

# The Christian Attitude Toward War

[This is the "Discussion" section of a research paper on the topic of the Christian and war. The rest of the paper (not included here) looks more in-depth at the various views, gives a historical overview of views held by the church (down through the centuries), and examines what the Bible says on the topic of war.]

## *Which View Best Fits the Biblical Data?*

People who claim to be "Christian" have taken every possible position on the topic of warfare. It is obvious that many wars have been morally wrong. Yet there have been some who, in complete disregard to the Scriptures, have held murderous campaigns against everybody they considered to be heretical or pagan. Others have gone the opposite way, claiming that war is *always* wrong for the believer. Not only is there no genuine scriptural basis for such a position, but their unwillingness to confront evil has often given indirect encouragement to those who were committing great atrocities against the innocent. The fact that Scripture does *not* condemn involvement in warfare should not be lightly set aside.

When we take into consideration all the Biblical evidence, we would have to conclude that the most scriptural view about warfare would be a "just war" view. But before we could consider a war to be "just," we would need to consider many factors, such as what the Scriptures say, the circumstances surrounding the war, the moral condition of our own country, and the effects of *either* choice on one's own life and on others. Of these factors, the Scriptures are the most important, for they are *God's Word* on the matter, and they must impact the way we interpret *all* other factors. Without a humble submission to the Word of God, accompanied by the "fear of the Lord" (Job 28:28; Psalm 111:10; and throughout the Proverbs), it is not even possible to have the wisdom that is necessary, in order to accurately assess the "justness" of a war.

A nation (or religious institution) that does not submit to the Word of God loses the basis for understanding whether or not a war is "just." Many so-called "just wars" of the past have really been "patriotic or holy wars" under a different name. Those fighting in them were often little interested in the true scriptural principles, but merely twisted them to fit their own purposes. We ought to learn from such instances and beware--or we may end up being guilty of the same type of error. We must never forget that God's Word must be the foundation for determining the "justness" of *everything* we do, as well as the motives behind what we do.

## *Difficulties With Such a View*

Even when a person is a genuine disciple (follower) of Jesus, evaluating the "justness" of a war won't always be easy. Trying to sort-out the issues can be very difficult. There are often *many* reasons that a nation may choose to go to war, some legitimate and some not. If we, as a nation, have committed serious injustices against another nation (or group), there may even be legitimate reasons for them to go to war against *us*.

Sometimes the *best* options will no longer be available, because of wrong decisions *already* made. At that point, the decision may be nothing more than trying to determine which choice will have the fewest long-term negative effects. The resulting complexity of the issue may leave people who have the *same* love for God choosing *opposite* positions. For that matter, there may be so many conflicting issues, that a person finds it difficult to reach *any* position.

Some people may criticize the "just war" view, because of difficulties such as have just been mentioned. Indeed, it would be much easier to simply claim that *all* wars or *no* wars are just! But the problem isn't the view; rather it is the people. It is the nation or people who are unwilling to deal with their *own* sins, before they consider going to war, to deal with the sins of *others*.

God instituted government for the purpose of administering justice. A government that focuses on the injustice of others, while at the same time ignoring its own injustices, is abhorrent to God. When this happens, the "justness" of their cause becomes blurred with injustice--making it increasingly difficult to evaluate whether or not the war is justified. Under such a condition, national (and personal) repentance is the only *good* choice--and the only legitimate *first* choice, as far as God is concerned. It is when a nation is willing to *first* deal with its own sins, that the difficulties in evaluating the "justness" of its war cause diminishes. Of course, with repentance, there might be such changes in the nation's interaction with other nations, that reconciliation (rather than war) might become a real possibility!

### *Our Response to War, When it Occurs*

How should we, as individuals, respond when there *is* a war? At that point, it's too late to argue whether or not it is a "just" war. Even those who are pacifists, or who believe that the war is unjust, must admit that it is occurring, in spite of their desires to the contrary.

In every way, we must live as disciples (followers) of Jesus. We must follow his example, and the examples of the apostles. We must *live* the love we claim is in us. We must have a desire to see justice (as defined by God) established, and injustice removed from the land--not only in matters related to the war, but in *all* areas of life. If injustices are present in the land, we must continue to oppose them, not closing our eyes to them for the sake of the "war cause." We must also have a spirit of humility, and of forgiveness, having an awareness of our own past sins, and of our own need for forgiveness. We must pray for our friends (including the soldiers), *as well as for our enemies*. We must pray for the salvation of many--for without salvation, even *peace* has no long-term (eternal) value.

People tend to ignore the fact that some issues are much more serious than whether we have peace or war. The very fact that war exists is a reflection of a deeper issue. As long as sin exists in the world, and people reject the God of the Bible (or at least disregard what he says), there will be wars. When religious institutions *claim* to be "Christian," but do not follow the ways of Jesus, there will be wars. It is only when people on *both* sides of the conflict humble themselves and *submit* to the God of the Bible, that wars will cease--and that, according to Scripture, will not occur until after the *final* war, when Jesus Christ himself will be the victor (Revelation 19:11-21).

Ultimately, we must trust God for the outcome--not just in the issue of who wins, but in regard to the long-term effects of the war. We must trust God, even if the outcome of the war is bad, from our point of view. Our view of life is very limited (and normally influenced by what surrounds us), but God sees the entire picture. Ultimately, he will accomplish his purposes--which extend far beyond our own lifetimes and what we can see.

Whatever the outcome, we must guard our own conduct, and make sure that we continue to be "salt" and "light" in a dark and corrupt world (Matthew 5:13-16). We must commit our lives to God, and remember that the day of justice will come. On that day, *all* people--saved and unsaved--will acknowledge that Jesus is Lord, and that his ways are right (Philippians 2:9-11).

For those who know and love God, he has promised to use *all* things, whether good or bad, to accomplish good in our lives. And even though circumstances may be difficult right now (especially if the war is occurring in *our own* neighborhood), we can rest assured that our hope for the eternal future is guaranteed. In the end, we will praise God for the way he has used *all* things in our lives, to accomplish good.

On the other hand, there is *no* long-term good for the person who does *not* submit to God. Ultimately, it will not matter whether he dies in war, or lives to an old age. Even if he has an entire lifetime of peace, it will have no long-term value for him, if the day comes, when Jesus has to say to him, "Depart from me." Pray that many will turn to God and be saved.