

Whether Soldiers, Too, Can Be Saved

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To the Worshipful and Honorable Assa von Kram, Knight, my gracious lord and friend, Martin Luther.

Grace and peace in Christ, worshipful and honorable dear sir and friend. When you were recently at Wittenberg at the time of the Elector's entry, we talked of the conditions of the soldiers, and in the course of the conversation many points were raised touching matters of conscience. Thereupon you and others asked me to publish a written opinion on this subject, because there are many who are offended by this occupation. Some of them have doubts, others give themselves up so completely for lost that they inquire no longer about God, and cast soul and conscience to the winds. I myself have heard some of these fellows say that if they were to remember these things they could never go to war; as though war were such a great thing that we are not to think about God and the soul when war is afoot; and yet when we are in danger of death, that is the very time when we ought most to be mindful of God and the soul.

In order, then, that our best advice may be given to these weak and timid and doubting consciences, and that the heedless may receive better instruction, I complied with your request and promised this book. For if a man goes into battle with a good and well-instructed conscience, he fights well, since a good conscience never fails to make great courage and a bold heart; but when the heart is bold and the spirit confident, the fist is all the stronger, horse and man are brisker, everything turns out better, and all the chances better favor the victory which God then gives. On the other hand, if the conscience is timid and uncertain, then the heart cannot be right bold. It is impossible for a bad conscience not to make men cowardly and fearful, as Moses says to his Jews, "If you are disobedient, God will give you a fearful heart, so that when you go out one way against your enemies, you shall be scattered seven ways, and have no good fortune." Then horse and man are lazy and unprepared, and lack vigor for the attack, and at last are defeated. As for the rude and heedless consciences in the company, — those who are called daredevils and foolhardy fellows, — with them everything goes at haphazard, whether they win or lose. For as it turns out for those who have good or bad consciences, so it turns out for these rude beasts, too, because they are in the army. Victory is not given on their account, for they are only the shells and not the true kernel of the army.

Accordingly, I now send you this opinion of mine, given according to the power that God has granted me, so that you and others who would like to go to war in such a way as not to lose God's favor and eternal life, may know how to arm and how to guide yourselves. God's grace be with you. Amen.

THAT SOLDIERS, TOO, CAN BE SAVED

In the first place, a distinction must be made between an occupation and the man who is in it, between a work and the doer of it. An occupation or a work can be good and right in itself and yet be bad and wrong if the man in the occupation, or the doer of the work is not good and right, or does not do his duty rightly. The office of a judge is a precious and godly office, whether it be that of Mundrichter or that of Faustrichter, whom we call executioner. But when the office is assumed by one to whom it has not been committed or by one who, though it has been committed to him, discharges its duties with a view to securing money or favor, then it is no longer right or good. The married state, also, is precious and godly, but there is many a rascal and knave in it. It is just the

same way with the occupation or work of the soldier; in itself it is right and godly, but we must see to it that the persons who are in the occupation and who do the work are the right kind of persons, godly and upright. This we shall hear.

In the second place, I would have it understood that I am not speaking, this time, about the righteousness that makes men good in the sight of God. For the only thing that can do that is faith in Jesus Christ, granted and given us by the grace of God alone, without any works or merits of our own, as I have written and taught so often and so much in other places; but I am speaking here about external righteousness which is to be sought in offices and works. In other words, to put it plainly, I am dealing here with such questions as these, — whether the Christian faith, by which we are accounted righteous before God can tolerate, alongside it, that I be a soldier, go to war and slay and stab, rob and burn, as one does to enemies, by military law, in times of war; whether this work is sin or wrong, about which one should have scruples before God; or whether a Christian must only do good and love, and kill no one, nor do anyone any harm. I say that this office or work, even though it were godly and right, can nevertheless become bad and wrong, if the person engaged in it is wrong and bad.

In the third place, it is not my intention to explain here at length how the occupation and work of a soldier is in itself right and godly, because I have written quite enough about that in the book *On Temporal Government*. For I might boast here that, since the time of the Apostles, the temporal sword and temporal government have never been so clearly described or so highly praised as by me. This even my enemies must admit, but the reward and honorable thanks that I have earned by it are to have my doctrine called seditious, and condemned as resistance to rulers. God be praised for that! For the very fact that the sword has been instituted of God to punish the evil and protect the good and preserve peace, (Romans 13:1, 1 Peter 3:1) is proof, powerful and sufficient, that fighting and slaying and the other things that war-times and martial law bring with them, have been instituted by God. What else is war than the punishment of wrong and evil? Why does anyone go to war, except because he desires peace and obedience?

Although slaying and robbing do not seem to be a work of love, and therefore a simple man thinks it not a Christian thing to do, yet in truth even this is a work of love. By way of illustration, a good physician, when a disease is so bad and so great that he has to cut off a hand, foot, ear, eye, or let it decay, does so, in order to save the body. Looked at from the point of view of the member that he cuts off, he seems a cruel and merciless man; but looked at from the point of view of the body, which he intends to save, it turns out that he is a fine and true man and does a work that is good and Christian, as far as it goes. In the same way, when I think of the office of soldier, how it punishes the wicked, slays the unjust, and creates so much misery, it seems an unchristian work and entirely contrary to Christian love; but if I think of how it protects the good and keeps and preserves house and home, wife and child, property and honor and peace, then it appears how precious and godly this work is, and I observe that it cuts off a leg or a hand, so that the whole body may not perish. For if the sword were not on guard to preserve peace, everything in the world must go to ruin because of lack of peace. Therefore, such a war is only a little, brief lack of peace that prevents an everlasting and immeasurable lack of peace, a small misfortune that prevents a great misfortune.

When men write about war, then, and say that it is a great plague, that is all true; but they should also see how great the plague is that it prevents. If people were good, and glad to keep peace, war would be the greatest plague on earth; but what are you going to do with the fact that people will

not keep peace, but rob, steal, kill, outrage women and children, and take away property and honor? The small lack of peace, called war, or the sword, must set a check upon this universal, world-wide lack of peace, before which no one could stand. Therefore God honors the sword so highly that He calls it His own ordinance, and will not have men say or imagine that they have invented it or instituted it. For the hand that wields this sword and slays with it is then no more man's hand, but God's, and it is not man, but God, who hangs, tortures, beheads, slays and fights. All these are His works and His judgments. In a word, in thinking of the soldier's office, we must not have regard to the slaying, burning, smiting, seizing, etc. That is what the narrow, simple eyes of children do, when they see in the physician only a man who cuts off hands or saws off legs, but do not see that he does it to save the whole body. So, too, we must look at the office of the soldier, or the sword, with grown-up eyes, and see why it slays and acts so cruelly. Then it will prove itself to be an office that, in itself, is godly, as needful and useful to the world as eating and drinking or any other work.

There are some who abuse this office, and slay and smite needlessly, for no other reason than because they want to; but that is the fault of the persons, not of the office, for where is there an office or a work or any other thing so good that self-willed, wicked people do not abuse it? They are like crazy physicians who would cut off a sound hand, without necessity and just because they wanted to; nay, they are a part of that universal lack of peace which must be prevented by right war and sword, and forced into peace. It always happens, and always has happened that those who begin war unnecessarily are beaten, for they cannot finally escape God's judgment, that is, His sword; it finds them and strikes them at last, as happened to the peasants in the revolt.

In confirmation of this, we have the greatest preacher and teacher, next to Christ, namely, John the Baptist (Luke 3:1) who, when soldiers came to him and asked what they should do, did not condemn their occupation and did not bid them desist from it, but rather confirmed it and said, "Be content with your wages and do no one violence or wrong." Thus he praised the profession of arms and, at the same time, forbade the abuse of it. For the abuse does not affect the office. Thus Christ, when He stood before Pilate, admitted that war was not wrong, when He said, "Were I king of this world, then would my servants fight that I should not be handed over to the Jews." Here, too, belong all the stories of war in Old Testament, the stories of Abraham, Moses, Joshua, the Judges, Samuel, David, and all the Kings in the people of Israel. If war and the occupation of arms were in itself wrong and displeasing to God, we should have to condemn Abraham, Moses, Joshua, David, and all the rest of the holy fathers, kings, and princes, who served God in this occupation and are of high renown in Scripture because of this work. All this is well-known to all who have read even a little in Holy Scripture, and there is no need to offer further proof of it here.

