

*Christian World View: Just War and the Bible*

St. Augustine (354-430) and St. Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) formulated theories of just war that have remained important in Christian thought to this day:

- There must be a just cause for the war.
  - War must be waged only in response to certain grave and lasting damage inflicted by an aggressor.
  - The motive for war must be advancement of good or avoidance of evil.
  - The ultimate objective of war must be to bring peace.
  - Revenge, revolt, a desire to harm, dominate, or exploit and similar things are not justification for war.
- Every possible means of peacefully settling the conflict must be exhausted first.
- There must be serious prospects of success; bloodshed without hope of victory cannot be justified.
- The war must be declared by a legitimate authority. Private individuals or groups should seek redress of their rights through their governments, not by acts of war.
- The war must not cause greater evil than the evil to be eliminated.
- Non-combatants (civilians) must not be intentionally harmed.
- Prisoners and conquered peoples must be treated justly.

The 19<sup>th</sup>-century Baptist preacher Charles Spurgeon once remarked:

“The Church of Christ is continually represented under the figure of an army; yet its Captain is the Prince of Peace; its object is the establishment of peace, and its soldiers are men of a peaceful disposition. The spirit of war is at the extremely opposite point to the spirit of the gospel.”

“The Lord's battles, what are they? Not the garment rolled in blood, not the noise, and smoke, and din of human slaughter. These may be the devil's battles, if you please, but not the Lord's”

”The Christian soldier hath no gun and no sword, for he fighteth not with men.”

*What is the Biblical Standpoint on War?*

•Scripture indicates that God used military battles to evict, judge, vindicate, rescue, humble, and teach. In the Old Testament, God commanded or assisted many wars. There is the sense that evil must not be allowed to remain unchecked.

“a time to kill and a time to heal, a time to tear down and a time to build” *Ecclesiastes* 3:3

“And Moses said to the people, ‘Fear not, stand firm, and see the salvation of the Lord, which He will work for you today. For the Egyptians whom you see today, you shall never see again. The Lord will fight for you, and you have only to be silent.’ *Exodus* 14:13-14

“And the Lord said to Moses, ‘Write this as a memorial in a book and recite it in the ears of Joshua, that I will utterly blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven.’ And Moses built an altar and called the name of it, The Lord is my banner, saying, ‘A hand upon the banner

of the Lord! The Lord will have war with Amalek from generation to generation” *Exodus* 17, 14-16.

“So Moses said to the people, ‘Arm some of your men to go to war against the Midianites and to carry out the Lord's vengeance on them. Send into battle a thousand men from each of the tribes of Israel.’...They fought against Midian, as the Lord commanded Moses, and killed every man.” *Numbers* 31: 3-7

“When you go to war against your enemies, and see horses and chariots and an army greater than yours, do not be afraid of them, because the Lord your God, who brought you up out of Egypt, will be with you. When you are about to go into battle, the priest shall come forward and address the army. He shall say: "Hear, O Israel, today you are going into battle against your enemies. Do not be fainthearted or afraid; do not be terrified or give way to panic before them. For the Lord your God is the one who goes with you to fight for you against your enemies to give you victory.”” *Deuteronomy* 20:1-4.

“Do not make yourselves unclean by any of these things, for by all these the nations I am driving out before you have become unclean, and the land became unclean, so that I punished its iniquity, and the land vomited out its inhabitants.” *Leviticus* 18:24-25

“Do not say in your heart, after the Lord your God has thrust them out before you, ‘It is because of my righteousness that the Lord has brought me in to possess this land,’ whereas it is because of the wickedness of these nations that the Lord is driving them out before you. Not because of your righteousness or the uprightness of your heart are you going in to possess their land, but because of the wickedness of these nations the Lord your God is driving them out from before you, and that he may confirm the word that the Lord swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob. Know, therefore, that the Lord your God is not giving you this good land to possess because of your righteousness, for you are a stubborn people.” *Deuteronomy* 9:4-6

•Thus, in a sense there is a need to fight against iniquity, against people who are doing things that are an abomination to God, and God assists such conflicts.

Also, God punishes his people by means of war when they turn away from him:

“After Rehoboam's position as king was established and he had become strong, he and all Israel with him abandoned the law of the Lord. Because they had been unfaithful to the Lord, Shishak king of Egypt attacked Jerusalem in the fifth year of King Rehoboam....then the prophet Shemaiah came to Rehoboam and to the leaders of Judah who had assembled in Jerusalem for fear of Shishak, and he said to them, "This is what the Lord says, 'You have abandoned me; therefore, I now abandon you to Shishak.' "The leaders of Israel and the king humbled themselves and said, "The Lord is just." When the Lord saw that they humbled themselves, this word of the Lord came to Shemaiah: "Since they have humbled themselves, I will not destroy them but will soon give them deliverance. My wrath will not be poured out on Jerusalem through Shishak. They will, however, become subject to him, so that they may learn the difference between serving me and serving the kings of other lands." When Shishak king of Egypt attacked Jerusalem, he carried off the treasures of the temple of the Lord and the treasures of the royal palace. He took everything, including the gold shields Solomon had made.” *2 Chronicles* 12:1-9

