

Issues: War

I. INTRODUCTION

A. *A Nation Divided*

1. It was 2 years ago this month that the War in Iraq began.
2. You probably remember the massive demonstrations that were staged the month before the invasion as Coalition troops prepared their assault.
 - a. In several European & US cities, tens of thousands took to the streets to voice either their opposition to or support of the war.
 - b. It was the topic of conversation everywhere you turned.
 - c. And it seems that EVERYONE, at some point, was asked what they thought of the whole thing.
3. According to polls taken consistently throughout the war, nearly 70% of the American public *supported* the action against Hussein's regime,
 - a. Another 20% *opposed* it,
 - b. And the other 10% were undecided. [\[1\]](#)
4. Now that Hussein's been removed from power, many of those who *supported* the war no longer support a continuing Coalition presence in Iraq.
 - a. Their view is, "We won the war. Hussein's no longer a threat. Let's get out."
 - b. According to numerous polls, the nation is about *equally split* between those who want the US to pull out of Iraq and those who think we should stay until the nation is stable.
5. *Then*, we hear rumblings about the danger of such nations as Syria, Iran, and North Korea.
6. And the question is floated by the press; "Will we go to war with these nations too?"

B. *What's Our View*

1. As citizens of the USA, we hold various political views, and these political opinions are going to affect our view on a *wide range* of social issues.
2. But as *Christians*, whose citizenship in the Kingdom of God *trumps* our citizenship as Americans, our views ought to be based, not on political loyalties, but on the unchanging truths of God's

Word.

3. In this installment of “*Building a Christian Worldview*” we’re looking at the issue of War.
4. Our aim for tonight is to see what the Bible says about the **right** Use of Force and when, *if ever*, War is **justified**.
5. This is no small subject and a cause of debate among some of the greatest thinkers in the history of the Church.
 - a. Ambrose, Augustine, Aquinas & Calvin all wrote extensively on it.
 - b. Many books have been written on this subject,
 - c. And seminaries offer semester-long courses on the “Doctrine of Just War versus Pacifism.”
6. **Generally**, Christians fall into **2 camps** when it comes to this subject –
 - 1) Those who **support** the idea of a **just war** because they read in the OT of God’s command that Israel make war, specifically the command to make a **conquest** of the land of Canaan.
 - 2) Those who **oppose** war based on the 6th Commandment not to murder, and on Jesus’ teaching and modeling of non-violence in the NT.

II. THE POWER OF THE SWORD

A. Romans 13

¹Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God. ²Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves. ³For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil. Do you want to be unafraid of the authority? Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same. ⁴For he is God’s minister to you for good. But if you do evil, be afraid; for he does not bear the sword in vain; for he is God’s minister, an avenger to execute wrath on him who practices evil. ⁵Therefore you must be subject, not only because of wrath but also for conscience’ sake. ⁶For because of this you also pay taxes, for they are God’s

ministers attending continually to this very thing. ⁷Render therefore to all their due: taxes to whom taxes are due, customs to whom customs, fear to whom fear, honor to whom honor.

1. It's vital we understand what the Apostle Paul writes here in it's *historical* context.
2. The governing authority was Rome.
 - a. And even though Rome was often *brutal* in its use of force,
 - b. Still Paul recognized the basic, God-ordained *role of civil government* and called on Christians to *honor* and *submit* to it.

¹Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God.

3. Paul is saying that *civil* government is *ordained* by God.
 - a. He appoints the office of rulers over others because there's a *need* for it.
 - b. That need exists because of the *Fall*, because of *sin*.
 - c. Without an authority structure in place, the sinfulness of man, manifested in his *selfishness* will result in constant conflict.
 - d. Civil government enables fallen men & women to live with a measure of peace & order because sinfulness is checked *by* that structure of authority.
4. While *some* people will *rebel* against the God-ordained authority of civil government, Paul says *Christians* are to submit to it!

²Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves.

