

**A JUST-PEACE STANCE:
Should Christians Engage in Warfare?**

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Table of Contents

Topic	Page
Should Christians Engage in Warfare (an Introduction)	4
A Brief History of the Debate	4
The Just War Theory	5
The Crusade Theory: Pre-emptive Strike	7
The Non-Resistant Theory	8
The Non-Violent Resistant Theory: Pacifism	10
Five Key Scriptures to Consider	11
My Personal View: Be a Peace-maker!	15
Four Reasons Why I Believe in Being a Peace-Maker	19
There are Two Kingdoms	19
Jesus Brings Peace	20
Humans are Created in the Image of God	21
Hell is a Reality	21
Critiques of Being a Peace-Maker	22
Jesus nor the Apostles Never Told Someone to Leave the Military	22
God Called His People to War in the Old Testament	22
Certain Passages in the New Testament Show that the Point of Christianity is not Peace	23
In Conclusion: Grace is Required!	23
Bibliography	25

A JUST-PEACE STANCE:

Should Christians Engage in Warfare?

"War! Huh – Good God, y'all! What is it good for? Absolutely nothing!" So wrote Edwin Starr in his protest song to the Vietnam War. But, is it true? Can good come out of war? This is a question that every Christian in America should ask themselves (and more importantly ask God). Our President hopes that war can produce peace. Bush hopes that a War on Terrorism can end terror campaigns just as the U.S.'s war on drugs was supposed to end drug abuse. Many Christians believe that "God is speaking again through a Bush" (as seen on a bumper sticker). Is it right for Christians to answer Bush's call to join the U.S military? The terrorists believe that we are fighting a jihad, or holy war. Are they right? Should Christians look at the War on Terrorism as a crusade? Should we be willing to kill the people who do immoral acts against America and her allies? Should we be willing to send people to hell, knowing they don't believe in Jesus, by pulling a trigger or pushing a button or typing into a keyboard? Should Christians engage in warfare?

A Brief History of the Debate

The Church in her early years called for Christians to not go to war. "For the first three hundred years we have no evidence that Christians went to war."¹ Some early Christian church fathers were strongly pacifist. Origen said that Christians "do not go forth as soldiers". Tertullian (ca. 155-240) was quite adamant in his advocacy of pacifism, claiming force was entirely out of place for the Christian. He stated that not only was violence at odds with the Christian faith, but the idolatry and emperor sacrifice required of the Roman military made army

¹ C. Wayne Zunkel, *To Follow in Jesus' Steps* (Elgin, IL: Brethren Press, 1991) 47.

service doubly prohibitive for the Christian.² Clement of Alexandria wrote "...he who holds the sword must cast it away and that if one of the faithful becomes a soldier he must be rejected by the Church, for he has scorned God." Pre-Constantinian Christianity did not see military service as possible.

The views of the Church began to change once the emperor became Christian. No longer could Christians point to the evil emperor when he was one of their brothers. Constantine, who converted to Christianity partly because of his belief that the Christian God would help him win battles, brought about great reform in the name of Christ. "Constantine, coming to power after a period of terrible persecution, was hailed by Christians as the great champion of their faith. There quickly emerged a close alliance of empire and church..."³ This helped change the idea that Christians should avoid politics or military life, because the state may now be considered godly.

Later Church fathers began to argue the view that Christians should go to war for good causes. Ambrose of Milan (ca. 339-397), the spiritual mentor of Augustine, argued that a secure peace may be won by a just war; and he insisted that the Christian faith should act to bring justice and compassion to the conduct of war.⁴ Christians were no longer the persecuted minority but an officially recognized religion of the state.

The Just War Theory

In this changing environment, the just war theory was developed by Augustine.

Augustine developed the idea that Christianity was not incompatible with war, but Christians

² Arthur F. Holmes, ed., *War and Christian Ethics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1975) 42.

³ *The Brethren Encyclopedia, Volume 2: K-Z*, (Philadelphia, PA & Oak Brook, IL: The Brethren Encyclopedia Inc., 1983) 998.