Someone, perhaps, would say at this point that the case was different with the holy fathers, because God had separated them from the other nations by choosing them as His people, and had bidden them fight; and that, for this reason, their example was insufficient for a Christian under the New Testament, since they had God's command and fought in obedience to God, while we have no command to fight, but rather to suffer, and put up with everything. This objection is answered dearly enough by St. Peter and St. Paul, both of whom command obedience to worldly ordinances and to the commandments of worldly rulers even under the New Testament, and we have heard above that St. John the Baptist taught soldiers, as a Christian teacher, and yet allowed them to remain soldiers, only so that they did not abuse their occupation, did no one violence or wrong, and were content with their wages. Therefore, even under the New Testament, the sword is established by God's word

and commandment, and those who use it aright and fight obediently, serve God thereby and are obedient to His Word.

Think for yourself! If we were to give way on this point and admit that war was wrong in itself, we would then have to give way on all other points and allow that the use of the sword was entirely wrong. For if the sword is a wrong thing when used for fighting, it would also be a wrong thing when used for punishing evil-doers and keeping the peace; in a word everything it does would have to be wrong. For what is just war, except the punishment of evil-doers and the maintenance of peace? If one punishes a thief or a murderer or an adulterer, that is punishment inflicted on a single evil-doer; but in a just war one punishes at one time a whole great crowd of evil-doers, who are doing harm in proportion to the size of the crowd. If, therefore, one work of the sword is good and right, they are all right and good, for the sword is a sword and not a fox-tail, and it is called, in Romans 13:4, "The wrath of God."

But in reply to their objection that Christians are not commanded to fight and that examples are not enough, because they have a teaching from Christ that they are not to resist evil, but suffer all things, — in reply to this I have made sufficient answer in my book *On Temporal Authority*. For Christians, indeed, do not fight and have no worldly rulers among them. Their government is a spiritual government, and, according to the Spirit, they are subjects of no one but Christ. Nevertheless, so far as body and property are concerned, they are subject to worldly rulers and owe them obedience. If worldly rulers call on them to fight, then they ought to and must fight, and be obedient, not as Christians but as members of the state and obedient subjects, as regards the body and temporal possessions. Therefore, when they fight, they do it not for themselves or on their own account, but as a service and act of obedience to the rulers under whom they are, as St. Paul writes to Titus, "They shall obey the rulers."

That is the sum and substance of it. The sword is in itself right and is a divine and useful ordinance, which God will have not despised, but feared, honored, and obeyed, on pain of vengeance, as Paul says, in Romans 13:4. For He has established two kinds of government among men. The one is spiritual; it has no sword, but it has the Word, by means of which men are to become good and righteous, so that with this righteousness they may attain everlasting life. This righteousness He administers through the Word, which He has committed to the preachers. The other is worldly government, through the sword, which aims to keep peace among men, and this He rewards with temporal blessing. For He gives to rulers so much property, honor, and power, to be possessed by them above others, in order that they may serve Him by administering this righteousness. Thus God Himself is the founder, lord, master, protector, and rewarder of both kinds of righteousness. There is no human ordinance or authority in either, but each is altogether a divine thing. Since, then, it is beyond doubt that the occupation is, in itself a right and godly thing, we will now discuss the persons who are in it and the use they make of their position; for it is most important to know who is to use this office and how he is to use it. And here enters the fact that when we try to set up fixed rules and laws for this matter, there arise so many cases and exceptions that it is very difficult, or even impossible, to decide everything accurately and equitably. This is the case with all laws; they can never be fixed so certainly and so justly that cases do not arise which deserve to be made exceptions. If the exceptions are not made, and the law is strictly followed, it would be the very greatest wrong; as the heathen Terence says, "The strictest law is the greatest wrong"; and Solomon also teaches in his *Ecclesiastes*, that we are not to be all too right, but at times to be unwise.

By way of illustration: In the recent rebellion of the peasants, there were some who were drawn into it against their will. These were especially people who were well-to-do, for the rebellion struck the rich, as well as the rulers, and it may fairly be assumed that no rich man favored the rebellion. At all events, there were some who had to go along without their own consent. Some, too, yielded to this compulsion, thinking that they could check the mad mob and with good counsel, hinder somewhat their wicked purpose and keep them from doing so much evil, thus rendering a service to themselves and to the rulers. Others, again, were drawn in by permission of their lords, whom they asked about it in advance; and there may have been other similar cases. For no one can imagine all of them, or comprise them all in the law.

Here, then, stands the law and says, "All rebels are guilty of death and these three kinds of men were found among the rebellious crowd, in the very act of rebellion." What shall we do to them? If we are to allow no exceptions and let the law take its strict course, they must die just like the others, who had a guilty heart and will in their act of rebellion, although those of whom we are speaking had an innocent heart and a good will. Some of our knightlets did this, especially to rich men, when they thought they could rob them, if they could say to them, "You, too, were in the crowd; you must go out." In this way they have done great wrong to many people and shed innocent blood, made widows and orphans, and taken their property besides; and they are of the nobility. Yes, of the nobility! The excrement of the eagle can boast that it comes from the eagle's body though it stinks and is useless; and so these men can also be of the nobility. We Germans are Germans, and stay Germans; that is, swine and senseless beasts. And so I say now that, in cases like those of the three kinds mentioned, the law ought to yield and justice take its place. For the law says dryly, "Rebellion is punishable with death, as *crimen laesae majestatis*, a sin against the rulers." But justice says, "Yes, dear law, it is as you say; but it can happen that two men do like acts with unlike hearts and intentions." Judas, for example, kissed Christ in the garden; this was outwardly a good work; but his heart was bad and betrayed his Lord with the good work that Christ and His disciples did to one another at other times with a good heart. Again, Peter sat down by the fire with the servants of Annas and warmed himself with the godless, and that was not good. Now if the law were to be applied strictly, Judas would have to be a good man and Peter a rascal; but Judas' heart was bad and Peter's was good; therefore justice must, in this case, be mistress of the law.

Therefore those who were among the rebels with good intentions justice not only acquits, but holds worthy of double grace. They are just like the pious Hushai, the Archite, who joined the rebellious Absalom and acted obediently, by David's orders, with the intention of helping David and checking Absalom, as it is all finely written in the second book of Samuel 15:32 and 16:16. Outwardly considered, Hushai, too, was a rebel, with Absalom, against David; but he earned great praise and honor everlastingly before God and all the world. If David had allowed this Hushai to be condemned as a rebel, it would have been just as praiseworthy a deed as those which our princes and knightlets are now doing to equally innocent people, nay, to people who have deserved well.

This virtue, or wisdom, which can and must guide and moderate the severity of law according to cases, and which judges the same deed to be good or evil according to the difference of heart or intention, — this virtue is called in Greek *epieikeia*, in Latin *aequitas*; I call it *Billigkeit*. For because law must be framed simply, in dry, short words, it cannot possibly embrace all the cases and the hindrances. Therefore, the judges and lords must be wise and pious in this matter and mete out reasonable justice, and let the law take its course, or set it aside, accordingly. The head of a household makes a law for his servants, telling them what they are to do on this day or that; there is

the law, and the servant who does not keep it must take his punishment. Now one of them may be sick, or be otherwise hindered from keeping the law, by no fault of his own; then the law is suspended, and he would be a mad head of a house who would punish a servant for that kind of neglect of duty. In like manner, all laws that regulate men's actions must be subject to justice, their mistress, because of the many, innumerable, various accidents that can happen, and that no one can anticipate or set down.

Accordingly, we have the following to say of the persons who are affected by the law of war or who are occupied with war. First, War may be made by three kinds of people. An equal may make war against his equal, that is, of the two persons neither is the vassal or subject of the other, though the one may be less great or glorious or mighty than the other. Or a superior may fight against his inferior. Or an inferior may fight against his superior. Let us take the third case first.

Inferior against superior

Here stands the law, and says, "No one shall fight or make war against his overlord; for a man owes his overlord obedience, honor and fear" (Romans 13:10). If one chops over one's head, the chips fall in one's eyes, and as Solomon says, "He who throws stones in the air, upon his head they fall." That is the law in a nut-shell. God Himself has instituted it and men have accepted it, for it does not fit together that men shall both obey and resist, be subject and not put up with their lords.

But we have already said that justice ought to be mistress of law, and where circumstances demand, guide the law, or even command and permit men to act against it. Therefore the question here is whether it can be just, i.e., whether a case can arise in which one can act against this law, be disobedient to rulers and fight against them, depose them or put them in bonds.