5. Paul equates a refusal to submit to the authority of civil rulers as nothing less than *opposition* to God Himself!
6. He says this because in their office as civil rulers, they're representatives of God, of His authority
 - a. Now, if only those who hold office *realized* this – that one day they will stand before God *to give account* for *how* they've performed their duty and *used* the authority God gave them.
 - b. What *we* as the ruled need to understand is that *our response* to their exercise of authority is really a response to God.
7. Let me use an example:

- a. In the home, God has ordained that a mother and father stand **as *His representatives*** in the lives of their children.
 - b. A child *learns* obedience and *owes* respect to his/her parents because of the way God has designed that relationship.
 - c. Parents aren't perfect, they make mistakes and at times *misuse* their authority.
 - d. But that doesn't alter the fact that children are to maintain an *attitude* and *posture* of subjection to their parents.
 - e. God will correct the erring parent; the *child's* abiding duty is reverent submission and respect toward his/her parents.
8. That's what Paul is saying here. It's the duty of *the ruled* to be subject to the God-ordained authority of civil rulers.
- a. We'll get into the subject about what to do when the authorities are unjust or make demands that are wrong, later.
 - b. What's important to realize now is that the authority in place at the time Paul wrote this was doing that very thing; misusing their authority – yet he still called for an *attitude* of honor and submission on the part of believers toward civil rulers.
9. Next, Paul laid out the proper scope and focus of civil rulers; He shows what their God-given authority is *for*.

³For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil. Do you want to be unafraid of the authority? Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same. ⁴For he is God's minister [servant] to you for good. But if you do evil, be afraid; for he does not bear the sword in vain; for he is God's minister, an avenger to execute wrath on him who practices evil.

10. This confirms what we just saw – that civil government is *necessary* because of the Fall!
- a. God ordains civil government to support what's morally *good* while suppressing evil.
 - b. But *authority* is empty if it isn't backed up with *force*!
 - c. And that's why Paul speaks here of the *sword* – the sword is the compelling power to authority.
11. Authority refers to *legal right*. Force speaks of *ability to do*.
- a. Authority without force is *ineffectual*.
 - b. Force without authority is *unlawful*.
 - c. A police officer carries a *badge & a gun*.

- 1) The badge represents *authority* – he/she is a duly *authorized* agent of the civil government, charged with the task of restraining evil.
 - 2) The gun is *power* – force; and makes the authority of the badge *effective*.
12. Paul is clear here; God gives civil government *both* authority and the power to back it up.
 13. The *proper use* of authority & force is the promotion of good & the restraint of evil.
 14. Twice in vs. 3 & 4 he refers to civil rulers & their agents as God’s ministers = *servants*.
 - a. We usually think of “ministers” as those in *clerical robes* –
 - b. Those who hold office in a church; like pastors & priests.
 15. Civil rulers & their agents are *no less* the servants of God *precisely because* their authority is *derived by God’s appointment*.
- ⁵Therefore you must be subject, not only because of wrath but also for conscience’ sake.**
16. As God’s people, who are ultimately submitted to Him, we must recognize & honor the *expressions* of His authority, & that’s what civil rulers are.
 17. We aren’t to submit to civil government *merely* out of a desire to avoid punishment but out of respect for God Himself!
 18. A *general attitude* of submission to civil rulers is an expression of submission to God.
 19. The *opposite* is also true: An attitude of hostility & rebellion toward civil rule is *opposition* to God.
 20. Now, someone will ask: What about those civil rulers who *hate God* & place *terrible demands* on people?
 - a. That’s a great question! And we have a marvelous answer in the example of our brothers & sisters in Christ who’ve *endured* such regimes.
 - b. Not long after Paul wrote this to the Church at Rome, several emperors came to the throne who arrested, tortured, & killed Christians. Paul was one of them, killed by Nero.
 - c. Believers were rounded up and brought before the crowds for execution in the Coliseum.
 - d. Throughout this campaign of terror, Christians were faced with the challenge of *renouncing Christ* or facing the lions.

