

THE CHRISTIAN AND WAR

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It seems that war is at times a necessary thing...it is certain that it is never a good thing. We must allow the teachings of Christ to inform and then determine our thinking about war. There are those that believe that all war (not just this one) can be made to go away. I do wish they were right but I fear that they are wrong.

We know the source of war. James wrote about where “wars and fighting’s” came from in a personal and congregational setting (James 4:1). But his answer has universal application. War comes from lust: *“Ye lust, and have not: ye kill, and desire to have, and cannot obtain: ye fight and war, yet ye have not, because ye ask not”* (James 4:2). People start wars because they want something others have and they would rather take it than obtain it otherwise. James reveals that if such people were in a position to ask God (and by extension, live as God intends) they could have the things they need. Lust leads to war.

So we know what makes for war. But this does not answer all of our questions. As Christians, may we defend ourselves against those who would harm us? This question leads to another: “Is there such a thing as a justifiable war?”

People struggle with this question. There are two primary views on this question among folks in the world of Christian thought. There have always been those who held a view that can be called “pacifist.” These folks reason that all war, even a defensive war, is evil and therefore must be avoided. Pacifism has adherents in all religious communities and is characteristic of a few, but is rarely the majority view. It is interesting to note, however, that a substantial segment of our brotherhood has at times opted for the pacifist position. David Lipscomb would not take up arms for South or North. Many Christians were objectors of conscience in World War II and in more recent conflicts. The sensitivity of this subject is manifested in the fact that the church has resisted division over the matter. It has been left as a matter of an individual’s conscience.

The other view, the majority view, is that a Christian may engage in a war that is morally justifiable. This position takes into account that Jesus did not tell the military men He spoke with to leave the military, and this was the army of an Empire,

not a republic (Matthew 8). The Lord took as a matter of course that there would be wars and rumor of it. Paul used the existence of the military to his advantage and to the advantage of the cause of Christ (Acts 22:25). He also used as a positive example the soldier that took care to please his commander (see 2 Timothy 2:4). Taken together, (Romans 13:1-7) and (1 Peter 2:13-17), argue that Christians must be supportive of properly constituted government as long as it pursues the goal of punishing evildoers. This is the case when a government defends its people against a foe that initiates conflict. A government is not to be supported when it follows a course that is detrimental to the proclamation of the Gospel. We obey the government unless it commands us to disobey the Lord.

I hold this last position because the nation of which I am a part is the community in which my family lives. I know I would defend my family if any member of it came under attack personally and locally. Thus, if it is right for me to do so, by extension, that which serves to defend my family on a larger scale is morally defensible and therefore right. A Christian, then, may support and otherwise participate in a morally justified war.

Now these thoughts still leave open the question of what constitutes a morally justified war. That can be discussed. It is proper and good however, for Christians to examine with great care God's Word and the implications of it on this very important subject. It does not look like war is going away. If history is any guide, after this one is over, another one will come. Knowing God's mind may well provide the only true comfort available.

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