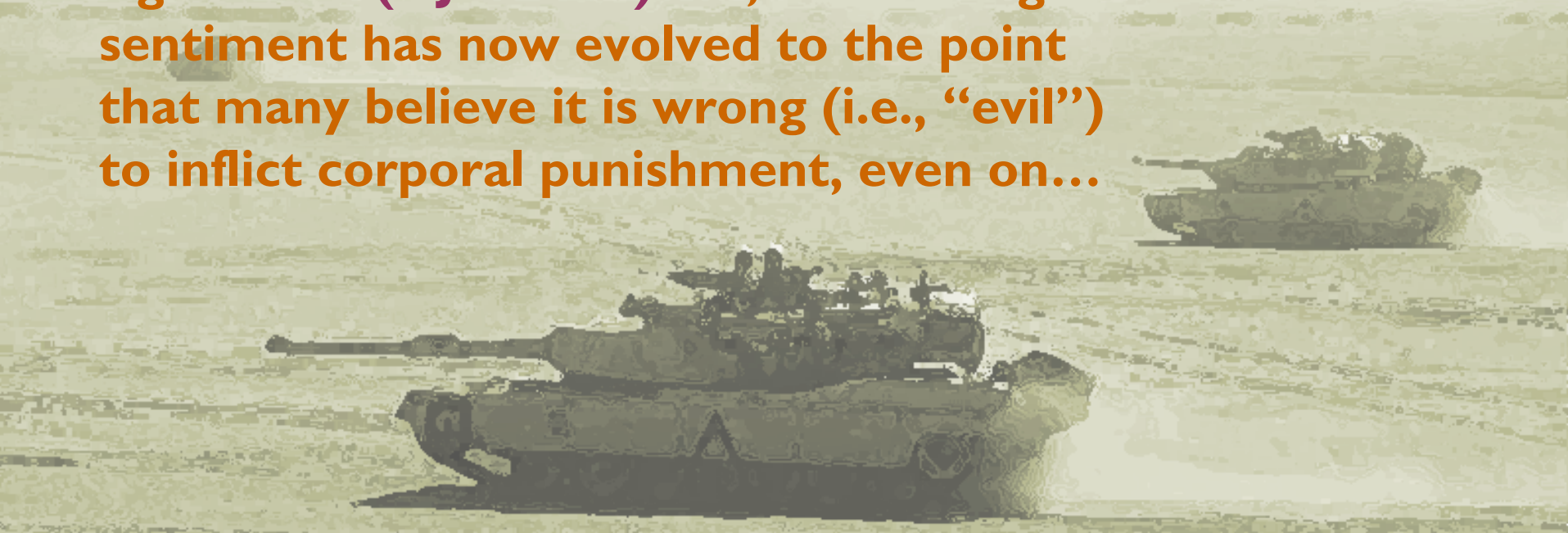
The Weightier Matters

Those who practice such a creed and, in turn, look down their noses at those of us they call “carnal Christians” should, I believe, be identified with the scribes and Pharisees of Jesus' day who, although they claimed élitist positions in their service to God, had in fact neglected the weightier matters of the law—**justice, mercy, and faith.**



But How About The Prohibition Against Returning Evil For Evil?

Yes, the Bible does talk about not returning evil for evil (cf. Romans 12:17; 1 Thessalonians 5:15; 1 Peter 3:9), but unless one's conscience condemns him (cf. Romans 14:23), it is never evil to do what is right. In fact, the Bible says, “He who practices righteousness is righteous” (1 John 3:7). So, even though sentiment has now evolved to the point that many believe it is wrong (i.e., “evil”) to inflict corporal punishment, even on...



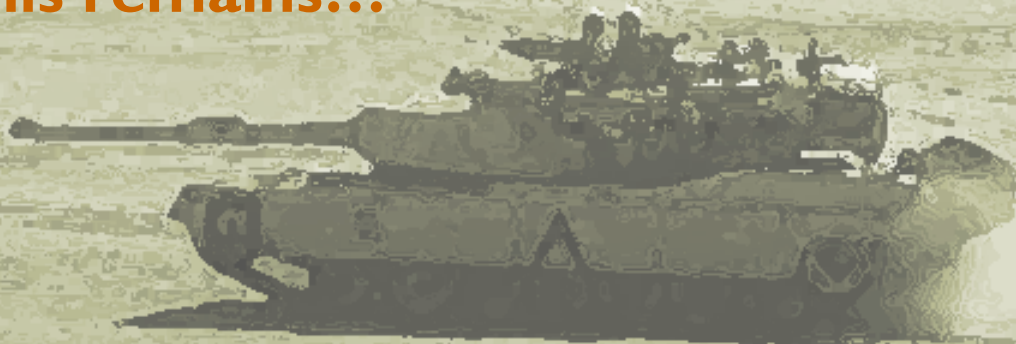
But How About The Prohibition Against Returning Evil For Evil?

one's own children, and even though this sentiment is now being enforced by law in some places, God caused it to be recorded long ago that “He who spares his rod hates his son, but he who loves him disciplines him promptly” (Proverbs 13:24, see also 19:18). The Bible makes it clear that even God provides such chastening to His own children (cf. 2 Samuel 7:14; Hebrews 12:5-11; Revelation 3:19). Consequently, when...



But How About The Prohibition Against Returning Evil For Evil?

a child does wrong and is properly punished for it, such is not an evil to be eradicated, but a virtue to be upheld. Along these same lines, when policemen and soldiers put their lives on the line in order to serve their fellow citizens and protect them from evil, they are involved in the highest form of love the Bible commands—the self-sacrificing love that is willing, if necessary, to lay its life down for another (cf. Romans 5:6-10). This remains...



But How About The Prohibition Against Returning Evil For Evil?

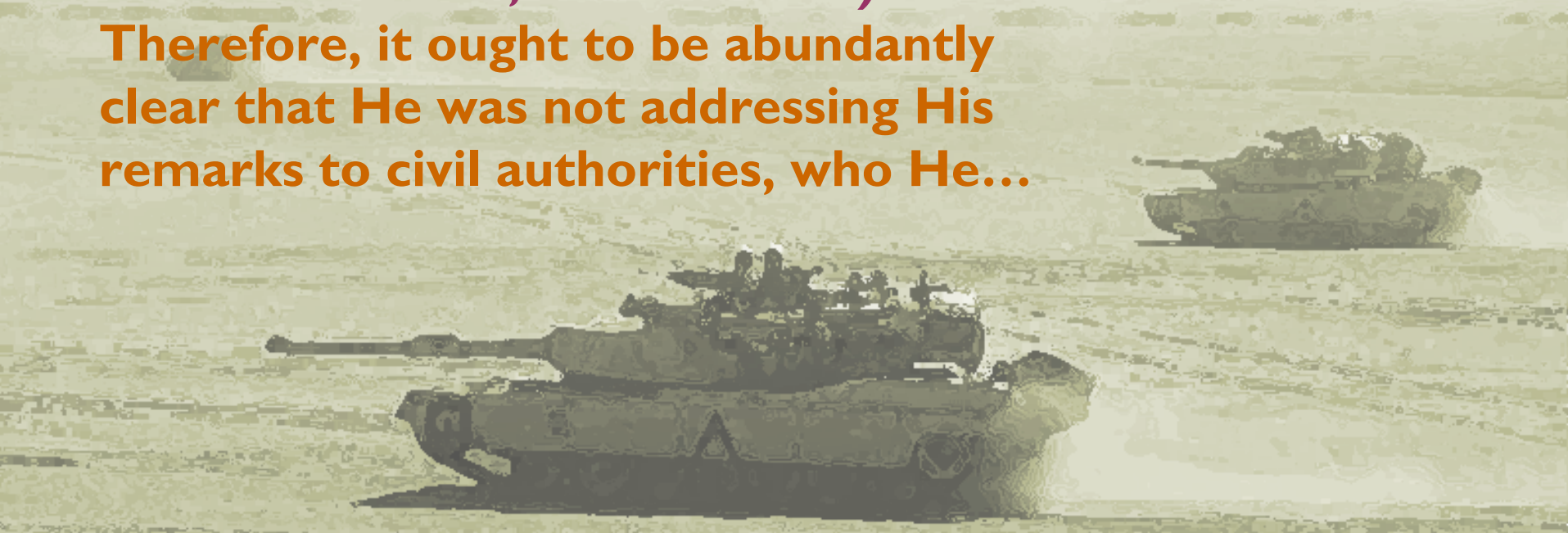
true even when such love includes the deadly, but just, use of force. Therefore, the Scriptural prohibition against returning evil for evil has nothing to do with the legitimate, lawful, and righteous utilization of force, for “Against such there is no law” (Galatians 5:23b)—never has been, and never will be!



But What About Turning The Other Cheek?

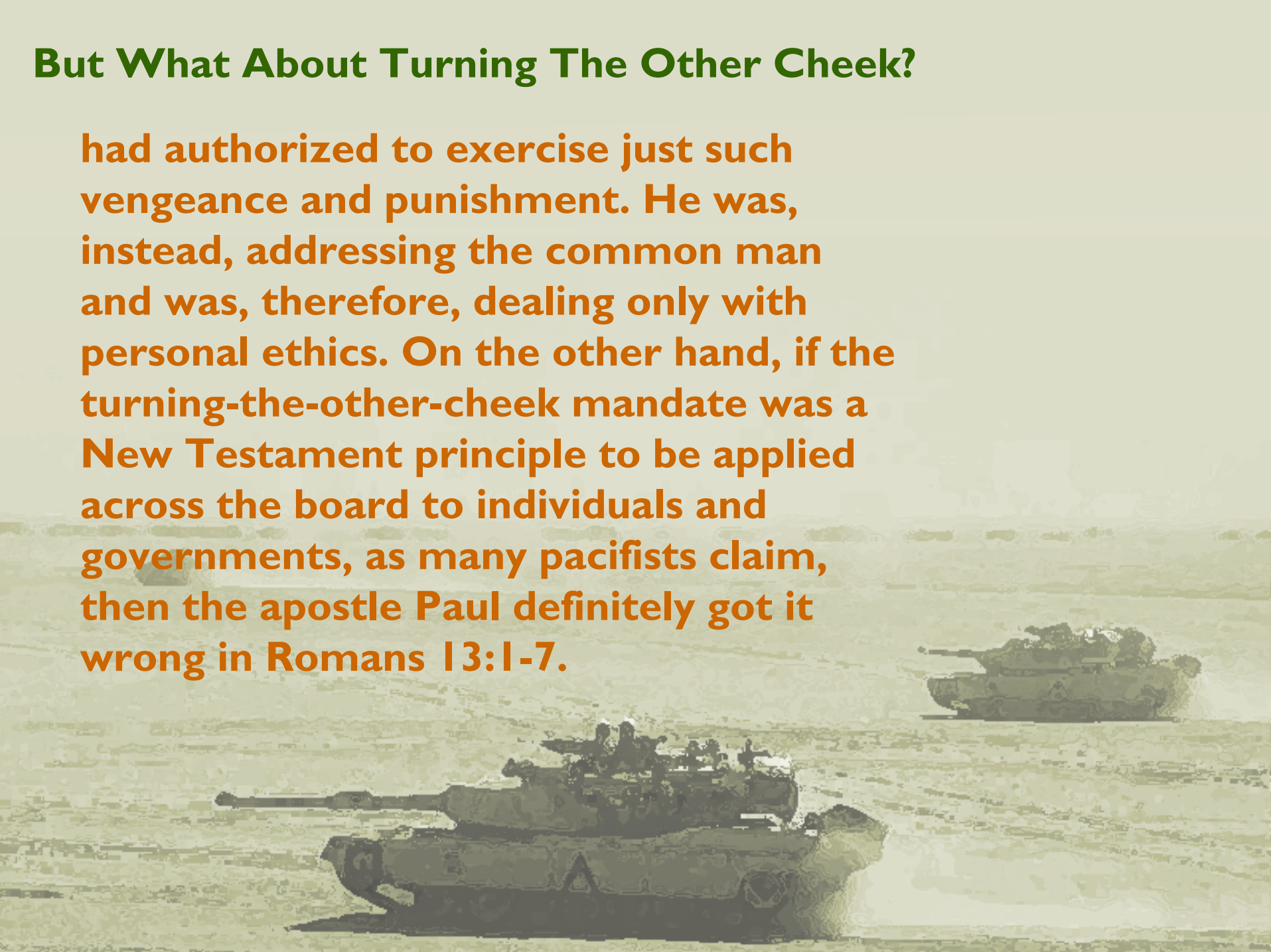
Yes, when giving instructions regarding personal ethics, Jesus talked about turning the other cheek. He did so in the context of not resisting an evil person, nor invoking the “eye for eye and tooth for tooth” mandate of the Mosaic Law in some exercise of personal revenge (cf. **Matthew 5:38-39; Exodus 21:24**).

Therefore, it ought to be abundantly clear that He was not addressing His remarks to civil authorities, who He...



But What About Turning The Other Cheek?

had authorized to exercise just such vengeance and punishment. He was, instead, addressing the common man and was, therefore, dealing only with personal ethics. On the other hand, if the turning-the-other-cheek mandate was a New Testament principle to be applied across the board to individuals and governments, as many pacifists claim, then the apostle Paul definitely got it wrong in Romans 13:1-7.

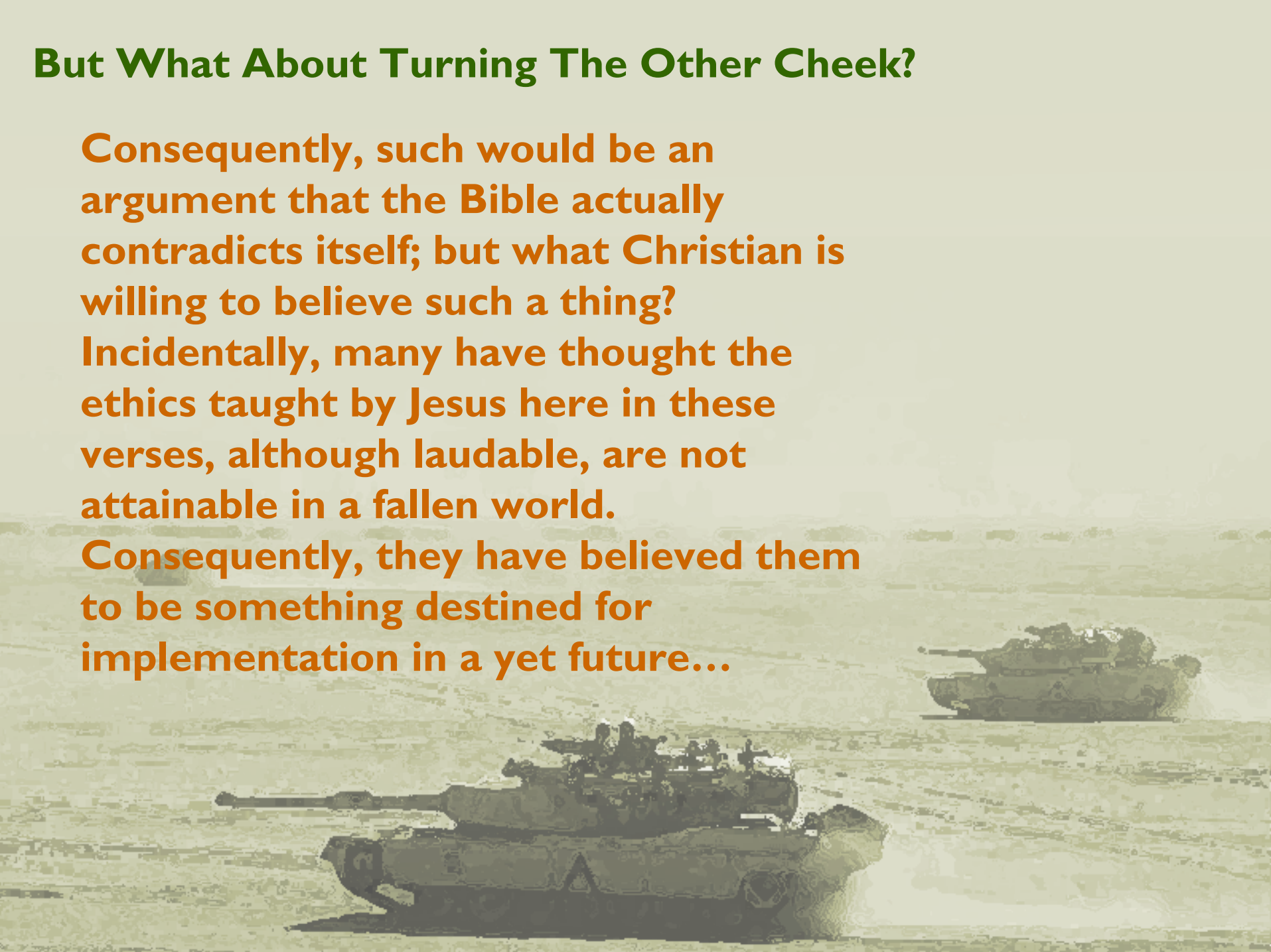


But What About Turning The Other Cheek?