⁴ Arthur F. Holmes, ed., *War and Christian Ethics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1975) 55.

were called to influence the military to what God wants, namely justice. He stated, "Peace should be the object of your desire; war should be waged only as a necessity."⁵ From this idea he called Christians to "jus ad bellum" (justice for war) and thus the "just war theory" was born.

This position is widely held by Christians even today. The "just war theory" is not a call for only war, nor is it a way to make war right. This theory "does not try to justify war. Rather it tries to bring war under the control of justice so that... it would eliminate war altogether."⁶ Over the years, this has expanded to include the following principles:

1. A war must have a just cause. A just cause would include: intervening on behalf of an innocent third party, punishing an evil or aggressor nation, or defending one's own nation against aggression.
2. A war must be declared by the proper authority. In the United States, for example, only the Congress has the power to declare war.
3. A war must have limited objectives. "If the purpose is justice, then unconditional surrender or the destruction of a nation's economic or political institutions is an unwarranted objective."⁷
4. A war must have proportionality. Military leaders should ask, "are the potential gains worth the possible costs and sacrifice, both with regard to finances and human lives?"
5. Noncombatants should be immune from attack.
6. A war must have the goal of peace. Not only should there be a strategy to win; there should be a peace that can be achieved.

⁵ Arthur F. Holmes, ed., *War and Christian Ethics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1975) 63.

⁶ Arthur F. Holmes, "The Just War Theory," in *War: Four Christian Views*, ed. Robert G. Clouse, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1981) 119.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 121.

7. War should be the last resort. Nonviolent means of persuasion should always be attempted for a reasonable amount of time before resorting to war.

These seven criteria make up the “just war theory.” This is considered the fundamentalist view of war. With the onset of nuclear missiles and weapons of mass destruction, some Christians have questioned whether or not this theory is still viable. How can it ever be justified to use such weapons, and can peace really come from mass destruction? Some Christians have taken a step further and have called for another view of war: The Crusade.

The Crusade Theory: Pre-emptive Strike

The Crusade Theory should not be confused with what went on in the Middle Ages. It is not a call for the Church to kill the infidels, or to take back land and property from them. This theory believes that Christians have the duty to go to war to “undo something that no one had the right to do in the first place.”⁸ This view also assumes that self-defense is justifiable for Christians. “Governments threatened by armed, unjust aggression must defend their people. This includes defense by armed force if necessary as a last resort.”⁹ If it is, “then under some circumstances a preventive or pre-emptive strike must also be justifiable.”¹⁰ That is why this is also called the “Pre-emptive Strike Theory.”

This theory suggests that it is the Christian duty, especially the American Christian duty, to right the wrongs in this world, even by military action. The Muslim sect of the Shiites

⁸ Harold O.J. Brown, “The Crusade or Preventive War,” in *War: Four Christian Views*, ed. Robert G. Clouse, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1981) 158.

⁹ National Conference of Catholic Bishops. *The Challenge of Peace: God’s Promise and Our Response*. (Washington D.C.: United States Catholic Conference, 1983) 24.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 163.

believes that “there is no separation of religion and politics.”¹¹ The Crusade Theory does not agree with this, but does say that Christians should use politics for religious goals.

The Pre-Emptive Strike doctrine is the official doctrine of Bush administration since September 11th. Some Critics of this view suggest that it is impossible to uphold, since we can not be in every place at all times. They argue that we can not always have correct information to justify a pre-emptive strike. They point to the missing “weapons of mass destruction” in Iraq as a prime example. Some of these critics are part of the Christian groups that declare that war is never permissible for Christians.