### The fall of the northern kingdom of Israel:

“The king of Assyria invaded the entire land, marched against Samaria and laid siege to it for three years. In the ninth year of Hoshea, the king of Assyria captured Samaria and deported the Israelites to Assyria. He settled them in Halah, in Gozan on the Habor River and in the towns of the Medes. All this took place because the Israelites had sinned against the Lord their God, who had brought them up out of Egypt from under the power of Pharaoh king of Egypt. They worshiped other gods and followed the practices of the nations the Lord had driven out before them, as well as the practices that the kings of Israel had introduced.” *2 Kings 17: 5-8*

### The fall of Judah:

But Jeremiah answered them, "Tell Zedekiah, 'This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: I am about to turn against you the weapons of war that are in your hands, which you are using to fight the king of Babylon and the Babylonians who are outside the wall besieging you. And I will gather them inside this city. I myself will fight against you with an outstretched hand and a mighty arm in anger and fury and great wrath. I will strike down those who live in this city—both men and animals—and they will die of a terrible plague. After that, declares the Lord, I will hand over Zedekiah king of Judah, his officials and the people in this city who survive the plague, sword and famine, to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon and to their enemies who seek their lives. He will put them to the sword; he will show them no mercy or pity or compassion...Whoever stays in this city will die by the sword, famine or plague. But whoever goes out and surrenders to the Babylonians who are besieging you will live; he will escape with his life. I have determined to do this city harm and not good, declares the Lord. It will be given into the hands of the king of Babylon, and he will destroy it with fire.'" *Jeremiah 21:3-10*

### •Yet God's ultimate goal is for a world of peace:

“He will judge between the nations and will settle disputes for many peoples. They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore.” *Isaiah 2:4*

“Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity” *Psalms 133:1*

### •And Jesus urges non-violence in the face of aggression:

“You have heard that it was said, 'Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.' But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if someone wants to sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. If someone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you. You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.” *Matthew 5:38-45*

“Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell.” *Matthew 10:28*

“Then the men stepped forward, seized Jesus and arrested him. With that, one of Jesus' companions reached for his sword, drew it out and struck the servant of the high priest, cutting off his ear. ‘Put your sword back in its place,’ Jesus said to him, ‘for all who draw the sword will die by the sword. Do you think I cannot call on my Father, and he will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels?’ *Matthew 26:51-53*

”Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: ‘It is mine to avenge; I will repay,’ says the Lord. On the contrary: ‘If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head.’ Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.” *Romans 12:17-21*

•However, Jesus never condemned anyone for their military service:

“When Jesus had entered Capernaum, a centurion came to him, asking for help. "Lord," he said, "my servant lies at home paralyzed and in terrible suffering." Jesus said to him, "I will go and heal him." The centurion replied, "Lord, I do not deserve to have you come under my roof. But just say the word, and my servant will be healed. For I myself am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. I tell this one, 'Go,' and he goes; and that one, 'Come,' and he comes. I say to my servant, 'Do this,' and he does it." When Jesus heard this, he was astonished and said to those following him, "I tell you the truth, I have not found anyone in Israel with such great faith. I say to you that many will come from the east and the west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. But the subjects of the kingdom will be thrown outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." Then Jesus said to the centurion, "Go! It will be done just as you believed it would." And his servant was healed at that very hour.” *Matthew 8:5-13*

”At Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion in what was known as the Italian Regiment. He and all his family were devout and God-fearing; he gave generously to those in need and prayed to God regularly. One day at about three in the afternoon he had a vision. He distinctly saw an angel of God, who came to him and said, "Cornelius!" Cornelius stared at him in fear. "What is it, Lord?" he asked. The angel answered, "Your prayers and gifts to the poor have come up as a memorial offering before God. Now send men to Joppa to bring back a man named Simon who is called Peter. He is staying with Simon the tanner, whose house is by the sea." *Acts 10:1-8*

•And Paul reminds us that God uses rulers to punish evil by the sword:

“Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves. For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong. Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right and he will commend you. For he is God's servant to do you good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword for nothing. He is God's servant, an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer. *Romans 13:1-4*

•Jesus knew that war would be a part of human existence until the end of days:

“When you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be earthquakes in various places, and famines. These are the beginning of birth pains.” *Mark 13:7-8*

“Or suppose a king is about to go to war against another king. Will he not first sit down and consider whether he is able with ten thousand men to oppose the one coming against him with twenty thousand? If he is not able, he will send a delegation while the other is still a long way off and will ask for terms of peace.” *Luke 14:31-32*

•Yet, Jesus calls his followers to be set apart from the world:

“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.” *Matthew 5:9*

“For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.” *2 Corinthians 10:3-5*

”For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you should follow in his steps. ‘He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth.’ When he was abused, he did not return abuse; when he suffered, he did not threaten; but he entrusted himself to the one who judges justly.” *1 Peter 2:21-23*

Some Thoughts for Discussion:

1. Are any of the wars being waged by the US today (Afghanistan, Iraq) “just wars”?
2. In the past century, which conflicts can be considered just wars? (WWI, WWII, etc).
3. What should be our response as a nation when we see human atrocities taking place in other countries? (Darfur, Bosnia)
4. Does the New Testament rule out our involvement in war?
5. How should Christians respond to the prospect of war in general.

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