Consequently, such would be an argument that the Bible actually contradicts itself; but what Christian is willing to believe such a thing?

Incidentally, many have thought the ethics taught by Jesus here in these verses, although laudable, are not attainable in a fallen world.

Consequently, they have believed them to be something destined for implementation in a yet future...



But What About Turning The Other Cheek?

millennial kingdom. This, we would all recognize, is a mistake. Jesus' instructions here, although extremely difficult, are the most practical ever given to man. The individual who understands and implements this personal set of ethics will learn to cultivate the kind of life God created mankind to live from the very beginning. Further, and this point must not be missed, there was absolutely nothing wrong with the...



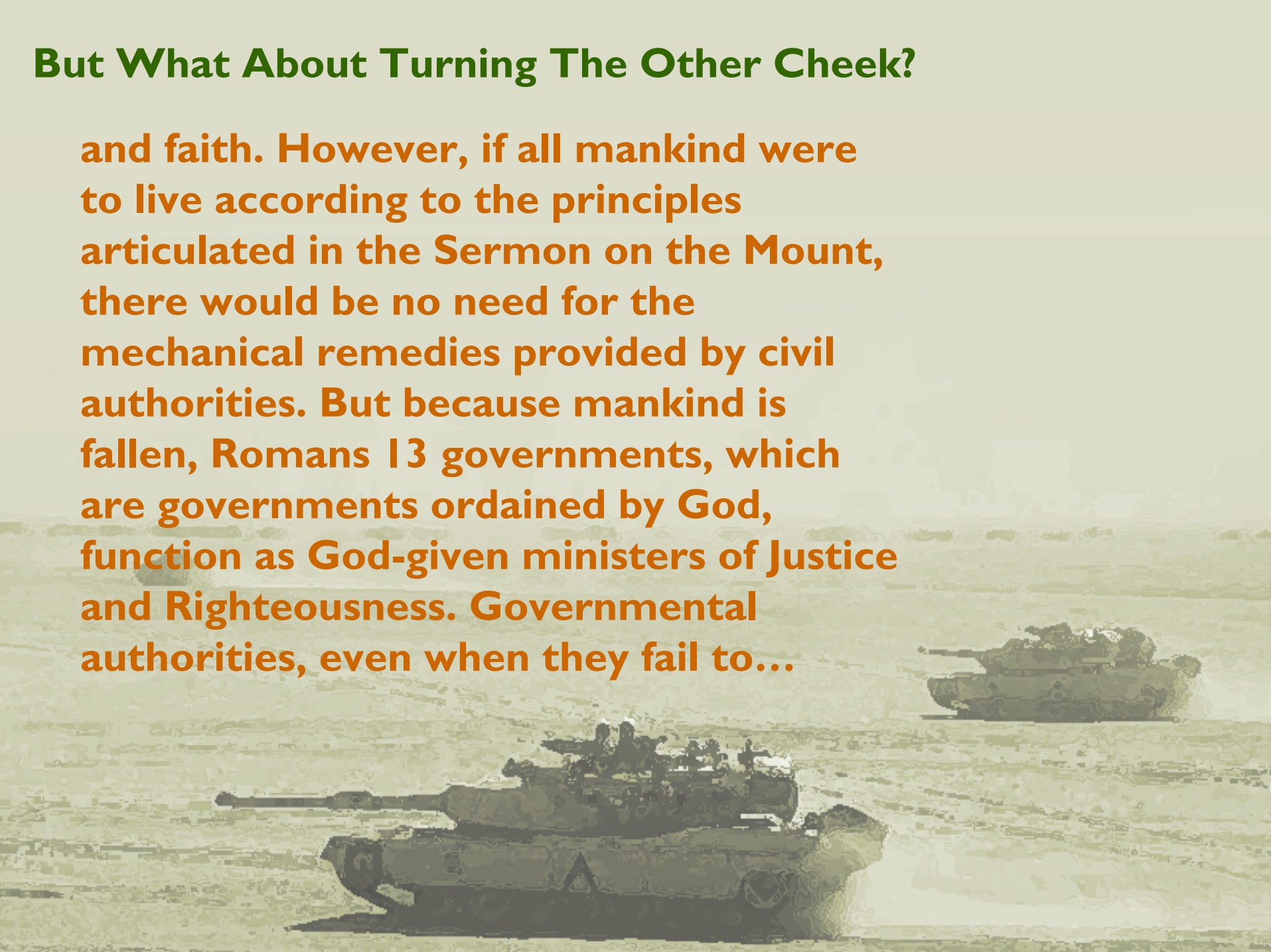
But What About Turning The Other Cheek?

lex talionis principle taught in the law of Moses (viz., the law of like for like—eye for eye, tooth for tooth, burning for burning, et cetera). In fact, it was, and still is, the model *par excellence* for earthly justice. However, *lex talionis* was not created as a personal set of ethics. It was, instead, created as a judicial remedy against the personal vengeance that seldom manifests the weightier matters of the law—things like justice, mercy...



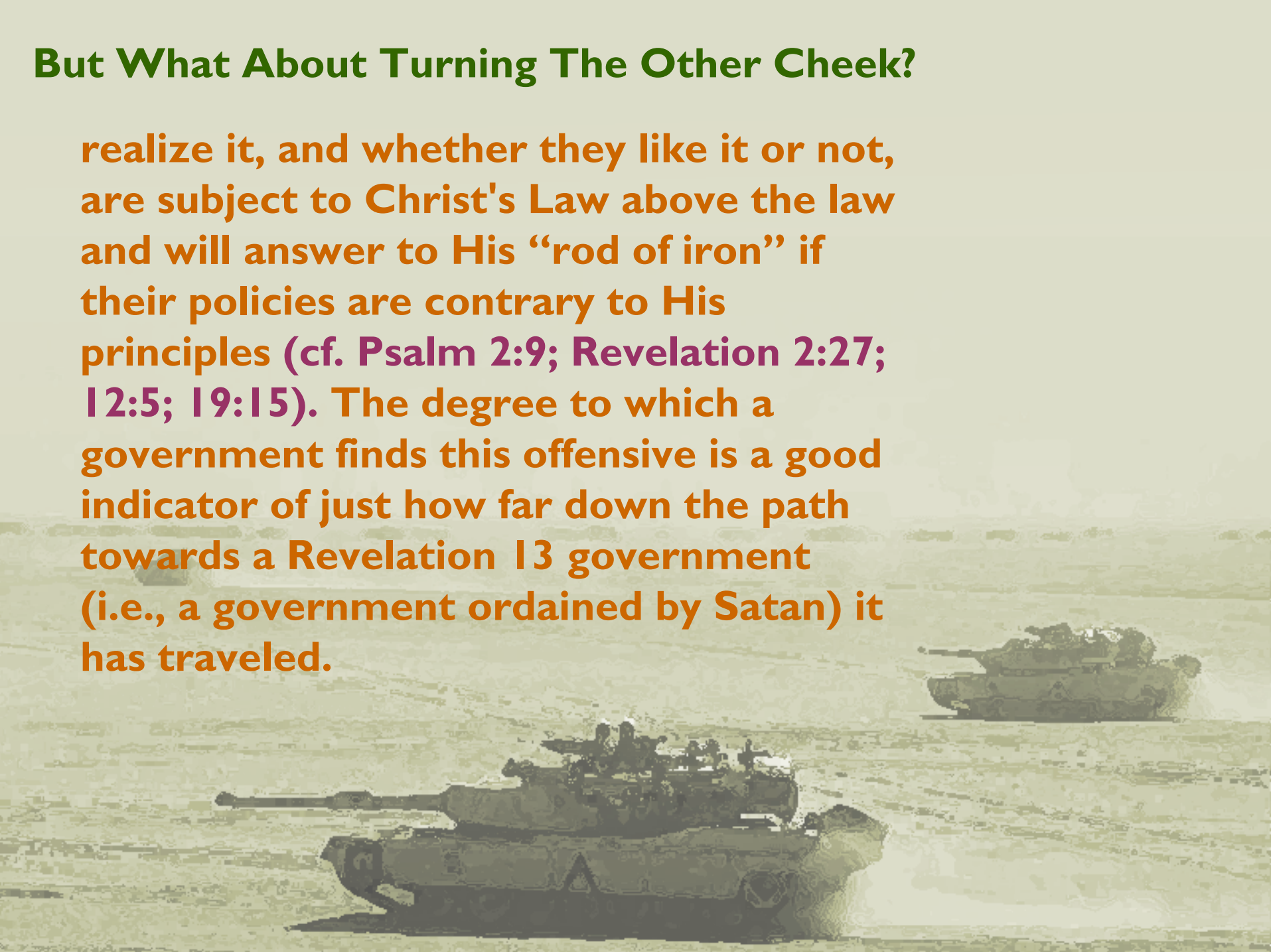
But What About Turning The Other Cheek?

and faith. However, if all mankind were to live according to the principles articulated in the Sermon on the Mount, there would be no need for the mechanical remedies provided by civil authorities. But because mankind is fallen, Romans 13 governments, which are governments ordained by God, function as God-given ministers of Justice and Righteousness. Governmental authorities, even when they fail to...



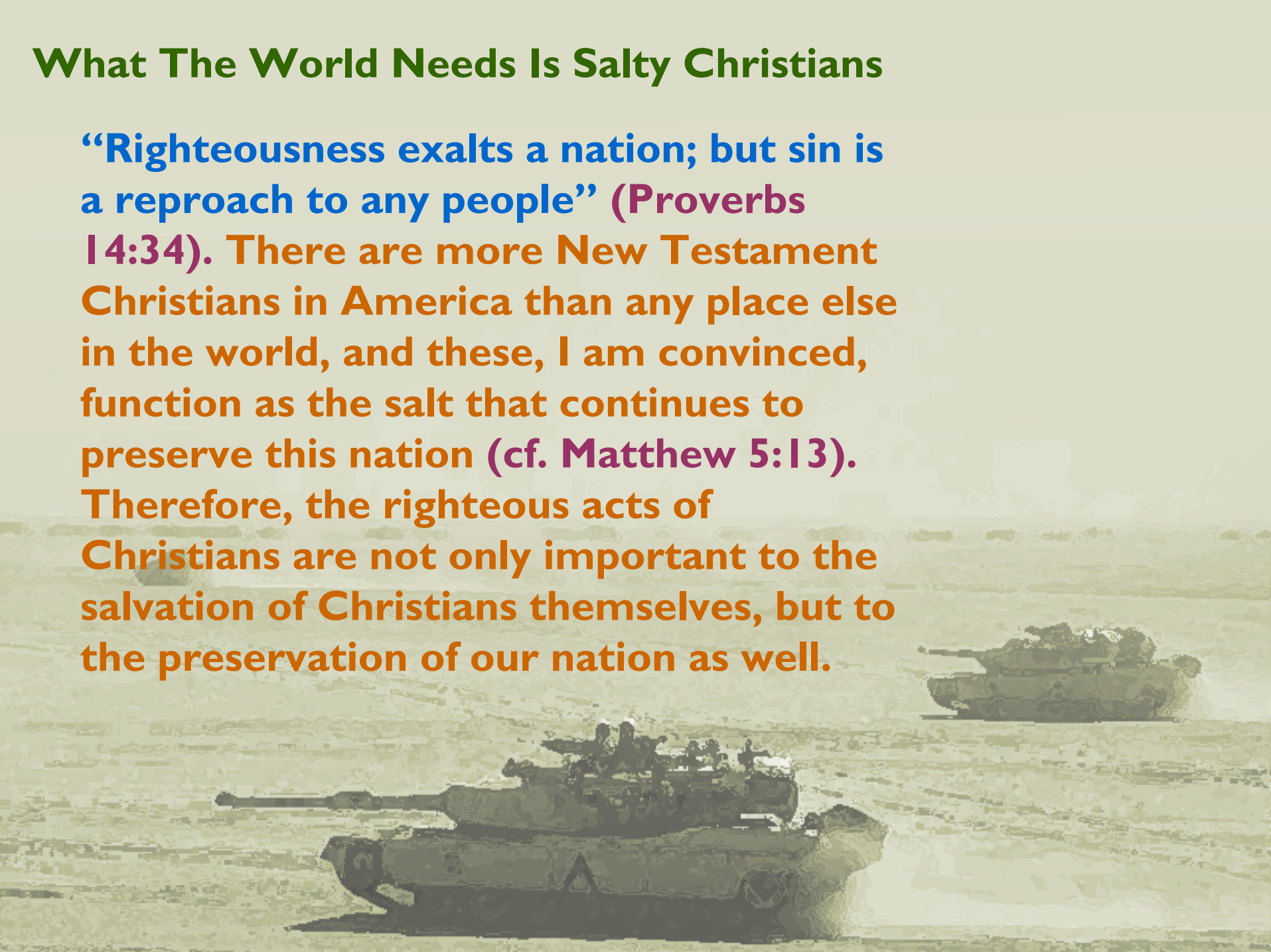
But What About Turning The Other Cheek?

realize it, and whether they like it or not, are subject to Christ's Law above the law and will answer to His “rod of iron” if their policies are contrary to His principles (cf. Psalm 2:9; Revelation 2:27; 12:5; 19:15). The degree to which a government finds this offensive is a good indicator of just how far down the path towards a Revelation 13 government (i.e., a government ordained by Satan) it has traveled.



What The World Needs Is Salty Christians

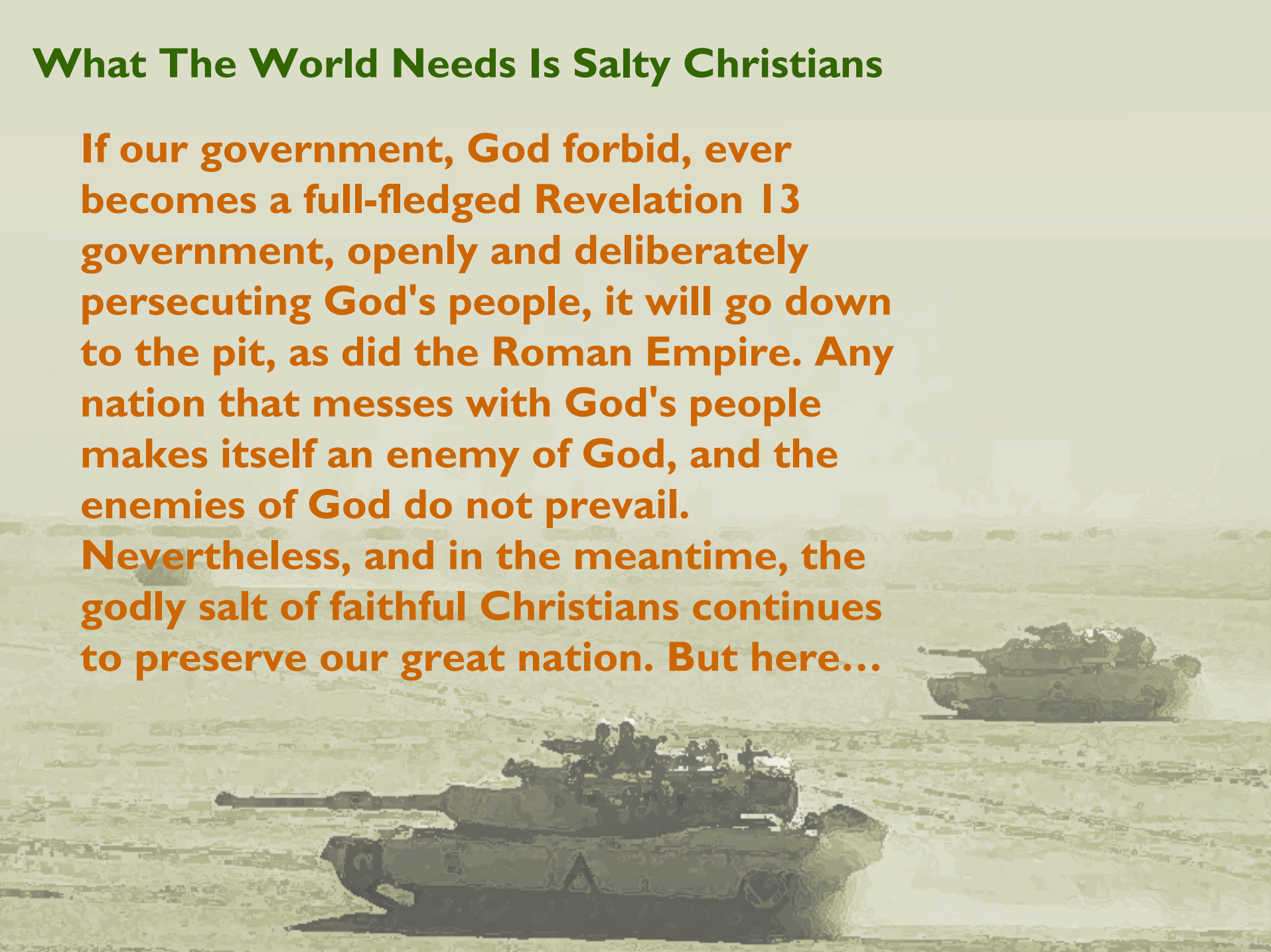
“Righteousness exalts a nation; but sin is a reproach to any people” (Proverbs 14:34). There are more New Testament Christians in America than any place else in the world, and these, I am convinced, function as the salt that continues to preserve this nation (cf. Matthew 5:13). Therefore, the righteous acts of Christians are not only important to the salvation of Christians themselves, but to the preservation of our nation as well.