The Non-Resistant Theory

This theory differs greatly from the previous two, because it states that Christians can not participate in any form of violence. The Non-Resistant Theory holds that Christians should trust God for protection and abstain from aggression. There are three church denominations that hold this view and are called the “historic peace churches”: the Church of the Brethren, the Mennonite, and the Quakers. They believe that war is the result of sin and that the purpose of the military is "to kill people and break things. The armed forces are not educational institutions, international relief agencies, or social engineering models. Armies are just large manifestations of the evil that lurks in human hearts, and of the great force that is necessary to keep that evil in check.”¹² The non-resistance Christian looks to Christ for his example and sees that Christ did not retaliate nor participate in war. This leads the Christians who follow the non-resistance view to hold the following principles:

¹¹ Stone, Ronald H. *Christian Realism and Peacemaking: Issues in US Foreign Policy*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1988.

¹² Mark A. Ray, “From Biblical Nonresistance to 'Peace,” *Brethren Revival Fellowship Journal* 34, no. 2 (1999): 6.

1. The government has the legitimate right to use force to contain evil, but Christians are not to participate in forceful actions.
2. Christ stated that wars would continue until His second coming.
3. Apart from God's grace, human nature can not change. War is inevitable so long as the human heart is not at peace with God through the blood of His Son.
4. The way to cause peace among the nations is to convert the people of the nations, therefore preaching the gospel is most important and the only way to bring peace.
5. When someone experiences God's grace, they receive the spirit of Christ and peace.
6. A Christian's allegiance is first to God's Kingdom over any earthly government.
7. In God's Kingdom, life is sacred and should not be destroyed.
8. Since Jesus held an indifferent view to the government, Christians should as well. We should only be involved so that more people can be impacted by the Gospel.
9. Love is the ultimate command. It is not within love to kill someone.

The Christians who hold to this view believe that evil can not prevail over non-violence. "It is not possible to use nonviolence, in the true sense, to accomplish an evil end."¹³ Within those churches that officially hold to the non-resistance theory, many of their members do not find it realistic. During WWII, fifty percent of the Mennonite boys who were drafted entered the United States military. Ninety percent of the Church of the Brethren young men chose military service as well.¹⁴ This means that this theory is sometimes too high of an ideal, but is often

¹³ Glenn Smiley, "How Nonviolence Works," in *Peace is the Way*, ed. Walter Wink, (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2000) 57.

¹⁴ Donald F. Durnbaugh, *Fruit of the Vine*, (Elgin, IL: The Brethren Press, 1997) 474.

“viewed as an alternative to less biblically based, more politically motivated nonviolence and pacifism.”¹⁵

The Non-Violent Resistant Theory: Pacifism

Some Christians agree that followers of Christ should never use violence, but do not believe in the Non-Resistant theory. They take the concept of Christ’s peace further and call for their government to disarm and use pacifistic methods to resist evil. Nonviolent Resistance, or Pacifism, is quite different from the Nonresistance Theory because it has a political agenda. Martin Luther King, Jr. held this view and used non-violent resistance to change America to legislate civil rites. The goal of this theory is not necessarily peace, but political change. This theory also holds to the teachings of Gandhi. “Political revolution was Gandhi’s primary objective. Gandhi’s program was not one of nonresistance or peace.”¹⁶

Christian Pacifists believe that since Christ is the Prince of Peace and He is in charge of the governments, peace among the nations can occur (no matter what a nation believes about Christ). They generally believe that innovation can also propel us toward peace. For example, the internet helps us understand other cultures by making the world “smaller”. A Christian Pacifist opposes war because of its results: abuse, destruction, death, wounds, and pain. They also call for governments to follow the principles of the Kingdom of God, since it is the most excellent way. If more governments followed Christ’s example, even if they don’t believe in Him, then peace would be possible. This means that education and legislation are possible ways to change the world. The Christian Pacifist does not call for Christians to only work for the Kingdom of God, but they have an active interest in the government, motivated by the desire to

¹⁵ *The Brethren Encyclopedia, Volume 2: K-Z* (Philadelphia, PA & Oak Brook, IL: The Brethren Encyclopedia Inc., 1983) 944.

