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FOCUSED ON THE WORD

PART 1 OF 2

The Bible on When War is Justifiable



President Franklin Roosevelt signing declaration of war against Japan, 1941.

If Jesus calls His followers to be “peacemakers,” then how could a Christian Cabinet Member or Congressman support the idea of going to war?

The short answer is this: **“Blessed are the peacemakers ...”** is one of Jesus’ beatitudes relative to how believers should conduct their *personal lives* (Matthew 5:9). But there is a distinction to be made between Jesus’ instruction regarding personal behavior and the responsibilities He sets forth relative to His ordination of the *institution* of government (Romans 13:1–8 and 1 Peter 2:13–14) that Christian Members are called to serve.

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WEEKLY BIBLE STUDIES

Governors: Fridays 9am (EST), Zoom

Former Cabinet Members / White House Senior Staff: Fridays 9am (EST), Zoom

Senate Members: Tuesdays 8am, rotating offices, hot breakfast served

House Members: Thursdays 8am, AG Hearing Rm., Longworth 1302, hot breakfast served

The views expressed in each Bible Study are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the position of any individual Bible Study sponsor.



MINISTRY UPDATE

“Be the light in the Darkness of this World!”—U.S. Political Leaders to Ministry Leaders at International Training Conference



“Your work is eternal! You will change the world!” Those inspirational messages were conveyed to the 100 ministry leaders and new recruits at the Capitol Ministries International Training Conference in Washington, D.C. who journeyed from 20 U.S. states and 60 nations to learn how to build discipleship Bible study ministries for political leaders around the world. Traveling from Italy, Switzerland and other European nations and countries in Asia, Latin America, Africa, the South Pacific Islands, and the United States were ministry leader candidates who were completing the required training before launching ministries. As well, seasoned leaders came who were

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In an Old Testament (OT) parallel, in the sixth commandment, the Hebrew word for ***murder*** is *ratsakh* in “***You shall not murder***” (Exodus 20:13), but note this word is different than the ones God uses in Scripture in relation to His people’s having to kill someone in war.

Accordingly, this week and next, given Russia’s unprovoked invasion of Ukraine, and recent attacks on Israel by Hamas, Syria, and Lebanon and the world’s growing response, let us investigate more fully what the Scriptures have to say about war.

Read on, my friend.

Ralph Drollinger

I. INTRODUCTION

When Jesus returns, He will wage war against the nations led by the Antichrist (cf. Revelation 19:11). In Deuteronomy 20, God Himself sends Israel to war. Therefore, this study is not so much about whether or not God condones war; He does. God’s acceptance and use of war in a fallen world is not difficult to understand when viewed in the sense that often and ultimately, He is manifesting His attributes of justice and righteousness through its use. Therefore, this study is not about whether God is for or against war—the answer to that question is obvious from Scripture. This study is more about the kind of war that is acceptable versus unacceptable in His eyes.

To gain a biblical understanding about God’s view of war, we need to elaborate first on what the Bible says is the role of God’s institution of government. This role must be clearly distinguished, contextualized, and separated from passages that speak to individual responsibilities

as noted in the preamble. Failure to make this distinction that Scripture itself makes leads to confusion, as if the Bible contradicts itself, which it does not.

Secondly, gaining an understanding of what kind of wars are just requires examining whether the basis for the internationally accepted *just war theory* is biblical. Are each of the eight principles that comprise this theory supported by Scripture? If so, what passages from God’s Word underlie each precept? Said another way, is each of the eight precepts “captive to Christ” (cf. 2 Corinthians 10:5), so to speak?

Lastly, a study on war would not be complete without examining the two leading camps in opposition to the *just war theory*: the *Christian Pacifist* and the *Noninterventionist* (this latter camp is peopled by Christians and non-Christians alike). How do advocates of these beliefs attempt to support their viewpoints, and are these viewpoints biblically based? As a result,



VERSE OF THE WEEK



1 Peter 2:13–14

Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether to a king as the one in authority, or to governors as sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and the praise of those who do right.



There is a distinction to be made between Jesus' instruction regarding personal behavior and the responsibilities He sets forth relative to His ordination of the institution of government that Christian Members are called to serve.

This study should prove most helpful for thinking clearly about the present crisis.

I am hopeful that examining these subjects in this order will aid the public servant in his or her formation of strong, biblically based convictions regarding the proper use of war.