What The World Needs Is Salty Christians

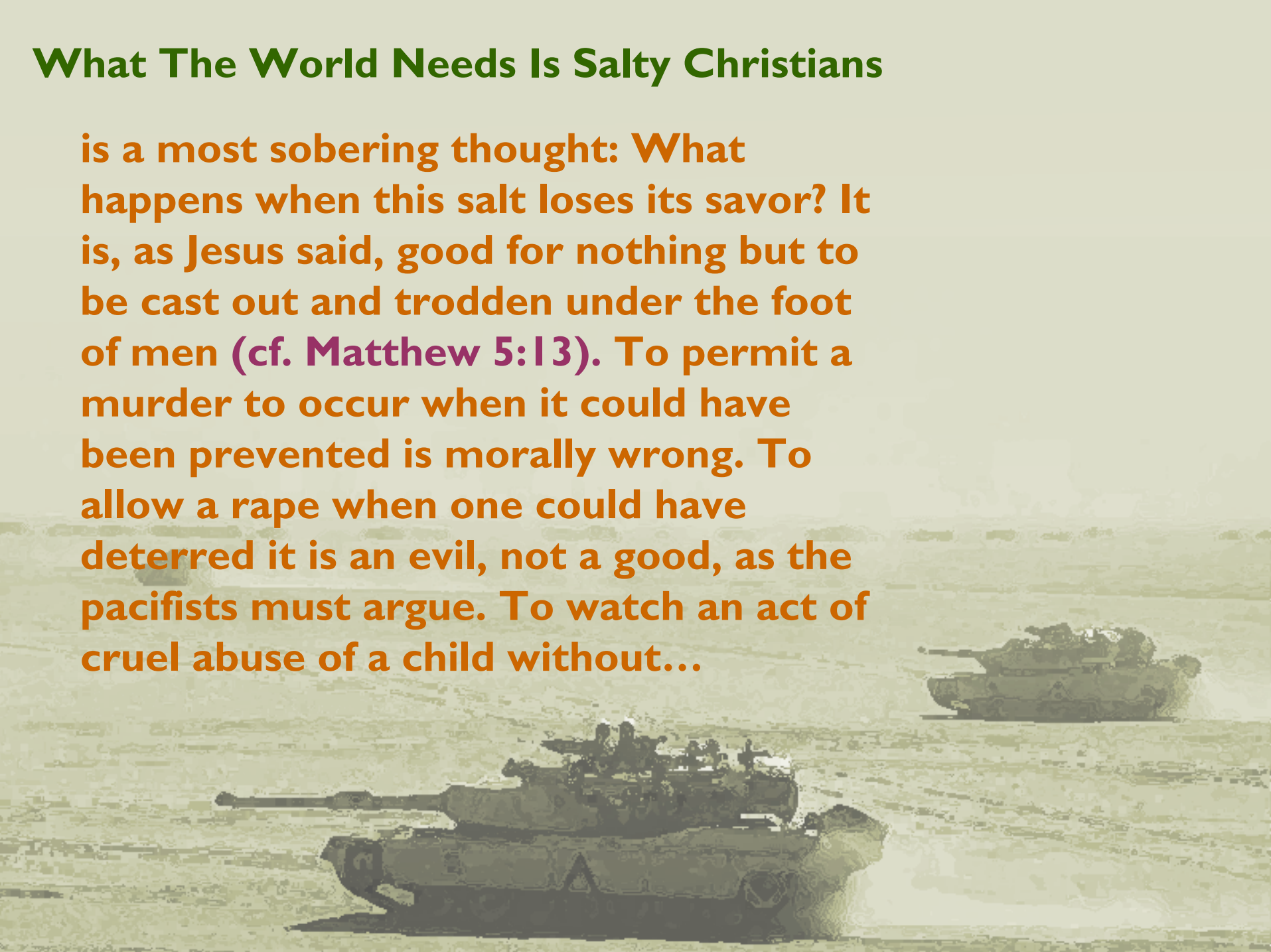
If our government, God forbid, ever becomes a full-fledged Revelation 13 government, openly and deliberately persecuting God's people, it will go down to the pit, as did the Roman Empire. Any nation that messes with God's people makes itself an enemy of God, and the enemies of God do not prevail.

Nevertheless, and in the meantime, the godly salt of faithful Christians continues to preserve our great nation. But here...



What The World Needs Is Salty Christians

is a most sobering thought: What happens when this salt loses its savor? It is, as Jesus said, good for nothing but to be cast out and trodden under the foot of men (cf. Matthew 5:13). To permit a murder to occur when it could have been prevented is morally wrong. To allow a rape when one could have deterred it is an evil, not a good, as the pacifists must argue. To watch an act of cruel abuse of a child without...



What The World Needs Is Salty Christians

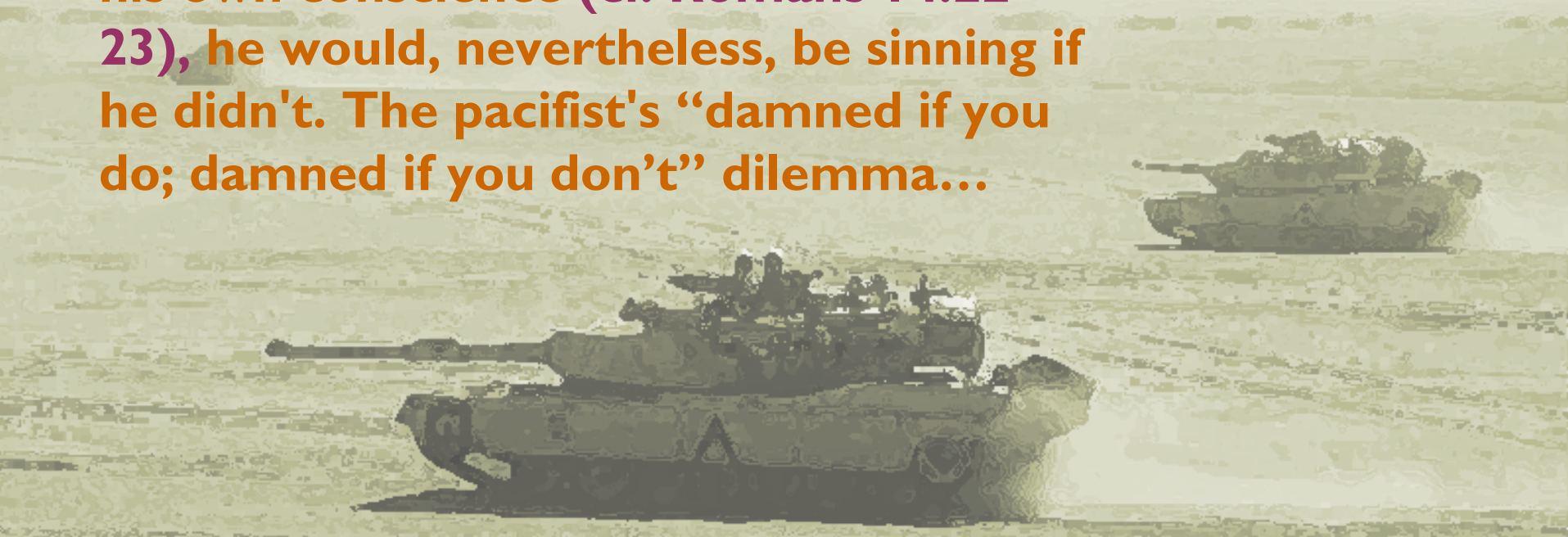
stepping in to end it is morally inexcusable. What's more, to call such intercession evil, and not good, is itself evil and does not reflect the rightly divided principles taught in the Bible. The word of God says, “Anyone, then, who knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, commits sin” (James 4:17, NRSV). In other words, not properly resisting evil is a sin of omission, which can be just as evil as a sin of commission.



What The World Needs Is Salty Christians

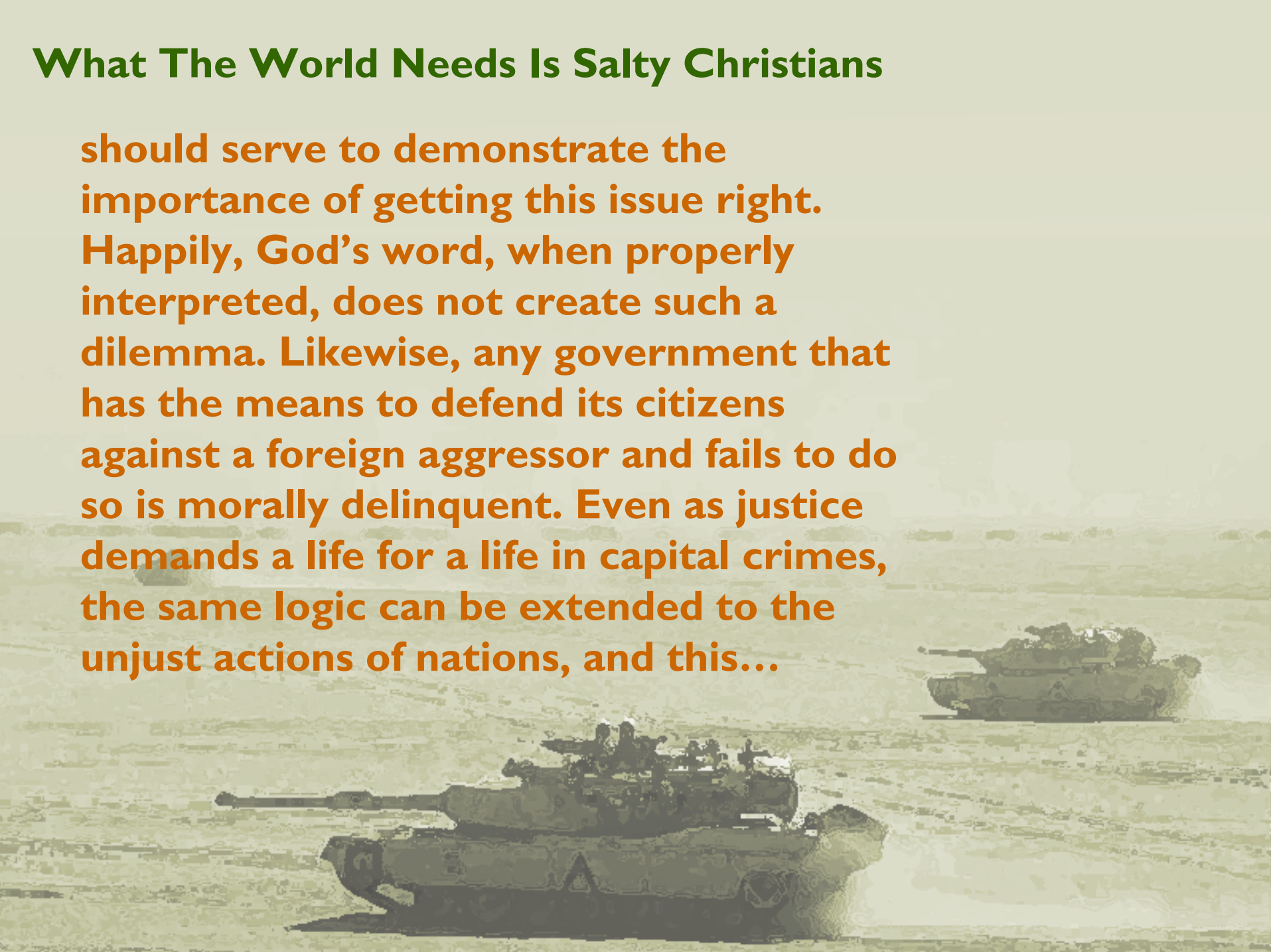
A man who will not protect his wife and children against a violent intruder—even when he believes the Bible prohibits him from doing so—fails them miserably.

Although it is true a pacifist who rightly defended his wife and children would sin by doing so, in that he would be violating his own conscience (cf. Romans 14:22-23), he would, nevertheless, be sinning if he didn't. The pacifist's “damned if you do; damned if you don’t” dilemma...



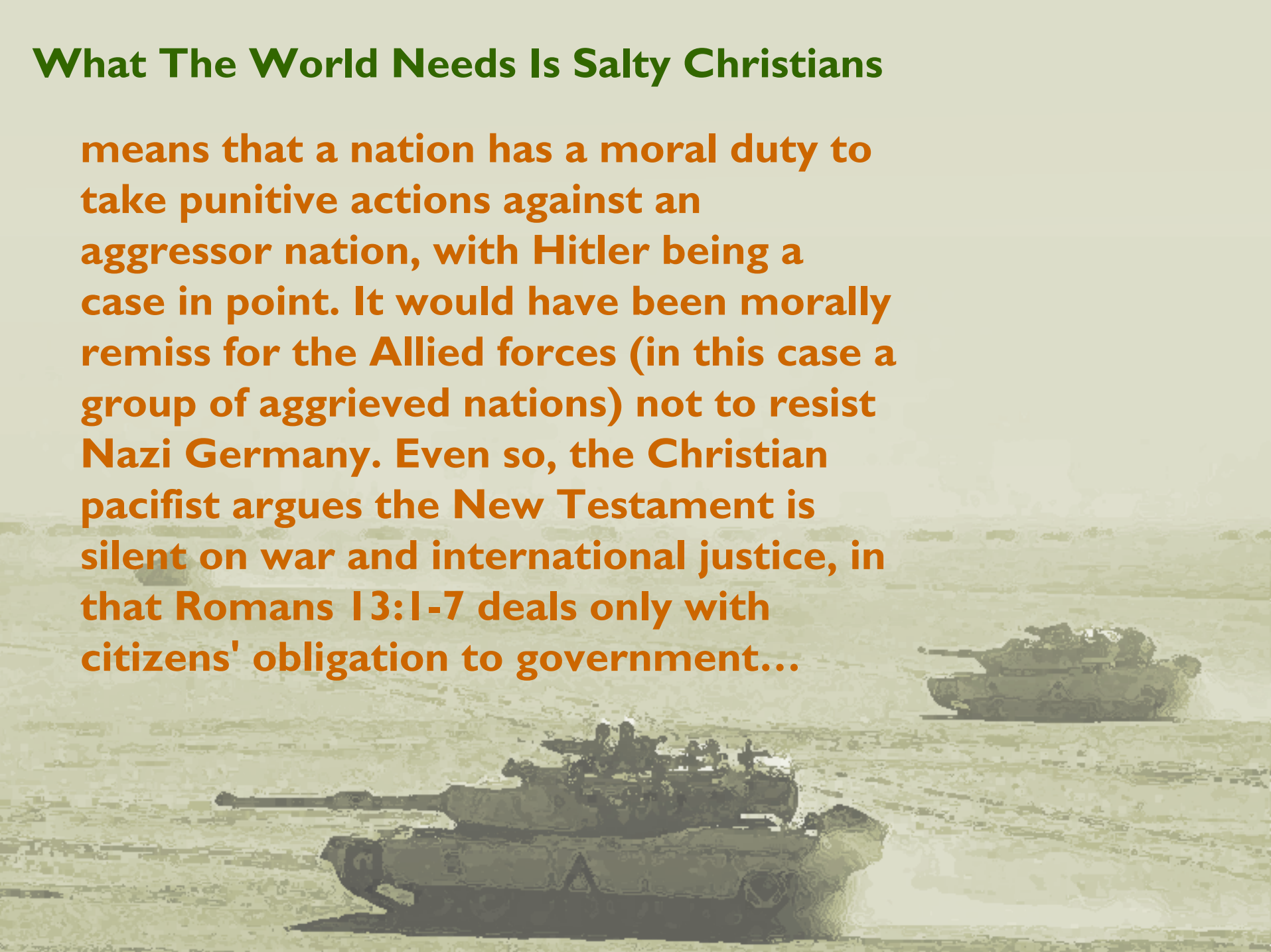
What The World Needs Is Salty Christians

should serve to demonstrate the importance of getting this issue right. Happily, God's word, when properly interpreted, does not create such a dilemma. Likewise, any government that has the means to defend its citizens against a foreign aggressor and fails to do so is morally delinquent. Even as justice demands a life for a life in capital crimes, the same logic can be extended to the unjust actions of nations, and this...