¹⁶ Guy Franklin Hershberger, *War, Peace, and Nonresistance*, (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1969) 191.

influence policies, even working directly for international peace and disarmament. Ultimately, a Christian Pacifist considers herself responsible for working for a just world order, the kind of world God would want.

Other Christians hold that this view is inconsistent with what Christ wants. Some believe that they “have read their Bibles only far enough to discover that God and Jesus call for and promote ‘peace’ and have taken this as the charter for them secularly to pursue their secular concept of peace – completely missing the fact that Scripture knows nothing of ‘secular peace’ but has spoken exclusively of ‘eschatological peace’ and its cross-bearing methodology.”¹⁷ In other words, the Bible does not claim that peace on earth is possible. Real peace will come when the Second Coming happens, and until then we live in an unmerciful world.

Of these four views on Christians and warfare, which is correct? What does the Bible say about peace and war? Should Christians engage in combat?

Five Key Scriptures to Consider

The Bible, especially the Old Testament, is filled with war-imagery and battles. It should be noted that in the New Testament, “we have a transition from physical warfare to spiritual.”¹⁸ There are a plethora of Scriptures that we can consider, but let us look at five of them from the NIV Bible and their possible interpretation from each of the above views:

1. Isaiah 48:22 – *“There is no peace”, says the Lord, “for the wicked.”*
 - a. The Just War Theory –Christians should use force if necessary to bring peace to a wicked situation.

¹⁷ Vernard Eller, *War & Peace from Genesis to Revelation*, (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2003) 201.

¹⁸ L. Ryken and others, eds. “War,” in *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998) 633.

- b. The Crusade Theory – We need to be watchful for the wicked, in case they plan to attack. We must be ready to end conflict by taking war to the enemy, and thus defeating wickedness.
 - c. The Non-Resistant Theory – We are all wicked. There is no hope for anyone who is outside of Christ, for only He can bring peace to a person’s life. The non-Christian already has strife in his life; we do not need to add to it by going to war with them. Spreading the gospel to the wicked is more important than defense or political peace.
 - d. The Non-Violent Resistant Theory – We should not expect peace from nations who do not know God. We are to be God’s instruments by bringing social justice and peace to a nation that does not know Christ. Even if they do not have “spiritual” peace, we can produce peace here on earth. We can non-violently protest the governmental wrongs.
2. Matthew 5:9 – *Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God.*
- a. The Just War Theory – Peace should be the ultimate goal in war. If we can not obtain peace (even if it is in the distant future), then we should not go to war.
 - b. The Crusade Theory – War should be used to protect the innocent and for self-defense, thus producing peace. War can be a tool for peacemakers.
 - c. The Non-Resistant Theory – This should be taken spiritually. Our efforts should not be for the military, but sharing Christ (the only source of peace).
 - d. The Non-Violent Resistant Theory – It is God’s will to stand up for instruments of peace. We will not be blessed unless we fight for disarmament and other pacifist ideals.

3. Romans 12:17-21 – *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.*
- a. The Just War Theory – We must understand that God punishes evil through government as stated in the next two verses (13:1-2).
 - b. The Crusade Theory – God has placed us in a position in America to be powerful against those who are our enemy. We must be people who right the wrongs of those who oppress people through our humanitarian efforts.
 - c. The Non-Resistant Theory – This is the key Scripture in understanding the way of peace. God is the one who brings justice, not humans. We must be people who love in practical ways.
 - d. The Non-Violent Resistant Theory – Since God will bring justice, we must work hard in this world to be instruments of peace. The Gospel should be shared by providing for people’s needs. We may never be able to verbally share the Gospel, but it is more important to meet the physical needs to hurting people.
4. 2 Corinthians 10:3-5 – *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.*