There is among us men a vice which is called fraud; that is, deception or trickery. If this vice of ours discovers that justice is superior to law, as has been said, then it becomes altogether against the law and seeks and hunts day and night for some way to bring itself to market under the name and appearance of justice and thus sell itself, so that the law comes to nothing and fraud becomes the sweet thing that does everything it ought to do. Therefore, there is a proverb which says, *Inventa lege, inventa est fraus legis*, "When a law starts, Mistress Fraud is soon on hand."

The heathen, because they knew nothing of God, did not know that temporal government is God's ordinance, for they held it as the good fortune and the deed of men and therefore they jumped right in here and thought that it was not only right, but also praiseworthy to depose, kill and drive out worthless and wicked rulers. Therefore, the Greeks, in public laws, promised jewels and presents to tyrannicides, that is, to those who stab or otherwise destroy a tyrant. The Romans in the days of their empire followed mightily after this example and themselves killed almost the majority of their emperors, so that in that great empire, almost no emperor was ever slain by his enemies and yet few of them died in their beds a natural death. The people of Israel and Judah also slew and destroyed some of their kings.

But these examples are not enough for us, for we are not asking here what the heathen or the Jews have done, but what is the right and the just thing to do, not only before God in the spirit, but also in the divine external ordinance of temporal government. For if today or tomorrow a people rises up and deposes their lord or slays him, — well, that will happen, and the lords must expect it, if it is God's decree; — but it does not follow that for that reason it is a right and just act. I have never known a case of this kind that was just, and even now I cannot imagine one. The peasants in their

rebellion alleged that the lords would not allow the Gospel to be preached and robbed the poor people, and, therefore that they must be overthrown; but I have answered this by saying that although the lords did wrong in this, it would not therefore be just or right to do wrong in return, that is, to be disobedient and destroy God's ordinance, which is not ours. On the contrary, we ought to suffer wrong and if prince or lord will not tolerate the Gospel, then we ought to go into another principedom where the Gospel is preached, as Christ says in Matthew 10:23, "If they persecute you in one city flee into another."

It is just, to be sure, that if a prince, king, or lord goes crazy, he should be deposed and put under restraint, for he is not to be considered a man since his reason is gone. Yes, you say a raving tyrant is crazy, too, or is to be considered even worse than a madman, for he does much more harm. That answer puts me in a tight place, for such a statement makes a great appearance and seems to be in accord with justice. Nevertheless, it is my opinion that the cases of madmen and tyrants are not the same; for a madman can neither do nor tolerate anything reasonable, nor is there any hope for him because the light of reason has gone out. But a tyrant, however much of this kind of thing he does, knows that he does wrong. He has his conscience and his knowledge, and there is hope that he may do better, allow himself to be instructed, and learn, and follow advice, none of which things can be hoped for in a crazy man, who is like a clod or a stone. Moreover, such conduct has a bad result or sets a bad example. If it is called right to murder or drive out tyrants, the thing grows and it becomes a common sign of self-will to call men tyrants who are not tyrants, and even to kill them if the mob takes a notion to do so. This the Roman histories show us. They killed many a fine emperor only because they did not like him or he did not do what they wanted, and did not let them be lords, and held them for their servants and monkeys as happened to Galba, Pertinax, Gordian, Alexander and others.

We cannot pipe much to the mob. It goes mad too quickly, and it is better to take ten ells from it than to allow to it a hand-breadth, nay a finger's breadth in such a case, and it is better that the tyrants do the wrong a hundred times than that they once do wrong to the tyrants. If wrong is to be suffered, then it is better to suffer it from the rulers than that the rulers suffer it from their subjects. For the mob has no moderation and knows none, and in every individual in it there stick more than five tyrants. Now it is better to suffer wrong from one tyrant, that is, from the ruler, than from unnumbered tyrants, that is, from the mob.

It is said that the Swiss, in earlier days, slew their overlords and made themselves free, and the Danes have recently driven out their king, and the cause in both cases has been the intolerable tyranny which their subjects had to suffer; but I have said above that I am not discussing here what the heathens do or have done, or anything that resembles their examples and history, but what one ought to do and can do with a good conscience, so that one is safe and sure that the thing he does is not in itself wrong before God. For I know well enough and I have read in a few histories how often subjects have slain or driven out their rulers as the Jews did and the Greeks and the Romans, and God has allowed it to happen and has allowed them to grow and increase in spite of it. But at last there has always been a terrible end to it, for the Jews were finally suppressed and dispersed by the Assyrians, the Greeks by King Philip, the Romans by the Goths and the Lombards, the Swiss have paid for it dearly with much blood and they are paying for it yet, and it is easy to see what the outcome will be. The Danes, too, are not yet through with the business. But I see no lasting government except where rulers are held in honor. An illustration is the Persians, the Tartars and more of those

peoples, who not only maintained themselves against the Romans with all their power, but destroyed them and many other lands.

My reason is this alone; namely, that God says, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay," and again, "Judge not." Besides, it is strictly and often forbidden in the Old Testament to curse rulers or speak evil of them, as in Exodus 23:1, "Thou shalt not curse the prince of thy people." Paul in 1 Timothy 2:1, teaches Christians to pray for rulers. Solomon teaches everywhere in his Proverbs and Ecclesiastes to obey the king and be subject to him. Now no one can deny that if subjects set themselves against their rulers, they revenge themselves and make themselves judges, which is not only against the ordinance and command of God, who will have judgment and vengeance belong to Him, but also against all natural law and justice. So it is said, "No one shall be his own judge," and again, "He who strikes back is wrong."

Here you will say, perhaps, "Yes, if everything is to be endured from the tyrants, you give them too much and their wickedness only becomes stronger and greater by such teaching. Is it to be endured then that every man's wife and child, body and goods, are to be in danger? Who can start any good thing if that is the way we are to live?" I reply: My teaching is not for you, if you will to do whatever you think good and whatever pleases you. Follow your own notion and slay all your lords, and see what good it does you. My teaching is only for those who would like to do right. To these I say that rulers are not to be opposed with violence and rebellion, as the Romans, the Greeks, the Swiss and the Danes have done; but there are other ways of dealing with them.

In the first place, if they see that the rulers think so little of their soul's salvation that they rage and do wrong, of what importance is it that they ruin your property, body, wife and child? They cannot hurt your soul, and they do themselves more harm than they do you, because they damn their own souls and the ruin of body and property must then follow. Do you think that you are not already sufficiently revenged upon them?

In the second place, what would you do if these rulers of yours were at war and not only your goods and wives and children, but you yourself must be broken, imprisoned, burned and slain for your lord's sake? Would you for that reason slay your lord? How many fine people did Emperor Maximilian lose in war during his lifetime, but no one did anything to him for it; and if he had destroyed them by tyranny no more cruel deed would ever have been heard of. Nevertheless, he was the reason that they perished, for they were killed for his sake. How, then, does a raging tyrant differ from a perilous war which strikes many a fine and honest and innocent man? Nay, a wicked tyrant is more tolerable than a bad war, as you must admit if you inquire of your own reason and experience. I believe, indeed, that you would like to have peace and good days, but suppose God prevents you by war or tyrants! Now, make up your mind for yourself whether you would rather have war or tyrants, for you have deserved both, and are guilty before God, but we are such fellows that we want to be knaves and stay in sin, and yet want to avoid the punishments for sin even to resist it and defend our sin. We shall succeed as well as the dog who bites the spikes.

In the third place, if the rulers are bad, what of it? God is there, and He has fire, water, iron, stone and numberless ways of killing. How quickly He has slain a tyrant! He would do it, too, but our sins do not permit it; for He says in Job 34:30 "He letteth a knave rule because of the people's sins."

It is easy enough to see that a knave rules, but no one is willing to see that he is ruling not because of his knavery, but because of the people's sin. The people do not look at their own sin, and think that the tyrant rules because of his knavery; so blinded, perverse and mad is the world! That is why things

go as they went with the peasants in the revolt. They wanted to punish the sins of the rulers, just as though they were themselves pure and guiltless; therefore, God had to show them the beam in their eye in order to make them forget another's splinter.