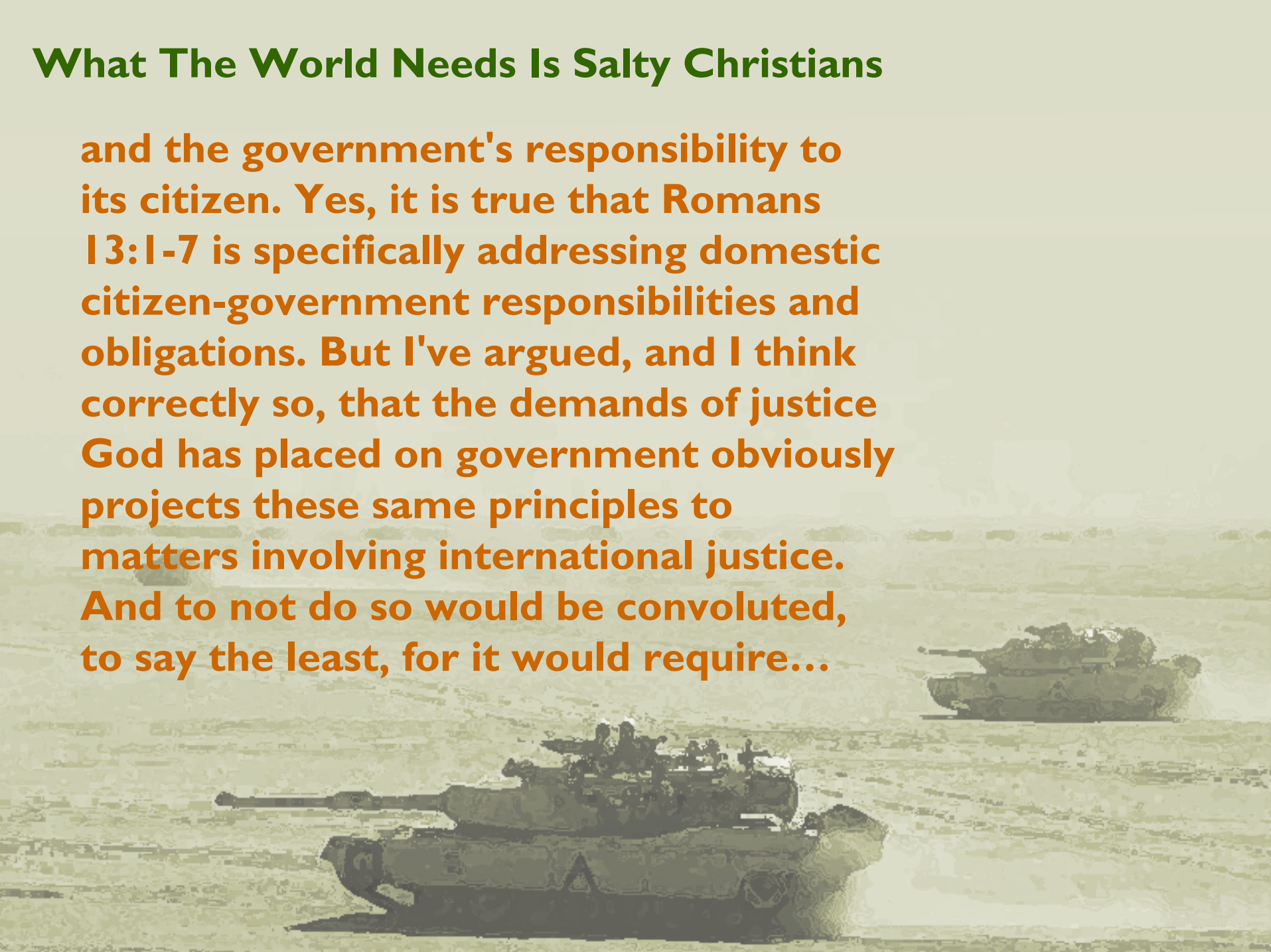
What The World Needs Is Salty Christians

means that a nation has a moral duty to take punitive actions against an aggressor nation, with Hitler being a case in point. It would have been morally remiss for the Allied forces (in this case a group of aggrieved nations) not to resist Nazi Germany. Even so, the Christian pacifist argues the New Testament is silent on war and international justice, in that Romans 13:1-7 deals only with citizens' obligation to government...



What The World Needs Is Salty Christians

and the government's responsibility to its citizen. Yes, it is true that Romans 13:1-7 is specifically addressing domestic citizen-government responsibilities and obligations. But I've argued, and I think correctly so, that the demands of justice God has placed on government obviously projects these same principles to matters involving international justice. And to not do so would be convoluted, to say the least, for it would require...



What The World Needs Is Salty Christians

a nation to serve and protect its citizens from domestic evildoers, but not from the aggression and violence of foreign tyrants.



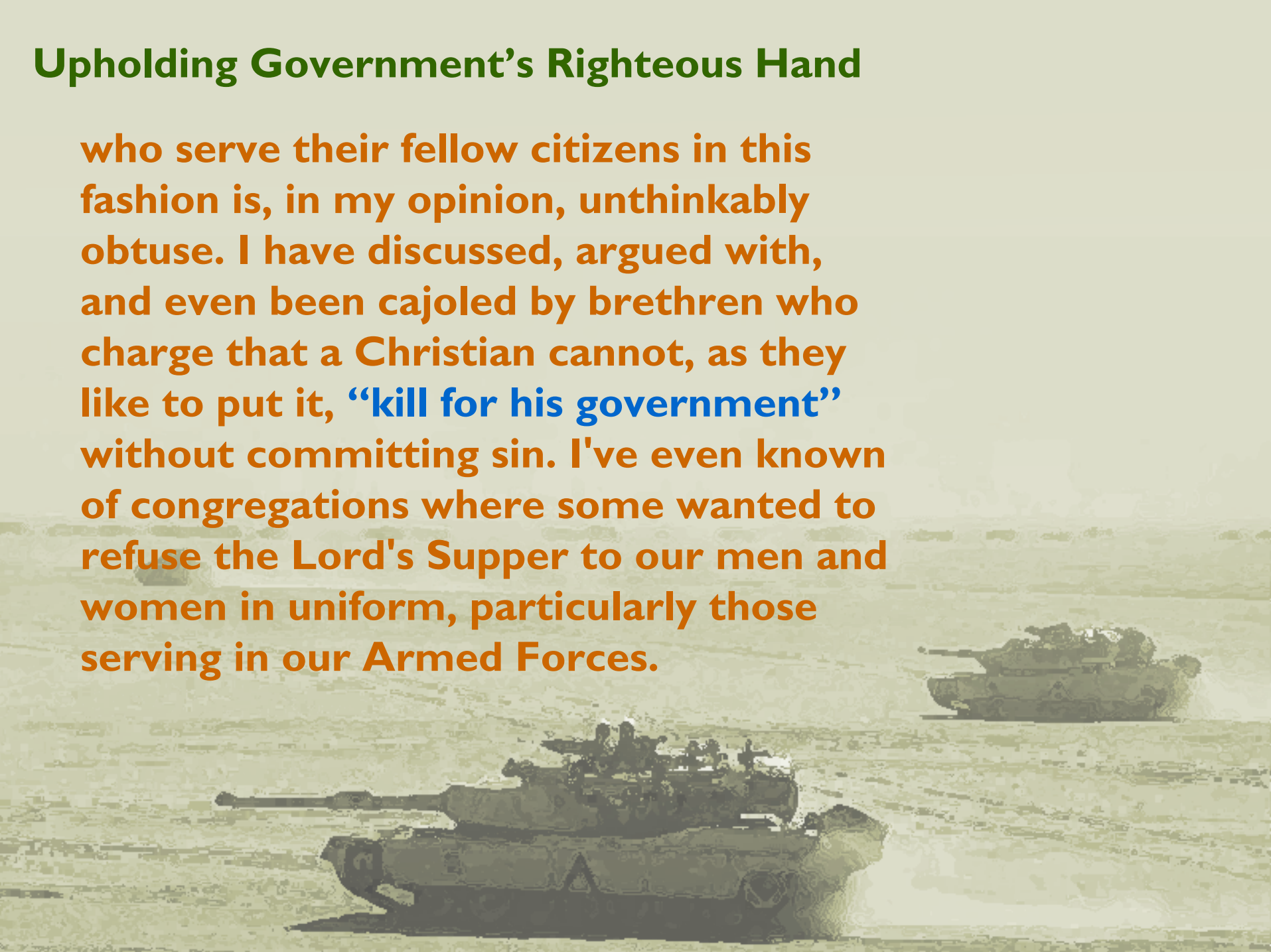
Upholding Government's Righteous Hand

So, instead of making the government's work harder by attempting to prohibit its God-given power to use deadly force, Christians should be willing to uphold the government's righteous hand as it does justice (cf. 1 Peter 2:14; Titus 3:1; Romans 13:1-7). Admittedly, and even understandably, not every Christian is suitable for military or police service. But for a New Testament Christian to look down his nose at fellow Christians...



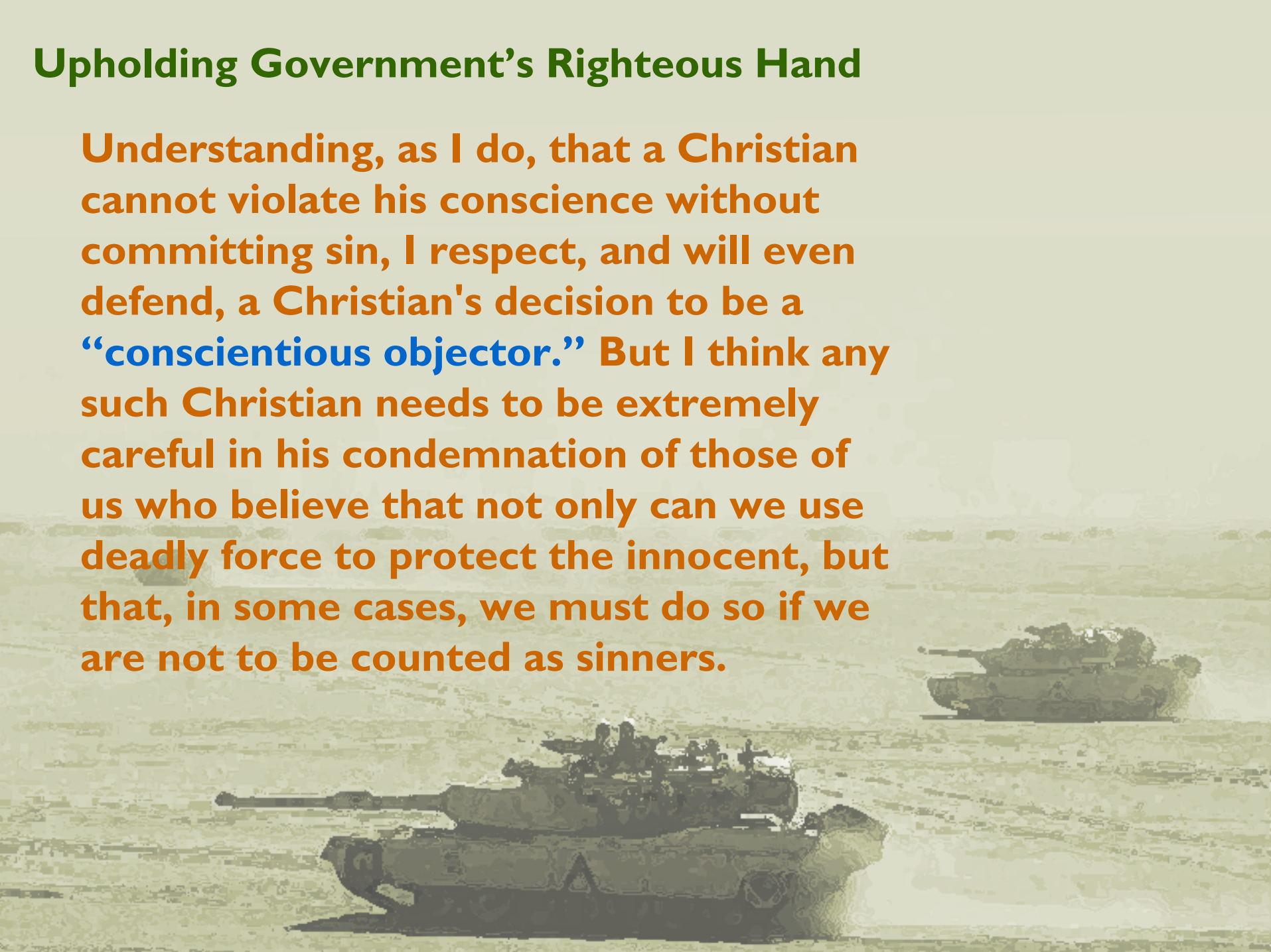
Upholding Government's Righteous Hand

who serve their fellow citizens in this fashion is, in my opinion, unthinkably obtuse. I have discussed, argued with, and even been cajoled by brethren who charge that a Christian cannot, as they like to put it, “kill for his government” without committing sin. I've even known of congregations where some wanted to refuse the Lord's Supper to our men and women in uniform, particularly those serving in our Armed Forces.