II. THE ROLE OF GOVERNMENT

The fall of man in Genesis chapter three warrants God's ongoing need to restrain the ensuing evil in and from man. One of the primary means God has ordained to achieve restraint, stemming from His holy attribute of perfect justice, is the principle of just recompense. This principle was first illustrated in Genesis following the Fall. The pain of childbearing for the woman and the necessity of labor for mankind's survival (3:16–17) illustrate the just cost of man's disobedience, i.e., a cost to be borne by mankind into his distant, physical future. Further, in Genesis 9:6 God institutionalizes capital punishment: *"Whoever sheds man's blood, by man his blood shall be shed."* That is to say God will use corporate man as His surrogate to mete out His just recompense, in this case for murder. The due recompense for the premeditated murder of another man will be his death: corporal punishment by corporate mankind. The concept presented is more fully explicated in Romans 13:1–4. Scripture says in this regard:

Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God. Therefore whoever resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed will receive condem-

nation upon themselves. For rulers are not a cause of fear for good behavior, but for evil. Do you want to have no fear of authority? Do what is good and you will have praise from the same; for it is a minister of God to you for good. But if you do what is evil, be afraid; for it does not bear the sword for nothing; for it is a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath on the one who practices evil.

Notice first of all that *governing authorities* are *established by God* (v. 1) for the purpose of, among others reasons, bearing *the sword as an avenger who brings wrath on the one who practices evil* (v. 4). This same idea is echoed by 1 Peter 2:13–14:

Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether to a king as the one in authority, or to governors as sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and the praise of those who do right.

Human institutions (ἄνθρωπινῃ κτίσει, *anthropine ktisei*—"that which is created for humans [by God]") exist *for the punishment of evildoers*. This basic truth is foundational to a proper understanding of the role of government in general and in specific as it relates to the subject of war. God's design, the purpose of government in large measure, is to curtail the evil deeds of men and to deter the further wrongdoing of man against the weak and defenseless; it is a form of God's restraining grace in a fallen world.

This fundamental purpose of government can be expanded to include not only the need to protect its citizenry from evil from within but to protect its citizenry from evil from outside. In this sense, government is *a minister of God to you for good*.



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honing their skills to benefit their ongoing weekly ministries to political leaders.

During the four-day event that took place Nov. 28–Dec. 2, 2023, the men received great encouragement from congressmen, former governors, and former White House Cabinet members who told them how valuable CapMin’s discipleship Bibles studies are to political leaders and to them personally. Among them was former U.S. Secretary of Energy Rick Perry who said, “Nothing I did in my time as Secretary of Energy had more influence on me than the world-wide ministry of Capitol Ministries. This is how you change the world—you teach people who lead, the biblically right thing to do. The work of Capitol Ministries is powerful.”

Every other year, CapMin leads regional trainings around the world and hosts an international training conference in D.C. on opposite years. These conferences are held to further develop ministry leaders who lead weekly Bible studies and to train recently recruited candidates on how to develop, build, and sustain discipleship ministries to political leaders. In addition it helps grow CapMin as each ministry leader is challenged to recruit others. The conference was tremendously successful! Participants were inspired, invigorated, enlightened, trained, heartened, encouraged, strengthened, and emboldened

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III. GOVERNMENTS GOING TO WAR

If this is the purpose of government, then it follows that God would expect a nation to protect itself from forces of evil outside its borders or outside forces that would attempt to harm innocent people in some way.

Many times in the OT Israel had to defend itself from the plundering onslaught of the Philistines, Assyrians, and Babylonians. (Depending on Israel’s obedience or disobedience to God, He would allow Israel either to be victorious or defeated, respectively.) In fact, as mentioned in the introduction, God commanded Israel to go to war in Deuteronomy 20:1:

When you go out to battle against your enemies and see horses and chariots and people more numerous than you, do not be afraid of them; for the Lord your God, who brought you up from the land of Egypt, is with you.

Additional evidence of God’s condoning a nation’s self-interest through the use of war are the following NT illustrations:

- John the Baptist does not condemn a Roman soldier for going to war; rather, he says, **“be content with your wages”** (Luke 3:14).
- When Cornelius the centurion was won to Christ, the apostles did not condemn his vocation (Acts 10:1; 44–48). Their response is unlike Jesus’ in John 8:11, wherein He tells the woman adulteress, **“Go. From now on sin no more.”**

These and other passages (cf. Luke 14:31) serve to illustrate the idea that God is not

averse to governments engaging in war; that is part of the reason He created them—to benefit mankind, in this way. Again, the more difficult question is this:

When is going to war justifiable in God’s eyes?

Certainly, the ancient practice of conquest and plundering another nation for the sake of gaining their wealth and new slaves is not a justifiable cause for war. So then what is? What are the specific earmarks to help us to ascertain the justifiable and unjustifiable use of war in the eyes of God?

