

A Christian View of Just War

When it comes to nations waging war on one another, Christians have advocated three positions.

Activism: It is always correct to support or fight in a war waged by one's government.

Arguments:

- Government has been ordained by God, and we are to submit to it (1 Pet 2:13-14, Rom 13:1-4)
- Israel waged war with God's explicit command
- Government is the parent and educator of the citizen, preserving order. Citizens have a duty to government the way children do to parents. If you do not like your government, you should leave to live under another one (but before they have drafted you for military service)

Pacifism: It is Never Right to Participate in War

Arguments:

- Killing is always wrong (Ex 20:13)
- Resisting evil with force is wrong (Mat 5:39, Ro 12:19-21)
- War produces more war, more evil, and is rooted in greed.

Selectivism: It is Right to Participate in Some Wars (Just Wars)

While we must submit to government, and while we should seek peace instead of wars, there are certain wars which should be waged, and which Christians should support.

Biblical Truths About War in Scripture

1) Israel's Canaanite wars:

- Some of the nations had reached a tipping point when it came to sin, and war was God's judgement on them.
- War seemed to be necessary to prevent Israel from being polluted by the depraved behavior and pagan religions of the nations they overthrew. God told Israel to totally annihilate the Canaanites lest Israel follow their bad example (cf. Ex 23:31; Josh 9:24, 11:20). Israel failed to do so, and the Canaanite traditions (Baal worship, immorality, etc.) had a very negative effect on Israel (cf. Ex 23:33; Num 33:52-56).
- The conquered nations were given time to repent.
- God used natural means to encourage these nations to leave the area (Ex 23:28).
- Those cities placed under a total ban were usually military fortresses or strongholds, such as Jericho. These would have had fewer civilians and existed primarily to keep Israel out.

- Many of the bans included tribes that contained Nephilim and Rephaim, which appear to include major demonic influence.

There's a significant difference between the OT people of God, Israel, and the NT people of God, the church. Israel was a nation, an ethnically distinct people, the physical descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Being a Jew was both a nationality and a religion. Also, they conducted war in response to the direct revelation from God. However, in the NT, God's people, the church, have no national or ethnic limitations. Christians come from all nationalities and backgrounds. Whereas God commanded physical war for Israel, he commands spiritual warfare for the church (Eph 6:10f). So the NT people of God cannot look back to Israel as an example of how to function politically. We do not conduct religious "crusades" (or jihad) to enforce the Christian way of life.

2) Soldiers who approached John the Baptist were not told to leave their career (Luke 3:14).

Paul frequently uses military comparisons to describe the Christian life (cf. Eph 6:11f; 1 Thes 5:8; 2 Tim 2:4). The NT refers to various military officers, but never criticizes such an occupation or suggests that military service is out of bounds for Christians.

3) James 4:1-2 indicates that warfare is a direct result of man's sin nature. Thus warfare usually comes about because of man's failure to practice principles of righteousness declared by God.

4) Christians are responsible to submit and obey legitimate authority, such as governments (Rom 13; I Peter 2:13-15). However, when governmental authority and biblical principles conflict, one must follow the Bible (Dan 3-4, Acts 4-5,)

5) The Hebrew midwives disobeyed government when it sought to take innocent life. Ex 1:17, 20-21). Therefore, not every war waged by a government is just.

- 6) While the Bible condemns murder (the planned killing of an innocent person), it does not directly forbid killing in war.
- 7) If God delegates the right to human government to take life through capital punishment, by implication, the same right is extended if justice demands war for a just cause. The protection of citizens from national aggressors will usually require force, or at least the threat of force.
- 8) Countries can become murderous and thieving, not only individual citizens. National aggressors should be resisted (Gen 14).
- 9) Jesus commanded his disciples to protect themselves (Lk 22:36, 38). The Sermon on the Mount forbids personal revenge, not self-protection.
- 10) A "warmonger" is one who profits financially from war. While war may be a necessary means of achieving righteous ends, it is possible to become a "blood thirsty" person who loves and promotes war. Jesus spoke of such in Mt 26:52. He is not condemning those who

serve their country in a legitimate war, but those who promote, encourage and for the wrong reasons choose to be involved in warfare.