- a. The Just War Theory – Diplomacy should be used and exhausted before war is used.
This means that those who seek peace can win out over those who are seeking to expand their power or borders.
 - b. The Crusade Theory – We must be in dialogue with those who wish to do us harm, so that we can have the right information to protect ourselves.
 - c. The Non-Resistant Theory – We must be able to give a reason for our hope in Christ, and be able to dialogue with those who are opposed to Christ so that they will be won over to Christ. Obedience to Christ is the key to peace.
 - d. The Non-Violent Resistant Theory –Diplomacy, education, and mediation should be our most powerful tools in defeating evil in this world.
5. James 3:17-18 – *But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere.*
- Peacemakers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness.*
- a. The Just War Theory – Our war efforts must be accompanied by the rebuilding of our enemies. We must engage the enemy only as a last resort and to produce peace and then rebuild that nation to produce peace.
 - b. The Crusade Theory – A nation has the right to protect itself and to keep peace.
Through protection and righting wrongs, we are being peacemakers of tomorrow.
 - c. The Non-Resistant Theory – A peacemaker can not engage in war and should not have to protect herself. God will do this, and will produce goodness in her life because she is following Christ.

- d. The Non-Violent Resistant Theory – These are the principles that should American domestic and foreign policy. We should be impartial in our justice and considerate of other cultures (even if they are non-Christian).

Each of these Scriptures is important as we determine what it means to be citizens of both the Kingdom of God and the kingdom of America. We must wrestle with each view and be faithful to even the “hard” Scriptures. We must determine what will bring God the most glory.

My Personal View: Be a Peace-maker!

I believe that all of the theories covered so far have weaknesses in them. While holders of each view are sincerely following Christ, I believe the ultimate call of the Christian is to be a peace-maker. The Just-War theory focuses on the question, “is this war just?”, while it should ask, “will this lead to peace?” Adherents might claim that the ultimate goal is peace, but too many have used it to justify war for the status quo. The Crusade Theory puts too much trust in possible intelligence. As the name implies, this theory can lead to modern day crusades that are ultimately ungodly. The Non-Resistant Theory is just too naïve. It adds to God’s commands. The Bible never explicitly tells us to not engage in warfare. If God thought that this command was necessary, He would have told us. Finally, the Non-Violent Resistant Theory is too secular. It gives too much credit to the human heart. Peace is not possible unless people turn to Christ.

I believe that the ultimate question for Christians is, “how will the Kingdom of God advance in my life? How will God be glorified?” I believe that God’s glory ultimately happens in peace. Jesus calls us to love our enemies. This doesn’t mean to become doormats for them. Real love stands up for what is right and protects the innocent, even if it means losing life on either side. In 1777 and 1780, families who believed that Jesus’ call to love your enemies meant to be non-resistant were massacred by Indians at Morrison's Cove, Pennsylvania. The Church of

the Brethren hold these people up as heroes because they would not fight back, even when it meant watching their wife and children die. I believe that this is a shame, since there was no story of any Indian being converted due to their action. Peace never came to the enemy, simply because Christians were non-violent. “We need peace-builders more than we need pacifists.”¹⁹

Peace-making is active, not passive. This might mean standing against military action. It is Christian to call people to peace and it is American to be a peace-maker. “If patriotism means wanting what is best for one’s country, and if one firmly believes that waging a war will neither make America safer nor create a more just world, then advocating for peace is an act of patriotism.”²⁰ People should not think that those who love peace are anti-American! I believe that if you are not a pacifist, you should at least be a pacifist sympathizer. It just would be great if pacifism were true. A world without war would be wonderful.

Every Christian should work towards peace. As stated above, James 3:18 tells us that a “harvest of righteousness” will be ours when we are peace-makers. I believe, however, that the Bible never says be a peace-keeper. A “peace-keeper” tries to never rock the boat, and tries to make sure nothing gets out of hand. Christians are called to be a peacemaker by taking a stand for Jesus! In fact, Christian leaders, and especially preachers are called to be a “peacemaker, a prophet, and an ambassador of peace”²¹. Ephesians 6:14-15 says, “Stand firm then... and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace.” Christians should be more willing to be a missionary than join the military. The opposite is true in most American homes today. People will send their sons and daughters to die for America, but won’t send them

¹⁹ Charles, P. Lutz, “On Not Leaving It to the Pacifists,” in *Peace – On Not Leaving It to the Pacifists*, ed. Gerald O. Pederson, (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1975) 73.