IV. THE EIGHT PRINCIPLES OF JUSTIFIABLE WAR

Throughout centuries of discussions relative to the ethics of war usage among both Christians and non-Christians alike, a broadly, internationally accepted *just war theory* has been developed. Historically in the church, the primary believers to tackle the issue of war from a philosophical standpoint were Augustine of Hippo and then some 900 years later, Thomas Aquinas. Augustine addresses war in his classic book, *The City of God*:

They who have waged war in obedience to the divine command, or in conformity with His laws, have represented in their persons the public justice or the wisdom of government, and in this capacity have put to death wicked men; such persons have by no means violated the commandment, “Thou shalt not [murder].”¹

Centuries later Thomas Aquinas began to codify Augustine’s thoughts on war into a punch list of indicators as to whether or not a war is ethically justifiable. The modern-day summary of that moral pursuit follows. Given the fact



that some of the best ancient Christian scholars originated the skeletal aspects of the *just war theory*, it should come as no surprise to today's believers that each is undergirded with biblical truth!

In summary, the Latin phrase for wars being morally right or justifiable is *jus ad bellum*, meaning “the right to go to war,” but only when embarking on it meets the following eight criteria:

A. JUST CAUSE

Is the reason for engaging in war, such as defending a nation from an evil aggressor, morally correct? As noted in the introduction, in Revelation 19:11, God furiously wages war against the Antichrist.

Notice His principle for engagement:

And I saw heaven opened; and behold, a white horse, and He who sat upon it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and wages war.

This is a glorious passage of the awesome spectacle of the triumphal Second Coming of Christ. Herein observe that God *wages war* only when it is for a *righteous cause*. Those nations considering waging war should do likewise: only consider engagement when the cause is justifiably *righteous*.

Going to war with the sole objective to conquer another nation is usually a wrong objective because God is for a diversification of nations per Genesis 11. To in any way invade, usurp, or colonize another nation is the wrong objective for the use of war. God intentionally *scattered* the nations (11:8), and His intent is that they be kept *scattered*. (Thank God that this Genesis 11:8 idea is deeply, unwaveringly embedded in our nation's fabric! Our nation possesses the mightiest war power in world history—a might that could be

used alternatively to conquer the world if it were not for our deep convictions stemming from Genesis 11:8! Considering our military muscle, may our continual awareness, understanding of, and convictions stemming from Genesis 11:8 never depart from our corporate culture, our thinking as a nation.)

**The war criteria of
“just cause” means that,
in some overt way, a
nation's sovereignty is
directly threatened.**

“Just cause” is the first principle for a nation to consider when pondering the use of war. A direct threat to a nation need be imminent to warrant the use of war.

B. COMPETENT AUTHORITY

This next principle asks this question: has the aggression to which a nation is responding been declared and/or proliferated by the actual authority within the nation? Stated differently, is a nation's consideration of going to war in response to a renegade or third-party covert action within the nation? This distinction helps to guard against and discern the existence of parties other than those in actual authority who may desire to *unrighteously* and *unjustifiably* accelerate a war using deception and agitation. For our nation to declare war on another nation that is not responsible for the evil actions being propagated within its own geographical boundaries is not just. This principle is rooted as well in 1 Peter 2:13–14.

C. COMPARATIVE JUSTIFICATION

This third principle means this: by way of stark comparison, that the enemy's actions are morally wrong and the nation's

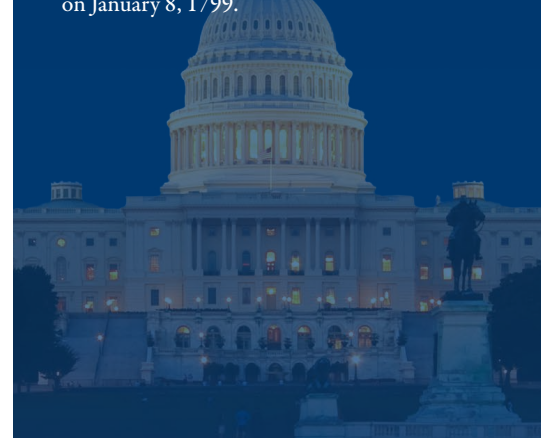
Patrick Henry



“The great pillars of all government and of social life [are] virtue, morality, and religion. This is the armor, my friend, and this alone, that renders us invincible.”

— Patrick Henry, U.S. Revolutionary War general, legislator, “The Voice of Liberty,” ratifier of the U.S. Constitution, Governor of Virginia.