In the fourth place, the tyrants run the risk that, by God's decree, their subjects may rise up, as has been said, and slay them or drive them out. For we are here giving instruction to those who want to do what is right, and they are very few; the great multitude remain heathen, godless, and unchristian, and these, if God so decrees, set themselves wrongfully against the rulers and create disaster, as the Jews and Greeks and Romans often did. Therefore you have no right to complain that by our doctrine the tyrants and rulers gain security to do evil; nay, they are certainly not secure. We teach, to be sure, that they ought to be secure, whether they do good or evil; but we cannot give them this security or achieve it for them; for we cannot compel the multitude to follow our teaching, if God does not give us grace. We teach what we will, and the world does what it will. God must help, and we must teach those who are willing to do what is good and right so that they may help hold the multitude in check. Because of our teaching the lords are just as secure as they would be without our teaching; for unfortunately your complaint is unnecessary, since the most of the crowd do not listen to us and it rests with God and in God's hands alone to preserve the rulers, whom He alone has ordained. We experienced this in the peasants' rebellion. Therefore, do not be misled by the fact that the rulers are wicked; their punishment and disaster are nearer than you could ask. The tyrant Dionysius of Syracuse confessed that his life was like that of a man over whose head a sword hung by a silken thread and under whom a glowing fire was burning.

In the fifth place, God has still another way to punish rulers, so that you have no need to revenge yourself. He can raise up foreign rulers, like the Goths against the Romans, the Assyrians against the Jews, etc., so that there is vengeance, punishment, and danger enough hanging over tyrants and rulers, and God does not allow them to be wicked and have peace and joy; He is right behind them, and has them between spurs and under bridle. This agrees, also, with the natural law that Christ teaches, in Matthew 7:12, "What ye would that people do to you, that do you to them."

No father would be driven out by his own family, slain, or ruined because of his misdeeds (especially if the family did it out of disregard of authority and love of violence, in order to revenge themselves and be judges in their own case) without previous complaint to a higher authority. It ought to be just as wrong for any subject to act against his tyrant.

I must give an example or two of this. They should be noted, and it would be profitable to follow them. We read of a widow who stood and prayed for her tyrant most devoutly, that God would let him live long, etc. The tyrant heard it and was astonished because he well knew that he had done her much harm, and this prayer was unusual; for prayers for tyrants are not commonly of that kind. He asked her why she prayed thus for him. She answered, "I had ten cows in your grandfather's time; he took two of them and I prayed against him that he might die, and your father became lord. It came to pass, and your father took three cows. I prayed again that you might become lord, and he might die. Now you have taken four cows, and so I am praying for you, for I am afraid that he who comes after you will take the last cow and everything that I have." The scholars, too, have a parable about a beggar who was full of wounds that flies got into, and sucked his blood and stung him. There came a merciful man who wanted to help him and drove all the flies away from him; but he cried out and said, "What are you doing? Those flies were almost full and did not worry me so much; now the hungry flies will come in their place and will plague me far worse."

Do you understand these fables? To change rulers and improve rulers are two things as far apart as heaven and earth; changing may be easy, improving is doubtful and risky. Why? Because it is not in our will or power but only in the will and the hand of God. The mad mob, however, does not ask so much how things can become better, but only that things may be changed; then if things are worse, they will want something still different. Thus they get bumble-bees for flies, and at last they get hornets for bumble-bees; like the frogs of old who could not put up with a log for lord; they got instead a stork that hacked them on the head and ate them. A mad mob is a desperate, accursed thing; no one can rule it as well as tyrants. They are the club tied to the dog's neck. If there were a better way to rule them, God would have set some other ordinance over them than a sword and tyrants. The sword shows what kind of children it has under it; namely, people who would be desperate knaves if they dared.

Therefore, I advise everyone who would act in this matter with a good conscience and do what is right, that he be satisfied with the worldly rulers and make no attack upon them, seeing that worldly rulers cannot do harm to the soul, as clergy and false teachers do; and let him follow the good David, who suffered as much violence from King Saul as you can ever suffer, and yet would not lay a hand upon his king, as he could often have done, but commended the matter to God, let things go as long as God would have them so, and endured to the end. If war or strife arise against your overlord, leave the fighting and striving to those who want it; for, as has been said, if God does not hold back the crowd, we cannot hold them; but if you would do what is right and have a secure conscience, let your harness and arms lie, and do not fight against your lord or tyrant; rather suffer everything that can happen to you. The crowd which does the fighting, will find its judge.

"But," you say, "suppose that a king or lord has given an oath to his subjects to rule according to prescribed articles, and does not keep them, and thus has the duty to give up the government. So it is said that the king of France must rule his kingdom according to the Parlements and the king of Denmark must also swear to certain articles, etc." I answer: It is fine and just that rulers govern according to laws and administer them and do not rule according to their self-will. Nevertheless, I add this, — not only does a king promise to keep the law of his land or the articles of election, but God Himself commands him to be righteous, and he promises to do so. Well, then, if this king keeps neither God's law nor the law of the land, ought you to attack him, judge him, and take vengeance on him? Who has committed that to you? Another ruler would have to come between you, who would hear both sides and condemn the guilty party; otherwise you will not escape the judgment of God, who says,

"Vengeance is mine," and again, "Judge not" (Matthew 7:1). The case of the king of Denmark is in point here. Luebeck and the seatowns joined with the Danes to drive him out. Therefore, I shall give my answer for the sake of those who may, perhaps, have a bad conscience in this matter, on the chance that some of them may think better of their conduct and know themselves better. It is true, indeed, that the king is unjust before God and the world, and the law is entirely on the side of the Danes and the Luebeckers. That is one thing. But there is another thing, viz., that the Danes and Luebeckers have proceeded as judges and overlords of the king, and have punished and avenged the wrong, and thus assumed the right of judgment and vengeance. Here come in questions for the conscience. If the case comes before God, He will not ask if the king was unjust and you just, for that has become clear; but He will ask, "You lords of Denmark and Luebeck, who commanded you to do these acts of punishment and vengeance? Did I command you, or did the emperor, or overlord? If so, prove it by letters patent." If they can do so, then they stand well; if not, God will judge thus, "You

rebellious stealers from God, who lay hands upon my office and have taken it upon you to execute divine vengeance, you are guilty of *laesae majestatis divinae*, that is, you have sinned against divine majesty and brought it down upon you." For to be wrong and to punish wrong are different things, *jus et executio juris, justitia et administratio justitiae*. To be right and wrong is common to every man; but to declare right and wrong is for Him who is Lord of right and wrong, and He is God alone, who commits this office to rulers, in His stead. Therefore, let no one assume to do this, unless he is sure that he has a command from God, or from God's servants, the rulers.

If things were to be so that everyone who was in the right might himself punish everyone who did wrong, what would become of the world? The servant would smite the master, the maid the mistress, the children the parents, the pupils the teacher. That would be a fine order of things? What need would there be, then, for judges and worldly rulers, appointed by God? Let the Danes and Luebeckers consider whether they would think it right if their servants, citizens and subjects resisted them whenever they were wronged. Why, then, do they not do to others what they would that others should do to them, and exempt others from a rule from which they themselves wish to be exempt, as Christ teaches, in Matthew 7:12, and the natural law also teaches? To be sure, the Luebeckers and the other cities might help themselves by saying that they were not subjects of the king, but were dealing as enemy with enemy, or equal with equal. The poor Danes, however, were subjects and acted against their ruler without command from God, and the Luebeckers advised them and helped them. Thus they took upon themselves the burden of others' sins and mixed themselves up and entangled themselves and tied themselves up to this rebellious disobedience toward both God and man, not to mention the fact that they despised the emperor's commands also.

I mention this case here by way of illustration, because we are discussing the doctrine that a person of lower rank shall not oppose a person of higher rank; for this expulsion of the king of Denmark is a notable history, and serves here to warn all others, to beware of this example and in the hope that the consciences of those who did it may be touched and that some of them may reform and leave their iniquity, before God comes and revenges Himself on His enemies and those who have robbed Him. Not that all of them will care about this! The great multitude, as has been said, does not care about God's Word; it is an abandoned crowd and is being made ready for God's wrath and punishment. But I am satisfied that some will take it to heart and not involve themselves in the deeds of the Danes and Luebeckers, and if they have been involved, will get out of it and not be partakers of other people's sin. For each of us has more than enough of his own sins to answer for.

