

Article 16: Peace and War

It is the duty of Christians to seek peace with all men on principles of righteousness. In accordance with the spirit and teachings of Christ they should do all in their power to put an end to war.

The true remedy for the war spirit is the gospel of our Lord. The supreme need of the world is the acceptance of His teachings in all the affairs of men and nations, and the practical application of His law of love. Christian people throughout the world should pray for the reign of the Prince of Peace.

"Kill 'em all, and let God sort 'em out!" As a Christian, what do you think about this slogan of war that is occasionally expressed in the military environment--sometimes jokingly, sometimes seriously? Is it humorous or repulsive? Is it biblical or blasphemous? Interestingly, though it is heard today in conversations, read on bumper stickers and worn on T-shirts, it is not a new sentiment. In fact, it expresses the feelings of a churchman nearly a thousand years ago, who, when asked by a military commander on the battlefield for assistance in distinguishing between Christians and non-Christians replied, "Kill them all. God will know which are His." The latter half of the response may be theologically correct, but the first half is morally repugnant. It was however, fully accepted and acted upon as a "Christian response."

War has always been a fascinating topic for Christians. Because this is one of the issues unlike issues like racism, abortion, sexual morality and assisted suicide. The Christian community has spoken almost always with a unified voice on these other issues. But war is another story. You will find for 20 centuries conservative, God loving, Jesus adoring, Bible believing Christians who hold strongly dissenting opinions on this issue of war. Some Christians conservatively theologically are super pacifist. Some are what we would call war mongers and others are in between.

Tonight, I want to answer several questions. What should be the Christian attitude and response to the death, destruction, and devastation caused by war? Is war moral, immoral, or amoral? Are all wars the same morally and ethically? When can Christians participate in war? When should Christians abstain from participation or protest against a war? Can Christians fight against other Christians? If we go to war, does Christianity provide any guidance for the conduct of war on either a strategic or personal level? What is there in Christian doctrine that promotes war, and what is there in Christian doctrine that promotes peace? When a Christian begins to think about how to apply his or her faith to the realm of warfare, these are some of the first questions that must be addressed. If we truly believe that our faith matters and that the Bible should be applied to every area of our lives, then we must think about its application in global affairs as well as family, church, vocational, and community life.

So tonight, I want to walk you through some of these differing thoughts and I want you show you what I believe the Bible says about this.

I. The Cause Of War

The apostle Paul wrote, "***If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men***" (**Rom. 12:18**). Yet, history and headlines provide ample proof that "peace" cannot always be the Christian response to the evil that people and nations perpetrate.

Before we can think Biblically about the *conduct* of war and in war, we must think Biblically about the *cause* of war. In short, we must consider war and the problem of evil. At the foundation of the Christian understanding of war is a belief in the fallen and broken nature of humanity--a belief that all of humanity and every aspect of personal and corporate life are marred by sin and original sin.

What is the real cause and real source of Wars and Conflicts. Look at James 2 ¹ ***What is causing the quarrels and fights among you? Don't they come from the evil desires at war within you?***² ***You want what you don't have, so you scheme and kill to get it. You are jealous of what others have, but you can't get it, so you fight and wage war to take it away from them. (James 4:1-2 - NLT)*** The root of war is not some geopolitical situation. The Root of war is mankind's sinful nature. That is the root of it. Now the government and the state has a role to establish peace and if necessary to use force. And the church has a role to bring peace, but the ultimate way that we change the world is through changing people's hearts.

So our sin nature corrupts all relationships, international as well as interpersonal. War is ultimately a reflection of and consequence of sin. The Russian author Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, who was both a soldier and a political prisoner under the Stalin regime, said of the widespread effects of sin that "gradually it was discerned to me that the line separating good and evil passes not through states, nor between classes, nor between political parties either--but right through every human heart."

Wars are fought on the battlefields of the globe, but they are waged first in human heart. It is in this light that Christian philosopher Arthur Holmes writes, "To call war anything less than evil would be self-deception. The Christian conscience has throughout history recognized the tragic character of war. The issue that tears the Christian conscience is not whether war is good, but whether it is in all cases avoidable."

The death, destruction, horrors, personal and property losses of war are real issues. For a Christian to think about and wrestle with the issues of war is to struggle with the problem of evil. So, the cause of all war is evil and sin. Now, how then do we as Christians Biblically responded to the problem of evil as it relates to war?

II. The Biblical Perspective On War

Christians throughout history have recognized that the formulation of a doctrine of war or approach to war is a biblical deduction based upon the interpretation of numerous passages in the Bible. I want to go over a few of them and make a few comments about each.

