

Should Christians Go To War?



**A Discussion-Group Study
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I. Representative Biblical references to “war”

A. Old Testament - over 200 references to “war”

Exod. 17:16 - “The Lord will have war against Amalek from generation to generation”

Numb. 31:3 - “a 1000 from all the tribes of Israel you shall send to the war”

Eccl. 3:8 - “a time for war, and a time for peace”

Isa. 2:4 - “Nation will not lift up sword against nation, and never again will they learn war.”

Micah 4:3 - “...never again will they train for war”

B. New Testament - 18 references; mostly figurative

Rom. 7:23 - “a different law in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind”

II Cor. 10:3 - “we do not wage war according to the flesh”

Heb. 11:34 - “men of faith...who became mighty in war”

James 4:1 - “source of your pleasures wage war in your members”

I Pet. 2:11 - “fleshly lusts, which wage war against the soul”

Rev. 2:16 - “I will make war against them with the sword of My mouth”

Rev. 12:7 - “there was war in heaven, Michael and his angels waging war with the dragon...”

C. Additional references to “fighting” and “violence” could be considered.

II. Defining “war” and its causes

A. Definition of “war”

1. A hostile conflict between two or more nations, states, communities or social groups employing force, violence, or armed confrontation.
2. Such conflicts have been a constant feature of human history.
3. Necessity of willingness and preparedness for war, for the existence and survival of a nation.

B. Causes of “war”

1. selfish, covetous, greedy desire for gain
2. defensive fear of injury or loss
3. pursuit of glory, reputation, pride, ambition
4. desire for power, dominion, supremacy
5. passions of hatred, bigotry, revenge, extermination
6. religious zeal, ideological quest



III. "War" and the Old Testament (Covenant)

A. Nation of Israel

1. Established by warfare, defeating and expelling former residents of the land of Canaan.

Justified on basis of:

a. Promise of God - cf. Gen. 12, 15,18

b. Retributive justice of God on Canaanites - cf. Judges 1:1-4; I Sam. 15:2

2. Continued as means to maintain continuity and security of nation.

B. God identified as leader of Israel

1. Considered to be theocratic head and king of Israel - cf. Exod. 15:18; Ps. 49:2,3; 93:1,2

2. Viewed as participating in their historical experiences, including war

Exod. 15:3 - "The Lord is a warrior; the Lord is His name"

Ps. 24:8 - "Who is the King of glory? The Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle"

Joel 3:9,10 - "prepare a war; let the soldiers draw near.

Beat your plowshares into swords,
and your pruning hooks into spears..."

Isa. 31:5 - "Lord of hosts" (armies) - more than 200 times in O.T.

C. Theological perspective of old covenant

1. God is not a physical, blood-thirsty, war-mongering God

2. Old covenant narrative is a pictorial, prefiguring in physical history of God's spiritual intent for His people

a. Physical warfare is pictorial portrayal of spiritual warfare

(1) of good conquering evil

(2) of God defeating Satan

b. War regarded as necessary evil to achieve salvation of God for His people.

(1) restoration of Israel couched in apocalyptic, figurative language of war - cf. Ezek 38,39

(2) Messianic deliverer to defeat Satanic forces

c. Prophetic reference to a new covenant

(1) promised covenant - cf. Jere. 31:31-34

(2) internal, spiritual realities - cf. Heb. 8:10-12; 10:16

(3) peaceful community - cf. Isa. 2:4; Micah 4:3

(4) Messianic "Prince of Peace" - cf. Isa. 9:6



IV. "War" and the New Testament (Covenant)

A. Jesus comes as fulfillment of God's intent

1. Promised Messianic deliverer - the Christ - Matt. 16:16-21
2. Primary message is that of a radically different "kingdom"
 - a. Unlike old covenant picture of physical kingdom
 - (1) Not nationalistic - I Pet. 2:9
 - (2) Not militaristic - Jn. 18:36
 - (3) Not ethnic or racialistic - Gal. 3:28; Eph. 2:13-16
 - b. Christocentric Lordship of Christ
 - (1) Christ reigns - Lk 1:33
 - (2) Christians reign in life through Him - Rom. 5:17,21
3. Jesus defeated forces of evil in ultimate cosmic conflict
 - a. Did so as recipient of violence, rather than in exercise of violence - cf. I Pet. 2:21-23
 - b. Decisively destroyed diabolic reign, once and for all - Jn. 12:31,32; 19:30; I Jn. 3:8
4. New covenant relationship with God is established
 - a. Internal realities of God's character - Heb. 8:10; 10:16
 - b. Lord of peace at work in Christians - II Thess. 3:16
5. Church constitutes new Israel, people of God - Gal. 6:16; I Pet. 2:9,10
 - a. To be community of peace; new Jerusalem - Gal. 4:26; Heb. 12:22; Rev. 3:12
 - b. To be peacemakers - Matt. 5:9

B. Conflict and warfare terminology in the New Testament

1. Only one (1) definite reference to physical war in New Testament:

Heb. 11:33,34 - "those who by faith conquered kingdoms,

escaped the edge of the sword, became mighty in war,
put foreign armies to flight”