²⁰ Paul Schrag, “Patriotism without Militarism,” in *A Peace Reader*, eds. E. Morris Sider and Luke Keefer, Jr., (Nappanee, IN: Evangel Publishing House, 2002) 262.

²¹ L. Ryken and others, eds. “War,” in *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998) 633.

to die for preaching the Gospel. Approximately 300,000 American men and women have served at one time or another in Iraq. Imagine what would have happened if just half of that number were sent as missionaries into Iraq! These messengers of peace would have glorified Christ through their actions, even if it meant that their lives were lost. Just look at what Paul went through in 2 Corinthians 11:23-27 when he tried to be a peacemaker. When you take a stand for peace, sometimes things get out of hand!

The gift of peace from Jesus does not mean the end of tension or the absence of warfare. In fact, Jesus said that He came to bring a sword that would divide families (Matthew 10:34)! It does mean, however, that we should spend more effort in making peace. You can not deny that the results of war are devastating. God is a God of life and peace, not chaos and destruction. “Just suppose that the imagination, creativity, and resources now invested in the development of war machinery were invested in a comparable way on a commensurate scale in a Department of Peace.”²² Christians are called to interact with society (Matthew 5), not isolate themselves. If Christians are to interact with the government imagine how God can be glorified by calling the government to peace and justice.

The peace that Jesus offers us should be the basis for all of our relationships, including those that are our enemies. This means that we should hold the following principles when asking if we should engage in warfare:

1. Christians should intervene on behalf of an innocent third party or for a godly cause, even if it means ending life. For example, we should be willing to go to war to end child-trafficking, or slavery.

²² Robert Loken, “Being a Peacemaker in a Nuclear Age,” in *Peace – On Not Leaving It to the Pacifists*, ed. Gerald O. Pederson, (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1975) 16.

2. Christians should recognize that only Jesus can bring real peace. Peace is not possible unless a nation is converted to Christ. We should not believe that war can result in peace. History has never shown this to be true.
3. Christians should be willing to sacrifice their own lives for the sake of others, but be willing to protect those that God has placed in their care (their spouse, children, etc.).
4. Christians should call for the government to use its resources equally between peace building and war. They should support the peace-making role of the government.
5. Christians should be more willing to sacrifice to share the gospel than to die for their country.
6. Christians should protect the civilians and non-participants of war. They should be willing to provide for their physical needs.
7. Christians should have the answers to long term peace building in a region before engaging in combat. They should know how to build more than how to tear down.
8. Christians should be masters of diplomacy, reconciliation, mediation, arbitration, and negotiation. All avenues of peace should be depleted before war is begun.
9. Christians should practice personal peace. They should overlook offenses done to them, renounce anger and hatred, pray for their enemies, and show love to their spouses.
10. Christians should be actively involved in the peace-making role of the Church. They should help people become reconciled to God; persuade fellow believers not to despise nor judge one another regarding neutral matters; and practice love toward other believers by following Jesus' instructions for settling differences (Matt. 18).

If Christians took to heart these principles, and allowed them to guide their path, peace would be the ultimate outcome. Some Christians believe that America and the Kingdom of God are the

same. This is not true, and is idolatrous. We need a guiding force in our citizenship. I believe Jesus calls us to be guided by His peace.

Four Reasons Why I Believe in Being a Peace-Maker

Being guided by peace does not mean to call for disarmament or pacifism. It also does not mean “that evil is never to be punished, however, but only that it is God’s prerogative to do so. One way He does it is through the state’s administration of justice. For the state is God’s minister to reward good and to punish evil.”²³ I believe that there are legitimate reasons to be a peace-maker.