At this point I shall have to pause and listen to my critics, who cry, "Ei, that means, I think, flattering the princes? Are you creeping now to the cross and seeking pardon? Are you afraid? etc." I let these bumble-bees buzz and be on their way. If anyone can do better, let him. I have not undertaken here to preach to the princes and lords. I think, too, that this flattery of mine will get me scant grace and that they will not be very glad for this flattery, because it puts their whole class in jeopardy, as you have heard. Besides, I have said often enough elsewhere, and it is all too true, that the most of the princes and lords are godless tyrants and enemies of God, who persecute the Gospel and are my ungracious lords and sirs; and I am not greatly concerned about that. But I teach that everyone should know how to conduct himself in this matter and how he ought to act toward his superiors, and should do what God has commanded him, letting the lords look to themselves and stand on their own feet. God will not forget the tyrants and men of high rank; He is able to deal with them, and He has done so since the beginning of the world.

Moreover, I will not have what I write here applied to the peasants only, as though they were the only ones of lower rank, and the nobles were not subjects also. Not so! What I say about inferiors in rank is intended to hit peasants, burghers, nobles, counts and princes; for all these have overlords and are the inferiors in rank of someone else. Just as a rebellious peasant has his head struck off, so a rebellious nobleman, count, or prince should have his head struck off. The one should be treated like the other and no one is wronged.

The Emperor Maximilian, I believe, could have sung a pretty little song about rebellious princes and nobles who would have liked to make a disturbance and put their heads together. And the nobles! How often have they complained and made conspiracies and sought to defy the princes and make a disturbance? What a cry have the Franconian nobility alone raised about how little they care for the emperor or for their bishops. These knightlets must not be called disturbers or rebels, even though that were just what they were; the peasant must stand for it and keep still. But unless my mind deceives me, God has punished the rebellious lords and nobles by the rebellious peasants, one knave by another, since Maximilian had to endure them and could not punish them, though he had to restrain them as long as he lived. I would wager something that if the peasants had not revolted, a rebellion would have arisen among the nobles against the princes and perhaps against the emperor; so critical was the position of Germany. But now the peasants got into it and they must be the only ones who are black; the nobles and princes get off easy, wipe their mouths, are pretty fellows, and never did anything bad. But God is not deceived and has given them a warning, so that they may learn by this example that they, too, must obey their rulers. Let this be my flattery of princes and lords!

Here you say, "Are we, then, to put up with a ruler who would be such a scoundrel that he let land and people go to ruin? To speak in the fashion of the nobility — Devil! St. Vitus' Dance. Pestilence! St. Anthony! St. Quirinus! I am a nobleman, and who shall allow my wife and children and body and property to be so shamefully ruined?" I reply: Listen! I am teaching you nothing; go on about your business! You are smart enough; I am not needed. The only trouble it costs me is that of seeing how you will finish this high-pitched little song of yours.

To the others, who would like to keep their conscience clear, we have this to say. God has cast us into the world, under the power of the devil, so that we have here no paradise, but are to expect all kinds of misfortune to body, wife, child, property, and honor every hour; and if ten misfortunes do not come in an hour, nay, if you can live for an hour, you ought to say, "Oh, how great is the kindness which my God shows me, that in this hour every misfortune has not come!" "How is that? Am I not to have a happy hour under the devil's rule?" That is what we teach our people. Of course, you may do something else; build yourself a paradise where the devil may not come so that you need not expect the rage of any tyrant; we will look on! Ah, we are only too happy! We want things as they are! We do not recognize God's kindness, and do not believe in it, — the kindness He shows in protecting us, when the devil is so wicked! We want to be nothing but wicked knaves and yet receive nothing but good from God.

That is enough on the first point, viz., that war and conflict with superiors cannot be right; and although it often happens, and is in danger of happening every day, just as everything else that is bad and wrong also happens, if God decrees it and does not prevent it, nevertheless it does not turn out well in the end and does not remain unavenged, even though they who do it may have good fortune for awhile.

Equal to equal

We will now take up the second point and discuss the question whether equals may fight with equals. This I would have understood as follows: It is not right to begin war whenever any crazy lord takes it into his head. For at the very outset, I want to say, above all else, that he who starts war is wrong, and it is just that he who first draws sword shall be defeated, or even punished, in the end. This is what has usually happened in history; those who have started wars have lost them, and it has been seldom that they have been beaten who have had to defend themselves. Worldly government has not been instituted by God to break peace and start war, but to maintain peace and repress the fighters. So Paul says, in Romans 13:1, that the duty of the sword is to protect and punish, to protect the good in peace and punish the wicked with war; and God, who tolerates no wrong, so disposes things that the fighters must be fought down, and as the proverb says, "No one has ever been so bad, that someone is not worse." So, too, God has it sung of Him, in Psalm 68:1, *Dissipat gentes, quae bella volunt*, "The Lord scattereth the peoples who have desire for war." Beware, therefore; He does not lie! And be advised, and hold far, far apart will and must, desire and necessity, lust for war and willingness to fight. Do not let yourself be tempted to think yourself like the emperor of the Turks. Wait until need and must come without desire and will. Then you will have enough to do and get enough of war, so that you can say, and your heart can boast, "I would gladly have had peace, if my neighbors had been willing." Thus you can defend yourself with a good conscience, for there stands God's word, "He scattereth those who have desire for war." Look at the real soldiers, those who have been in the game. They do not draw sword suddenly, do not brag, have no desire to smite; but when they are compelled, so that they have to do it, then beware of them; they do not jest; their sword is tight in the sheath, but if they have to draw, it does not return bloodless to the scabbard. On the other hand, the crazy fools who are the first to fight wars in their minds and make a fine start, devour the world with words, and are the first to draw their swords; but they are also the first to run away and to put up their swords. The Romans, that mighty empire, won most of their victories because they had to fight; that is, everybody hung on them and wanted to win his spurs at their expense, so that they had to defend themselves; then they laid about them vigorously enough. Hannibal, the prince out of Africa, hurt them so that he had almost destroyed them; but what shall I say? He had begun; he also had to stop. Courage (from God!) remained with the Romans, even though they lost, and where courage stays, deeds surely follow. For it is God who does the deeds, and He will have peace, and hates them that begin war and break peace.

I must mention here the example of Duke Frederick, Elector of Saxony, for it would be too bad if that wise prince's sayings were to die with his body. He had to endure many wicked plots on the part of his neighbors and of others, and had such cause for war that another crazy prince, who had desire for war, would have started ten wars; and yet he kept his sword in the sheath, always gave the others good words, and acted as though he were very much afraid and almost ready to flee, and let the others boast and brag, though he held his ground before them. When asked why he let them brag so, he replied, "I shall not start anything; but if I must fight, you shall see that it will be I who say when it is to stop." Thus he remained unbiten, though many dogs showed their teeth. He saw that they were fools and could be indulgent with them. If the king of France had not begun the war against the Emperor Charles, he would not have been so shamefully defeated and captured; and now that the Venetians and Italians are setting themselves against the emperor, and starting trouble, God grant that it may be they who must first stop it and let the word be true, "God scattereth those who desire war," for even though the emperor is my enemy, I do not love wrong.

All this God confirms with fine examples in the Scriptures. He had His people first offer peace to the kingdoms of the Amorites and Canaanites and would not have His people begin the fight with them, so that this precept of His might be confirmed. On the other hand, when these kingdoms began the war and forced God's people to defend themselves, they had to go to pieces. Self-protection is a proper cause of war and therefore all laws agree that self-defense shall go unpunished, and he who kills another in self-defense is innocent in everyone's eyes. Again, when the people of Israel willed to smite the Canaanites without necessity, they were beaten (Numbers 14:45); and when Joseph and Azarias wanted to fight in order to win honor, they were beaten; and Amaziah, king of Judah, also desired to war against the king of Israel, but read, in 2 Kings 14:8, what happened to him; also King Ahab began to fight against the Syrians at Ramath, but lost and was destroyed (2 Kings 22:2); and the men of Ephraim would have devoured Jephthah and lost 42,000 men (Judges 12:6); and so on. You find that the losers were almost always those who started the war. The good king Josiah had to be slain because he began to fight against the king of Egypt, and had to make good the saying. "The Lord scattereth those who desire to war." Therefore my people in the Harz have a proverb, "I have verily heard that he who smites is smitten." Why so? Because God rules the world powerfully and leaves no wrong unpunished. He who does wrong has his punishment from God, as sure as he lives, unless he repents and gives compensation to his neighbor. I believe that Muenzer and his peasants would have to admit this.