First in the Bible we find that ...

A. War Is A Reality In This Life.

There is an appointed time for everything. And there is a time for every event under heaven ... A time for war and a time for peace. (Eccl 3:1,8) I don't see Solomon commanding that we go to war, he is just simply saying that this is an observed reality. There will be times when we have peace and times when we have war. Jesus predicted as much in Matthew 24.

⁶ "You will be hearing of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not frightened, for those things must take place, but that is not yet the end. ⁷ "For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and in various places there will be famines and earthquakes. (Matt 24:6-7)

B. Governments Have The Authority To Wage War

God has established government to protect its citizens and punish those who terrorize us. The Bible is very clear about why legitimate governments are established and the extent of their authorities. Look at Romans 13.

¹ Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God.

² Therefore whoever resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves. ³ For rulers are not a cause of fear for good behavior, but for evil. Do you want to have no fear of authority? Do what is good and you will have praise from the same; ⁴ for it is a minister of God to you for good. But if you do what is evil, be afraid; for it does not bear the sword for nothing; for it is a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath on the one who practices evil. (Romans 13:1-4) Paul uses the word sword, wrath and avenger. And Paul is saying that civil authorities have to have weapons in order to secure justice and domestic tranquility. In fact, Paul says that God uses governments as His minister and that they are established by God for this very purpose.

C. Soldiers Are Honored in the Bible

Now let me ask you a question. Do we have anyone here who has served in the military? There is a major question in the heart of Christians, can a Christian be a servant of Christ who commands us to bring peace to the earth and a servant of a government who often brings war. How can a Christian do both at the same time. Isn't there an internal conflict with this? Christian author William Temple writes, "We Christians at war are called to the hardest task of all. We are called to fight without hatred, to resist without bitterness and in the end if God so grants it, to triumph without vindictiveness." That is how a Christian soldier fights.

Well in the Scriptures, we are never told to not serve in a secular military. In fact, we find places in the New Testament where they were honored. Look at the passage about Cornelius in Acts.

Now there was a man at Caesarea named Cornelius, a centurion of what was called the Italian cohort, a devout man and one who feared God with all his household, and gave many alms to the Jewish people and prayed to God continually. (Acts 10:1-2)

You probably also remember the story when Jesus praised one Centurion Soldier saying, "I have not found faith like this in all of Israel." So the Bible does not condemn serving as a soldier but actually praises those who do as though you can be a servant of God and the state at the same time.

D. Christians Are To Never Take Personal Revenge

We are not to take punishment into our own hands but defer justice to God through legitimately established governments. Look at Rom. 12.

¹⁷ Never pay back evil for evil to anyone. Respect what is right in the sight of all men. ¹⁸ If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men. ¹⁹ Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, "VENGEANCE IS MINE, I WILL REPAY," says the Lord. (Rm 12:17-19)

Only God knows perfectly the hearts of men and only he can temper vengeance and justice. The Lord will not leave the guilty unpunished. The bible says again and again, that God will punish guilty men according to kind eventually. But as said in the first point, he invest legitimate government with the ability to be his present agents of justice. Not individual citizens. It is not our individual right to respond.

E. Christians Are To Show Love, not Hate

The Bible says that the way to overcome evil is not through personal retaliation or bitterness but through personal good and compassion of the Christian. One more time the Apostle Paul writes ***Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. (Romans 12:21)***

Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another ... he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law. (Rm 13:8) And Jesus says, ***But I say to you, do not resist an evil person; but whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also. (Matt 5:39)***

From a personal perspective, we trust God to work through governing authorities to punish evil doers. That may be the guy who robs your house or Osama Bin Ladin who plans attacks on our nation. It is the government's job to protect us. We are called as Christians to love, forgive, show the love of God through acts of kindness and try to lead people to Christ. That is one of our primary responsibilities. The next one is to pray.

F. Christians Are To Pray

"But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, (Matt 5:44) First of all, then, I urge that entreaties and prayers, petitions and thanksgivings, be made on behalf of all men, ² for kings and all who are in authority, so that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity (1 Tim 2:1-2)

What is amazing about this is that we are to pray for our enemies, that brings peace in our heart so that we can let go of revenge. But we are to also pray for kings, plural. That means we pray for all others in authority. That means that Christians need to pray for all world leaders. You might pray for the President but are you praying for the leaders of Saudi Arabia and Turkey. According to the Bible we are to pray for them so that we might have peace. We need to pray for all leaders and soldiers and our enemies. So that God would soften their heart.