- 1) And understand that the Roman Emperors cast this as a ***political, not religious*** issue.
 - 2) You see, ever year, the people of the Empire had to renew their loyalty to Rome by taking an oath.
 - 3) They would drop a pinch of incense onto some hot coals while saying, “Caesar is lord.”
 - 4) Since the pagans worshiped many gods, calling Caesar one more was no big deal.
 - 5) But Christians believed in only One God, the Lord Jesus Christ. To call Caesar “Lord’ would have been an act of betrayal to God.
 - 6) And though they were ***in fact far more loyal*** to the Roman Emperor than most others, they ***could not*** say the words of the oath.
 - 7) For this, they were rounded up and sent to their deaths by the hundreds of thousands.
- e. The Christians ***could not*** obey Caesar, because to do so would have been to ***disobey*** God, whose commands are ***higher*** than the commands of man.
 - f. But here’s what’s crucial to observe – those early Christian martyrs’ radical submission to God ***manifested*** itself in a meek & humble respect for their executioners.
 - g. The martyrs weren’t defiant, hostile, & mean-spirited. They went to their deaths with a joyous expectation of seeing Christ, knowing that the testimony of their submission to God found it’s most obvious & brilliant expression as they walked out to face the wild beasts.
 - h. History tells us the quiet humility & dignity with which the martyrs faced death, coupled with the love & respect they showed their executioners resulted in many of their enemies, the very men who were charged with their execution, becoming Christians!
 - i. As Tertullian said, the blood of the martyrs was the seed of the church.
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21. This kind of quiet submission to God and humble honor toward even wicked rulers stands in sharp contrast with the violent riots & vicious demonstrations staged today to voice opposition to civil government.

⁶For because of this you also pay taxes, for they are God's ministers attending continually to this very thing. ⁷Render therefore to all their due: taxes to whom taxes are due, customs to whom customs, fear to whom fear, honor to whom honor.

22. These last verses are crucial because Paul makes it clear Christians not only owe a debt of *submission & respect* to civil rulers, they owe them *support*.
- Taxes are one of the ways we honor & affirm the God-ordained role of civil government.
 - Our duty is to render *what's* due *to whom* it's due.
 - How* they use it, is between them & God and they will have to give account *for* it.

B. The Use of Force

- I want to focus on Paul's reference to *the sword* in v. 4.
- He sees the *proper* or *just use* of the sword as being the restraint & punishment of evil

⁴For he [the civil ruler or his agent] is God's minister to you for good. But if you do evil, be afraid; for he does not bear the sword in vain; for he is God's minister, an avenger to execute wrath on him who practices evil.

- Some people think *ALL use of force* is evil but such is not the case.
- Because we live in a fallen world, with evil men, force is necessary to *restrain* them,
 - And when they *perpetrate* evil, to *punish* them.
 - It's this *threat* of punishment that keeps *further* evil from breaking out.
- We know *God* will *spiritually* judge individuals for the evil they do in eternity.
- What we need to understand is that the Bible is quite clear *He also judges* evil in the here & now through human agents.
 - We can think of some stories in scripture that give proof to this.
 - God judged the wicked Amorites through the nation of Israel when they conquered Canaan.
 - God judged Israel with the sword of the Assyrians, and later the nation of Judah by the Babylonians.
 - When the Babylonians in turn grew wicked, He judged them by

the Persians, who were judged by the Greeks, who were judged by the Romans, who were judged by the Visigoths, and on and on it goes.

- e. There were even times when God *bypassed* the human agent of judgment & intervened *directly* to show His divine wrath – the Flood, & Sodom & Gomorrah are *proverbial* as demonstrations of God’s *direct judgment* of sin.
7. The closing of the Red Sea on the armies of Egypt, the campaigns of the Judges, all these show that God is not adverse to the use of force when it’s used to a *just* end.
8. Standing on the shore of the Red Sea, watching as the bodies of the Egyptians washed up on the banks, Moses and the children of Israel sang this song [Exodus 15:1-3]
¹ “I will sing to the LORD, For He has triumphed gloriously! The horse and its rider He has thrown into the sea! ² The LORD is my strength and song, And He has become my salvation; He is my God, and I will praise Him; My father’s God, and I will exalt Him. ³ The LORD is a man of war; The LORD is His name.
9. We read that in the Millennium when Jesus rules *visibly* on Earth, evil will still *occasionally* manifest itself, and He will punish it swiftly with a rod of iron. (Psalm 2:9)
10. It won’t be until the New Heavens and Earth when evil is finally & forever banished that the use of force will be unnecessary.
12. In Luke 3, we read how when the people came out to be baptized by John the Baptist, some soldiers came out as well.
 - a. John was telling the people *how* to get ready for the Messiah Who would soon come.
 - b. In v. 14 we read –
¹⁴ Likewise the soldiers asked him, saying, “And what shall we do?” So he said to them, “Do not intimidate anyone or accuse falsely, and be content with your wages.”
 - c. Note that John didn’t tell them to *quit* soldiering!
 - 1) If being a soldier was *inherently immoral*, then John would have told them to quit, just as Jesus told the woman caught in adultery to go and sin no more.