1. There are two Kingdoms.

Our allegiance should first and foremost be to God’s Kingdom, not our earthly kingdom. A follower of Christ is not of this world (John 18:36), but is a citizen of Heaven. We should be cautious about involving ourselves in politics, and by extension, involving ourselves in human conflicts. We should also realize the truth of Ephesians 6:12 (NIV) - *For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.* This means that our battle is for God’s peace and justice. Patriotism can not be our driving force for war. “Once the law of nationalism has been accepted by a society as its highest law, it will justify killing of any number of thousands of people, the drafting of any number of millions of men, the waste of any quantity of human and material resources, the expenditure of any number of billions of dollars,

²³ John R. W. Stott, “Christian Responses to Good and Evil – A Study of Romans 12:9-13:10,” in *Perspectives on Peace Making: Biblical Options in the Nuclear Age*, ed. John A. Bernbaum, (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1984) 54.

the violation of any international law, and the distortion of any truth to satisfy its purposes and to achieve its ends.”²⁴

We must work hard at dealing with the battle that is within us (Romans 7:23); and work hard at using the resources that God has given us (2 Corinthians 10:3-4). We must realize that God’s weapons promise results! Thus, Christians should be willing to die for their country, but not necessarily kill for it.

2. Jesus brings peace.

G. K. Chesterton once said, “Jesus has never been tried and found wanting. Jesus has been found difficult and seldom tried.” We must admit that living for Jesus is difficult, and requires us to carry our cross daily. Following Jesus, however, leads to peace. Jesus said in John 14:27, “*I am leaving you with a gift—peace of mind and heart. And the peace I give isn’t like the peace the world gives. So don’t be troubled or afraid.*” This gift of peace or reconciliation with God, made available through Christ, places an ethical demand on the Christians.²⁵

A follower of Christ has peace with God. Ephesians 2:13-16 (NIV – emphasis mine) says, “But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ. **For he himself is our peace**, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, **thus making peace**, and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility.” This gift in Christ means that we have the obligation to share it with others. It must be our secondary concern (while our primary is to bring glory to God). Peace

²⁴ Frank Epp, *A Strategy for Peace: Reflections of a Christian Pacifist*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1973) 54.

²⁵ W. A. Elwell, and P. W. Comfort, *Tyndale Bible Dictionary*, (Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, 2001). 1004.

should be reflected and made in our lives so that the forgiveness we have with God can be made evident. If Jesus brings peace, then being a peace-maker is more important than going to war.

3. Humans are created in the image of God.

A human being, whether an American or an Iranian is created in the image of God. Christians hold dear the doctrine of “Imago Dei” when it comes to abortion, but seem to forget this doctrine in their talk of war. Christians should not be afraid to die (for to die is gain), but should be afraid to snuff out the image of God in another person.

It is God’s prerogative to take life, not ours. It is God’s prerogative to make life, not ours (Deuteronomy 32:39 and 1 Samuel 2:6). God will take an accounting of all the blood that is spilt, and will demand payment (Genesis 9:5). This means that we should not be so gung ho about war! Christians should be more willing to have a bumper sticker that says, “I support my Church: I tithe,” then a ribbon that says, “support your troops.” Guess which one is more prominent in the Church parking lot on Sunday morning?

4. Hell is a reality.

Someone who is for peace is not codependent. They do not let people walk all over them. In some cases, they may even have to fight to protect the innocent. A peace-maker, however, is a person who believes that love is a better way. Christians want people to be saved, because they love them. Our interest should be in the spiritual outcome of the souls involved. Since hell is a reality, we should think twice about pulling a trigger. We should redouble our efforts to present the Gospel to all who will hear. We indeed fight a battle, but it is a spiritual one (Ephesians 6:11-18).

Critiques of Being a Peace-Maker

Being a peacemaker has many benefits, but is this position viable? Some people may have the following critiques of this position:

1. Jesus nor the Apostles never told someone to leave the military.

Being a peace-maker may seem that a person should leave the military. The problem with this is neither Jesus nor the Apostles never called someone to leave the military. In fact, one of the main reasons Augustine developed the Just War Theory is because of this.