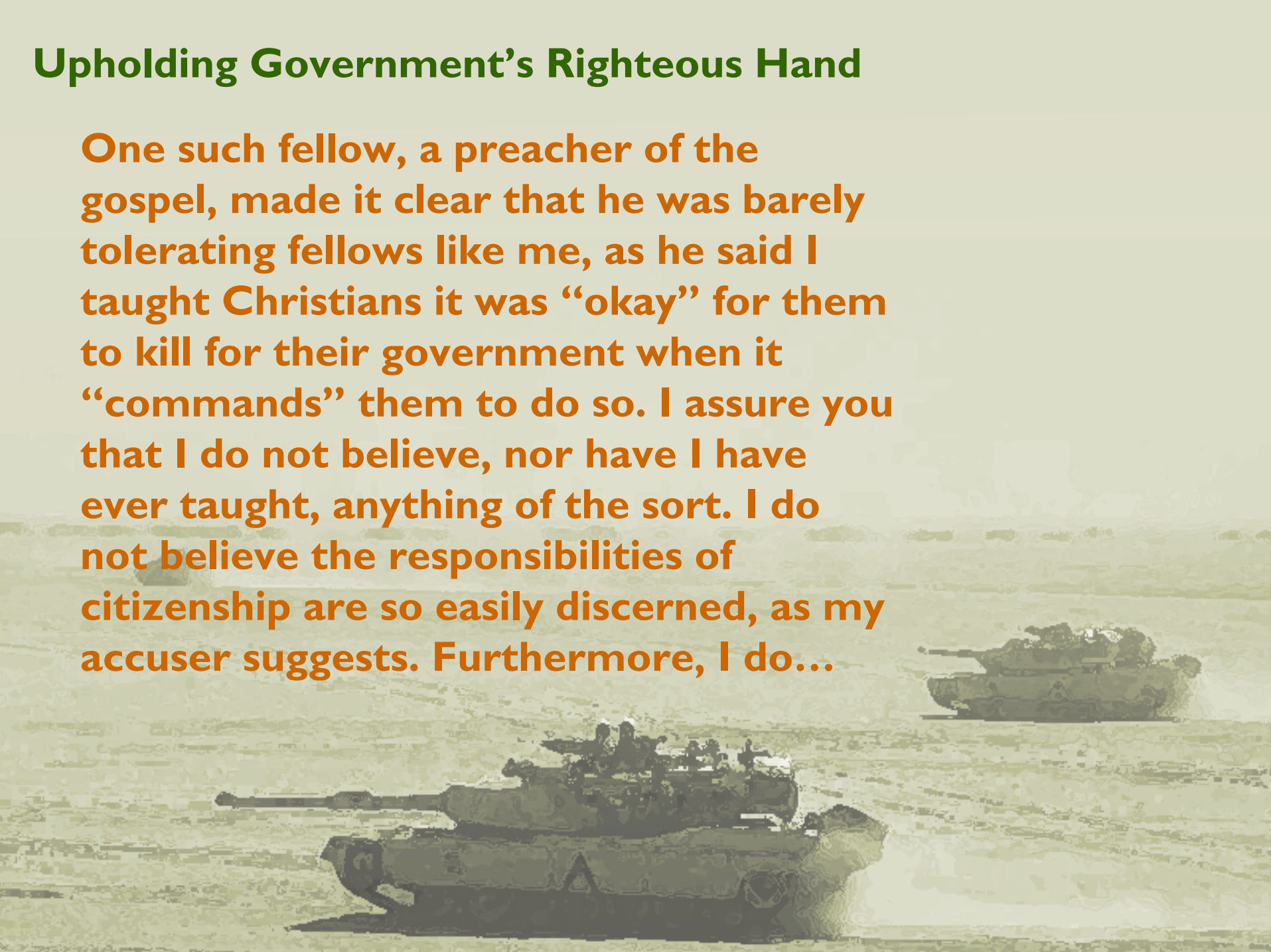
Upholding Government's Righteous Hand

Understanding, as I do, that a Christian cannot violate his conscience without committing sin, I respect, and will even defend, a Christian's decision to be a **“conscientious objector.”** But I think any such Christian needs to be extremely careful in his condemnation of those of us who believe that not only can we use deadly force to protect the innocent, but that, in some cases, we must do so if we are not to be counted as sinners.



Upholding Government's Righteous Hand

One such fellow, a preacher of the gospel, made it clear that he was barely tolerating fellows like me, as he said I taught Christians it was “okay” for them to kill for their government when it “commands” them to do so. I assure you that I do not believe, nor have I have ever taught, anything of the sort. I do not believe the responsibilities of citizenship are so easily discerned, as my accuser suggests. Furthermore, I do...



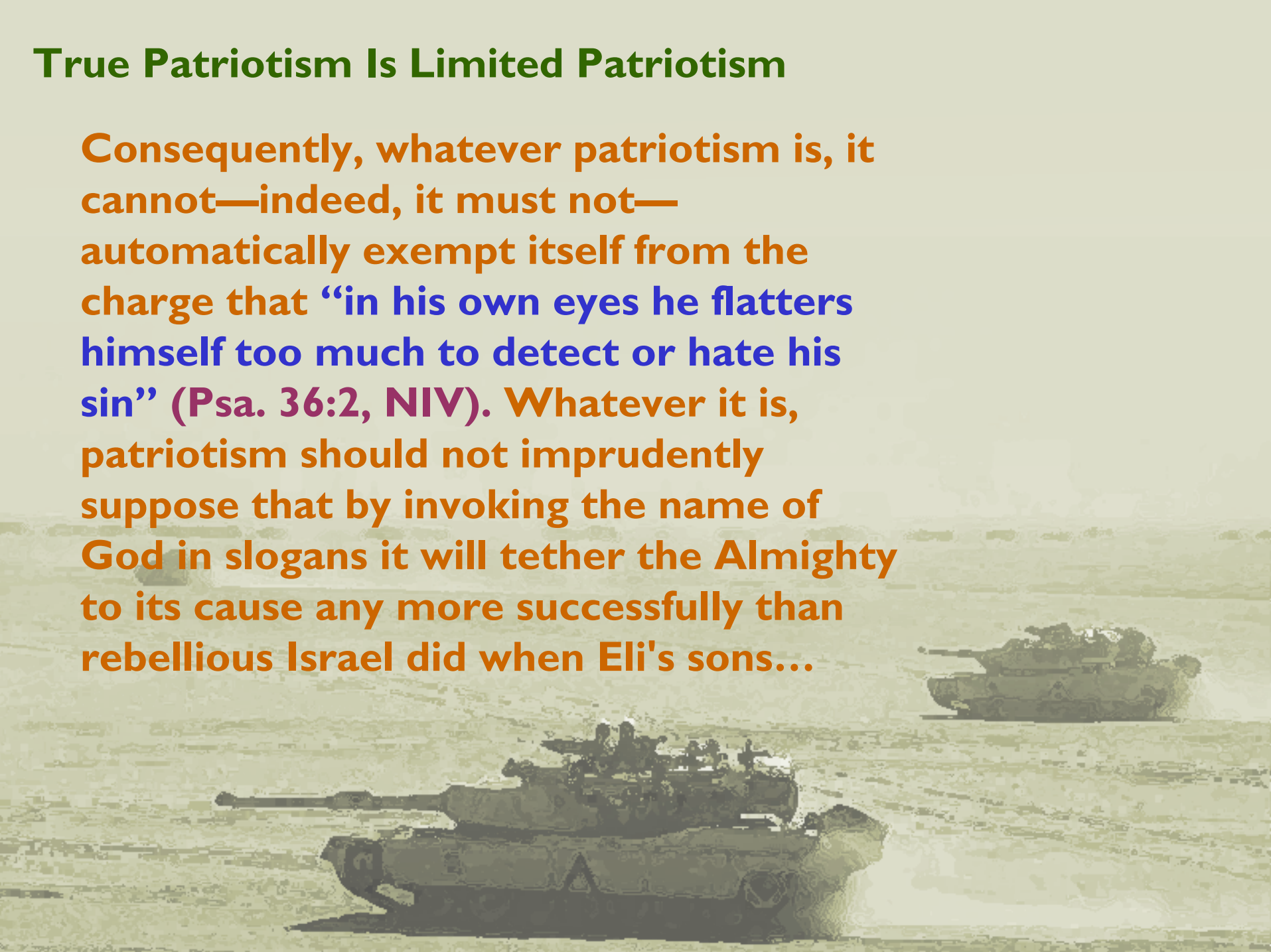
Upholding Government's Righteous Hand

not believe one's citizenship obligations should ever interfere with the Christian's duty to obey God rather than men (cf. Acts 5:29). Thus, I believe there are times when a Christian must refuse to serve his country, and that if he didn't, he would certainly be involving himself in sin. In other words, the state does not possess ultimate authority. Instead, it possesses only delegated authority (cf. John 19:11), and any government that doesn't recognize this is idolatrous.



True Patriotism Is Limited Patriotism

Consequently, whatever patriotism is, it cannot—indeed, it must not—automatically exempt itself from the charge that “in his own eyes he flatters himself too much to detect or hate his sin” (Psa. 36:2, NIV). Whatever it is, patriotism should not imprudently suppose that by invoking the name of God in slogans it will tether the Almighty to its cause any more successfully than rebellious Israel did when Eli's sons...



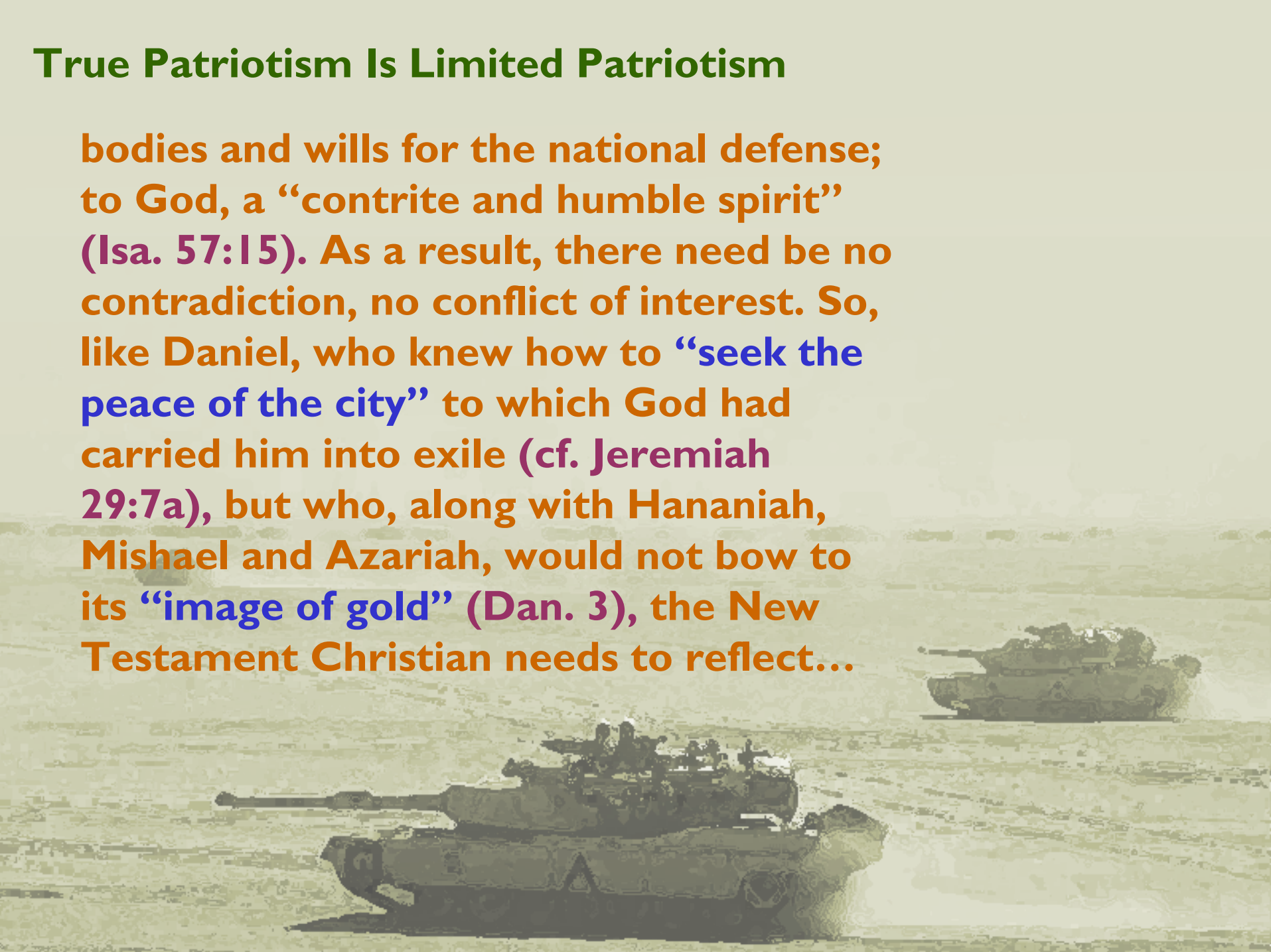
True Patriotism Is Limited Patriotism

took the ark of the covenant out of mothballs and propped it like a talisman before the armies marching against the Philistines (cf. 1 Sam. 4). True patriotism does not permit itself to be manipulated by media mantras into a pumped-up frenzy that drowns out all other voices—particularly the voice of Jesus, who said, “Render to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's.” To the state, then, obedient servants present their...



True Patriotism Is Limited Patriotism

bodies and wills for the national defense; to God, a “contrite and humble spirit” (Isa. 57:15). As a result, there need be no contradiction, no conflict of interest. So, like Daniel, who knew how to “seek the peace of the city” to which God had carried him into exile (cf. Jeremiah 29:7a), but who, along with Hananiah, Mishaël and Azariah, would not bow to its “image of gold” (Dan. 3), the New Testament Christian needs to reflect...



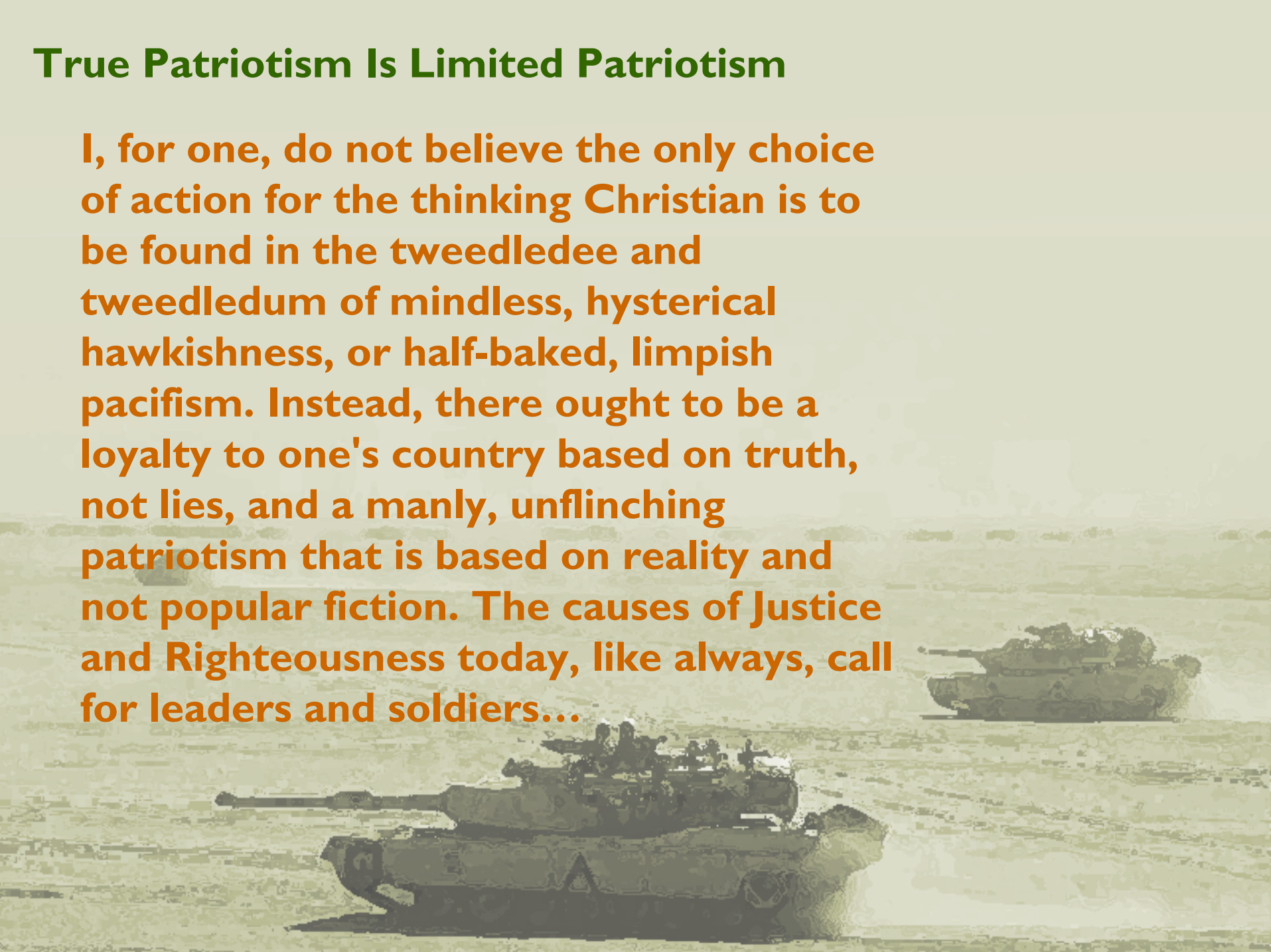
True Patriotism Is Limited Patriotism

the godly patriotism the Lord enjoins for His priesthood of spiritual pilgrims who, in every age, sojourn in Babylon while “longing for a better country” (Heb. 11:16, NIV). “Pray,” He says, “to the Lord for [your country]; for in its peace you will have peace” (Jer. 29:7b).