Basically, as I see it, God has established two forces of peace in the world. He has established the state that outwardly forces peace and justice on the world. But at the same time, God has given the world the church. And the church through individual Christians is to bring peace by changing men's hearts and minds. The world is really changed through our love and prayers and sharing the gospel. Both are established by God. Both are necessary. Which leads to my final biblical principle on war.

G. Only When Christ Reigns will There Be World Peace

The LORD will mediate between nations and will settle international disputes. They will hammer their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks.

Nation will no longer fight against nation, nor train for war anymore. (Isaiah 2:4 -

So will the world ever have ultimate peace, yes when Jesus comes back and we all have glorified bodies and we are ruled by a perfect ruler Jesus Christ. So we will only have world peace when the prince of peace reigns.

So we looked at a few of the primary Biblical passages that deal with war. But how those passages are interpreted determines the position that one holds about war. There is no "red letter" biblical doctrine of war. Thus the issue is not "what is the Bible's view of war" but, "what view best interprets and reflects the biblical passages regarding war?"

III. The Church's Interpretations Of War

The Christian response to war has been a spectrum ranging from absolute rejection of war and participation in war to full participation with the proclamation of divine blessing and authority. I want to list for you several Christian perspectives on war that have emerged over the centuries. The spectrum of Christian participation in war runs as follows:

A. Pacifism / Nonresistance

But first I wanted to give you just an example because my guess is that few of us here were raised in a Christian pacifist environment such as the Brethren or the Quakers or pacifist Catholics. Were any of you raised as a Christian Pacifist? Now because the great majority of us were not raised in that kind of environment, I want you to know their position. The Brethren In Christ denomination are strong evangelicals, conservative, and Bible believing and yet they are very strong pacifist. They do not believe in taking up arms for any reason at all. And they believe that is what the Bible teaches. Listen to what they write.

Jesus loved his enemies and calls us to love ours. In the early church the converted entered the new community and for them Christ—not the nation—was Lord. They accepted martyrdom (in imitation of Christ) rather than depend on or use the sword. They chose to give life, not take life. All of Jesus' teachings and actions are anti war. When two of his disciples wanted to call down fire on the Samaritans, Jesus rebuked them. During the arrest of Jesus, Peter sought to defend him with the sword. Our Lord admonished Peter, "**All who draw the sword will die by the sword**" (Matthew 26:52).

Here the defensive sword is rejected. Later, in response to a question from Pilate, Jesus answered, **“My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jews. But now my kingdom is from another place” (John 18:36)**. Thus Jesus repudiated the war/violence method of establishing his kingdom in this world, choosing instead the way of sacrificial forgiving love. Through Christ, enemies are changed into friends. For Christians the basic divide is between the saved and the lost, not between two or more political systems. Nations become hostile toward their enemies. In sharp contrast, Christians share the gospel with non-Christians; they love those hostile to God. To kill non-Christians is to cut them off from becoming Christians. Our task is not to take their lives but to give our lives so they can say “yes” to Christ. If we fight against and destroy fellow Christians, we are dividing the body of fellow believers. Biblical nonresistance does not mean passivity in the face of evil. It calls for a vigorous, loving, non-violent response in which both the way we proceed and the end we seek provide the possibility of a positive solution.

Now this is a very different position than what most of us were raised in, yet these are strong followers of Christ and the Word. The next group I would call.

B. Just War

Most of us are not familiar with the history of the Crusades. But in early mid Millennium Europe, there was a war for 1000 years. It was crazy. And it was all done in the Name of God and there was so much bloodshed. And the godly saints in the church, back then, the Catholic church. They started thinking, this can't be God's will that these countries are constantly slaughtering each other. There was not a year of peace for 1000 years in central Europe. So they developed a theory from the Bible, a principle called Just War that we are going to be looking at in more detail. This Just War Theory was used to reign in these sovereign rulers that felt like they had a mandate to go to war any time they desired to go acquire countries and land and resources. These principles for Just War started with Augustine and then were formulated by Thomas Aquinas.

Now today because the Catholic church was associated with so many of these wars like the Crusades, they have become increasingly, not pacifist but extremely strict about whether or not a war is a Just War. And if it does not match with all the criteria, they won't support it. Because Catholics are very sensitive about their pasts and they do not want to be accused of supporting another Crusade. So they are not pacifist but they will say, “It must totally line up with all the Just War principles before we will support it.”

C. Preventive War

To be honest, this is where most evangelical American churches fall. This position goes something like this.

Jesus wasn't a pacifist. Twice in the New Testament, He cleansed the temple by force. It says He made a whip and He went in and He cleansed the temple. He didn't politely ask them, "Would you guys, pretty please get out of here?" He forced them out. They were in the wrong place. So He forced them out.

