

A CHRISTIAN RESPONSE

Session 4:
War pt 1

February 8, 2023

Three Primary Questions

1. What are the questions society and those in the church are asking about the issue of war?
2. What does the Bible teach about war?
3. What is an appropriate response/stance from followers of Jesus Christ?

Questions Being asked

- Questions often practical, not theoretical or spiritual (Ex. – “Should we be fighting in Ukraine? Russia? China? Not, “What is a Christian view on war?”)
- Answers to practical questions are often approached politically rather than spiritually (Rep./Dem)
- Our focus: NOT about any current conflictual situation; also, our focus is NOT political in terms of political parties

Questions Being Asked (cont.)

- Broader questions:
 - *Should Christians support war or speak against it?*
 - *When is war justifiable from a Christian perspective?*
 - *What does the Bible teach us about war?*

Four Basic Christian Responses

1. Pacifist – “War is never an option for Christians.”
2. “Just-War” theory – “War is rarely an option, but sometimes necessary and can be justified spiritually.”
3. War often Necessary – “War is a political issue—not spiritual; no one likes war, but when necessary, we support our leaders/troops and are not opposed to war.”
4. “Holy War” – “America is a Christian nation; we are fighting against the evil forces opposed to God and God’s will for this world.”

Responses (cont.)

Pacifist---"Just-War"---Necessary---Holy War

- Most American Christians are probably somewhere in the middle of this scale

Pacifist View

- Pacifism is a belief that violence, even in self-defense, is unjustifiable under any conditions; negotiation is always preferable to war as a means of solving disputes
- Those who hold this view believe Jesus was a pacifist (For example – “If someone strikes you, turn the other cheek...non-violence)

Pacifism (cont.)

- Christians such as Anabaptists, Mennonites and others believe that nonresistance and non-violence are central practices for Christian witness and discipleship
- Strength – This perspective seems to fit with the teachings and lifestyle of Jesus; Jesus lived a non-violent life

Pacifism (cont.)

- A primary criticism of pacifism is that it is simply not practical (Ex. – child and bully)
- Also, if God/Jesus promotes pacifism, then how are we to understand the Hebrew Scriptures (OT) in which God supports and even encourages violent conflict (war)?

“Just-War” Theory

- Success – must be a reasonable hope for success; if you can't win, don't fight
- Just Cause – an act of defense in response to armed aggression; purpose to stop long-term oppression or to stop devastating technology

“Just-War” Theory (cont.)

- Last Resort – negotiate, political pressure, input/help from other countries, etc.
- Announcement – announce intention to make war or attempt to avoid war
- Use of Just Means – no torture, no intentional targeting of innocent civilians, etc.

“Just-War” Theory (cont.)

- Evaluate Cost – must always be less than the potential benefits
- Just Intention – the final cause must be to restore tolerable peace and justice
- Just Authority – proceed through proper constitutional processes

“Just-War” Theory (cont.)

- Strength – a “middle-of-the-road” approach that probably best exemplifies many Christians
- Critique – It is something Jesus never taught or even hinted at in the New Testament

War as Necessary

- Political situations arise in which war is necessary – the preferred way of resolving the dispute
- If our governmental leaders say war is necessary, our role is to support their decision
- No moral/spiritual issues involved with killing in war; “Thou shalt not kill” does not apply to war and military action

War as Necessary (cont.)

- Seeks justice, retribution and revenge for actions committed against us
- Strength – very popular approach during distressing and troubling times; also, much Biblical support from Hebrew Scriptures (nation of Israel engaging in war with God's support and even prompting); has been a major Christian perspective for centuries
- Weakness – very difficult to support from the teachings of Jesus or from His lifestyle; how does this perspective mesh with Jesus' call to "love our enemies"?

Holy War/Crusade

- United States is modern Israel: “God’s chosen people/country”; obviously, God is on our side in any political conflict; therefore, when we wage war, It is us and God against the enemies of God/enemies of God’s will
- Strength – strong patriotism; great rallying cry to unite Americans against common enemy
- Weakness – theology; belief that we are somehow more important to God than an Iraqi; cringe about “jihad” yet somehow think this view is okay if it’s us instead of them

Biblical Perspective

- Old Testament – God's people are called to fight/wage war
- New Testament – very little, if any, support for war or violence as a means of resolving conflict
- Human experience – situations arise and appear to require some sort of physical action to oppose evil

Ecclesiastes 3:1,8

1 There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens...

8 a time to love and a time to hate, a time for war and a time for peace.

Interpretation of Ecclesiastes

- Many commentaries do not delve into the question of war; accept the verse at face value
- Some say this verse, while stating there are times for war, does not answer the question of “when” war is appropriate

Ecclesiastes (cont.)

- Remaining questions:
 - *What is God's plan for our time and situation?*
 - *When should aggression be met by resistance?*
 - *When should we seek healing compromise?*
 - *When does an offender need a life sentence?*

Deuteronomy 20:10-18

¹⁰ When you march up to attack a city, make its people an offer of peace. ¹¹ If they accept and open their gates, all the people in it shall be subject to forced labor and shall work for you. ¹² If they refuse to make peace and they engage you in battle, lay siege to that city. ¹³ When the LORD your God delivers it into your hand, put to the sword all the men in it.

Deuteronomy 20:10-18 (cont.)

¹⁴ As for the women, the children, the livestock and everything else in the city, you may take these as plunder for yourselves. And you may use the plunder the LORD your God gives you from your enemies. ¹⁵ This is how you are to treat all the cities that are at a distance from you and do not belong to the nations nearby.

Deuteronomy 20:10-18 (cont.)

16 However, in the cities of the nations the Lord your God is giving you as an inheritance, do not leave alive anything that breathes. 17 Completely destroy them — the Hittites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites — as the Lord your God has commanded you. 18 Otherwise, they will teach you to follow all the detestable things they do in worshiping their gods, and you will sin against the Lord your God.

Matthew 5:38-44

38 “You have heard that it was said, ‘Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.’ 39 But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also. 40 And if anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, hand over your coat as well. 41 If anyone forces you to go one mile, go with them two miles.

Matthew 5:38-44

42 Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you.

43 “You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ 44 But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.