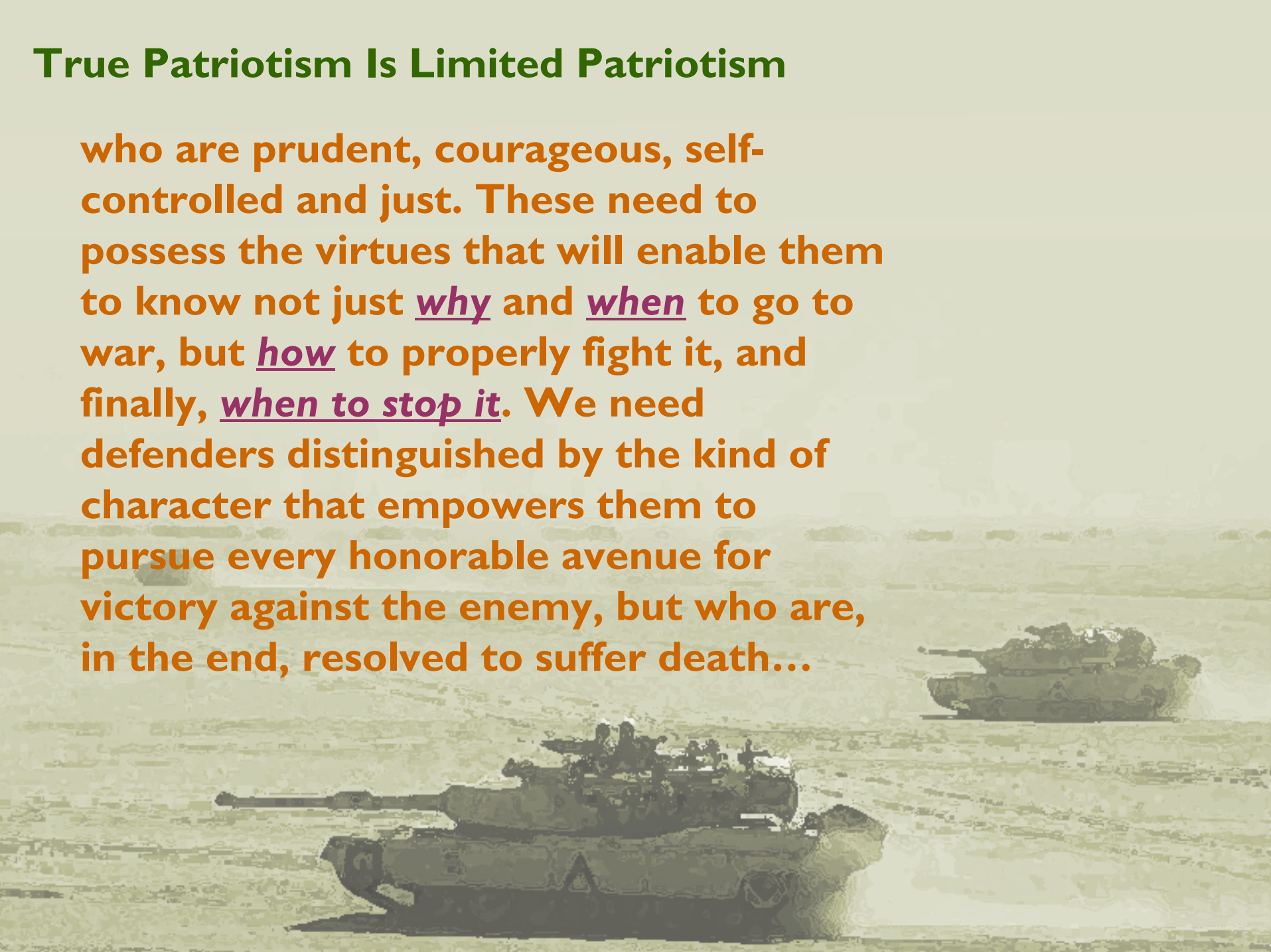
True Patriotism Is Limited Patriotism

I, for one, do not believe the only choice of action for the thinking Christian is to be found in the tweedledee and tweedledum of mindless, hysterical hawkishness, or half-baked, limpish pacifism. Instead, there ought to be a loyalty to one's country based on truth, not lies, and a manly, unflinching patriotism that is based on reality and not popular fiction. The causes of Justice and Righteousness today, like always, call for leaders and soldiers...



True Patriotism Is Limited Patriotism

who are prudent, courageous, self-controlled and just. These need to possess the virtues that will enable them to know not just why and when to go to war, but how to properly fight it, and finally, when to stop it. We need defenders distinguished by the kind of character that empowers them to pursue every honorable avenue for victory against the enemy, but who are, in the end, resolved to suffer death...



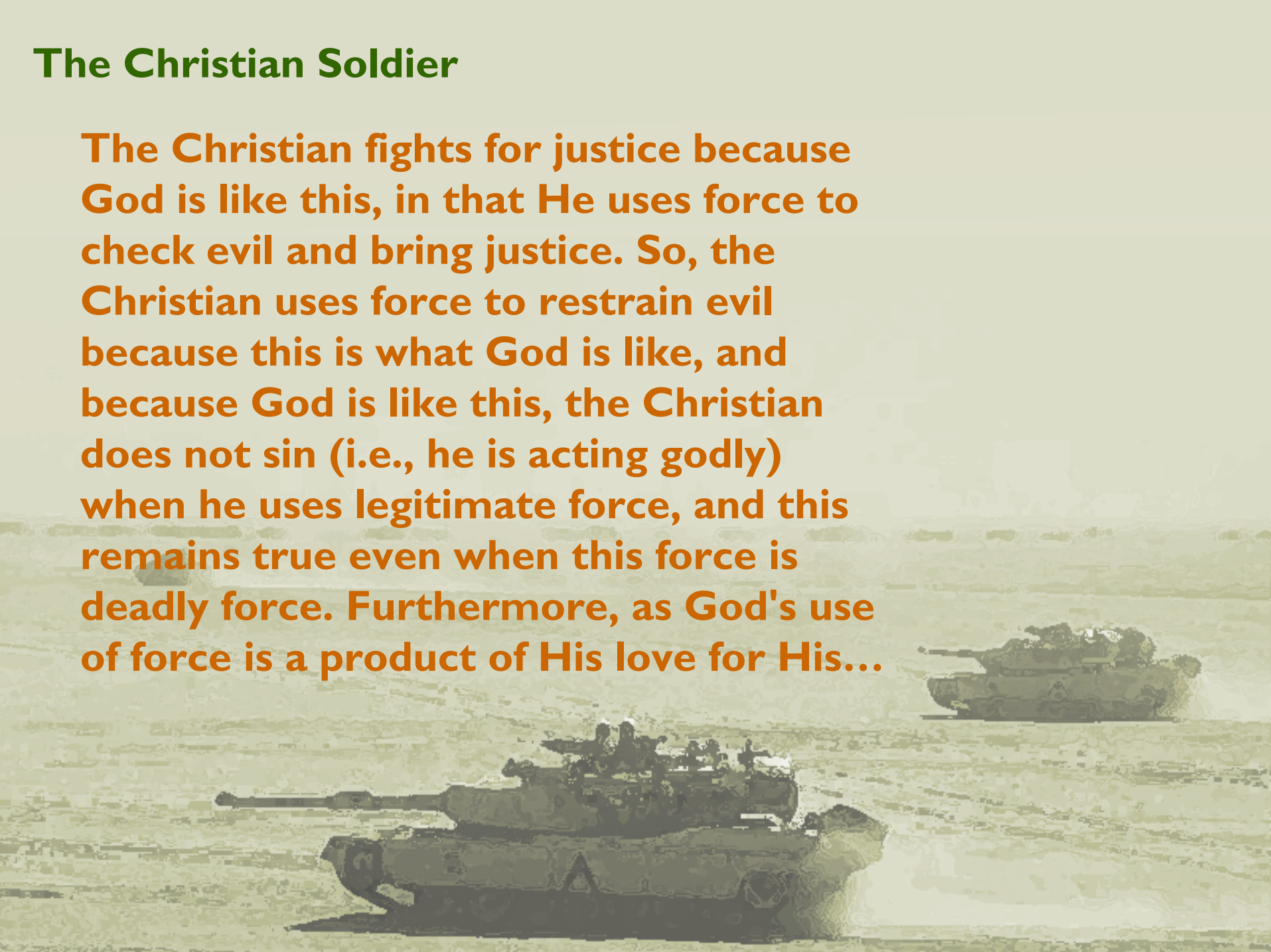
True Patriotism Is Limited Patriotism

before dishonor. Where better to find
this character and these virtues than in
the Christian?



The Christian Soldier

The Christian fights for justice because God is like this, in that He uses force to check evil and bring justice. So, the Christian uses force to restrain evil because this is what God is like, and because God is like this, the Christian does not sin (i.e., he is acting godly) when he uses legitimate force, and this remains true even when this force is deadly force. Furthermore, as God's use of force is a product of His love for His...



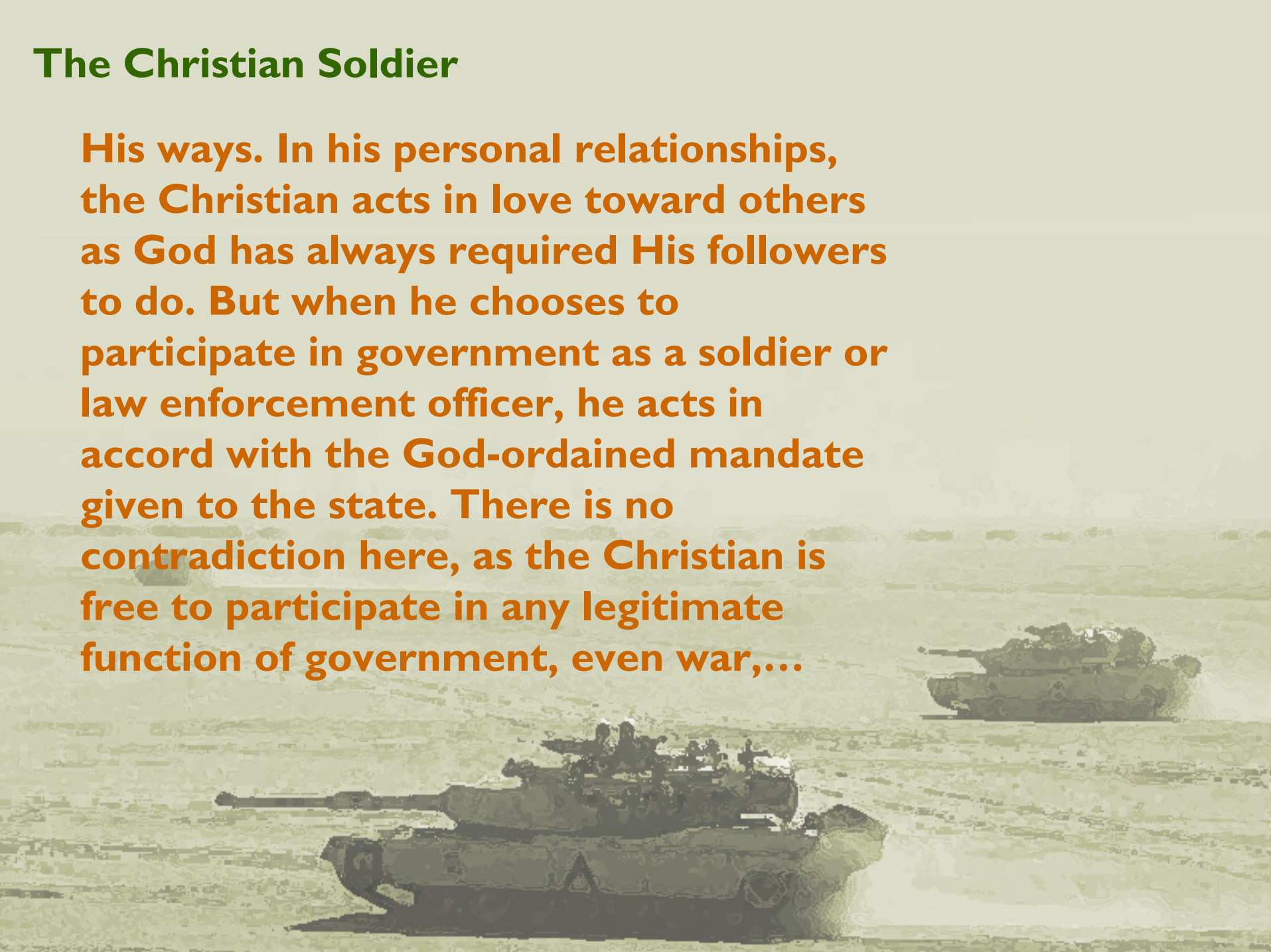
The Christian Soldier

creatures, and as it is clear that God even loves those whom He kills, the Christian, just like God, must love his enemies even when called upon to kill them. Any acts that are not God-like are morally suspect for the Christian soldier. The acts of a soldier can never be one of personal vengeance (cf. Matthew 5:38-41). Therefore, a just war is something Christians participate in out of loving obedience to God and in conformity to...



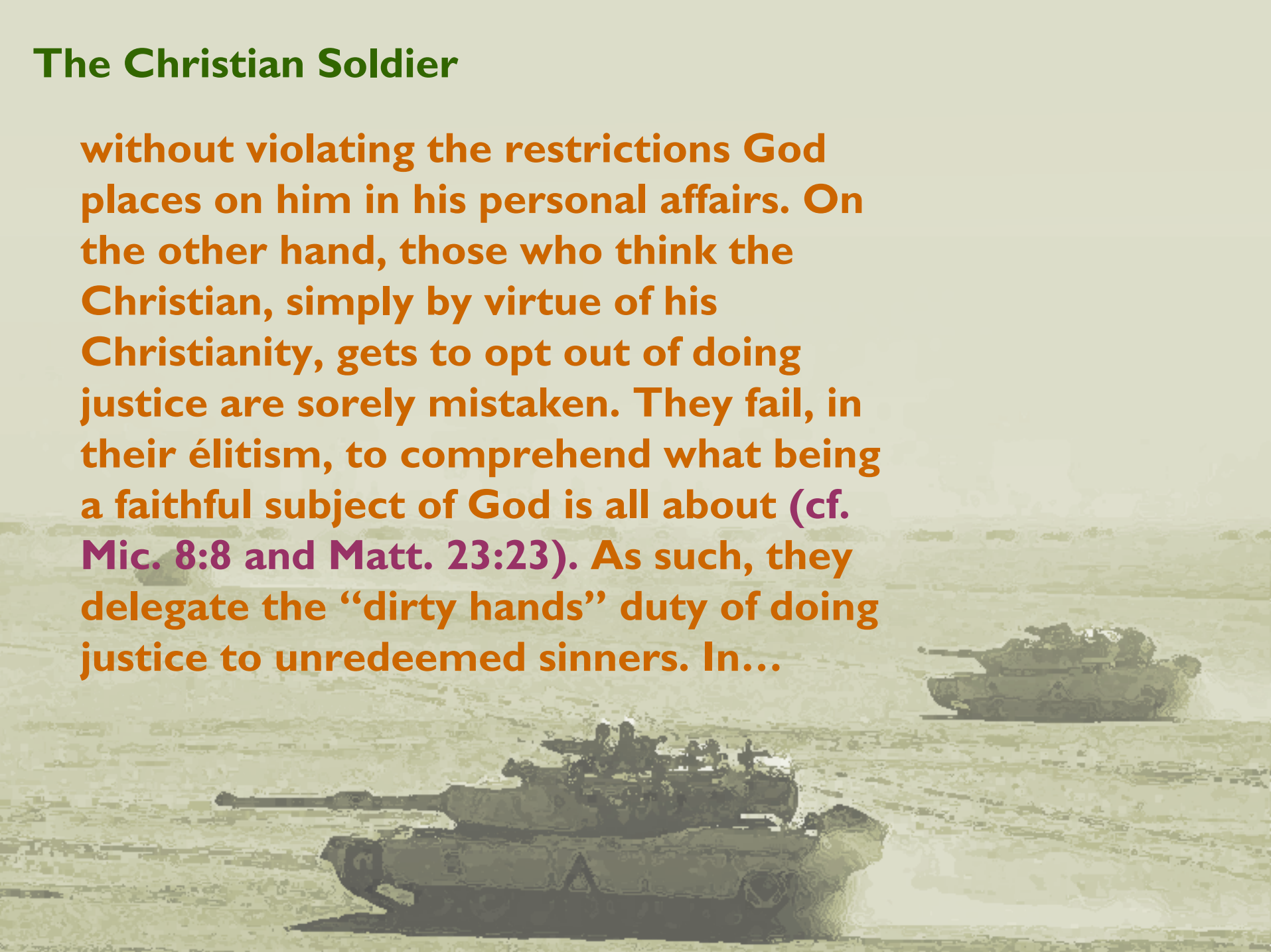
The Christian Soldier

His ways. In his personal relationships, the Christian acts in love toward others as God has always required His followers to do. But when he chooses to participate in government as a soldier or law enforcement officer, he acts in accord with the God-ordained mandate given to the state. There is no contradiction here, as the Christian is free to participate in any legitimate function of government, even war,...