Patrick Henry, *Patrick Henry: Life, Correspondence and Speeches*, William Wirt Henry, editor (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1891), Vol. II, 592, to Archibald Blair on January 8, 1799.





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to teach the Word of God inside the halls of government from city halls to parliaments. “Words can NOT express how inspiring this has been,” said Bonaventure Byukusenge, new ministry leader for national public servants in Rwanda.

Brennan Cattani, ministry leader in Manitoba, Winnipeg, said, “The biggest impact on me was seeing the fruit of the ministry. Hearing D.C. legislators from various levels of government proclaiming the name of Jesus boldly and recognizing that it’s the regular deep dive into Scripture which has unlocked a passion for Him in them was truly encouraging. So many said that it was a long obedience in the same direction which has yielded this fruit, and having that paired with the equipping elements of the training, fueled my hope for what the Holy Spirit is capable of doing in my province!”

As the ministry continues to grow around the world, regional conferences have been scheduled this year to train newly recruited Bible-teaching evangelists who will be leading discipleship Bible studies to the leaders of their nations. Regional training conferences are scheduled for Cape Town, South Africa, Sept. 2–6; Kathmandu, Nepal, Sept. 30–Oct. 4; Bogota, Colombia, Oct. 28–Nov. 1; and Brussels, Belgium, Nov. 7–11.

actions bringing the war are morally right should be apparent. Notice Romans 13:3 in this regard:

For rulers are not a cause of fear for good behavior, but for evil. Do you want to have no fear of authority? Do what is good and you will have praise from the same.

This simple point could be easily overlooked: if another nation is doing what is morally right, there is no justification to go to war with them. Relatively speaking there must be a stark, comparative justification for engaging in the action of war:

**The injustice suffered
by one party must
significantly outweigh
that suffered by the other
party enacting the war.**

For instance, the added plight that America’s invasion brought on the French people was justifiable in comparison to the atrocities suffered under Hitler because of the moral contrast of unjustifiable national conquest and captivity versus the hope and cost of national liberation.

D. RIGHT INTENTION

Is the purpose of the war to achieve *justice* and *righteousness* or to conquer, pillage, and destroy—or are the motives perhaps vengeful? Proverbs 21:2 speaks to what underlies the need to discern right intentions:

Every man’s way is right in his own eyes, but the Lord weighs the hearts.

Many passages speak of man’s tendency to be self-deceived due to the Fall (cf. Proverbs 16:2, 24:12; 1 Samuel 16:7; 1 Corinthians 4:4). The noetic effect of

sin, if unchecked by the counsel of God’s Word and the advice of other godly people, can mask bad intentions. Relative to the sinful proclivities of man, the OT book of Judges states, *every man did what was right in his own eyes* (17:6) but, in doing so, they did wrong. Man, in realization of his sinfulness, need always obtain the godly counsel of others (cf. Proverbs 13:10). Proverbs 24:6 summarily states how one ought to wage a war that God approves relative to this principle of right intentions:

For by wise guidance you will wage war, and in abundance of counselors there is victory.

Carefully discerning whether the motives and intentions for going to war are just is critically important. This discernment can only be accomplished through the counsel of many. It follows then that a nation should not unilaterally wage war by its executive; rather, seeking congressional approval would be supported by Scripture. Such approval is a check and balance that is necessary in response to the realization that man is often lacking in the best judgment or ability to discern whether our motives and intentions are proper and God-honoring. Summarily, establishing right intentions is a sure-footed scriptural principle.

E. LAST RESORT

Have all the other reasonable means of resolving the conflict been seriously tried and exhausted? Romans 12:18 underscores this idea:

If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men.

God is most pleased when parties can resolve their problems thereby eliminating any need for war. At the same time, pur-



suit of this principle is often misused by the wrongful party: is the perpetrating nation using drawn-out negotiations as a stall tactic while they prepare to do evil? The rightful party should not be naive to this stratagem; a time comes when it is obvious that the grace of one party is being taken advantage of by the other to unjustly delay what in the end will be necessary, the just use of force. War should always be the last resort.

F. PROBABILITY OF SUCCESS

Entering a war is foolish unless there is a high probability of success. Luke 14:31 buoys the biblical basis of this principle:

Or what king, when he sets out to meet another king in battle, will not first sit down and consider whether he is strong enough with ten thousand men to encounter the one coming against him with twenty thousand?

When answering the question of the probability of success of entering a war, the obvious considerations of counting the cost must be considered. Determining what a successful effort to go to war will cost is difficult, and each conflict is different with its own set of circumstances. The point of this study is not to delve into those weeds but to point out that weighing the probability of success and the cost of biblically-based considerations are vital before determining to enter into a war.