2. No admonitions for Christian involvement in physical battle or war in the New Testament.
3. No direct statements that war is categorically sinful, or that Christian involvement in war is prohibited.
4. Warfare terminology in N.T. is predominantly metaphorical and figurative.
 - a. Christ’s battle with and defeat of evil powers - cf. Col. 2:15; Eph. 4:8; Rev. 12:7-9
 - b. Christian’s engagement in spiritual and behavioral conflict
 - (1) psychological - Rom. 7:23; James 4:1; I Pet. 2:11
 - (2) world-system - Eph. 6:10-20; I Tim. 1:18; 6:12; II Tim. 4:7



V. History of the Church's attitude toward "war"

A. Opposition to involvement in war

1. Many of early church fathers indicated that Christians should not participate in war.
2. No record of Christians participating in military prior to 174 A.D.
3. Until 323 A.D. almost all Christian literature repudiates involvement in military service and war. Some allowed for non-combative roles.
4. Some soldiers were excluded from participation in the Lord's Supper until they had confessed of their sin of shedding blood.
5. From Constantine (323 A.D.) onwards, when Christianity became official Roman religion, objection to war decline
6. Throughout Church history there have been varying kinds of pacifists
 - a. Waldensians
 - b. Mennonites
 - c. Brethren
 - d. Quakers

B. Acceptance of involvement in war

1. Tertullian (197 A.D.) reported many Christians in the Roman army
2. Clement of Alexandria (150-215 A.D.) indicated a soldier should "abide in that calling wherein he was called" (cf. I Cor. 7:24)
3. After Constantine (323 A.D.) objection to involvement in war declined
4. Ambrose (339-397) - "one who does not defend another from injury is as much at fault as the perpetrator."

5. Augustine(354-430) - A war can be just when

- a. appointed by God,
- b. it repulses wanton attack,
- c. seeks restoration of peace

6. Thomas Aquinas (1224-1274) - Three criteria for just war:

- a. waged by legitimate governmental authority,
- b. against an enemy who deserves punishment for wrongdoing,
- c. with the motivation that good should prevail and evil be removed.

7. Luther (1483-1546) defended the natural rights of nations to defend themselves.

8. Calvin noted that retributive justice is entrusted to civil governments by God, for the wicked ought to be punished, and the righteous ought to intercede on behalf of the wronged.



VI. Definition and types of pacifism

A. Definition of pacifism

1. Pacifism means “opposition to war”
2. English word “pacifism” derived from Latin *pacificus*, which combines *pax* (peace) and *ficus* (pact). (Pacific Ocean named because it seemed mild and peaceful).
3. Pacifism not to be confused with passivism (inactivity).

B. Types of pacifism

1. Humanistic pacifism
 - a. essential goodness of human nature should forestall such
 - b. education will instruct men to avoid ignorance of war
 - c. self-preservation dictates avoidance
2. Social pacifism
 - a. non-violent social change - Gandhi
 - b. programming for social development of utopian society
3. Legalistic pacifism
 - a. “thou shalt not kill”
 - b. War is an absolute evil, wrong, sin
4. Moralistic pacifism
 - a. war is immoral
 - b. subjective convictions of conscientious objection
5. Political pacifism
 - a. active ideological protest
 - b. it is in the self-interest of nations to avoid war
 - c. solidarity of nations should police their interactions
6. Anarchistic pacifism
 - a. anti-establishmentarianism - oppose the war-machine
 - b. “make love, not war”
7. Apocalyptic pacifism

- a. "we are just waiting for God to bring it to an end"
- b. "not worth fighting for"
- 8. Isolationistic pacifism
 - a. "ours is an enclave of peace"
 - b. "others can; we cannot"
- 9. Mystic pacifism
 - a. "It's all an illusion"
 - b. "We are above all this worldly fuss"
 - c. Avoid the worldly system
 - d. practice the inward self-discipline of meditative peace
 - e. visualise peace; eliminate hate
- 10. Religious pacifism
 - a. church law disallows
 - b. evangelise others; don't kill them
 - c. imitation of Jesus
 - d. willingness to accept self-sacrifice and suffering
- 11. Lordship pacifism
 - a. Christ in me does not seek war
 - b. Available to express His peaceful character and action



VII. Finding the balance between the physical and spiritual realms.

- A. Citizens of physical, earthly nation
 - 1. Legitimate God-ordained authority of human government - Rom. 13:3-6; Matt. 22:21
 - 2. Christian responsibility to obey government - Rom. 13:1-3,5,7; I Pet. 2:13-15
- B. Citizens of heaven (Phil. 3:20); spiritual kingdom
 - 1. Not a militaristic, warring kingdom - Matt. 26:52; Jn. 18:36
 - 2. Peacemakers (Matt. 5:9) who love their enemies (Matt. 5:43) and are non-retaliatory (Rom. 12:19)
 - 3. Individual right of conviction (Rom. 14:5) and conscience (Heb. 13:18)
- C. Desiring to let the peace of Christ control us (Col. 3:15), in order to leave peaceably with all men (Rom. 12:18).
- D. Allowing the law of love (Rom. 13:10; Gal. 5:14) to seek the highest good of all men.