Let this be, then, the first thing to be said on this point, — War is not right, even between equal and equal, unless it is fought with such a good conscience that one can say, "My neighbor compels and forces me to fight, though I would rather avoid it." In that case, it can be called not only war, but due protection and self-defense. For a distinction must be made among wars; some are begun out of a desire and will to fight and before one is attacked, others are forced by necessity and compulsion after the attack has been made by the other party. The first kind can be called wars of desire, the second wars of necessity. The first kind are of the devil; God give him no good fortune! The second kind are human misfortunes; God help in them!

Be instructed, therefore, dear lords! Keep yourselves from war, unless you have to defend and protect yourselves and the office which you bear compels you to fight. Then let war come; hew in; be men, and test your armor; for then you are not fighting in your minds. The case will be serious enough, and the teeth of the wrathful, boasting, proud iron-biters will get so blunt that they will scarcely be able to bite fresh butter.

The reason is this. Every lord and prince is bound to protect his people and get peace for them. That is his office; it is for that that he has the sword (Romans 13:4). This should be for him a matter of conscience and he should so depend upon it as to know that this work is right in the eyes of God and is commanded by Him. I am not now teaching what Christians are to do; for your rule does not concern us Christians, but we are rendering you a service and telling you what you are to do before God, in your office of ruling. A Christian is a person to himself; he believes for himself and for no one else. But a lord and prince is not a person to himself, but to others; he has to serve them, that is, protect and defend them. To be sure it were good if he were a Christian besides and believed in God; then he would be happy; but it is not princely to be a Christian and therefore few princes can be Christians, as they say, "A prince is a rare bird in heaven." Now even if they are not Christians, nevertheless they ought to do what is right and good according to God's outward ordinance; He will have this of them.

But if a lord or prince does not perceive this duty and commandment, and lets himself think that he is prince, not for his subjects' sake, but because of his beautiful, yellow hair, as though God had made him a prince so that he may rejoice in his power and wealth and honor, take pleasure in these things and rely on them; — if that be the case, he belongs among the heathen, nay, he is a fool. That kind of prince would start a war over an empty nut and think of nothing except satisfying his self-will. God keeps that kind of prince in check by the fact that others, too, have fists and that there are people the other side of the mountain, too; thus one sword keeps the other in the scabbard. But a prince who has his reason does not consider himself; he is satisfied if his subjects are obedient. Though his enemies and neighbors boast and brag and let fly many bad words, he thinks, "Fools always gabble more than wise men; many words go into the bag and silence is an answer to much." Therefore he does not concern himself much about them until he sees that his subjects are attacked or finds the sword actually drawn; then he defends himself as well as he can, ought, and must. Otherwise, one who is such a coward as to take up every word and seek the reason for it, is trying to catch the wind in his cloak; how much peace or profit he will have from that, let him confess himself; then you will find out.

That is the first thing on this point; it is equally necessary to note the second. Even though you are sure and certain that you are not beginning it, but are forced into war, nevertheless you must fear God and have Him before your eyes, and not march out, saying, "Yes, I am forced into it and have good cause for war." If you depend on that and plunge in headlong, that, too, is not the thing to do. It is true that you have good reason to fight and defend yourself, but that does not give you God's guarantee that you will win. Indeed this very confidence may well be a reason why you must lose, even though you had just cause for war, since God cannot suffer confidence and pride except in one who humbles himself before Him and fears Him. It pleases Him when one fears neither man nor devil and is bold and confident, brave and firm against both, if they began the war and are in the wrong; but that this should win the victory, as though it were our deeds or power that did it, there is nothing in that! He will be feared and hear us singing, from our hearts, a song like this, — "Dear Lord, Thou seest that I have to go to war, though I would be glad not to; I do not build, however, on the justice of my cause, but on Thy grace and mercy; for I know that if I were to rely on my just cause and be confident because of it, Thou shouldest rightly let me fall as one whose fall was just, because I relied upon my right and not upon Thy sheer grace and kindness."

Hear what the heathen say about this, the Greeks and Romans, who knew nothing of God and the fear of God. They held that it was they themselves who made war and won victories; but by long experience, in which a great and well-armed people was often beaten by a small number of ill-armed folk, they had to learn and freely admit that nothing in war is more dangerous than to be secure and confident, and thus they reached the conclusion that one should never despise the enemy, no matter how small he may be; also that one should surrender no advantage, no matter how small it be; also that one should neglect no precaution, vigilance, or attention, no matter how small it be; everything must be measured out as though one were weighing gold. Foolish, confident, heedless people serve no purpose in war, except to do harm. The word, *Non putassem*, — "I did not think of it," — they held to be the most shameful word that a soldier could speak, for it is a sign of a secure, confident, careless man, who in one moment, by one step, with one word, can do more damage than ten of him can repair, and then will say, "Indeed I did not think of it." How terribly Prince Hannibal smote the Romans while they were confident and secure against him; and cases of the kind are innumerable in history, and are daily before our eyes.

The heathen learned this by experience and taught it, but did not know how to give any reason or cause for it, except to blame it on Fortune, of which they had to be afraid. But the reason and cause is, as I have said, that God would testify by all such histories that He will be feared, and even in such things will not endure confidence, despite, temerity, or security, until we learn to take from His hands all that we can have, as a gift of pure grace and mercy. Therefore, it is a strange thing that a soldier who has a good cause should be at the same time confident and discouraged. How can he fight, if he is discouraged. But if he fights undiscouraged, there is the more danger. This, then, is what he should do. Before God, he should be discouraged, fearful, and humble, and commit his cause to Him, that He may dispose things, not according to our law, but according to His kindness and grace; thus he wins God to his side with an humble, fearful heart. Toward men, he should be bold, free, confident, because they are in the wrong, and smite them with a confident and untroubled spirit. Why should we not do for our God what the Romans, the greatest fighters on earth, did for their false god, Fortune, whom they feared? If they did not do this, they fought a perilous battle, or were badly beaten.

Therefore, our conclusion on this point is that war against equals should be a thing that is made necessary and should be fought in the fear of God. It is made necessary when an enemy or neighbor makes the attack and starts the war, and will not help when one offers to settle the case by legal procedure, discussion, or agreement; or when one passes over and puts up with all sorts of evil words and tricks, but will be content with nothing but his own way. For I am assuming throughout that I am preaching to those who want to do right before God; those who will neither offer nor consent to do what is right do not concern me. To fear God is not to rely on the justice of one's cause, but to be careful, diligent, and cautious, even in the very smallest details, in so small a thing as a whistle. With all this, however, God's hands are not bound, so that He cannot bid us make war against those who have given us no occasion. Thus He bade the children of Israel go to war against the Canaanites. In such a case there is necessity enough, viz., the command of God; though even such a war should not be fought without fear and care, as God shows, in Joshua 3:1, when the children of Israel marched confidently against the men of Ai, and were beaten. A necessity of the same kind arises, if subjects fight at the command of their rulers; for God commands that men are to obey their ruler, and his command is a necessity, though this, too, must be done with fear and humility. Of this we shall say more hereafter.

Superior against inferior

The third question is whether superiors have the right to go to war with inferiors. We have, indeed, heard above that subjects are to be obedient and are even to suffer wrong from their tyrants, so that, if things go well, the rulers have nothing to do with their subjects except cultivate right, righteousness and judgment; but if they rise and rebel, as the peasants did lately, then it is right and proper to fight against them. That, too, is what a prince should do to his nobles, an emperor to his princes, if they are rebellious and start a war. Only it must be done in the fear of God, and too much reliance must not be placed on one's right, so that God may not determine that the lords be punished by their subjects, even though the subjects are in the wrong. This has often happened, as we have heard above. For to be right and to do right do not always go together; nay, they never go together except by the gift of God. Therefore, although it is right that subjects be quiet and suffer everything, and not revolt, nevertheless, it is not for men to decide whether they shall do so; for God has appointed inferiors to care for themselves alone and has taken the sword from them and has put them in a prison; and if they make a disturbance about it, and gather others to them, and break

loose, and take the sword, then before God they are worthy of judgment and death. Superiors, on the other hand, are appointed to be a common person, and do not exist for themselves alone. They are to have the attachment of their subjects and are to bear the sword. For compared to the emperor, his overlord, a prince is not a prince, but an individual in the obedience of the emperor, as all others are, each for himself; but compared to his subjects, he is as many persons as he has people under him and attached to him. So the emperor, too, when compared with God, is not emperor, but an individual person like all others; but compared with his subjects, he is as many times emperor as he has people under him. The same thing is to be said of all other rulers. When compared to their overlord, they are not rulers at all and are stripped of all rulership. When compared to one another, they are all adorned with rulership. Thus, in the end, all rulership comes to God, whose alone it is; for He is emperor, prince, count, noble, judge, and everything, and He divides these out to His subjects as He wills, and brings them back again to Himself. Now no individual person ought to set himself against the community or attach the community to him, for in so doing he is chopping above his head, and the chips will surely fall in his eyes. From this you see how they resist the ordinance of God who resist their rulers, as St. Paul teaches in Romans 13:2. Thus he says also, in 1 Corinthians 15:24, that God will abolish all rulership, when He Himself shall reign and return all things to Himself.