“Augustine wondered why, if rejection of military force was so crucial to one’s faith in God, men such as David, the Centurion of the Gospels (Luke 7), Cornelius (Acts 10), and the soldiers who came to John the Baptist (Luke 3) were not told to renounce their occupation. In several cases were even held out as examples of faith.”²⁶

This, however, is an argument from silence. We are not told what happens to the military officials in the New Testament who convert. It is possible that they left the military. As for David, he was not allowed to build the Temple due to his military exploits. We must remember that Jesus and the Apostles did call people to a life of peace-making.

2. God called His people to war in the Old Testament.

This argument may cause us to be gung-ho for war. If God said to kill, then it must be OK. This is one reason that I reject the non-resistance theory. There must be a time when war is right, if God has shown in the past that He was for it. A heretic in the early church, however, used this argument to say that Jesus was a different God than the God of the Old Testament. Marcion believed that the Old Testament should be rejected because God frequently ordered war and destruction (Exodus 17:16; Numbers 31:1-2; Deuteronomy 7:1-2; 1 Samuel 15:1-3, etc.).

²⁶ Arthur F. Holmes, *War and Christian Ethics*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1975) 62-63.

The Christian believes that the Old Testament is the Word of God. God called for war in the Old Testament, so that the nation of Israel would remain pure, ushering in the Messiah, the Prince of Peace into the world. We must remember that Israel was a Kingdom of the world, functioned under the Law, and did not have regeneration and the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit.

3. Certain passages in the New Testament show that the point of Christianity is not peace.

There are also New Testament passages that seem to indicate that violence was used for God's will, instead of peace-making. Jesus cleaned out the Temple (Matthew 21:12). The Beast in Revelation is given power by God to make war with the saints (13:7). Peter tells us to obey the government (1 Peter 2:13-ff), even though his emperor at the time cut his own mother's womb open to see where he came from. All of these seem to point to aggression, rather than the way of peace-making. I ask you, however, why is the violence used? I would tell you that it was for peace-making. Jesus drove out the money-exchangers because the underdog was being cheated from the relationship with God; the Beast is given power so that the saints will learn patience and faithfulness (Revelation 13:10); and we are to obey even a corrupt government so that our suffering would have a reward (1 Peter 2:19-21). I believe that if read in context, the supposed "war passages" of the New Testament would point to peace-making.

In Conclusion: Grace is Required!

We should be doing more for peace. Holding to these principles of peace-making is not easy. GRACE IS REQUIRED. I believe that Christians will make mistakes, even if they try to be a peace-maker. Being a peace-maker does not mean that we will prevent all war, but it has certain rewards that we should cherish:

1. Peacemakers will be called children of God (Matthew 5:9 & 38-48);
2. Peacemakers will have holiness in their lives (Hebrews 12:14); and

3. Peacemakers are promised that God will watch over them and listen to their prayers (1 Peter 3:10-12).

We must realize that the benefits of being a peacemaker are tremendous! Christians need to be taught, and shown what it means to be a peace-maker.

Two things need to be kept in mind. The first is that Christians aren't doing enough for peace-making. The tradition that I came to Christ in, the Stone-Campbell Movement, said nothing about peace. I never heard one sermon, or one lesson on the topic of Christ's views of peace. I missed out on what I now believe to be a hall-mark of Christianity: the doctrine of peace-making. More needs to be said on peace, more needs to be taught on peace, more peace needs to be lived out. We need examples of peace-makers in the Church, and we need love to win out! The second thing to keep in mind is that Christians engaging in combat is not an essential issue. In other words, we can differ on our theories and still call each other brothers and sisters in Christ. In essentials, we must have unity. In opinions, we must have liberty. In all things, we must have love.

Christians today are faced with the War on Terror, catastrophe relief, pain and suffering, and mixed messages about their world. Should Christians engage in warfare? I do not believe this to be the question. The real question that Christians should ask is, "how can Christians engage in peace-making?"

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