The Idea of “Just” War

Christians have long held that most wars are immoral and unjustifiable, but that some wars are morally acceptable, legitimate or “just.” The following must be true for a war to be just:

- The cause must be just. Aggression, revenge, economic gain or the taking of territory are not legitimate causes for war.
 - Defending your nation against a aggressor is just.
 - Defending innocent citizens is a just cause.
 - Defending a weaker nation assaulted unjustly by a stronger nation is a just cause.
 - Retaliating against intermittent forms of aggression (such as terrorism) is a just cause.
- War must be the last resort. All other solutions to the hostilities must be tried first. Only when negotiations and compromise have failed is war permissible.
- War must be formally declared by legitimate governmental authority. War is not the prerogative of individuals but of governments.
- War must have limited objectives. One side should not attempt to thoroughly annihilate the other side, and even the aggressor should have his territory restored in defeat.
- Warfare must employ only necessary force. Weapons and tactics must fit the context and use only what is needed to repel aggression and secure peace. Torture, chemical warfare, human shields, and scorched earth policies are not just forms of warfare.
- Noncombatants should normally be immune from war. Civilians, POWs, medical workers and other noncombatants should not be targeted. However, the industries that drive a country’s war-making capacity (e.g., transport, oil, communications, etc.) are legitimate targets.
- Reasonable prospect for victory (Lk 14:31-32). If one cannot win a war, undertaking it is a mass suicide. Of course, where the aggressor is evil, a fight to the death is better than torture or slavery.
- If an attack is imminent and certain, a preemptive strike may be justified as the best way to defend yourself.

Values and War

- Đ Peace is normally preferable to war. But peace is not the highest moral value. There are times that one must sacrifice peace in order to assure higher values like freedom from oppression and defense of one’s own country. War may bring about a greater good.
- Đ Groups of people (nations) are more significant than individuals. When nations or large groups are threatened or oppressed, war may be the means of providing relief for the suffering.
- Đ Order is of more value than freedom. Rights and freedoms are valuable, but rights and freedoms must exist in an orderly environment. The Bible has much to say about order and responsibility but says little about individual rights and freedoms.

- Ⓓ Personal hope and inner peace should not stem from the freedom of conflict. One's hope should be in God, not in any governmental powers.
- Ⓓ Except in the case of the Rapture, all people will eventually die. Only the time and manner of death are in question. The saving or extending of human life is not the ultimate value in the world. Some things are worth dying for.

Nuclear War

The world has been under the threat of nuclear war since 1945, when nuclear weapons were used in WWII to destroy Hiroshima and Nagasaki in Japan. After WWII, during the "cold" war, the number and destructive capacity of nuclear weapons increased dramatically. Today, if the nuclear arsenals of several countries was employed, it is possible that all human life on the planet would be wiped out. For example, a nuclear exchange between the US, China, Russia, and Europe could destroy most if not all human life.

Given these realities, some have suggested that any use of nuclear arms would be immoral because such a war would likely escalate, with the possibility of destroying all human life becoming greater and greater. To avoid such a scenario altogether, nations should agree to control, limit, and eventually destroy all nuclear weapons.

However, given the fact that "nukes" exist, it is wise for civilized governments to have them on hand in order to prevent hostile nations from attempting invasions. Mutually assured destruction, the fact that in a nuclear war both sides would be destroyed, helped keep the peace during the cold war. If responsible nations destroy their nuclear capacities, it is likely that "rogue" states will use nuclear technology to threaten or even destroy their enemies. So it's wise for the leading nations of the world to maintain at least a minimum nuclear arsenal. If they are outlawed, then outlawed nations will be the only ones with them. If nuclear weapons are ruled unjust, then the unjust will rule.

Adapted from Brad Anderson & Norm Geisler