Questions

So much on these three points; now come the questions. No king can go to war alone, any more than he can administer the law courts alone; he must have people who serve him in war, just as he must have counselors, judges, lawyers, prison-keepers, executioners, and whatever else belongs to justice. Therefore, the question arises whether a man ought to take wages, — Dienstgeld or Manngeld, as they call it, — and hire himself out, binding himself to serve the prince as the times may demand, according to the present custom. In answer to this question, we make a distinction among these soldiers.

In the first place, there are the subjects, who, even without such an arrangement, are obligated to aid their overlords with body and goods and obey their summons. For the goods that counts, lords and nobles hold, were parceled out in ancient times by the Romans and the Roman emperors and given in fief on the condition that those who possess them should always be armed and ready, the one with so many horses and men, the other with so many, according to the size of the holding. The holdings were the wages with which they were hired. Therefore they are called fiefs and these incumbrances still rest upon them. The emperor permits these holdings to be inherited and this is right and fine in the Roman Empire; but the Turk, it is said, allows none of them to be inherited and tolerates no hereditary principality, county, or knights' fee, or fief, but appoints to them, and gives them how, when, and to whom he will. Therefore he has such immeasurable wealth and is lord in the land, or rather a tyrant.

The nobles, therefore, may not think that they have their property for nothing, as though they had found it, or won it in gambling. The encumbrance on it and the feudal dues show whence and why they have it, namely, as a loan from the emperor or the prince, so that they ought not use it for display and riotous conduct, but be armed and prepared for war for the protection of the land and the maintenance of peace. Now if they complain that they must keep horses and serve the princes and lords when others have quiet and peace, I reply: Dear sir, let me tell you something. You have your pay and your fief, and are appointed to this office and well paid for it. But have not others, too, work enough to do on their little properties? Or are you the only ones who have work to do? And

your office is seldom called for, but others must do their duty everyday. If you are not willing to do this or think it burdensome or unjust, then let your fief go; others will be found who will be glad to accept it and do in return what it requires.

Therefore, the wise have included all the work of men in two divisions, agriculturam and militiam, that is, agriculture and warfare, and this is the natural division. Agriculture is to feed and warfare to defend. Those who are in the defending office are to get their income and their food from those who are in the feeding office, in order that they can defend; those who are in the feeding office are to have protection from those who are in the defending office, in order that they can feed. The emperor or prince in the land is to look to both offices and see to it that those in the defending office are armed and mounted, and those in the feeding office are honestly trying to increase the food; but useless people, who neither feed nor defend, but only consume, loaf, and live in idleness, he should not tolerate, but drive out of the land, as the bees do, who sting the drones to death, because they do not work and only eat up the honey of the other bees. Thus Solomon, in his Ecclesiastes, calls the kings builders, who build the land, for that should be their office. But God preserve us Germans! We are not getting wise and doing this the right way, but are continuing for awhile to be consumers, and letting those be feeders and defenders who have the desire for it or cannot get around it.

That this first class have a right to their pay and their fiefs, and do right when they help their lord make war and serve him in so doing, as is their duty, — this St. John the Baptist has confirmed, in Luke 2:1. When the soldiers asked him what they were to do, he answered, “Be content with your wages.” For if it were wrong for them to take wages, or if their occupation were against God, he could not have let it continue, permitted it, and confirmed it, but, as a godly, Christian teacher, he would have had to rebuke it and keep them from it. This is the answer to those who, because of tenderness of conscience, — though this is now rare among these people, — profess that it is perilous to take up this occupation for the sake of temporal goods, since it is nothing else than bloodshed, murder, and the infliction of all suffering upon one’s neighbor, as times of war show. These men should inform their consciences that they do not do this from choice, desire, or ill-will, but that the word is God’s and that it is their duty to their prince and their God. Therefore, since it is a right office, ordained of God, it is fitting that there should be pay and reward for it, as Christ says, in Matthew 10:10, “A laborer is worthy of his hire.”

Of course, it is true that if a man serves as a soldier, with a heart that neither seeks nor thinks of anything but acquiring wealth, and if temporal wealth is his only reason for doing it, he is not happy when there is peace and is sorry when there is no war. Such a man goes off the track and is the devil’s own, even though he fights out of obedience to his lord and on his summons; for he makes a bad work out of a work that is, in itself, good; with the addition that he does not pay much attention to the fact that he serves from obedience and duty, but only seeks his own profit. Therefore he has not a good conscience, which can say, “Well, for my part, I would like to stay at home, but because my lord calls me and asks me, I come in God’s name and know that I am serving God in so doing, and I will earn or take the pay that is given me for it.” For a soldier ought to have the knowledge and confidence that he is doing his duty, and must do it, and thus be certain that he is serving God, and can say, “It is not I that smite, stab, slay, but God and my prince, whose servants my hand and my body now are.” For that is the meaning of the watchwords and battle-cries, “Emperor!” “France!” “Lueneburg!” “Brunswick!” So the Jews cried against the Midianites, “The sword of God and Gideon!”

An avaricious fellow spoils all other good works, too; for example, a man who preaches for temporal wealth is lost, though Christ says that a preacher shall live from the Gospel. To do things for temporal wealth is not bad, for income, wages, and pay are temporal wealth. If that were so, no one could work or do anything for his support, because everything is done for temporal wealth. But to be greedy of temporal wealth and make a Mammon of it is wrong always in all positions, in all occupations and works. Leave out greed and other evil thoughts, and to fight in war is not sin; take your wages for it, and whatever is given you. Therefore, I said above that the work is, in itself, right and godly, but it becomes wrong if the person is wrong or uses it wrongly.

A second question: "Suppose my lord were wrong in going to war." I reply: If you know for sure that he is wrong, then you should fear God rather than men (Acts 4:1), and not fight or serve, for you cannot have a good conscience before God. "Nay," you say, "my lord compels me, takes my fief, does not give me my money, pay, and wages; and besides, I am despised and put to shame as a coward, nay, as a faith-breaker in the eyes of the world, as one who has deserted his lord in need." I answer: You must take that risk and, with God's help, let go what goes; He can restore it to you a hundredfold, as He promises in the Gospel, "He that leaveth house, home, wife, goods, for my sake, shall get it back a hundredfold." In all other works, too, we must expect the danger that the rulers will compel us to do wrong; but since God will have us leave even father and mother for His sake, we must certainly leave lords for His sake. But if you do not know, or cannot find out whether your lord is wrong, you ought not to weaken an uncertain obedience with an uncertainty of right, but should think the best of your lord, as is the way of love, for "Love believeth all things; thinketh no evil" (1 Corinthians 13:7).

Thus you are secure, and walk well before God. If they put you to shame, or call you faithless, it is better that God call you faithful and honorable than that the world call you faithful and honorable. What good would it do you, if the world held you for a Solomon or a Moses, and before God you were counted as bad as Saul or Ahab?

The third question: "Can a soldier obligate himself to serve more than one lord and take wages or service-money from each?" Answer: I said above that greed is wrong, whether in a good or a bad occupation. Agriculture is certainly one of the best occupations, and yet a greedy farmer is wrong and is condemned before God. So in this case, to take wages is just and right, and to serve for wages is also right, even though the wages were scarcely a gulden a year. Again, to take wages and serve for them is, in itself, right, no matter whether they come from one or two or three or ever so many lords, so long as your hereditary lord or prince is not deprived of his dues, and your service to others is rendered with his will and consent. Just as a good artisan may sell his skill to anyone who will have it, and thus serve the one he sells to, so long as this is not against his ruler and his community; so a soldier has his skill in fighting from God and can serve with it whoever desires his service, exactly as though it were an art or trade, and he can take pay for it as though for his work. For this, too, is a calling that springs from the law of love; if anyone needs me and calls for me, I am at his service, and take for this whatever is due, or what is given me; for thus says St. Paul, in 1 Corinthians 9:7, "No one serveth at his own charges." So he approves this right. Since, then, a prince needs and requires another's subject for fighting, the subject, with his own prince's consent and knowledge, may serve and take pay for it.