In Luke 22, Jesus told His disciples to sell their coats and buy a sword. The Bible says there is a time for war and a time for peace. Then the question becomes, "When's the right time?" How do you know a good war from a bad war? There are several times in the Bible when it says we ought to fight:

1. In order to preserve freedom. There are many examples in the Bible of this. Once God told Joshua to wipe out the Midianites, they were very oppressive. They were very evil. He was afraid that they would be oppressed by them. They had all kinds of evil practices like throwing babies into the fire. It was a terrible, atrocious culture. In Numbers 32, God gets very upset, in fact He expresses anger, at two tribes in Israel, because they wouldn't go to war. If you don't know what's worth dying for, you don't know what's worth living for. There are some things that are worse than war.

2. In order to defend innocent people. Proverbs 21:15 "When justice is done it brings joy to the righteous but terror to evildoers." God says that God is not only a God of peace but He is a God of justice. Things should be done right. That's why the Civil War was fought. Blacks were being treated unjustly. So there had to come force, to force people to treat them justly. Somebody said that all that is necessary for evil to triumph is for good men to do nothing. We must do justice. John Stewart Mills said, "A man who has nothing which he is willing to fight for, nothing which he cares about more than his personal safety, is a miserable creature who has no chance of being free."

3. In order to stop the spread of evil. The Bible makes very clear that God has authorized the government to enforce the law and punish offenders. **For it is a minister of God to you for good. But if you do what is evil, be afraid; for it does not bear the sword for nothing; for it is a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath on the one who practices evil. (Romans 13:4)** The sixth commandment is not "Thou shalt not kill." But "Thou shalt not murder." The word is used 47 times in the Bible and it always means murder. Is there a difference between killing and murder? Absolutely. C.S. Lewis said, "All killing is no more murder than all sexual intercourse is adultery." There is a difference. When is killing right? To bring about justice. To preserve freedom. To reduce evil in the world.

Now in principle, I agree with the Preventative War position. But the problem with this is that in reality almost anyone could justify any war based on these principles. Because just about anyone could say, well we are fighting this war to ... To bring about justice. To preserve freedom. To reduce evil in the world. Muslim terrorist would say that is why they are fighting us. America is a pagan land, and I would have to agree with them. So they would say we need to destroy this country and all infidels who live here. So even though I would agree with these principles, I believe there needs to be a more careful process to define when we should go to war. The final

D. Crusade /Jihad

This was the cry of Crusaders of the Middle Ages and the cry of the Muslim extremist today. This war is "God wills it!" We are actually fighting for God, not just for our country. God is on our side. That is what both sides of the Civil war said. Some Christians will point to the Old Testament as proof of this. But the problem with that is that in the OT, Israel was a Theocracy. It was a nation lead by God. In contrast to us in America where we have a democracy and a republic where the nation is run by the majority and elected officials. You see the problem with this view of war is that the church incorrectly identifies itself with the function of the state. And the problem with that is the state could be wrong. Just look at the Lutheran church in Germany that said as a church, we need to follow Hitler because he is God's Chancellor in Germany.

So that is the different positions that Christians have held over the years. Now, each view has strengths and weaknesses. But what I would like to do now is lay out the most widely accepted view that has been accepted through out Church history. It is called the Just War Theory.

IV. The Principles Of A Just War

The just war tradition developed over hundreds of years. A list of just war criteria has emerged over the centuries for judging the appropriateness of going to war and to govern the conduct of military forces in war. So it lays out those factors that allow you to go to war and then how are going to conduct the war once it gets started. Now we are going to list the eight principles of a Just War. When we do, evaluate whether or not our war in Iraq is a just war.

- **The Right Process** – War is to be a last resort only after reasonable attempts at diplomacy are exhausted.
- **The Right Authority**. A just war can only be waged by legitimate governments. A war in question must be initiated with a formal declaration by properly constituted authorities. Only governments can declare war, not individuals, terrorist organizations, mercenaries, or militias.
- **The Right Response**. No war of unprovoked aggression can ever be justified. A just war can only be fought to redress wrongs that have been committed. A first strike attack on a nation that has committed no atrocities cannot be considered justice; that's aggression.

This is the first area where some people call into question whether or not we should have gone into Iraq.

- **The Right Intentions**. War is not justified to gain control of another nation or its assets.
- **The Right Potential**. Is there a reasonable chance of success? Deaths and injury incurred in a hopeless cause are not morally justifiable. This was a huge issue in the middle ages and really the one that stopped the Crusades.