The Christian Soldier

without violating the restrictions God places on him in his personal affairs. On the other hand, those who think the Christian, simply by virtue of his Christianity, gets to opt out of doing justice are sorely mistaken. They fail, in their élitism, to comprehend what being a faithful subject of God is all about (cf. Mic. 8:8 and Matt. 23:23). As such, they delegate the “dirty hands” duty of doing justice to unredeemed sinners. In...



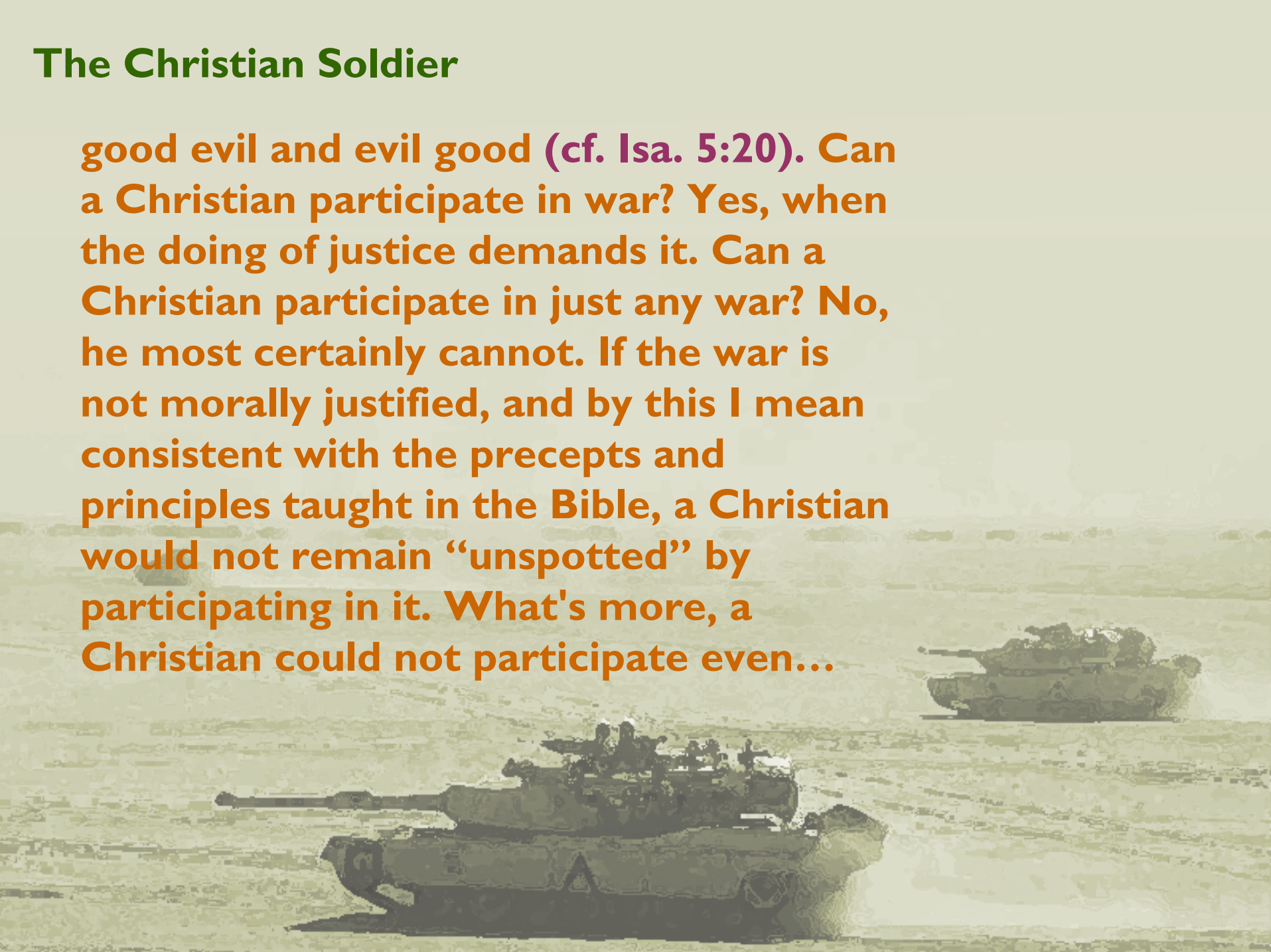
The Christian Soldier

doing so, they fail to fully understand the nature of God (a nature that demands justice) and denigrate the very character of those people God has appointed over the administration of justice—people the apostle Paul called “ministers to thee for good.” How unfortunate it is that many of God's people, past and present, because they have failed to rightly divide God's word (cf. 2 Tim. 2:15), have majored in the theology of calling...



The Christian Soldier

good evil and evil good (cf. Isa. 5:20). Can a Christian participate in war? Yes, when the doing of justice demands it. Can a Christian participate in just any war? No, he most certainly cannot. If the war is not morally justified, and by this I mean consistent with the precepts and principles taught in the Bible, a Christian would not remain “unspotted” by participating in it. What's more, a Christian could not participate even...



The Christian Soldier

in a just war if the means being used to fight it are unjust. Consequently, the Christian must always sit in judgment upon the activities of his government, supporting it when it is right, but refusing to do so when it is wrong. This, I believe is part of what being a true Christian is all about.



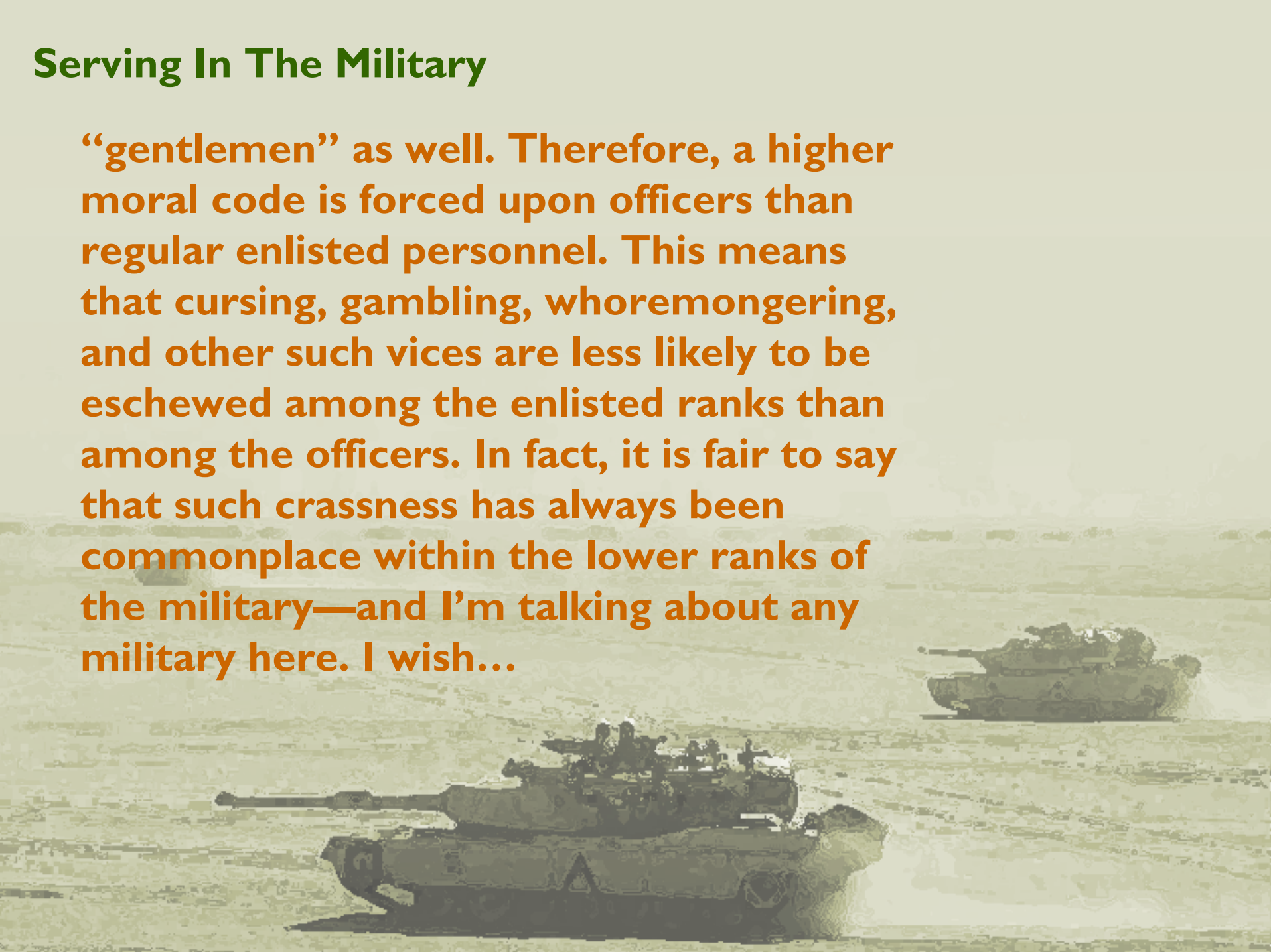
Serving In The Military

Does this mean I heartily, and without reservations, recommend military service? No, I don't. Serving in the military is dangerous business, and I'm not just referring to the obvious physical dangers of the job. More important than the physical dangers are the moral and spiritual dangers confronting the warrior. Soldiering isn't easy, particularly for the enlisted man. By an act of Congress, commissioned officers are declared not just officers, but...



Serving In The Military

“gentlemen” as well. Therefore, a higher moral code is forced upon officers than regular enlisted personnel. This means that cursing, gambling, whoremongering, and other such vices are less likely to be eschewed among the enlisted ranks than among the officers. In fact, it is fair to say that such crassness has always been commonplace within the lower ranks of the military—and I’m talking about any military here. I wish...



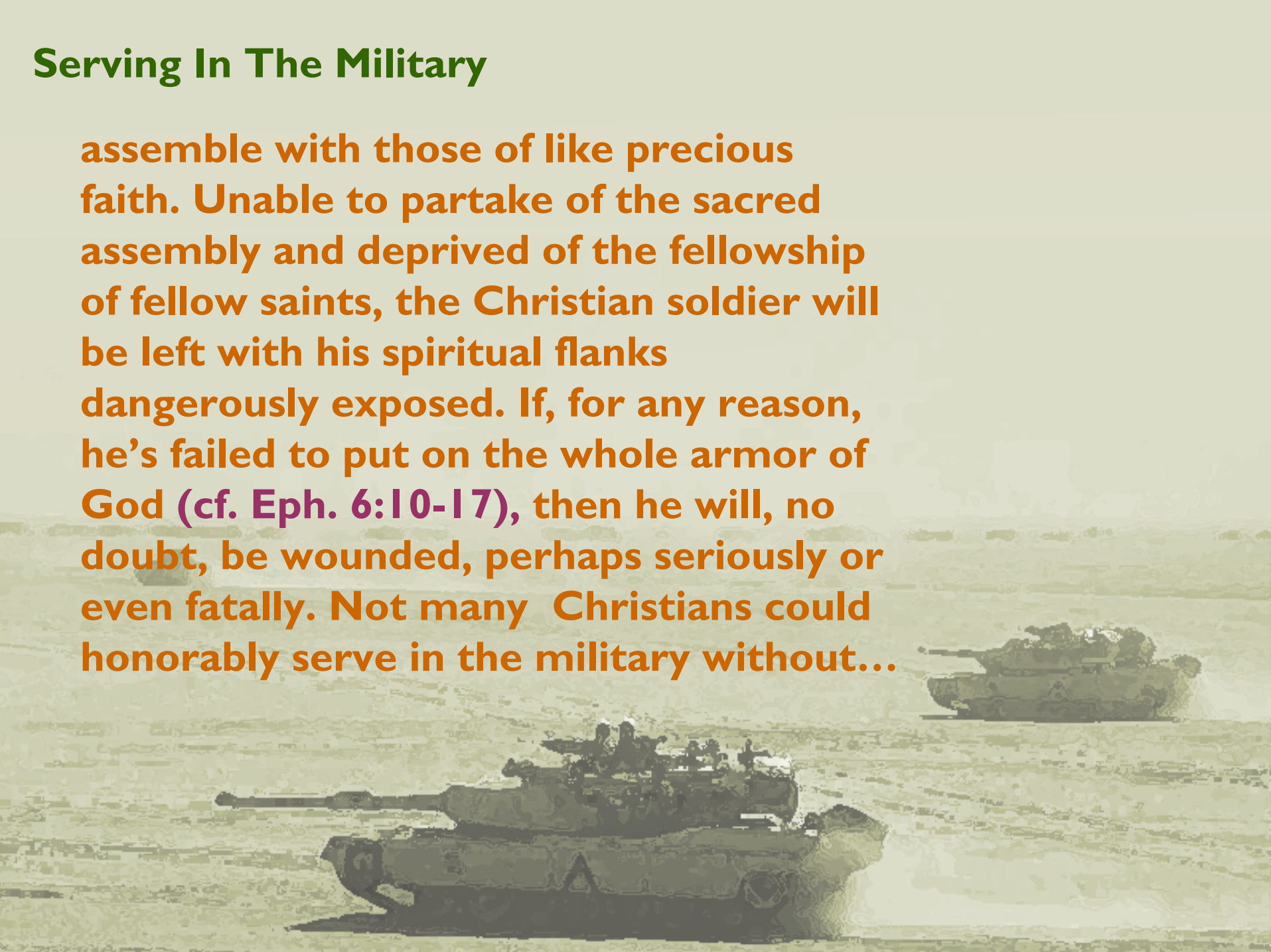
Serving In The Military

it were not so, but it is. Consequently, the man who enlists in the military will have more opportunities to stray from the straight and narrow than his civilian cohort. Indeed, much peer pressure will be brought to bear on the Christian who refuses to go along. As a result, he will be branded a “mama’s boy,” “a girly boy,” or even a “queer.” Additionally, the Christian will at times—and sometimes for long periods of time—be unable to...



Serving In The Military

assemble with those of like precious faith. Unable to partake of the sacred assembly and deprived of the fellowship of fellow saints, the Christian soldier will be left with his spiritual flanks dangerously exposed. If, for any reason, he's failed to put on the whole armor of God (cf. Eph. 6:10-17), then he will, no doubt, be wounded, perhaps seriously or even fatally. Not many Christians could honorably serve in the military without...