- 2) But John gave no such direction.
 - 3) Rather, he told them to fulfill their occupation as soldiers *honorably* and within the scope of its authority;
 - 4) Not misusing the power they possessed to their own selfish ends,
 - 5) But with an eye to a justice that's aimed at love & peace.
13. Justice & love are *not* mutually exclusive.
 14. In fact, in Romans 13 Paul *links* the two when he says that civil rulers are ordained by God to *promote good* while *restraining evil*.
 - a. Justice is not *an end in itself*; true justice always looks to bring about of an environment of virtue, and the greatest virtue of all is love.
 - b. Therefore justice doesn't **JUST** restrain or punish evil – it does so **BECAUSE** it's motivated by *love* for others.
 - c. *Bare* justice, unmodified by love, can be brutal and cruel.
 - d. Justice *in the cause and pursuit of love* seeks to restrain evil so that peace and goodness can prevail.

C. Just War

1. Based on what Paul say in Romans 13 and how we see God using force in the cause of justice in the Scriptures, theologians have given a list of qualifications for the Just Use of Force – or what is known as a *Doctrine of Just War*.
2. There are 7 qualifications; A Just War must . . .

- 1- Have Just Cause • It must fall within the realm of restraining evil and/or punishing evildoers. Also, it can only be waged as a *last resort*. All non-violent options must be exhausted before the use of force can be justified.
- 2 - Be Declared by a Proper Authority • Just causes cannot be served by actions taken by those who do not constitute a legitimate authority.
- 3 - Possess Right Intention • The only permissible objective of a just war is to redress an injury or to prevent an injury from occurring, when there is a reasonable assumption one is about to incur.
- 4 - Have a Reasonable Chance of Success • Deaths and injury incurred in a *hopeless* cause are not morally justifiable.
- 5 – Have As Its Ultimate Goal the Establishment of Peace • The peace established after the war must be *preferable* to the state that would have prevailed if the war had *not* been fought.

6 – Be Waged with Means Proportional to the End • States are prohibited from using force not necessary to attain the limited objective of addressing the injury suffered, preventing an imminent injury, and establishing a preferable peace.

7 - Use Weapons and Methods which Discriminate between Combatants and Non-combatants • Civilians are never permissible targets of war, and reasonable effort must be taken to avoid killing non-combatants. The deaths of civilians are justified *only* if they are unavoidable victims of a deliberate attack on a military-political target.

3. Those who oppose the use of force often do so on the basis of Jesus' words in the Sermon on the Mount to *not* retaliate.
 - a. He said if someone strikes you on the cheek, you ought to turn the other also.
 - b. In Luke 6:35 Jesus said . . .

Love your enemies, do good, and lend, hoping for nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High. For He is kind to the unthankful and evil.

c. Exodus 20:13

You shall not murder.

d. Psalm 34:14

Depart from evil and do good; Seek peace and pursue it.

e. Matthew 5:9

Blessed are the peacemakers, For they shall be called sons of God.

4. How do we square these verses with what Paul says in Romans 13 about the authority and duty of civil government?
5. We need to realize that these are two different subjects.
 - a. In Romans 13, Paul is identifying the God-ordained role of civil government and the way believers are to relate to it.
 - b. These other verses deal with *interpersonal relationships*, not the role of civil government. It's "apples and oranges."
6. When in the Sermon on the Mount Jesus said there was to be no retaliation, He was referring to *personal* relationships.
7. The 6th Commandment prohibiting murder does *not* forbid all killing.
 - a. How could it when the *punishment* proscribed for those who