Because some of these Christian theologians were thinking, "Wait a minute. Why are you over there fighting the Crusades? Because it is the right thing to do. Well, that is great, but if you can't win, if you are just sending people over the abyss to their death, then it is wrong. There has to be a reasonable chance for success and if there is not, then you wait for another time when there is.

This is where the president is catching a lot of flack now in Iraq. This is the same thing in Vietnam. Why are we sacrificing all these lives in a war we can't win?

- **A Right Goal.** A country is expected to be better after the war than before. This means that securing peace is the goal and purpose of going to war. The war must be waged in such a way that once peace is attainable, hostilities cease. Complete destruction of a nation's political institutions or economic institutions is an improper objective.
- **A Right Force.** Nations are prohibited from using force not necessary to attain the objective. The types of weapons and amount of force used must be limited to only what is needed to repel the aggression, deter future attacks, and secure a just peace. Therefore, total or unlimited warfare is inappropriate. ("You don't burn down the barn to roast the pig.")
- **A Right Target.** Innocent civilians are never permissible targets of war. War can only be just if every effort is made to avoid civilian casualties. This is the amazing difference between us and the terrorist. We try our best to avoid civilians and yet the Muslim extremist use them as human shields and target civilians to blow up in the market places.

It is interesting how contemporary these 8 Just War principles sound. But they were articulated 800 years ago. And yet here they are sounding very relevant today. And you can see how some Christian thinkers who are only Just War proponents can look at the current war in Iraq and go, well in a couple of points, this is not a just war. And you can see how others can say, it is a just war. I could spend a lot of time here reading articles from different Christian leaders on either side of this debate. So study it and ask yourself, do I agree with this? Because the bottom line, the interpretation and application of these eight rules are not easy in modern warfare with things like Weapons of Mass Destruction and Terrorism. You are fighting a group, not a nation. Warfare is not clean or nice. It is horrible. And these principles are used, not to propagate war, but to contain it. They are moral and ethical guidelines for attempting to minimize the death and devastation that always accompany war.

Well, I know that you are probably on information overload so let me wrap this up with some application.

V. How Does A Christian Respond?

- **Trust God To Work Through Governments**

If God has established Governments then we need to submit to them and be loyal citizens to them and if we are to serve in the military, then we are to do it honorably. But in the midst of war, we can't live in stress, we must rest in the sovereign control of God over all the world.

- **Pray For Those In Authority Over You.**

As I have already mentioned, this includes all leaders. But if we really want God to bring peace, then our world leaders and those in authority over us need wisdom. So we need to pray for them often.

- **Never Take Personal Revenge**

We are to trust out governmental officials to work justly to protect us and prosecute those who have committed crimes. The fact is, no justice in this life will be completely fair. That is why we know there is going to be an eternal judgment that will be perfectly fair for all of us.

- **Speak Up For Justice And Forgiveness And Peace.**

Just because we live in a government does not mean we should not take a stand. When we saw those two planes fly into the twin towers, in our heart we said, somebody has got to pay. And we have got to also be the voice that says, we need to forgive and heal and send missions and bring peace.

- **Show The World What The Love Of God Is Like.**

This is really what is going to change men's hearts. That is what happened in Korea. I think this is our best model. We fought the Korean War to prevent the spread of Communism. But once freedom was established in South Korea, the missionaries came into that land and now percentage wise, South Korean is more of a Christian nation than we are in the USA. Because they saw the love of Christ after they had seen the Justice of the USA. Through our love and kindness, we actually build a bridge to God.

- **Pray For The Safety Of All Those Affected By War.**

We need to pray for all those involved in a war. Obviously the leaders but especially for those men and women fighting the battles and for their families over here waiting anxiously.

- **Demonstrate Loyalty To The Cross Above The Flag.**

Growing up in an Immigrants household, I am one of the most patriotic people you will ever meet. I cry while singing the start spangled banner and I am so proAmerica that I can turn people off. I am always pro-support of our troops and our military. After what happened in Vietnam to our troops, I go to the other side in making sure that this does not happen now. But that being said, I must always be a Christian first. And when my country that I love so much, is doing something that may morally or biblically be incorrect, I must be willing to be more loyal to God than my country. That may mean that I speak up about things that I feel are morally wrong but our country is promoting. And that is not being unpatriotic, it is putting the cross above the flag in my heart.

Summary: There are two agencies on this earth that work toward peace on this planet. And they have totally different roles. Governments bring external peace through force. But the church is separate from the state and we go in with love and the gospel for the purpose of changing men's hearts.