G. PROPORTIONALITY OF RESULTS

Will the good results stemming from the success of the war objectives be greater than the losses that will inevitably occur from pursuing the war? Luke 14:28 speaks to this principle:

For which one of you, when he wants to build a tower, does not first sit down and calculate the cost to see if he has enough to complete it?

Even though God states that governments are to *bear the sword ... as an avenger who brings wrath on the one who practices evil*, it doesn't always follow that the good achieved by avenging the evil is outweighed by the additional harm that could result to innocent bystanders. Perhaps the proportionality of results will increase with patience or further creativity manifest in the timing or type of war utilized. Such considerations going into war are certainly undergirded by Scripture to correctly ascertain God's will in the decision. Using Russia as an example, if cutting off their supply lines and imposing sanctions that have severe consequences have greater proportional results, is it wiser to do that than it is to attempt to fight an embedded enemy? A nation's leaders need calculate and weigh the costs and benefits of their war strategy before waging it.

H. RIGHT SPIRIT

All war must be undertaken with great reluctance, sobriety and counsel. Those who engage the force of war must do so with great sorrow. Psalm 68:30 speaks about those who delight in war:

He has scattered the peoples who delight in war.

Given the pain of punishment, the inevitability of harming innocent people, and the overall further setbacks that will occur to the nation and its citizens, for any individual or nation to gleefully participate in combat is to be woefully displeasing to God. This last criterion of the *just war theory*, likened to all that precede it, is a principle substantiated by Scripture.



NOW AVAILABLE

The book of Acts records how a small band of men—the apostles—in very short order *turned the world upside down* (Acts 17:6, KJV) during the first century in which they lived. This small team of uneducated, common men were not elite leaders, so how were they able to saturate the world with the gospel—changing lives, changing culture, and eventually changing the Roman Empire?

Scripture provides the answer: not only did they fulfill the Great Commission one soul at a time through a ministry of geometric evangelism and discipleship, but they succeeded *by concentrating on and impacting a particular element of society, specifically kings and all who are in authority* (1 Timothy 2:1–4).

All in Authority: Reigniting the Bible's Top-Down Missions Strategy provides the biblical exegesis for this missional strategy that is found in both the Old and New Testaments. The book provides a clarion call for the Church to make political public servants a priority mission field in our nation today. Request your complimentary copy at capmin.org.



V. A SUMMARY OF THE JUST WAR THEORY

When the criteria are carefully and corporately reasoned and going to war is just and righteous, then a nation must engage with its full force, intense focus, and all-out power in a quest for immediate and decisive victory. In response to fulfillment of all the elements of the *just war theory* when going to war is just and righteous, what results can in no way be a half-hearted response! A nation cannot respond flaccidly with less-than-clear objectives!

Winston Churchill, when faced with the inevitability of engaging Nazi Germany, worked through and fulfilled all the above criteria with Parliament. Upon entering the war, he personally emulated this ensuing right spirit and resolve—what necessarily must follow when justifiably and righteously a nation enters a war. In his address to Parliament in 1940 he declared the following:

Let us therefore brace ourselves to our duties, and so bear ourselves that, if the British Empire and its Commonwealth last for a thousand years, men will still say, “This was their finest hour.”² You ask, what is our aim?...Victory, victory at all costs, victory in spite of all terror; victory, however long and hard the road may be; for without victory, there is no survival.³

Churchill serves as an executive model for properly leading a nation into war. When war is justified and righteous, a country’s leadership should never enter into it with “low testosterone.” It is an all or nothing commitment of the totality of the nation in its decisive quest for all out victory as quickly as possible!

NEXT WEEK: We will examine the Four Principles of Fighting a War and consider several opposing positions to the just war theory: Christian pacifism and noninterventionism. We will consider whether these are biblically tenable positions.

1. Saint Augustine, trans. by Marcus Dods, *The City of God* (Carol Stream, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers, 2009).
2. Winston Churchill, “1940: The Finest Hour,” 2021, *International Churchill Society*, <https://winstonchurchill.org/resources/speeches/1940-the-finest-hour/their-finest-hour/>
3. Winston Churchill, “Blood, Toil, Tears and Sweat, 1940,” May 13, 1940, *American’s National Churchill Museum*, <https://www.national-churchillmuseum.org/blood-toil-tears-and-sweat.html>.

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*Making Disciples
of Jesus Christ
in the Political Arena
Throughout the World*



Capitol Ministries® provides Bible studies, evangelism, and discipleship to political leaders.

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