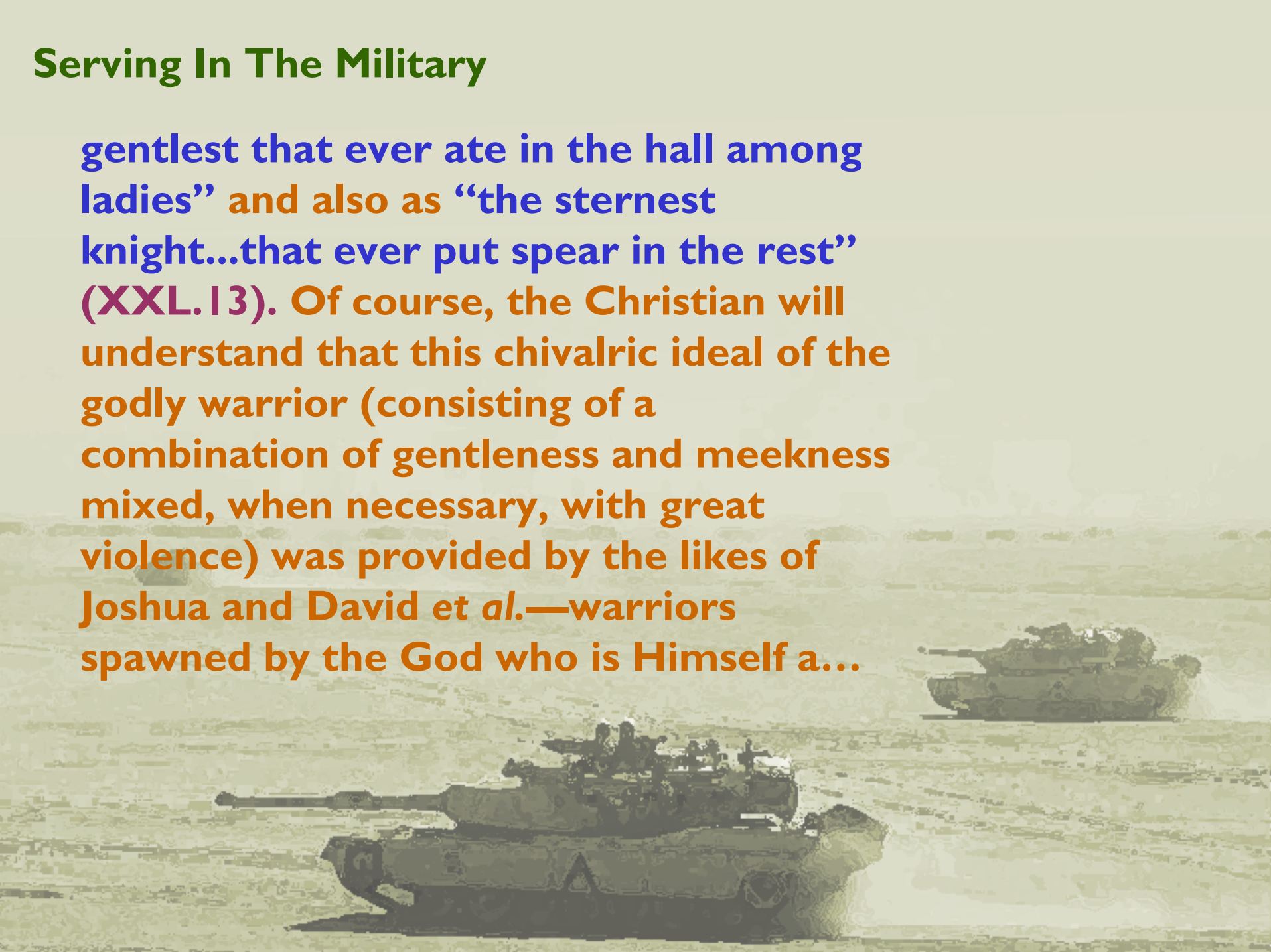
Serving In The Military

compromising at least some of their convictions. Now, I'm not saying it can't be done, mind you; only that it would be extremely difficult for the average Christian. But after all, the true warrior, whether enlisted man or officer, is anything but average. The fictional model for such a person is the knight of the Middle Ages, and in Malory's *The Death of Arthur*, the knight Sir Lancelot is pictured as “the meekest man and the...



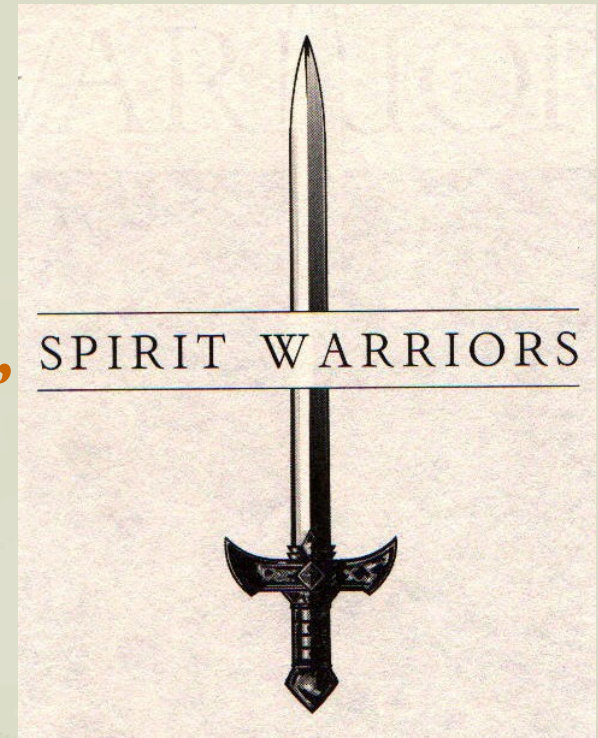
Serving In The Military

gentlest that ever ate in the hall among ladies” and also as “the sternest knight...that ever put spear in the rest” (XXL.13). Of course, the Christian will understand that this chivalric ideal of the godly warrior (consisting of a combination of gentleness and meekness mixed, when necessary, with great violence) was provided by the likes of Joshua and David *et al.*—warriors spawned by the God who is Himself a...



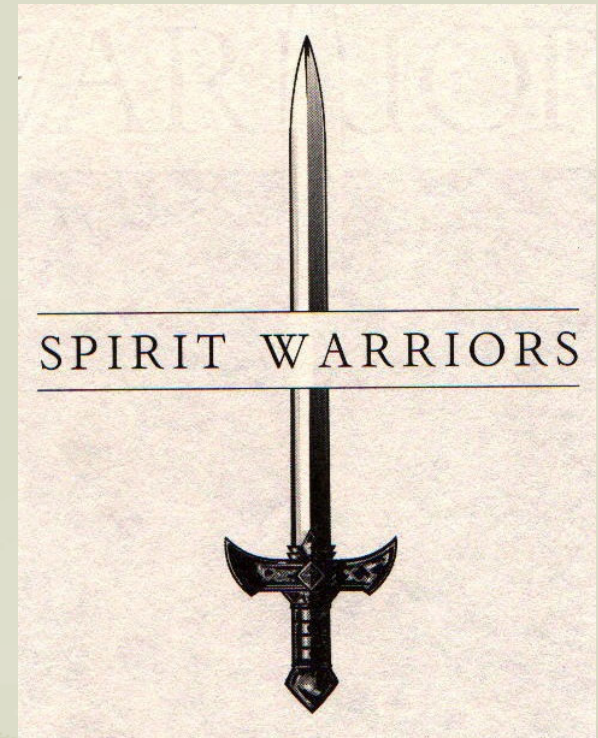
Serving In The Military

“Man of War” or “Warrior” (see various translations of Ex. 15:3). **Christianity, like the Judaism before it, is not for wimps. Whether involved in carnal or spiritual warfare, God’s warriors, genuine Spirit warriors, are called upon to “Be on the alert, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong” (1 Cor. 16:13, NASB). This kind of expected behavior places one under a “double demand,” as C.S. ...**



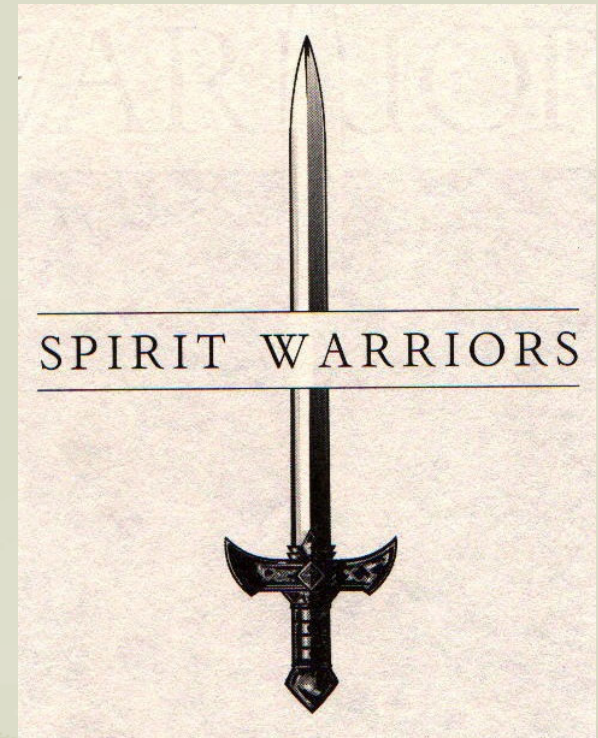
Serving In The Military

Lewis referred to it, for knightly Sir Lancelot represented not an ideal mean between meekness and violence, but the highest degree of both at the same time. When striving faithfully to serve God and country, this is exactly what Christian soldiers do. He knows that the greatest evil in war is not death, nor is it even killing. Instead, the greatest evil is killing...



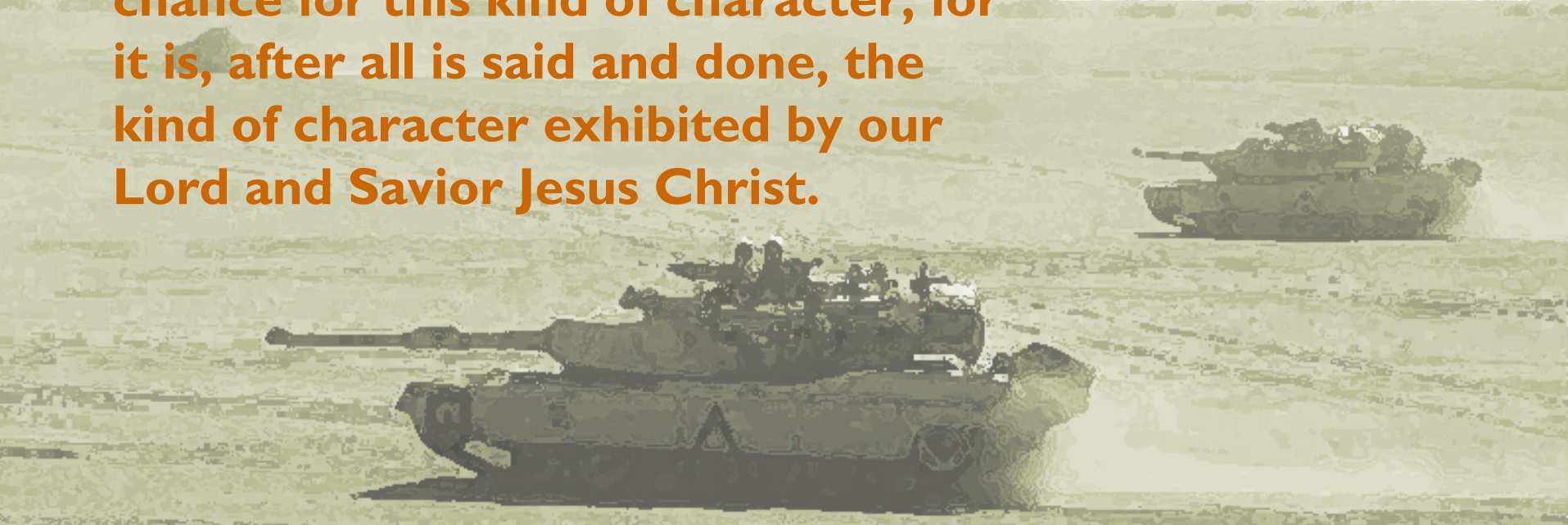
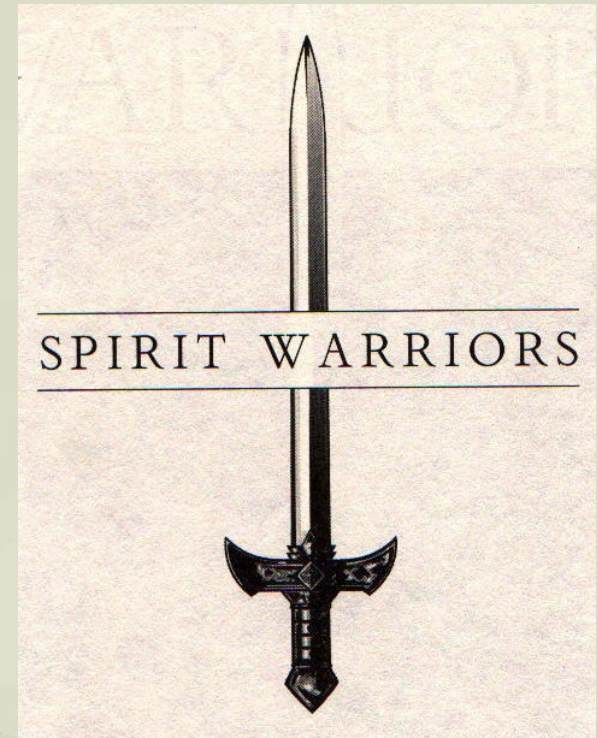
Serving In The Military

unjustly. Consequently, just wars require just people to wage them. The virtues of wisdom, justice, courage, and self-control must guide the Christian in his decision as to when he can make his country's war his war. To “serve and protect” the innocent is the primary motive for the Christian's decision to participate in war. In doing so, he must realize that the chivalrous character, which requires one to be...



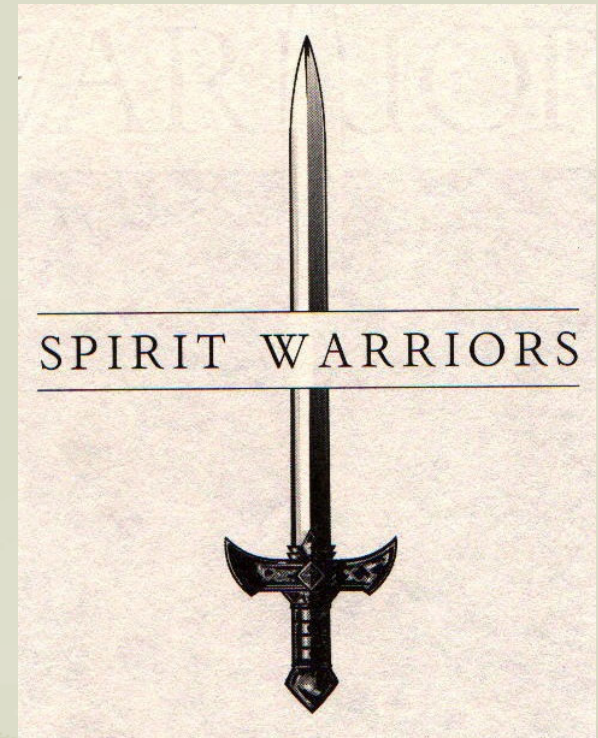
Serving In The Military

fierce to the *n*th degree and meek to the *n*th degree, must always be emulated. However, such fierceness and meekness do not grow together naturally, and to acquire such a character is no easy matter. Only in the Christian do we find the best chance for this kind of character, for it is, after all is said and done, the kind of character exhibited by our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

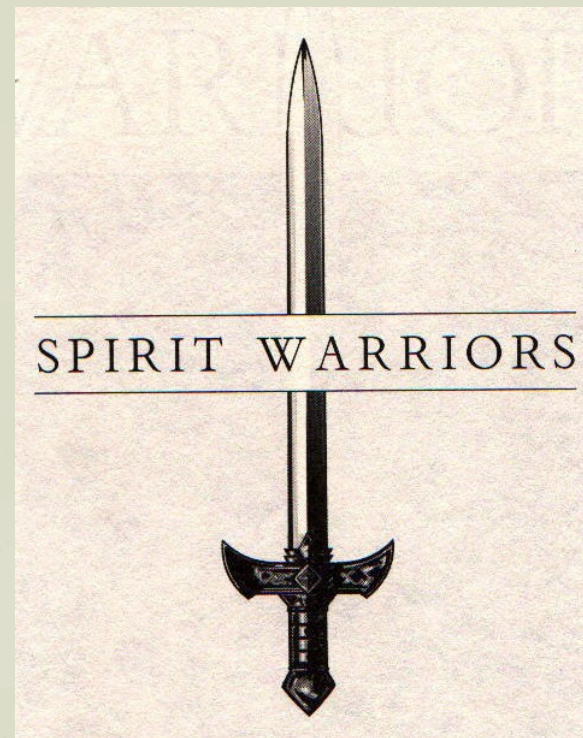


Serving In The Military

Consequently, the chivalrous character is not a work of nature, but a work of art. Therefore, if this kind of character is not espoused by the church and cultivated by the military, it will likely not be acquired at all, and if there are no chivalrous soldiers, then no war—however just its cause—will be fought justly.



May God richly bless all chivalrous soldiers as they seek to faithfully fulfill both aspects of this “double demand,” exhibiting at the same time, a fierceness and meekness best found in those who have, by means of God’s magnificent grace, cultivated the wisdom of serpents and the harmlessness of doves (cf. Matt. 10:16).





**MOMENTS EARLIER,
HE'D TRIED TO KILL...**

» Injured Iraqi soldier—shot during an attempted ambush of the 3rd Battalion, Fifth Regiment convoy—gets a lift from Marine Lance Cpl. Marcco Ware

JOHN MAKELY [THE SUN/AP]

“Run to and fro through the streets of Jerusalem, look and take note! Search her squares to see if you can find a man, one who does justice and seeks truth, that I may pardon her. Though they say, ‘As the Lord lives,’ yet they swear falsely” (Jeremiah 5:1-2, ESV).