- violate* the 6th commandment was *death?* (Num. 35:31)
- b. Murder is the illegal, pre-meditated, & purposeful taking of human life.
 - c. God gives the State the “power of the sword” to *execute* murderers. (Gen 9:6)
 - d. The sword isn’t used to *spank* people. It’s not the *flat side* of the sword that’s used; it’s the *sharp* edge.
8. Psalm 34:14 says -
- Depart from evil and do good; Seek peace and pursue it.**
- a. While this is aimed at individuals, its application is equally valid as an instruction for rulers.
 - b. For it says that they are to “seek & pursue peace.”
 - c. The route to peace doesn’t automatically lie in pacifism and non-violence.
 - d. All non-violent means ought to be tried as we *seek* peace,
 - e. But when evil refuses to honor peace, then it must be put down.
 - f. Even Paul, in Romans 12:18 recognized that while we must pursue peace, because we live in a fallen world, not all *want* to be at peace.

If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men.

9. This is the mandate we have as *individuals* as it relates to *interpersonal relationships*.
10. We err when we think this ethic applies to civil government.
11. Civil rulers have a God-ordained task with the delegated power to back it up – the *protection* of those they serve.

D. The Policeman

1. I want to pose a question: Would you feel *safe* if there were no Police in Ventura County?
 - a. What I mean is, if *nothing* changed in terms of world conditions,
 - b. Just remove all of the police and law enforcement of all the cities and county; would you feel safe?
2. Why? Because of the presence of evil.
 - a. We know if law enforcement were taken out of the picture, crime would skyrocket.
 - b. Travel on the streets would become dangerous as people

- ignored the traffic laws.
3. Let me change this around a bit now - If a policeman saw a criminal in the act of committing a crime, what do we expect the officer to do about it – drive on, or stop and restrain him?
 4. One of the biggest complaints during the LA riots was that the police retreated and didn't do their job.
 - a. Buildings burned - stores lost millions of dollars in goods to looting.
 - b. Evil was unrestrained because the authorities didn't do their job.
 5. What's true of police on the *local level* – now expand to the *world stage*.
 - a. The armed forces are our *national police*,
 - b. Charged with the task of protecting us from crooks & criminals who happen to be presidents & premiers.
 6. A strong & capable military acts as a *restraint* to evil.
 7. And when evil attacks, then it's the solemn duty of the civil rulers to use the power of the sword to punish that evil.

III. CONCLUSION

A. *Sometimes War Is Necessary*

1. Because we live in a fallen world, War is *sometimes a necessity* and can be used to affect a good and just end.
 - a. War gave the United States liberty from a despotic & unjust ruler.
 - b. War saved the Union and freed the slaves,
 - c. War kept Hitler from spreading Fascism across the world.
 - d. The current War on Terror will hopefully keep more attacks like 9/11 at bay.
2. War that's waged to protect a nation's citizens from *imminent* harm is the proper function of civil government.
3. Wars of aggression that are driven by greed for wealth or territory, or any dubious military or political advantage are *never* justified.
4. Nation & empire building that uses force, whether economic or military, is simply not just.
5. But war that comes about as a result of an attempt to resist or punish evil, can be just & right.

B. *Our Calling*

1. As Christians, we must be careful that we don't get sucked into

- one side or another of the *political* debate over War.
2. We mustn't let party affiliations like *Republican* or *Democrat* determine our view.
 3. Support of the President ought not be based on whether we *like* him or not.
 4. Our **first calling** is as the People of Christ.
 - a. We serve a King *before* a president.
 - b. Our citizenship is in Heaven before any earthly nation.
 - c. In fact, our allegiance to God makes us the best possible citizens here on Earth.
 5. We do not blindly or chauvinistically support any man or political agenda.
 6. Our cause is Justice bound by a passionate pursuit of Love & Peace.
 7. Our task, our duty, as it says in 1 Tim. 2:1-3, is to *pray* for those in authority, where ever they are.
 - a. To pray that they would be faithful to their God-ordained duty to be agents of justice.
 - b. To pray for peace, and the most *just route to it!*
 8. No matter how good the World may be doing – it is *ever* the role of the Church to stand as a *prophetic voice* calling the world to an even *greater* degree of righteousness.
 9. Which means of course, the Church is modeling that herself.

[1] <http://specials.msn.com/special/americatwar/default.asp>