"But suppose that one of the princes or lords were to make war against the other, and I were obligated to both, but preferred to serve the one who was in the wrong, because he has showed me

more grace or kindness than the one who was in the right and from whom I get less, — what then?” Here is the quick, short answer: Right, that is, that which pleases God, should be above wealth, body, honor and friends, grace, and enjoyment, and in this case there is no respecting of persons, but only of God. In this case, too, a man must put up with it if he is considered ungrateful or is despised, for here there is an honest excuse, namely God and right, which will not allow him to serve the one he likes best and leave the one he likes least. Although the old Adam does not listen willingly to this, nevertheless, it must be so if right is to be kept; for there is no fighting against God, and he who fights against right fights against God, who gives, orders, and maintains all right.

The fourth question: “What is to be said about the man who goes to war not only for the sake of wealth, but also for the sake of temporal honor, in order that he may become a big man and be looked up to?” Answer: Greed of money and greed of honor both are greed, the one as wrong as the other, and he who fights in this vice gets hell for himself. We are to leave the honor and give the honor to God alone and be satisfied with the wages and rations. It is, therefore, a heathen and not a Christian custom to exhort soldiers before the battle like this, — “Dear comrades, dear soldiers, be brave and confident; God willing, we shall get honor today and become rich.” On the contrary, they should be exhorted like this, — “Dear comrades, we are gathered here in service, duty, and obedience to our prince, and, according to God’s will and ordinance, we are bound to stand by him with body and goods. Although, before God, we are poor sinners, as are our enemies, nevertheless, since we know that our prince is in the right in this case, or at least do not know otherwise, we are therefore sure and certain that in serving and obeying him, we are serving God. Let everyone, then, be brave and courageous and let no one think otherwise than that his fist is God’s fist, his pike God’s pike, and cry with heart and voice, ‘God and the Emperor!’ If God gives us victory, the honor and praise shall be His, not ours, for He does it through us poor sinners. But the booty and the pay we will take as presents and gifts of His goodness and grace to us, who are unworthy, and thank Him for them from our hearts. Now God grant the victory! Forward, with joy!”

For without doubt, if one seeks the honor of God and lets Him have it — as is just and right, and as it ought to be! — then more honor will come than anyone could seek, because God has promised in 1 Kings 2:4, “He that honoreth me, him will I honor again; but he that dishonoreth me shall be dishonored in return.” Since He cannot fail to keep this promise of His, He must honor those who honor Him, and it is one of the greatest sins when one seeks one’s own honor, for this is nothing else than *crimen laesae majestatis divinae* — “robbery of the divine majesty.” Let others, therefore, boast and seek honor; do you be obedient and quiet, and your honor will find you. Many a battle is lost that might have been won if honor alone could have done it. For these honor-greedy warriors do not believe that God is in the war and gives the victory; therefore they do not fear God and are not joyful, but foolhardy and mad; and at last they are beaten.

But I think those the best “comrades” who encourage themselves, and have themselves encouraged, before the battle with the thought of the women whom they love, and have this said to them, “Ha, now, let everyone think of her whom he loves best.” I say this, if I had not heard that this was done from two credible men, who had had experience in these matters, I would never have believed that in a business of this kind, where the danger of death stares men in the face, the human heart could so forget itself and be so light. No one does this, to be sure, when he fights alone with death, but here in the crowd the one stirs up the other, and no one gives a thought to what affects him, because it affects many. But to a Christian heart it is terrible to think and hear that in the hour when one has God’s judgment and the peril of death before him, he tickles himself and encourages himself with

fleshly love; for those who are killed or die thus certainly send their souls straight to hell without delay.

“Nay,” they say, “if I were to think of hell, I could never go to war at all.” That is still worse, to put God and His judgment willfully out of mind and neither know nor think nor hear anything about them. Therefore a great part of the soldiers belong to the devil, and some of them are so full of the devil that they know no better way to prove their joy than by speaking contemptuously of God and His judgment, as though they were the real iron-eaters when they dare to swear shamefully by the Passion, and curse, and defy God in heaven. It is a lost crowd; it is chaff, and as in other classes, there is much chaff and little wheat. It follows that the lands knechts, who wander about the land seeking war, though they might work and ply a trade till they were called for, and who thus waste their time, from laziness or from roughness and wildness of spirit cannot be on good terms with God. They can show God no reason and no good conscience for their gadding about, but have only a foolhardy desire or eagerness for war or for the leading of a free, wild life. In the nature of them, a part of these fellows must finally become knaves and robbers. But if they were to betake themselves to labor, or a trade, and were to earn their bread, as God has commanded all men to do, until their prince summoned them for himself, or permitted and asked them to go to another, then they could stand up with a good conscience as men who knew that they were serving the pleasure of their overlord by it; and this fine conscience they could not have otherwise. For it ought to be to all the world a comfort and joy, nay, a mighty reason for loving and honoring rulers, that Almighty God shows us this great grace and appoints rulers for us as an outward sign of His will, so that we are sure we are pleasing His divine will and doing right, whenever we do the will and pleasure of the ruler. For He has fastened and bound His will to them, when He says, “Give to Caesar what is Caesar’s,” and in Romans 13:1, “Let everyone be subject to the rulers.”

Finally, soldiers have many superstitions in battle. One commends himself to St. George, another to St. Christopher; one to this saint, another to that. Some can conjure iron and bullets; some can bless horse and rider; some carry St. John’s Gospel, or some other object on which they rely. All these are in perilous state, for they do not believe in God, but rather sin through unbelief and false belief in God, and if they were to die, they must needs be lost. This is what they ought to do. When the battle begins and the exhortation, of which I spoke above, has been given, they should commend themselves simply to God’s grace and adopt a Christian attitude. For the exhortation above is only a form for doing the external work of war with a good conscience; but since no good work saves men, everyone should say this exhortation, too, in his heart or with his lips, — “Heavenly Father, here I am, according to Thy divine will, in the external work and service of my lord, which I owe first to Thee and then to my lord for Thy sake. I thank Thy grace and mercy that Thou hast put me into a work of which I am sure that it is not sin, but right and pleasing obedience to Thy will. But because I know and have learned from Thy gracious Word that none of our good works can help us and no one is saved as a soldier but only as a Christian, therefore, I will rely not at all on this obedience and work of mine, but put myself freely at the service of Thy will and believe from the heart that only the innocent blood of Thy dear Son, my Lord Jesus Christ, redeems and saves me, and this He has shed for me in obedience to Thy holy will. On this I stay; on this I live and die; on this I fight and do all. Dear Lord God the Father, preserve and strengthen this faith in me by Thy Spirit. Amen.” If then you want to say the Creed and the Lord’s Prayer, you may do so, and let that be enough. Thus commit body and soul to His hands, and draw sword, and smite in God’s name.

If there were many such soldiers in an army, who, think you, would do anything to them? They would devour the world without lifting sword. Nay, if there were nine or ten such in a company, or only three or four, who could say these things with a true heart, I would prefer them to all the guns, pikes, horses and armor, and I would let the Turk come on, with all his power; for Christian faith is not a jest, nor is it a little thing, but as Christ says in the Gospel, "It can do all things." But, my dear sir, where are those who believe thus, and can do such things? Nevertheless, although the crowd does not do this, we must teach it and know it for the sake of those who will do it, however few they may be. For God's Word does not go out in vain, says Isaiah, lo, it brings some to God. The others who despise this wholesome teaching, given for their salvation, have their Judge to whom they must make answer. We are excused, and have done our part.

Here I shall let this rest for this time. I wanted to say something about war against the Turk, because he had come so close to us, and some reproached me as though I had advised against war with the Turk. I have long known that at last I would have to become a Turk, and it does not help me that I have written so plainly about this and have said, especially in the book *On Temporal Government*, that equal may well go to war with equal. But since the Turk is back home again and our Germans are no longer asking about this, it is not yet time to write about it.

This instruction, my dear Assa, I should have completed long ago; but it has been delayed so long that meanwhile, by God's grace, you and I have become godfathers. And yet I hope that the delay has not been fruitless and that the cause has been furthered by it. I commend you to God.