

D-LIFE BOOT CAMP

Training for a lifestyle
of discipleship.



Keeping it Real

CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP

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"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age." Matthew 28:19-20

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The Biblical Ethics of War

Introduction

War is a harsh reality of the human experience. Throughout history, nations and peoples have engaged in conflicts, and the Bible does not shy away from addressing war. As Christians, it is important to understand what Scripture teaches about war, justice, and peace.

What should the Christian's attitude be towards war? Is it ever right to take the life of another person under the commandment of one's government? Is there a biblical basis for engaging in war? These questions have found varying responses among Christians. Basically, views regarding taking the life of another in war fall into 3 categories.

First, there is **activism**, which holds that the Christians ought to participate in any war engaged in by one's government because government is ordained of God. **Second**, there is **pacifism**, which contends that Christians should never participate in war to the point of killing others because God has commanded, people never to take the lives of others. **Finally**, there is **selectivism** (*The just war view*), which argues that Christians should participate in some wars ---the just ones. To do otherwise is to refuse to follow the just course commanded by God.

The Biblical Argument: Government is Ordained of God.

Scripture seems emphatic on this point. Government is of God. Whether in the religious or civil realm, God is the God of order and not of chaos (**Genesis 9:6; 1 Corinthians 14:33, 40**).

Old Testament data on God and Government. From the very beginning, Scripture declares that humankind is to **“have dominion over... every living thing that moves upon the Earth”** (Gen. 1:28). Humankind is to be king over all the earth. After the fall the woman is told, **“Your desire shall be for your husband and he shall rule over you”** (Gen 3:16 RSV). When Cain killed Abel, the text implies that he failed to realize that he was his “brother's keeper” (Gen 4:9-10). Finally, when the whole antediluvian civilization had become corrupt and the Earth was filled with violence (Gen. 6:11 RSV), God destroyed it and instituted human government. God said to Noah and his family after the flood, **“For your lifeblood I will surely require a reckoning....; of every man's brother, I will require the life of man.”** For whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for God made man in his own image” (Gen 9:5-6 RSV; man = humankind).

In brief, God ordained human government. Adam was given the crown to reign over the earth. And then evil became rampant, and Noah was given the sword to enforce that rule. Government is of God both because order is from God and because disorder must be put down for God. Humans have the right from God to take the lives of unruly human beings who shed innocent blood. Government is invested with divine power.

The sword given to Noah was used by Abraham when he engaged in war against the kings who had committed aggression against Abraham's nephew Lot (Gen. 14). This passage indicates God's approval of wars and protect the innocent from aggressors.

A. The sixth commandment does not prohibit all participation in war.

The sixth commandment **“you shall not murder”** Uses a Hebrew verb that refers to the unlawful taking of another human life (What we call murder). The commandment also prohibits, causing the death of another person through negligence or carelessness. But this verb is never used to refer to killing in war, so it is a misapplication of the sixth commandment to use it as an argument against. All participation in war.

B. Governments are responsible to defend their nations against attacks by other nations.

One of the most basic responsibilities of government is to restrain evil and punish those who do evil. When a government does this, it defends the weak and defenseless, and deters further wrongdoing. The apostle Peter says the civil government is intended “to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good” (1 Pet. 2:14) And Paul says that the government is authorized by God “to bear the sword (Rom. 13:4) against evildoers so that it can be “a terror” to bad conduct (v. 3). It also “carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoers (v. 4). **According to Paul, when the ruler uses superior force ----even deadly force---- against evil, he is God's servant for your good.**

If a government is commanded by God to protect its citizens from a robber or thief who comes from *within* a country, then certainly. It also has an obligation to protect its citizens against thousands of murderers or thieves who come as an army from somewhere outside of the nation. Therefore, a nation has a moral obligation to defend itself against foreign attackers who would come to kill, conquer, and subjugate the people in that nation.

C. How can we know if a war is a just war?

1. God's Sovereignty Over War

Key Verses: Exodus 15:3, Daniel 2:21, Proverbs 21:31

- The Bible declares that **God is sovereign** over nations and war.
- **Exodus 15:3** states, "The **Lord** is a warrior; the Lord is his name."
- **Daniel 2:21** teaches that God raises up and removes leaders according to His will.
- **Proverbs 21:31**: "The horse is made ready for the day of battle, but the victory belongs to the Lord."

2. Just War vs. Unjust War

Key Verses: Deuteronomy 20:1-20, Romans 13:1-4, Psalm 144:1

- The Bible provides principles that distinguish just wars from unjust wars.
- Deuteronomy 20 outlines laws regarding warfare, including protection for non-combatants.

- Romans 13:1-4 describes how God establishes governments to execute justice and maintain order.
- Psalm 144:1 acknowledges God's role in preparing His people for battle.

Criteria for a Just War (Based on Biblical Principles):

- **Just Cause** – War should be fought to correct a grave injustice (Genesis 14:14-16).
 - **Legitimate Authority** – Only rightful governing authorities should declare war (Romans 13:1-4).
 - **Last Resort** – War should be pursued only after peaceful means have been exhausted (Matthew 5:9).
 - **Proportionality** – The response should not exceed the aggression (Deuteronomy 20:10-12).
 - **Discrimination** – Innocents should be protected (Deuteronomy 24:6, 2 Kings 6:21-23).
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3. The Call to Peace and Reconciliation

Key Verses: Matthew 5:9, Romans 12:18, Isaiah 2:4

- Jesus calls His followers to be peacemakers (Matthew 5:9).
 - Romans 12:18: "If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all."
 - Isaiah 2:4 envisions a time when nations will "beat their swords into plowshares."
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4. The Role of Christians in Times of War

Key Verses: Matthew 22:21, Acts 5:29, Luke 6:27-28

- Christians are called to balance their allegiance to God and their responsibility to government (Matthew 22:21).
 - When human laws contradict God's commands, believers must obey God rather than men (Acts 5:29).
 - Jesus commands us to love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us (Luke 6:27-28).
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Discussion Questions:

1. How do we reconcile God's sovereignty over war with His desire for peace?
 2. When, if ever, is war justifiable from a biblical perspective?
 3. How can Christians be peacemakers in a world prone to conflict?
 4. What does Jesus' teaching on loving enemies mean for our understanding of war?
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Conclusion

The Bible provides guidance on war, justice, and peace, calling believers to seek righteousness while promoting peace whenever possible. While war may sometimes be necessary to uphold justice, Christians are ultimately called to reflect Christ's love and work toward reconciliation.

Memory Verse: Matthew 5:9 – "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God."